DAVE PORTER AND HIS RIVALS

The Chums and Foes of Oak Hall



EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Dave Porter and His Rivals; or, The Chums and Foes of Oak Hall

Edward Stratemeyer

THE AUTHOR



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1862 - 1930

AI-created interpretation after historical photograph, circa 1894, New York Public Library, MssCol 2903.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward Stratemeyer

Edward Stratemeyer was an American writer and publisher, born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1862. He began his career writing popular stories for young readers, developing an understanding of the pace, recurring characters and serial adventures that could sustain an audience from one volume to the next.

In 1905 he established the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Its working method combined planned series and story outlines with manuscripts commissioned from other writers. Books often appeared under shared pen names, creating a continuing authorial identity even when the individual writer changed.

The enterprise became associated with some of the most familiar series in American children's publishing, including the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew. Stratemeyer also wrote many books himself, so his roles as author, organiser and editor need to be distinguished. After his death in 1930, his daughters continued the business. Its records are preserved at the New York Public Library.

Readers can watch how an episode resolves one difficulty while introducing another. Suspense may depend on a chapter ending, a delayed explanation or a familiar character placed in unfamiliar circumstances. The series format encourages comparison: repeated situations reveal which qualities the stories reward. Knowing about the collaborative publishing system adds another question, concerning how each book contributes to the recognisable voice of a larger sequence.

Biographical references: New York Public Library, Stratemeyer Syndicate records. Portrait source: historical photograph, circa 1894, New York Public Library, MssCol 2903. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

PREFACE

"Dave Porter and His Rivals" is a complete story in itself, but forms the seventh volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

When I brought out the first volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," I trusted that the story would please the young people for whom it was written, but I did not imagine that so many thousands of boys and girls all over our broad land would take to Dave as they have, and would insist upon knowing more about him.

My opening tale was one of boarding school life, and this was followed by "Dave Porter in the South Seas," whither our hero had gone in search of his father, and then by "Dave Porter's Return to School," in which book Dave met all of his friends again and likewise a few of his enemies.

So far our hero had heard about his father, but had not yet seen his parent, and the next volume, "Dave Porter in the Far North," related the particulars of a trip to Norway, where the youth had some stirring adventures amid snow and ice in the Land of the Midnight Sun.

Coming back to America, the lad was sent again to Oak Hall, as set down in the next volume, called "Dave Porter and His Classmates." During that term at school many complications arose, and our hero did something for the honor of Oak Hall that was a great credit to him.

Dave's father was now with him, but his sister Laura was in the Far West, and upon her return he received an invitation to visit a large ranch, and how he went, and what strenuous times he had, were related in "Dave Porter at Star Ranch."

As soon as his Western outing was at an end, Dave returned home, and then betook himself once more to Oak Hall. Here, to his surprise, he found an unusual state of affairs, the particulars of which are given in the pages that follow.

Once again I thank those who have praised my books in the past. I hope the present volume will also please them and do them good.

Edward Stratemeyer.

CHAPTER I

AN AUTOMOBILE RIDE

"Everybody ready?"

"Yes, Dave; let her go!" cried Phil Lawrence.

"How about you folks in the other auto?" queried Dave Porter, as he let off the hand brake and advanced the spark and lever of the machine he was about to run.

"We are all ready," responded Roger Morr.

"Been ready for an hour," added Ben Basswood, who sat beside Roger.

"Oh, Ben, not quite as long as that!" burst out Laura Porter, who was one of three girls in the tonneau of the second car.

"Well, make it fifty-eight minutes then; I'm not particular," responded Ben, calmly.

"Are the lunch hampers in?" asked Jessie Wadsworth, anxiously. "Mamma said we musn't forget anything."

"Trust Dave and Roger to look after the food," burst out Phil Lawrence.

"Likewise Mr. Phil Lawrence," added Dave. "Just wait till it comes lunch time, and you'll see Phil stow away about fifteen chicken sandwiches, ten slices of cake, three pickles, five olives——"

"Stop! I draw the line on olives, Dave!" cried Phil, making a wry face.

"Oh, olives are fine; I love them!" cried Belle Endicott.

"Then all that are coming to me are yours," returned Phil, quickly. "But start her up, fellows, if we are going!" he added, and then, putting a big horn to his lips, he blew a loud blast.

"Take good care of yourselves!" cried a voice from the veranda of the mansion in front of which the two automobiles were standing, and Mrs. Wadsworth waved a hand to the young people.

"We'll try to," answered Dave, and then he threw in the clutch on low gear, and the big touring car moved gently away, out of the grounds of the Wadsworth mansion and into the main highway

leading from Crumville to Shady Glen Falls. The second car speedily followed.

It was a late summer day, with a clear blue sky overhead and just enough breeze blowing to freshen the air. A shower of rain the day previous had laid the dust of the road and added to the freshness of fields and woods.

The boys and girls had planned this outing for several days. All of the youths were to return to Oak Hall school the following week, and they wished to do something for the girls to remember them by, as Dave expressed it.

"Might have a party," Roger had suggested.

"No good, unless it was a lawn party," Phil had answered. "It's too stuffy in the house, these warm days."

"We might take a couple of autos and go for a day's outing up the river road," Dave had suggested, and this proposition had been accepted immediately. It was decided that Dave should run the Wadsworth machine, he having learned to do so some time before, and Roger was to run a car hired at the new Crumville garage. Each car had a capacity of five passengers, including the driver, and the party consisted of ten young people, five boys and five girls.

"Now, Dave, don't let her out for more than fifty miles an hour," remarked Sam Day, who sat in the back of the leading auto, between two of the young ladies.

"Fifty miles an hour!" shrieked Jessie Wadsworth. "What an idea! Dave, don't you dare!"

"Oh, Lazy is only fooling, Jessie," answered Dave. "He wouldn't want to ride at that rate of speed himself."

"Twenty miles an hour is fast enough," said Belle Endicott. "I want to view the scenery. It is lovely around Crumville—so different from around the ranch."

"Yes, the scenery is fine, even though we haven't such big mountains as you have out West," answered Dave.

"And Shady Glen Falls is an ideal spot for a picnic," said Jessie. "Papa took us there last summer."

"You've got to make the most of the Falls this summer," went on Dave. "I heard in town last week that next year a paper company is going to put a mill there."

"Oh, Dave, is that the Eureka Paper Company?" questioned Jessie.

"Yes. What do you know about them?"

"Why, I heard papa and your uncle talking about it. It is a company in which Mr. Aaron Poole holds a big interest."

"Aaron Poole!" murmured the youthful driver of the automobile, and his face grew serious, as he remembered the trouble he had had with that mean individual.

"Yes. Papa heard Nat bragging down at the post-office, about what great things his father was going to do, when the paper company got started."

"That's just like Nat Poole," was Phil Lawrence's comment. "If Nat couldn't brag about something he'd die."

"By the way, where does Nat keep himself?" questioned Sam Day. "I haven't met him since I came to Crumville."

"He has been keeping shady—since our little affair at Niagara Falls," explained Dave.

"Is he going to return to Oak Hall?"

"I presume so. He left his motor-boat and some other things up there, so I heard."

"We can get along without Nat Poole, Dave."

"Right you are, Lazy," put in Phil Lawrence. "But maybe, with Link Merwell gone, he won't be quite so bad as he was."

"Oh, that horrid Link Merwell!" cried Jessie. "I trust we never see or hear of him again!"

"Well, one thing is certain, Merwell will never get back to Oak Hall," said Dave. "He got his walking papers and that settled it. He is out for good, the same as Nick Jasniff."

"Dave, have you heard anything about Jasniff lately?" questioned Phil.

"One of the boys wrote that he had heard Nick had returned to the United States. Personally, I haven't seen or heard from him since we met in Europe—and I don't want to see him," added Dave, earnestly.

Toot! toot! came from behind the leading automobile, and a moment later the second car ranged up alongside.

"Guess you folks are doing more talking than running!" cried Roger, with a grin. "Here is where we show you the road!" And in a

twinkling the second car shot ahead, and was "hitting her up," as Ben expressed it, at thirty miles an hour. Dave immediately turned on more speed likewise, and over the smooth, straight road both machines spun.

"Oh, Dave, is it safe?" asked Jessie, with a little gasp, as the speed increased.

"Yes,—as long as we are on the straight road," he answered. "We'll have to slow down at the turn."

"I like to ride fast—but not too fast," said Lucy Basswood, Ben's cousin, the other girl in the car.

The turn in the road was almost gained, and both machines had slowed down once more, when there came a shrill, screeching whistle from behind, and a racing car shot into sight, moving along with a great noise, for the muffler had been cut out. All of the girls screamed in fright, and instinctively Dave and Roger ran their cars as close to the right side of the road as possible. Then, with a roar, the racing car shot past, sending up a cloud of dust, and a shower of small stones, one of which hit Laura Porter in the cheek, and another striking Phil in the ear.

"Fellows that run that way ought to be arrested," was Roger's comment.

"Oh, I was so afraid we should be struck!" gasped Jessie, sinking back into her seat with a white face.

"Did you recognize them?" asked Belle Endicott.

"I didn't have time to look," answered Roger. "I was busy getting out of the way."

"Just what I was doing," added Dave. "I didn't want them to take off the mudguard, or a wheel."

"I caught sight of one of the fellows," said Ben Basswood. "He looked right at me as he passed."

"Who was it?" questioned several eagerly.

"Nat Poole."

"Nat Poole!" cried Dave. "Surely, he wasn't driving that racing car."

"No, he was in the rear, with another chap,—and two were on the front seat. But I didn't recognize any of the others."

"I saw that machine in Crumville last week," said Laura. "I believe it belongs in Lumberdale."

"I hope those fellows are not bound for Shady Glen Falls," said Laura. "It would quite spoil our outing, to have such persons around."

"A picnic like ours would be dead slow for that crowd," remarked Phil. "If they stop anywhere, it will be most likely at some roadhouse, where they can drink and smoke, and play pool and cards."

The racing car had long since disappeared in the distance, and now the other automobiles proceeded on their way. The girls were very nervous, and the boys did all in their power to remove the strain. But the girls declared that they had had a narrow escape from a serious accident, and it put much of a damper on the trip.

"If ever I meet the driver of that car I'll give him a piece of my mind," said Dave. "It's against the law to run at such high speed."

The distance to Shady Glen Falls from Crumville was thirty-five miles. The last half of the journey was over a winding dirt road, and the boys had calculated that it would take them two hours to reach the picnic grounds.

"We'll go by way of Darnell's Corners, and come back by way of Haslow," said Dave. "That will give us a sort of round trip." And so it was decided.

Darnell's Corners was but five miles from the Falls. It was only a small settlement, boasting of a tavern, a blacksmith shop, a church, and two stores. As they came in sight of the place Phil uttered a cry:

"There is that racing car now!"

Phil was right, the car stood in front of the tavern, the engine still running and letting out short puffs of smoke.

"Where are the fellows who were in it?" questioned Sam.

"Must have gone inside for a drink," answered Ben.

"Here come two of them now," said Roger, in a low voice, as the tavern door swung open and two young men appeared, each wearing a linen duster and a touring cap.

"It's Nat Poole!" cried Jessie.

"I know that driver," said Dave. "He is Pete Barnaby, a sport from Lumberdale. He used to follow the horse races before autoing

became popular. He once tried to sell Caspar Potts a horse, but we found out the animal was doctored up and worthless, and we didn't take him. Barnaby was furious when the deal fell through."

"I've heard of him," said Ben. "He wanted to sell my father a horse, but father wouldn't have anything to do with him."

While the boys were talking the tavern door had swung open again, and now two other persons stepped forth. They, too, wore linen dusters and touring caps, and one carried a basket containing something to eat and to drink.

"Dave!" cried Phil, in astonishment. "Look who they are!"

"Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff!" murmured Dave. "How in the world did they get here, and what underhanded work are they up to now?"

CHAPTER II

DAVE AND HIS PAST

Dave Porter had good reasons for looking upon Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff with suspicion. In the past these two unworthies had caused Dave a good deal of trouble, and when exposed each had vowed that sooner or later he would "square accounts" with the youth who had gotten the better of him. Dave had hoped he had seen the last of them, but here they were, eyeing him closely, each with a face that plainly showed his envy and his hatred.

To those of you who have read the preceding volumes of this series Dave Porter and his friends and enemies will need no special introduction. For the benefit of others let me explain that Dave had once upon a time been a homeless child, having been found wandering along the railroad tracks near Crumville. He was placed in the local poorhouse, and later on bound out to a broken-down college professor named Caspar Potts, who had taken to farming for his health.

Professor Potts could not make farming pay, and was in danger of being sold out by Aaron Poole, the father of Nat Poole, already introduced, when a most unexpected happening changed the whole current of events. In the town lived Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, a rich manufacturer. He had a young daughter named Jessie, and one day, when this miss was waiting for an automobile ride, the gasoline tank of the machine took fire, and Jessie was in danger of being burned to death when Dave rushed in and rescued her.

"A boy who will do such a brave deed deserves to be assisted," said Mr. Wadsworth, and he talked to the boy, and learned that Caspar Potts had once been one of his own college professors. Arrangements were at once made for the professor and Dave to move to the Wadsworth mansion, and then Dave was sent to boarding school, as related in detail in my first volume, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall." With Dave went Ben Basswood, his one chum in Crumville.

At the school Dave made a number of friends, including Roger Morr, who was the son of a United States senator; Phil Lawrence, the offspring of a wealthy shipowner; Sam Day, usually called Lazy,

because of a habit he had of taking his time, and others whom we shall meet in the near future.

In those days, Dave's greatest trouble was the cloud over his parentage, and when he got what he thought was a clew to his identity he promptly followed it up by taking a trip far across the ocean, as related in "Dave Porter in the South Seas." After some stirring happenings, on ship-board and among the natives, he located his uncle, Dunston Porter, and learned much concerning his father, David Breslow Porter, and his sister Laura, then traveling in Europe.

After his trip to the South Sea islands, the lad returned to Oak Hall, as related in the third volume, called "Dave Porter's Return to School." Here he was warmly received by his many friends, and became more popular than ever, much to the disgust of Link Merwell, Nick Jasniff, and also Nat Poole, who had followed him to Oak Hall from Crumville.

"Dave Porter puts up a big front, but I'll take him down a peg or two," said Nick Jasniff, and he forced a fight with the Crumville lad. Much to his surprise he was knocked down and badly whipped, and then, in a sudden brutal rage, he snatched up an Indian club and might have inflicted serious injury to Dave had not the latter seized him, while others forced the weapon from his grasp. Then, in alarm, Jasniff ran away from Oak Hall, and having gotten himself mixed up with some men who were wanted for a robbery, he left the country.

During this term at the school Dave was anxiously awaiting to hear from his father and his sister. Then came word, through Jasniff, who tried to belittle Dave, that Mr. Porter and Laura were in Europe, and the youth determined to go in search of them. Roger accompanied him, and what befell the pair was related in detail in "Dave Porter in the Far North." In England Dave ran across Nick Jasniff, and compelled the fellow to tell what he knew of Mr. Porter, and then Dave followed his parent to the upper part of Norway, where father and son at last met, under conditions far out of the ordinary.

Laura Porter, not knowing anything of Dave's existence, had gone from Europe to the ranch home of her friends, the Endicotts. She returned to Crumville, to meet her long-lost brother, and then Dave again returned to Oak Hall, as told of in "Dave Porter and His

Classmates." Jasniff was gone, but Link Merwell and Nat Poole remained, and both did what they could to dim Dave's popularity. Link Merwell was particularly obnoxious, and in the end Dave took matters in his own hands and gave the bully the thrashing he richly deserved. Then some of the fellow's wrongdoings reached the ears of the master of the school, and he was ordered to pack his trunk and leave, which he did in a great rage.

"It is all Dave Porter's doings!" said Link Merwell, bitterly. "But wait—I'll square up with him, see if I don't!"

Laura Porter and Belle Endicott were great friends, and through the latter Laura and her brother received an invitation to visit the Endicott ranch in the Far West, and this they did, as related in the volume entitled "Dave Porter at Star Ranch." They took with them Jessie Wadsworth and also Roger and Phil. On the way they met Nat Poole at Niagara Falls, and Poole attempted to play a mean trick on Dave. But the latter turned the tables on the money-lender's son, and the latter went back home a wiser if not a better boy.

The Endicott ranch was located next to one owned by Link Merwell's father, and, as was to be expected, it was not long before there was a clash between Dave and his party on one side and Merwell and his followers on the other. Link Merwell, as usual, did all in his power to injure Dave, and make the outing for the others a failure, but he was caught in his own trap, and it was proved that he had, to a certain extent, aided some horse-thieves in their nefarious work. Mr. Merwell had to pay Mr. Endicott for the animals that were missing, and, in order to hush the matter up, he agreed to sell his ranch and move to some other part of the country.

"Well, I hope that is the last of Link Merwell, so far as we are concerned," said Roger at the time.

"We can do very well without such chaps as Merwell and Nick Jasniff," Dave had added, with a grim smile.

"Yes, and without such fellows as Nat Poole, too," Phil had put in. "Although I must say I don't think Nat is as bad as Link and Nick."

"Nat is too much of a dude to be real bad," said Laura.

"Nat lacks backbone," explained Dave. "He usually does what the others tell him to. But Jasniff and Merwell are both wicked fellows, and Jasniff is brutal."

The home-coming from the ranch had been a gala occasion at the Wadsworth mansion, and the young people had been warmly welcomed by Jessie's parents and by Mr. Porter and Caspar Potts. Ben Basswood had come over from his home to greet them, and he brought with him Sam Day, who was paying him a visit.

"I suppose you are all going back to Oak Hall," remarked Sam to the boys.

"Of course," answered Dave. "You are going back, aren't you?"

"Sure thing—and so are all of the others of our old crowd."

"We must make the best of what vacation is left before we get down to the grind again," remarked the senator's son, and the next day the matter was talked over, with the result that the automobile trip to Shady Glen Falls was proposed and decided upon. All had started out in the best of spirits, never dreaming of the trouble that was in store for them.

"Dave, what are you going to do?" whispered Ben, as he, too, recognized the crowd coming toward the racing car.

Before Dave could answer, Nat Poole strode forward with a sickly smile on his face.

"Hello, there!" he cried, and nodded curtly to the girls. "Out for a ride, I see."

"Nat, who was driving your car?" asked Dave, sharply.

"What business is that of yours, Dave Porter?" questioned the dudish youth, quickly.

"You came pretty close to running us down. You were speeding altogether too fast."

"Ho! ho! We scared you, did we?" returned Nat. "Sorry for the girls, I'm sure," and his face took on a mean little grin.

"What are you finding fault about, Dave Porter?" demanded Pete Barnaby, the owner of the racing car, coming closer. His nose was very red, and his breath smelt strongly of liquor.

"I am finding fault with the way your car was run, if you want to know it," answered Dave, stoutly.

"We are not asking you for advice."

"Perhaps not, but if you try any such trick again, Pete Barnaby, you may get yourself into trouble."

"You were exceeding the speed limit," put in Roger.

"And you came close to running us down," added Ben.

"Oh, you boys are a timid bunch," grumbled the owner of the racing car. "I didn't come within ten feet of touching you."

"Of course they are a timid crowd," said Nick Jasniff, loudly. "If they had any sand they wouldn't say anything about it."

"You're a nice one to talk about 'sand,' after what Dave did to you at the school gym.," was Phil's sarcastic comment.

"Look here, Phil Lawrence, I don't want any of your hot air!" cried Nick Jasniff, in a sudden rage. "You keep your mouth shut."

"It's a wonder you didn't stay in Europe, Jasniff," said Dave. "I didn't think you'd dare to come back to the United States."

"Say, you needn't——" began Jasniff, and then drew back, looking much disturbed. "You—er—you needn't rake up old times. Those things are all settled, and I've got as much right to be here as you have."

"Well, you won't come back to Oak Hall," said Sam.

"Don't want to come back. I'm going to a better school."

"And so am I," said Link Merwell, as if he was anxious to make the fact known to his former schoolmates.

"I don't care where you go, so long as you don't bother us any more," rejoined Dave.

"Oh, you haven't seen the end of us yet, has he, Nick?" said Link Merwell, appealing to his crony.

"Not much he hasn't," retorted Nick Jasniff.

"We are going to Rockville Military Academy," continued Link Merwell, mentioning a school which, as my old readers know, was located not a great distance from Oak Hall. In the past there had been many contests between the students of the two seats of learning, and the rivalry was very bitter.

"Rockville!" cried the senator's son. "I shouldn't think they'd want you there."

"Say, you take that back, or I'll—I'll——" blustered Merwell, and then stopped, not knowing how to proceed.

"Oh, say, come on, you fellows," broke in Nat Poole, who was growing scared, thinking there might be a fight. "You can talk this

over some other time. Just remember what we started out to do. Hurry up, let's do it," and he motioned his companions towards the racing car.

"I'm ready to go ahead," answered Pete Barnaby, climbing into the driver's seat. "Come on, pile in, if you're going."

"I don't want Dave Porter and his crowd to think I am afraid of them," growled Link Merwell.

"We'll meet you after you get back to Oak Hall," sang out Nick Jasniff. "And we'll settle old scores."

"Well, you look out that you don't get your fingers burnt trying to do it!" retorted Dave. And then the racing car started off and was speedily lost to view around a turn of the road.

CHAPTER III

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE FALLS

"What horrid young fellows!" was Jessie's comment. She was trembling from head to foot and her face was pale.

"Don't mind what they say," answered Dave, kindly. He thought a great deal of the girl, and it distressed him greatly to see her so worried.

"I shouldn't think they'd want Jasniff and Merwell at Rockville," was the comment of the senator's son. "Everybody in that town knows how Jasniff was mixed up in that railroad station affair." He referred to a robbery committed by some men, the particulars of which were recorded in "Dave Porter's Return to School." Nick Jasniff had been in company with the evil-doers, but his share in the transaction had been smoothed over and hushed up by his family.

"Well, I heard that the military academy was rather hard up for pupils this term," answered Sam. "About a dozen of the sophs and juniors left, and the enrollment of freshmen was rather slim. I suppose on that account the authorities can't be overly particular as to who they take in."

"And of course Merwell and Jasniff had their sides of their stories to tell," said Dave. "You can be sure they didn't tell matters as Doctor Clay would have done."

"Or as we might have done—had we been asked," broke in Sam.

"Well, I hope you boys keep away from them when you get to school," said Laura.

"What do you suppose they are up to now, Dave?" asked the shipowner's son.

"I don't know, Phil; but from the look on Nat Poole's face I should think——" And then Dave stopped short.

"What?"

"Well, never mind now. I may be wrong, and there is no use of worrying. Come on, let us get to the Falls,—and try to forget that crowd." And so speaking, Dave started up the touring car he was

running, and followed in the direction Pete Barnaby had taken, and Roger came after him.

The meeting at the tavern had disturbed all of the girls, and the boys had hard work trying to cheer them up and make them forget the unpleasant encounter. Everybody felt that there was "something in the air," but each person hated to mention it to the others.

Presently Dave reached the point where they would have to take to a side road that was deep with dust and hemmed in on both sides by rocks and bushes. Here, in the dust, could plainly be seen the marks of another automobile.

"Think they came this way, Dave?" questioned Sam.

"Yes,—although some other folks may be at the Falls on an outing."

"Oh, I hope we don't meet them again!" said Belle Endicott. The two machines were running slowly and close together.

They passed on around a long curve, and over a small hill, and then came in sight of the river, glistening in the sunshine between the trees. From a distance came the roar of the Falls, where a fairly large body of water rushed steadily over the rocks.

"Isn't it a shame that they are going to use the Falls for a mill!" said one of the girls.

"Well, this is a commercial age, and so one must expect those things," answered Dave. "But I shall hate to see the Falls used for business. They are so pretty."

There was another turn just ahead, and it was lucky for Dave that he was running slowly, for there, across the road, were placed several logs and dead limbs of trees. As it was, he ran directly on top of some of the tree limbs before he could come to a stop, and Roger, so close behind, had to turn into some bushes to avoid ramming the car in front.

"Well, of all things!" burst out Phil, while several of the girls screamed in fright.

"Who did this?" demanded the senator's son.

"It is easy to see who did it," answered Dave. "See the sign?" And he pointed to a big white card, tacked to a post propped up among the logs and tree limbs. On the card was painted, in red, the following:

THIS ROAD CLOSED
By Order of Aaron Poole
Pres. Eureka Paper Co.

"This is some of Nat's work!" burst out Phil. "That is why he was in such a hurry to get ahead of us."

"I believe you," answered Dave. "I was afraid he was up to some trick, but I didn't want to say anything about it until I was sure."

"But if Nat is guilty, how did he know we were coming here?" asked Roger.

"I guess I can explain that," said Ben. "I was talking to my cousin about it, down at the drug store. Just as we were coming out, after having some soda, I saw Nat behind one of the partitions. He must have heard all we said, and I suppose it made him mad to think we were going to have a good time, and that he wouldn't be in it."

"Exactly," returned Dave. "Just as he was mad when he wasn't invited to the party, and tried to spoil the ice-cream."

"Do you suppose they have a right to close the road?" questioned Roger.

"I don't know. I always thought this was a public highway."

"So it is," added Ben. "The paper company bought the ground on one side of the road but not on the other. I don't think they can stop us from going through, even though they may stop us from going down to the Falls."

"But if we can't go to the Falls, what is the use of keeping on this road?" asked Laura.

"We can go above the Falls, Laura," answered her brother. "There is a beautiful spot there called Lookout Point, where you can look out all over the valley."

The matter was talked over for a few minutes, and the boys decided to go ahead, to show that they considered that they had a right to use the road, even if they did not go down to the Falls. The roadway was cleared sufficiently to let the cars pass, and the power was turned on once again.

"Be careful, Dave, that you don't run into more trouble!" sang out Roger.

"I'll be on the lookout!" was the answer. "And you be prepared to stop quick, too, so as not to run into me."

"I'll drop back to a place of safety," returned the senator's son. "There is no use of keeping so close together, anyway."

The road wound in and out among the trees, and in some spots was so narrow that the boys had to run with great care, for fear of bumping into the stump of a tree or on the rocks, or switching into some low-hanging branch. Dave had his foot on the brake, ready to stop quickly, should it become necessary to do so.

"Hi, there! Stop! Don't you dare to come any further!"

The call was an unexpected one, coming just as the leading automobile hove in sight of the Falls. Dave saw Nat Poole hurrying towards him, followed by Merwell and Jasniff. Pete Barnaby was nowhere in sight, and the marks on the narrow road told that his racing car had gone on ahead.

"What do you want, Nat?" asked Dave, as coolly as he could, having brought his machine to a standstill.

"Can't you read, Dave Porter?" fumed the son of the Crumville money-lender.

"Certainly I can read."

"Well, then, what are you doing on this road? You know it is closed. You haven't any right on it at all—you or anybody else. You turn around and go back, just as quick as you can."

"This is a public road, Nat Poole!" cried Ben. "You hadn't any right to put up that sign."

"Humph! A lot you know about it, Ben Basswood! This is my father's land, and I reckon he knows his rights. You are not going down to the Falls to-day to have your picnic." And Nat's small eyes gleamed maliciously.

"We don't intend to go down to the Falls,—now that we know how matters stand," said Dave. "But we are going through on this road."

"Not much you ain't—not another step!" roared Nat.

"That's right, Nat, make 'em keep off your property," put in Link Merwell.

"Show 'em that you won't allow a poorhouse nobody to dictate to you," added Nick Jasniff, but in such a low voice that Dave did not catch all he said.

"I said we were going through on this road—and we are," answered Dave, calmly, and he started to turn on the power again. As he did this Nat Poole leaped to the road directly in front of the touring car, and Jasniff and Merwell followed suit.

"Stop! Don't you dare to touch me, or I'll have the law on you!" screamed the money-lender's son.

"We'll fix 'em for you, Nat!" cried Nick Jasniff. "Come on, Link, get to work!" And leaping to one side of the roadway he dragged forth the dead limb of a tree and dropped it in front of the first car. Quick to understand, Merwell followed with another dead limb, and then with some stones.

"That's the stuff!" cried Nat Poole, his face brightening. "Pile it up, fellows!" And he, too, ran for some sticks and stones, with which to make the barrier in the narrow roadway more complete.

Had Dave elected so to do he might have gone ahead when first this work was done by the enemy. But there was danger of injury both to the big touring car and to those in the roadway, and he did not wish to take the risk. Besides, there was no telling if Roger could get through, and he would not leave the crowd in the second automobile in the lurch.

"Now, I reckon you'll have to turn back!" cried Nat Poole, in triumph, after so much had been piled in the roadway that passing was totally out of the question.

"Nat Poole, I believe you are the meanest boy in the whole world!" cried Jessie, and there was a suspicion of tears in her eyes as she spoke.

"Humph! You people needn't think that you are going to have the best of me all the time," growled Nat.

"We are not doing this against any of the young ladies," said Link Merwell, with a smirk at Laura that made Dave's sister turn away in disdain. "We are only doing it to square accounts with Dave Porter and his cronies. We owe them a good deal,—and this is the first installment."

"With a good deal more to follow!" added Nick Jasniff, with a wicked chuckle.

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, this is a public highway," said Dave, as calmly as he could. "You have no right to block the road, and I want you to clear that stuff away just as fast as you put it there."

"Hear him talk!" cried Link Merwell. "You'd think he was Governor of the State, wouldn't you?"

"Don't you mind what he says, Nat," said Jasniff. "If they start to take the stuff away we'll put it back." And then, looking around, he picked up a heavy stick which might be used for a club. He was spoiling for a fight, and only the presence of the girls, and the fact that he and his cohorts were but three against five, kept him from attacking Dave.

"Oh, Dave, what shall we do?" whispered Jessie. She was becoming more frightened every minute.

"I don't see how we are going to turn around," said one of the other girls. "The trees are too close to the sides of the road."

"We are not going to turn around," answered Dave, and his face took on a stern look. He turned to his chums. "How about it?"

"I'll fight them before I turn back!" answered Roger.

"So will I," added Phil. "I don't believe they have any more right to this road than we have."

"Oh, you mustn't fight," cried Laura.

"Do you want to let that crowd crow over us, Laura?" asked Dave, flatly.

"No, no, Dave! But—but——" And then Laura stopped short, not knowing what to say. She did not wish to see an encounter, nor did she wish her brother and his chums to give in to those who were so unjustly opposing them.

CHAPTER IV

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

"This is the time we get the best of Dave Porter!" whispered Link Merwell to his cronies. "I guess we have spoiled their picnic."

"I—I—don't think th—they'll fight," faltered Nat, as Dave leaped to the ground, followed by his chums.

"Better arm yourselves with clubs," suggested Nick Jasniff. "Remember, we are only three to five."

"Maybe we had better—er—go away," returned the money-lender's son, hesitatingly.

"No, I am going to see the thing out," answered Jasniff.

"So am I," added Merwell. "Don't go, Nat—they won't dare to fight—with the girls looking on."

"Whoa, there! Whoa!" came a cry from behind the two touring cars, and looking back the boys and girls saw a man drive up on a buckboard drawn by a spirited horse.

"Why, if it isn't Jed Sully!" cried Ben.

"Who is he?" questioned Sam.

"Sort of a roadmaster in these parts. I suppose he is going around, inspecting the roads and bridges."

"Then he ought to be able to tell us about this road!" put in Phil, quickly.

"Hello! What's the meaning of this?" demanded Jed Sully, after alighting. And he strode forward and confronted the boys.

"How are you, Mr. Sully?" said Dave, for he had met the roadmaster before.

"Oh, so it's you, Dave! Blocked up, eh?" And the roadmaster looked first at Dave and his chums and then at those standing on the other side of the barrier. "Who did this?"

"They did," answered Roger, and pointed to the other crowd.

"What for?" And the roadmaster's voice grew a bit hard.

"Nat Poole, there, claims that his father has a right to close this road," explained Dave. "He put up a barrier some distance back, but we passed it. Now he and his friends have put up this."

"And we want to know if they have a right to do it," added Ben. "I had an idea the new paper company bought only one side of the road."

"So it did," answered Jed Sully. "And even if it bought both sides it couldn't close off this road, which is a public highway." He turned to Nat. "Are you Aaron Poole's son?"

"Ye-as," faltered the youth addressed, and he commenced to look worried.

"Did your father give you orders to close off this road?"

"Why—er—he—that is," stammered Nat. "What business is it of yours, anyway?" he cried.

"It is a good deal of my business," responded Jed Sully, warmly. "I am the roadmaster for this district, and I won't allow you or anybody else to close off this road, or any other, without special permission. You had no right to put those logs across the road away back, and put up that sign, and I want you to take 'em away as soon as you can."

"Well, my father bought this land, and——"

"No, he didn't buy it; the paper company bought it," corrected Jed Sully. "But that gave 'em no right to close the road. You take that stuff out of the way, and at once, or I'll have you locked up." And walking around the barrier he caught Nat by the arm.

"Let go—don't you touch me!" screamed the money-lender's son, trying to jerk away.

"You let my friend alone," broke in Nick Jasniff, and made a motion as if to use his club.

"Here, none of that—or I'll have you all in the lock-up in jig time," said the roadmaster, so sternly that Jasniff allowed the club to drop to his side. He turned again to Dave and his friends. "Did you see these chaps put this stuff here?"

"Yes," replied the others.

"Then get to work and clear it away instantly, or I'll lock you all up, and these fellows can testify against you," continued the roadmaster, to Nat and his cronies.

"Good! that's the way to talk to 'em!" cried Roger, in a low voice.

"I guess Nat didn't expect to meet the roadmaster," returned Sam.

The money-lender's son and his cronies tried to argue the matter, but Jed Sully would not listen to them. He knew Aaron Poole, and had no love for the man who had on more than one occasion foreclosed a mortgage, and driven people out of house and home.

"I'll give you ten minutes to clear the road," he said, taking out a big silver watch. "If it ain't cleared by that time I'll take you over to Lumberdale and lock you up."

"I won't touch a stick!" cried Jasniff, defiantly.

"Nor I," added Merwell.

"Oh, but—er—I don't want to be locked up!" whined Nat.

"You said your dad had a right to the road," said Jasniff, in disgust.

"I thought he did have, but—er—I guess I was mistaken. Oh, come on and help me!" pleaded Nat, and set to work without further delay, to clear the road.

Jasniff and Merwell were very angry, but they did not care to let their crony do all the work, and they were a bit afraid of Jed Sully, so presently they took hold and aided the money-lender's son in clearing the highway.

"As soon as you've finished here you'll come back with me and clear the other spot," said the roadmaster. "And you can tear up that sign, for it is no good."

"I'm going to put it up near the Falls," answered Nat. "Nobody can come down there any more."

"Then you'd better put up a fence to keep 'em out," was the roadmaster's comment.

"You don't want us to come back with you, do you?" asked Dave, in a whisper. "We are off for a picnic and it is getting late."

"No, you can go on if you want to," answered Jed Sully. "I can manage them, I reckon. If they give me any trouble I'll put 'em in the lock-up and get you to testify to what they did on the road."

"Oh, Dave, let us go on!" cried Jessie. "I don't want to stay here another minute."

The others were all anxious to depart, and as soon as the road was entirely clear the two touring cars were started up.

"Hope you have a nice time clearing away that other stuff," remarked Phil to Nat Poole and his cronies, as the machine passed on.

"Don't you crow,—we are not done with you yet!" shouted Merwell, and Jasniff shook his fist at the departing cars. Nat Poole felt so humiliated he turned his gaze in another direction.

"It was a lucky thing that that roadmaster came along when he did," remarked Sam, when the scene of the encounter had been left behind. "If he hadn't showed up I don't know what we should have done."

"Maybe we would have had a fight," returned Ben.

"Oh, I am glad it didn't come to that!" cried Jessie, and her face showed her relief.

"Wonder what became of the racing car and Pete Barnaby?" questioned the shipowner's son.

"Perhaps Barnaby went ahead to make more trouble for us!" said Dave. "We had better be on our guard," he called to Roger.

"I'll follow you at a safe distance, as I did before," answered the senator's son.

The Falls were passed, and then they commenced to ascend a long hill, leading to Lookout Point. Just before the spot was reached they took to another side road, and were glad to see that no other automobile had passed that way.

"We'll have the Lookout all to ourselves," said Dave. "And that is just what we want."

"Maybe I'm not getting hungry!" cried Phil. "I really believe I could choke down a chicken sandwich, if I was forced to do it!"

"'Forced' is good!" answered Dave. "Girls, be sure to keep the hamper away from Phil, or he won't leave enough behind to feed a canary," and this remark brought forth the first laugh since the trouble on the road.

They drove as close to Lookout Point as the road allowed, and then placed the two cars in a safe place under the trees.

"We must keep our eyes open," whispered Dave to the other boys. "That other crowd may sneak up and try to damage the machines, so as to make us walk from here."

"We'll watch out," answered Roger; and the others said the same.

While the boys started a campfire over which to boil some coffee, and obtained a bucket of fresh drinking water from a nearby spring, the girls spread a tablecloth over some flat rocks and set around the dishes and the things to eat. There was more than enough of everything to go around, and it was particularly appetizing after that long ride in the fresh air.

"I tell you, this is something like," cried Dave, munching on a sandwich and a stalk of celery. "I shouldn't mind having a picnic like this once a week regularly."

"Make it twice a week," returned Roger, who was eating a sandwich from one hand and a hard-boiled egg from the other.

"Who'll have some coffee?" cried Phil, coming up with a pot of the steaming beverage. "I've got to strain it through the corner of a napkin, but I guess that won't hurt it."

"Napkin, indeed!" cried Jessie. "There is a strainer in the spout."

"Oh, is there? I didn't look in to see. Well, here goes! Coffee! Ten cents a cup, or two cups for a nickel! Good for the complexion and warranted to cure the blues!" cried the shipowner's son gayly, and swung the pot around over his head.

"Hi! Look out there!" roared Sam, clapping his hand to his ear. "I like coffee, but I don't drink it that way!" And he wiped off a few drops that had reached him.

"Phil is fined one horseshoe nail for spilling the coffee," cried Dave.

"Don't nail me so soon!" answered the shipowner's son gayly.

"Shoo! Just to hear that!" murmured Roger.

"I'm too hoarse to answer to that!" said Ben.

"Say, do you know why a lawyer likes to drink coffee?" asked Sam.

"Why?" asked the girls, in a chorus.

"Because there is always a fee in it for him," was the answer. And then the joker had to dodge an olive and a pickle that Dave and Phil hurled at him, while all the girls giggled.

An hour was spent over the lunch, the boys doing their best to entertain the girls and succeeding admirably. Of course a good many of the things that were said were silly, but everybody was in good humor and out for a good time, so what did it matter? In their high spirits they forgot all about the unfortunate occurrence of the morning.

After the lunch the boys helped the girls clean up and put away what was left, and then all strolled about, first to the edge of the Lookout, to view the scenery, and then to the woods and the brook beyond. Dave naturally paired off with Jessie, while Roger went with Laura, and Phil with Belle.

"Well, it won't be long now before I'll be off again for Oak Hall," said Dave, as he and Jessie stood where the brook tumbled over a series of rocks, making a murmur pleasant to hear.

"Yes, Dave, and I—I shall be sorry to have you go," said Jessie, looking him full in the eyes.

"You'll write to me often, won't you, Jessie?" he asked, in a lower voice.

"I'll answer every letter you send, Dave," and now she cast down her eyes for a moment. "I always do."

"I know it—and you can't imagine how much I treasure those letters," he went on.

"Well, I—I think a lot of your letters, too," she whispered.

"Then you want me to write very often?"

"Yes."

"All right, I will. And, Jessie——" continued Dave, but just then a shout from Sam interrupted him.

CHAPTER V

THE BOYS AND A BULL

"Wonder what Sam wants?" said Dave, as the shouting continued. "I guess I'll have to go and see."

He ran over the rocks in the direction of the cries, and soon came in sight of his chum.

"Hurry up!" cried Sam. "I want you!"

"What is it, Sam?" questioned Dave.

"We are going to have trouble."

"What, have Jasniff and those others come here?"

"No, but maybe it's just as bad, Dave. Just look toward the autos."

Dave did as requested, and his face became a study. He was half inclined to laugh, yet, having been brought up in the country, he well knew the seriousness of the situation.

The two automobiles stood side by side, about three yards apart. Between them was a big and angry-looking bull, tramping the ground and snorting viciously. The bull had a chain around his neck, and to the end of this was a small-sized tree stump, which the animal had evidently pulled from the ground in his endeavor to get away from his pasture. The tree stump had become entangled in the wheel of one of the automobiles, and the bull was giving vicious jerks, first one way and then another, causing the machine to "slew around" in an alarming fashion.

"Sam, we'll have to get him out of there!" cried Dave. "If we don't he may break that wheel—or do worse."

"I'm afraid he'll run off with the car!" gasped Sam. He was almost out of breath from running and calling.

By this time the others were coming up. At the sight of the savage bull several of the girls commenced to scream.

"Oh, we'll be killed!"

"Can't somebody drive him away!"

"Look! look! He is dragging one machine into the other!"

"You girls had better keep back," warned Dave. "If he breaks loose he may come for you."

"Oh, Dave, do be careful!" cried Jessie.

"Yes, yes, don't go too close," added his sister.

"What do you suppose we can do?" questioned the senator's son, as the boys gathered in a group at a little distance, and the girls got behind them.

"If I had a hooked pole I'd soon fix him," answered Dave.

"How?" asked Phil, who knew little or nothing about bulls.

"See that ring in his nose? I'd hook him in that and then keep him at the end of the pole. That always brings 'em to terms."

"But we haven't got any hook," said Ben. "We might make one, though," he added.

A small hatchet had been brought along—with which to chop firewood—and securing this the boys quickly cut two slender but strong saplings, and trimmed them of their branches.

"There is a hook in our car," said Jessie. "If you could only get that!"

"Don't you try it," said Ben. "I've known a bull to leap into a wagon, and this one might leap right into the auto and wreck everything—and hurt you in the bargain."

"I'll use a tree root for a hook," said Dave, and quickly found what he wanted, and bound it fast to one of the poles by means of a fishing line he happened to be carrying.

"Now, Ben, you stand by to prod him, if he gets too rambunctious," went on Dave, as he handed the second pole to his chum.

"All right," answered Ben. He, too, had been brought up on a farm, and knew a little about bulls.

The animal had quieted down for a moment, and was grazing on some grass between the automobiles. But, as the lads approached, he raised his head, pawed with his hoof, and gave a vicious snort.

"He means to fight, Dave!" cried Ben. "We've got to be on our guard."

"Oh, do be careful!" cried Belle. To her this beast of the farm looked more terrifying than those she had seen on the ranch.

With great caution Dave approached the bull from one side while Ben approached from the other. The animal snorted again, and lowered his horns. All the girls began to scream.

"Better be quiet," called out Dave. "You'll only excite him more."

"Oh, be careful!" answered Jessie, in a horrified whisper.

At that moment the bull backed up against one of the automobiles, and then moved forward again. This action released the tree stump, so that the beast was now free to go where he pleased. He started straight for Ben.

"Prod him!" yelled Dave, and Ben promptly did as requested, catching the bull in the mouth with his stick. Then, as the animal turned aside, Dave jumped closer, put out his stick, and caught the improvised hook in the nose ring.

"Good! you've got him!" shouted Phil. "Can we help you any?"

"I don't think so—keep quiet," was the reply.

The bull snorted wildly for a moment, and Dave had all he could do to keep the animal at the pole's length. But he knew how to twist the ring, and this speedily brought the beast to terms. The snorting ceased, and the bull stood still, glaring viciously at his captor, but not daring to attempt an attack.

"Come, gee haw!" cried Dave, presently; and with caution commenced to pull on the pole. Slowly the bull stepped after him, dragging the chain and stump behind him.

"What are you going to do with him?" called out Roger.

"Tangle him up in the bushes—if I can," was the answer, and Dave turned in the direction of the brushwood lining the watercourse.

At this point there were a good many sharp rocks and twisted roots of bushes and trees, and it was not long before the loose stump caught on them.

"Come on, we'll fasten him good and hard!" cried Phil, dashing up behind the bull, and as quickly as it could be done he and the others piled some loose rocks against the tree stump, so that it would be next to impossible for the bull to work it free.

"Now you can let him go, Dave," said Ben, who had stood guard with his pole. "We've got him as fast as he ever was." And then Dave

let loose from the ring, much to the animal's relief, for he chanced to have a tender nose, and the twisting of the ring hurt him a good deal.

"Are you sure he won't get away and come for us?" questioned Laura, as all drew to a safe distance.

"He won't get away very soon," answered Ben. "But we ought to notify his owner of what we have done."

"Whose bull is it?" asked one of the girls.

"I give up—I never saw him before."

"I think the bull belongs to the Hook Stock Farm," said Dave, mentioning a farm located about a mile away. "I don't know of anybody else around here who would own a bull. When we go home we can stop at the farm and tell them of what has happened."

Leaving the animal quietly grazing among the bushes, the boys and girls walked over to the automobiles, to learn if any damage had been done. In his movements the bull had scratched some paint from the wheels and the mudguards, but that was all, for which they were thankful.

"Well, it's about time to start for home," said Dave, consulting his watch. "Remember, we are to go the long way around,—and stop at the Hook place in the bargain."

"I'm ready to go," answered Jessie. The presence of the bull still disturbed her.

Yet it was some little time before they started, for the things had to be packed, and several of the boys and girls wanted to get photographs of the picnic party. Then Dave cranked up, and Roger did the same. All piled in, and the start for home was begun.

"I'll wager that Nat Poole, Link Merwell, and Nick Jasniff are the maddest boys in this State," was Phil's comment, as the first car rolled on, with he and Dave on the front seat.

"I believe you, Phil," answered the driver of the machine. "And if Jasniff and Merwell really do go to Rockville Academy you can make up your mind that they will cause us all the trouble possible."

"I don't believe the better class of fellows at the military academy will take to those chaps."

"Neither do I. But there are some mean boys at that school—you remember them—and Merwell and Jasniff will flock with that bunch.

Oh, they'll try their best to down us, you see if they don't!" declared Dave.

On the road beyond the picnic ground they came to a spot where some rocks and logs had been piled up and then taken away again. All gazed at the spot with interest.

"I guess Pete Barnaby did this—under directions from Nat Poole," said Ben.

"Yes, and Jed Sully made him, or the Poole crowd, clear it away again," answered Dave. "They'll not close this road as long as Sully is roadmaster."

"Be on your guard, Dave!" sang out Roger. "Those rascals will play some trick on us, if they can."

"I'm on the watch!" answered Dave.

As they bowled along all kept their eyes on the alert, and it was well that they did so, for at a turn they suddenly came upon some broken bottles thrown down just where the machines had to pass. Dave gave a yell of warning, and turned off the power and applied the brakes just in time, and, as before, Roger had to turn into the bushes, to avoid striking the turnout ahead.

"They thought they'd make us cut our tires," said Dave.

"Right you are," answered Phil. "Phew! If we had gone over that glass we might have had some nasty punctures or blow-outs."

"They ought to be arrested for this!" said Sam, wrathfully. "It's against the law to put glass on a public highway."

"We can't prove they did it," answered Ben. "If we accused them, of course they would deny it. But it shows their meanness."

The boys got out and picked up some of the glass, and swept the rest aside as well as they could. Then the machines were started up once more, and soon they came in sight of the Hook Stock Farm, and Dave beckoned to a man who stood near the gateway.

"Have you lost one of your bulls?" he asked.

"We sure have!" answered the man, quickly. "What do you know about him?"

"We know he tried to run off with our autos," returned Dave, with a grin, and then told the man the story, and described where the animal could be found. While he was speaking two other stock farm

hands came up. They had been looking for the bull since early morning.

"He's a valuable beast," said one of the men. "I hope he ain't hurt none."

"He isn't hurt—and we are mighty glad he didn't hurt us," said Phil.

"Oh, he won't hurt nobody—if he's left alone," said the man.

"How can he hurt anybody, if he is left alone?" was Roger's dry query. But the man was too dull to see the joke.

From the stock farm hands, the boys found out which were the best roads to take, and then passed on again, up hill and down dale for a distance of six miles, when they came out on a broad and well-kept highway.

"Good! This is what I like!" cried Dave, and turned on the power until the touring car was moving along at a lively rate. Roger "hit her up," as he called it, also, and before long they had covered an additional ten miles. Then they had to go over a hill, beyond which lay the village of Lester.

"Let us stop at Lester for some ice-cream soda," whispered Phil to Dave, and the latter agreed.

At the foot of the hill there was a turn, and Dave slowed up to make this, and Roger did likewise. Then, as they passed a deep and muddy ditch, Dave gave a cry and came to a stop.

"Look there!" he called out, pointing down into the ditch.

All gazed to where he pointed. There, in the water and mud, rested the racing car belonging to Pete Barnaby. And standing in the mud up to his knees was the sporty man himself, looking the picture of woeful despair.

CHAPTER VI

A TALK WITH AARON POOLE

As the boys halted their touring cars and gazed at the racing car and its owner, they could not help but smile, and Phil laughed outright.

"How did it happen?" asked Dave, in as kindly a tone as he could assume, for he saw that Pete Barnaby was in serious trouble. The turnout had landed in a particularly soft spot, and was settling deeper and deeper every minute.

"None of your business!" growled the sporty man, wrathfully.

"Oh, all right!" returned Dave, coldly. "I thought maybe you would want us to help you."

"Precious little help I'd get from you chaps!" grumbled Pete Barnaby.

"You might get some if you would act half civil," answered Dave.

"Humph! I suppose you want me to ask you to help me, so that you can have the pleasure of refusing me, eh?"

"No, if I can aid you I will," answered Dave, promptly.

"He doesn't deserve any help," whispered Phil.

"I know that, Phil," answered Dave. "But I'd hate to leave him in the lurch. Why, that machine may sink so deep nobody could get it out."

"If you'll haul me out I'll pay you for your trouble," said Pete Barnaby, gruffly. "It's an easy way to earn ten dollars."

"I don't want your money," replied Dave. "I'll do what I can."

"So will I," added Roger. "The two machines together ought to be able to do the trick."

"Do you really mean it?" asked the sporty man, and now his voice had a ring of hope in it.

"Yes," said the senator's son, and Dave nodded.

The boys got out, and from the three cars ropes were produced and tied together, and the two touring cars were hooked one in front of the other, and then made fast to the racing car.

"Don't haul too hard at the start," begged Pete Barnaby. "If you do you may pull my car apart."

"We'll be careful," answered Dave. He turned to his chum. "Remember, Roger, we've got eighty horse-power hooked up here."

"I'll be on my guard," answered the senator's son. "But remember," he added to Pete Barnaby, "we are not to be responsible if the hauling breaks your car."

"I'll run that risk—only go slow," answered the man in trouble.

The rope had been made as long as possible, so that the stalled car could be drawn out of the ditch lengthwise instead of sidewise. The two cars in the road started up on low speed, and gradually the rope grew taut.

"Look out, everybody, in case that rope snaps!" cried Ben. "I once heard of a rope like that snapping and killing a house-mover."

"You are cheerful, I must say," was Sam's dry comment. Nevertheless, all were on their guard as the rope grew as tight as a string on a bow.

"She ain't moving yet!" cried Pete Barnaby. He stood by the side of his machine watching the rope closely.

Hardly had he spoken when there came a slow, sucking sound, as the wheels left their bed of soft mud. Then the racing machine moved forward slowly.

"Hurrah! she's coming!" cried Sam. "Put on a little more steam and you'll have her!"

Dave and Roger turned on more power, and the racing machine continued to move. Soon it was at the edge of the ditch, and then, with something of a jerk, it came up on the roadway, leaving a trail of dirty water and slimy mud behind it.

"Say, you did it all right enough!" cried Pete Barnaby, in delight. "I was afraid she was too deep down to budge."

"She would have been too deep if you had left her there very much longer," answered Dave. "Now, if you'll untie those ropes and clean them off for us, we'll be on our way again."

"Sure, I'll clean them off." And the sporty man set to work with alacrity. "Say, don't you really want me to pay you for this?" And he made a move as if to draw a roll of bills from his pocket.

"I don't want a cent," answered Dave.

"It's all right," added Roger; "only, Mr. Barnaby, I'd advise you after this not to stand in with Nat Poole and his crowd."

"I'm sorry I did, now; honest I am," was the sporty man's answer. "I—er—I only did it as a favor for Nat, because his father is holding one of my notes. How did you make out after I went away? I see you must have got through."

"We did," replied Dave, and then mentioned how Jed Sully had come to their aid. At this news Pete Barnaby began to grin.

"It was sure a neat way of turning the trick," he said, "and seeing how you young gentlemen have helped me, I'm glad you did it. You can be sure I'll never lay a straw in your way again, never!" And then, the ropes having been put away, the two touring cars proceeded on their way once more, leaving Pete Barnaby to clean up his machine and put it in running order again.

"Dave, that was a real nice thing to do!" declared Jessie, and gave him a bright look.

"He must have felt awfully small, for you to be so generous after the way he acted," was Laura's comment.

"Maybe it will be a lesson to him, to do what is square in the future," said Belle.

They were soon in the town of Lester, and there stopped at the main drug store, where the boys treated the girls to ice-cream "sundaes," as they are sometimes called. Then they took a round-about way back to Crumville, arriving there at sundown.

"Oh, what a nice day we have had, in spite of the drawbacks!" cried Jessie, dancing into the mansion.

"Drawbacks?" queried her mother. "Did you get a puncture, or a breakdown?"

"Oh, no; nothing happened to the cars," answered the curly-haired miss. And then she turned to the boys, to let them tell the story. While they were doing this, Mr. Wadsworth came in, followed by Dave's father and his uncle, and Caspar Potts.

"That is just on a par with Aaron Poole's actions in general," said Mr. Wadsworth. "He would claim the earth, if he dared. I think the other property owners along that road will have something to say if he tries to close it up."

"I heard about the new paper company this morning," said Dave's father. "Some of the stockholders are not in sympathy with the way Mr. Poole is managing affairs, and they talk of putting him out."

"I hope they do put him out!" cried Dave. "He tries to carry things with too high a hand altogether."

"I am glad people are finding out what sort of folks the Pooles are," said Caspar Potts. He had not forgotten how in the past Aaron Poole had driven him to the wall, and tried to get his little farm away from him.

After the automobile outing, Phil, Roger, and Sam left Crumville to pay their folks a brief visit before departing for Oak Hall. This left Dave and Ben to get ready by themselves, and to take out the girls, which they did on several occasions. They thought they might meet Nick Jasniff and Link Merwell, but did not do so, and later on heard that the pair had departed for Rockville Military Academy. They saw Nat Poole, but he kept out of speaking distance.

"I wish Nat was going to Rockville, too," said Ben. "He'd never be missed at Oak Hall."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Ben," returned Dave. "Nat spends considerable money—although how he gets it from that miserly father of his I don't know—and that makes him some friends. But I, too, wish he wasn't going back to our school."

"Do you suppose he'll take the same train we take?"

"Perhaps, although I hope not."

On the day before departing for Oak Hall, Dave and Ben went down to the railroad station to purchase their tickets. There they saw Nat, with a new dress-suit case and a new fall overcoat, talking to his father.

"He must be going to take the train this afternoon," said Dave, and he was right. When the train came in Nat got aboard, along with a number of other passengers. As he did this, he espied the others, and spoke a few words to his father in a whisper. Then the train rolled away, and Aaron Poole strode over to where Dave and Ben were standing.

"See here, young man, I want to talk to you!" cried the money-lender, gazing sourly at Dave.

"What do you want, Mr. Poole?" asked Dave, as calmly as he could.

"You tried your best to get my son into trouble the other day."

"No, I didn't—Nat got himself into trouble."

"Bah! You needn't try to tell me! I know all about it."

"I don't care to discuss the question," went on Dave, a trifle sharply.

"Nat was to blame—if you don't believe it, ask Mr. Sully, the roadmaster," put in Ben.

"Don't you try to tell me!" fumed Aaron Poole. "I know both of you boys only too well! You did your best to get my son and his friends into trouble. Now, I want to warn you about something. I understand both of you are going back to Oak Hall. Nat is going there, too, and I give you fair warning that you must treat him fairly. If you don't I'll come to the school and have it out with Doctor Clay, understand that?" And the money-lender shook his long finger into the faces of the boys.

"Mr. Poole, just let me tell you something," answered Dave. "It is something you ought to know, and I feel it is my duty to tell you, even though you are not treating us as you should. Come out of the crowd, please."

"I don't want to listen to your talk."

"Well, you had better,—unless you want a lot of trouble later on."

"What do you want?" And rather unwillingly the money-lender followed Dave and Ben to a secluded corner of the railroad station.

"I want to warn you about the company Nat is keeping. The two boys he is going with, Nick Jasniff and Link Merwell, are bad characters. You don't have to take my word for it—write to Doctor Clay and see what he says. Nick Jasniff ran away from school and he got hold of some money that didn't belong to him and used it. Link Merwell got mixed up with some horse-thieves, on his father's ranch out West, and his father had to foot the bill to hush the matter up. I feel it my duty to tell you this, so that you can warn Nat. That's all." And Dave caught Ben by the arm and started to walk away.

"Humph! So that is your game, eh? Trying to blacken other boys' characters!" sneered Aaron Poole. "Well, it won't work with me, for I know you too well, Dave Porter. Don't I know where you came

from—the Crumville poorhouse? I guess I can trust my son to pick out the right kind of friends. You are jealous of him, because those other boys won't go with the like of you! Don't talk to me! Only——" And Aaron Poole raised his forefinger again. "Remember my warning, when you get to Oak Hall!" And then he strode away, his thin lips tightly drawn, and his sharp chin held high in the air.

"Well, wouldn't that make you groan!" was Ben's comment, after the man had disappeared. "Dave, you had your trouble for your pains."

"I don't care, Ben—I just felt I had to tell him. It's a shame to let Nat cotton to fellows like Jasniff and Merwell. They will drag him down as sure as fate."

"I believe you there. But if Nat's father won't listen—why, I'd drop the matter. Besides, you must remember that those fellows are going to another school, situated quite some distance from Oak Hall. Nat won't see them, excepting on special occasions."

"He can meet them whenever he goes to Rockville—the town I mean—and Jasniff and Merwell will get him to drink and smoke, and maybe gamble, and worse. Nat is easily led at times."

"Yes, I know that." Ben drew a long breath. "Well, let's drop the subject, Dave. We have our own battles to fight." And then the boys separated, each to finish the preparations for his departure.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE WAY TO OAK HALL

Swiftly the hours rolled away until it was time for Dave to bid his family and his friends good-by and leave for Oak Hall. The evening before his departure he took a walk with Jessie, to the end of the Wadsworth garden, but what was said between the pair was never known to anybody but themselves. When they came back he was holding her hand, and both of them looked as if they understood each other perfectly and were correspondingly happy.

All of the girls, as well as Dave's father, went to the depot to see him off, and there they met Ben and some of his folks. Then the train came in, and the youths climbed on board, dress-suit cases in hand. The girls waved their handkerchiefs.

"Have a good time!" cried Belle, gayly.

"Take good care of yourself, Dave!" added Jessie.

"Don't forget to write," supplemented Laura.

"We'll do everything you want us to do!" shouted Dave, with a smile, and then he and Ben waved their caps from the car window as the train rolled forward, and Crumville was left behind.

"Well, we are off at last," observed Ben, as he and Dave settled back in the seat for the run to the Junction, where they would have to change cars for Oakdale, the town nearest to the school. "And I am not sorry, are you?"

"Not at all, Ben. When it comes time to go to Oak Hall I am always glad to go and meet the other fellows; when the term is over I am equally glad to get home and see the folks. It is like the seasons—at the end of the summer I am glad winter is coming, and at the end of winter I am just as pleased that summer is at hand."

"It's the change, I suppose." Ben stretched out and drew his knees high up in front of him. "My, but when you come to look at it, what changes have taken place at Oak Hall since we first went there! Don't you remember what a bully Gus Plum used to be, and how Chip Macklin used to toady to him! Now Plum has reformed completely, and Chip is as manly a little chap as any of 'em."

"It's a pity that Nat Poole can't take a leaf from Gus's notebook and reform, too," answered Dave.

"Maybe he will—after he sees the error of his ways. But, Dave, what of athletics this season? Are you going in for them?"

"I am—but not too strongly, Ben. I want to get all the education I can."

"Want to get through and leave Oak Hall?"

"I don't want to be a schoolboy all my life. I want to get out in the world and make something of myself."

"What are you going to become after you leave school?"

"I don't know yet. I was talking it over with father and my uncle, but I haven't reached any decision."

At the Junction the boys had to wait about half an hour for the train to Oakdale. Dave suggested that they walk over to a candy store and have some soda water.

"May meet some of the other fellows there," he added. "The train from the other way came in quarter of an hour ago, and I saw a lot of dress-suit cases in the baggage room."

As the two youths entered the candy store a shout went up from three boys who were drinking soda.

"There are Dave Porter and Ben Basswood!"

"Hello, Dave, old man; how are you?"

"My, look at Ben's new suit! It's almost loud enough to talk!"

"Hello, fellows!" answered Dave, and striding forward he shook hands with the crowd, one after the other.

"Got any of those mountain lions with you?" queried Joseph Beggs, a round-faced, fat lad. "Heard you brought down about a dozen while you were on the ranch."

"Yes, Buster, I've got three in my trunk," answered Dave, gayly. "Want me to let 'em loose!"

"Heard you did up Link Merwell," said Luke Watson, another lad, who was well liked because of his singing and playing abilities. "I was glad to hear it."

"So were all of us," broke in the third boy, a tall, slim youth, Maurice Hamilton by name. "But speaking of mountain lions puts me in mind of a story. Once three men——"

"The same old Shadow!" interrupted Dave, grabbing his hand and giving it a squeeze that made the story-teller of the school wince. "Shadow, I believe you'd try to spin a yarn when you were proposing to your best girl."

"That sure would be a yarn," cried Ben, as he, too, shook hands.

"I haven't any best girl and you know it," retorted Shadow. "But I say," he continued, closing one eye tightly. "How is Miss Jessie Wadsworth, Dave?"

"Very well," was the answer, and Dave turned a bit red. "Let us have something," he added, hastily, to the clerk behind the soda fountain counter. "What shall it be, Ben?"

"Make it a true love frappé," sang out Buster Beggs, with a broad grin.

"But don't forget to put some ginger in it," added Shadow Hamilton.

"My love, how can I leave thee!
One parting hug I give thee!
And now when Oak Hall calls me,
I go, whate'er befalls me!"

sang Luke Watson, and put up his hands as if playing an imaginary guitar.

"Say, doesn't anybody want to hear that story about the mountain lions?" queried Shadow, reproachfully. Story-telling was his hobby, and it had often been said by his friends that he would rather spin a yarn than eat.

"Some other time, Shadow," answered Buster. "We want to hear about Dave's trip West, and about what he did to Link Merwell."

"Before I tell you about that, let me give you a piece of news," said Dave. And then he related how he and the others had met Merwell and Jasniff with Nat Poole, and how the two former youths were going to Rockville Military Academy. As he had anticipated, this created quite a sensation, and a lively discussion followed, which was kept up even after the crowd got aboard the train which would carry them to Oakdale.

"Well, if Rockville wants such fellows it can have 'em," was Buster Beggs's comment. "I, for one, am glad they are out of Oak Hall."

"I know one fellow who will be glad they are gone," said Shadow. "That is Gus Plum."

"Yes, indeed," answered Dave, for he well remembered what influence Merwell and even Jasniff had exercised over Plum when the youth had found his appetite for liquor almost too strong for him.

Of course Dave had to go over many of his Western adventures, and the others listened with keen interest to all he had to tell. When he mentioned the theft of the horses at the ranch, and how Link Merwell had been mixed up with the thieves, more than one shook his head.

"According to that, Link and Nick are a team," said Luke Watson. "Dave, you had better be on your guard. They won't hesitate to play you some foul trick."

Oakdale, a small but prosperous town, was reached at last, and the schoolboys piled out of the train, along with a few other passengers.

"Hello, there is Polly Vane!" cried Dave, catching sight of a slender lad with a girlish face. "How are you, Polly?"

"Oh, it's Dave Porter!" answered Bertram Vane, in a low but pleased voice. He held out his slender hand. "I am delighted to see you back! How tanned you are, and how strong-looking!"

"It was the mountain air did it, Polly. By the way, is Horsehair around?" he continued, with a glance beyond the depot platform.

"Oh, yes! Here he comes now!" And as Polly spoke the big carryall of the school swung into view, with Jackson Lemond, commonly called "Horsehair," on the driver's seat. The boys made a rush for the carryall, throwing their suit-cases in the rack on top, and piling inside one over the other.

"Horsehair, you're looking fine!"

"How's the widow, Horsehair? Heard you were going to marry a widow with eight children."

"Nine children, Buster,—don't drop any of the family like that."

"Nothing like getting a ready-made family while you are at it, Horsehair."

"I heard the widow was a suffragette, Horsehair. Is that right?"

"If she's that, Horsehair, she'll make you mind the children and wash dishes—better beware!"

"Oh, don't worry about that. Horsehair is an expert at washing dishes, and at minding babies he once took first prize at a county fair; didn't you, Horsehair?"

"Say, you!" roared the carryall driver, his face as red as a beet. "You quit your knockin'! I ain't gittin' married to no widder, nor nobody else! An' I ain't washin' dishes an' mindin' babies nuther! Such boys!" And with a crack of his whip he started up the turnout so suddenly that half the lads were pitched into the laps of the other half.

It was certainly a jolly crowd that rolled over the well-kept highway toward Oak Hall. They knew that many hard lessons awaited them, and that, once school opened, discipline would be strict, but just now all were in high spirits. To the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" Luke Watson started up the school song, and the others joined in lustily:

"Oak Hall we never shall forget,
No matter where we roam,
It is the very best of schools,
To us it's just like home!
Then give three cheers, and let them ring
Throughout this world so wide,
To let the people know that we
Elect to here abide!"

"That's the stuff!" cried Ben, slangily. "Now, then, for the field cry," and then came the Oak Hall cheer:

"Baseball!
Football!
Oak Hall
Has the call!
Biff! Boom! Bang! Whoop!"

"I think we ought to display the school colors!" cried Dave. "Anybody got a flag?"

"Here is one," answered Polly Vane, from his seat in front, beside the driver. "But I haven't got a stick for it."

"Never mind, Shadow's fishing rod will do," answered Dave. "Shadow, hand it over."

"All right, but don't break the rod," said Shadow. "It cost me four bones."

The rod was put together, and the school colors fastened to the top. Then the rod was thrust out of a side window of the carryall and waved in the air, first by one student and then another.

"Look out, that you don't hit nobody with that fishin' pole!" warned the carryall driver, as the turnout swung around a bend of the road.

He had scarcely spoken when a buggy came into view, driven by a tall, serious-looking individual, wearing a high silk hat. The buggy swung forward quickly, directly in line with the fishing rod, and before the boys could haul the colors in the rod hit the silk hat, sending it whirling into the bushes beside the roadway.

CHAPTER VIII

ABOUT SOME NEW STUDENTS

"Hi! hi! what's the meaning of this outrage!" roared the individual in the buggy, as he brought his horse to a standstill. "Do you want to kill me?"

"Who is it? Is he hurt?" questioned Dave, quickly.

"I don't know," answered Ben. "The rod took off his hat, but whether it struck his head or not remains to be seen."

"Wot's the trouble back there?" demanded Jackson Lemond, as he succeeded in bringing his team to a halt.

"Trouble is, we hit that man with the rod," answered Buster.

"Humph! I told you to be careful," grumbled the carryall driver. "It don't pay to act like a passel o' wildcats, nohow!"

"It's too bad it happened," said Dave, and leaped to the ground and ran back to where the buggy stood, with the driver glaring at them savagely. The other students followed.

"Are you hurt?" asked Dave, anxiously. The man in the buggy was a total stranger to him.

"Hurt? I don't know whether I am or not. What do you mean by knocking off my hat with that stick?"

"It was an accident, sir. We had our school colors on the fishing rod and were waving them in the air. We didn't expect to hit anybody."

"Bah! you are a lot of rowdies!" growled the man. "Give me my hat!" And he pointed to where the head covering rested on some bushes.

"There you are," said Ben, restoring the hat to its owner. "But we are not rowdies—it was purely an accident," he added, with a little flash out of his clear eyes.

"Bah, I know schoolboys! They think it smart to be tough!" The man looked his silk hat over. "I ought to make you buy me a new hat."

"That doesn't seem to be damaged any," said Buster, as he looked the tile over. "If it is, of course we'll make it right," he added, hastily. He and Luke were holding the fishing rod at the time of the accident.

"Do you boys belong at Oak Hall?" demanded the man, smoothing down the roughed-up silk hat with his forearm.

"Yes," answered Dave.

"I thought so. Well, if this hat is cracked or anything like that I'll notify the master of the school, and make you get me a new hat. Maybe it will be a lesson to you, to be more careful."

"Let me see the hat, please," said Luke.

"What for?"

"I wish to see if it is really damaged."

"If it is, I'll let you know quick enough, don't fear."

"I want to see it now. I am not going to pay for a new hat if this one is all right."

"Ha! so you don't want to take my word for it, eh?" roared the man.

"I want to look the hat over," answered Luke, stubbornly.

"So do I," added Buster.

"I'll not give you the hat—to play more tricks with. I shall take it to a hat dealer, and if he says it is injured, I'll call at the school about it." And having thus delivered himself the man in the buggy put the silk hat on his head, spoke to his horse, and whirled on down the road in the direction of Rockville.

"Talk about a peppery individual!" cried Ben. "He certainly is one."

"I don't think the hat was damaged at all," said Dave. "It will simply be a hold-up—if he tries to get a new one out of us. That hat is quite old and rusty-looking."

"He was a rusty-looking fellow all the way through," commented Buster. "Wonder who he is?"

"He's some kind of a doctor," answered the carryall driver, who had left his turnout to join the boys. "He came to Oakdale and Rockville this summer, and he gives lectures on how to git well and strong, an' then he sells medicine. I know a feller got a bottle from

him, but it didn't do him no good. He calls himself Doctor Montgomery,—but I reckon he ain't no real doctor at all."

"Must be one of these quacks who go around the country trying to rope people in," said Dave. "If he is, he ought to be run out of the neighborhood."

"Maybe we'll never hear from him again," said Luke. But the boys were destined to hear from Hooker Montgomery again, and in a manner to surprise them.

Returning to the carryall, the boys took in the colors, so that they might do no further damage, and then the journey to Oak Hall was resumed. The encounter on the road had sobered them a little, and this did not wear away until they came in sight of the school buildings.

"Hurrah! I see Phil and Roger!" cried Dave, as the carryall swung in between the large oak trees that gave the place its name. "Hello!" he shouted. "Here we are again!"

"Dave!" returned the senator's son, running forward, while Phil did the same. "How are you all?" he added, waving his hand to the crowd in general.

A number of other boys were present, and soon Dave was surrounded by his old friends, all eager to shake hands. They wanted to know all about his trip, and he in return wanted to know what they had been doing. So there was a perfect babble of voices as the crowd walked into the main school building, where good old Doctor Hasmer Clay, the head of the institution, stood to welcome each new arrival.

"Glad to see you back, Porter," he said, kindly. "And I must thank you in person for the skin you sent from the ranch. We have placed it on the floor of the reception room. I am quite proud to think one of my pupils is such a good shot."

"Roger and Phil are good shots, too," answered Dave, anxious that his chums should have all the credit due them.

"So I understand." Doctor Clay paused for a moment. "I believe you met Lincoln Merwell out West." He eyed Dave curiously as he mentioned the fact.

"Yes, I met him—and we had some trouble—but it is all over now. But, Doctor Clay——" Dave motioned the master of the school to one

side and lowered his voice. "Do you know that Merwell and Nick Jasniff are going to Rockville Military Academy?"

"Is it possible!"

"That is what they say. It seems to me that the authorities of Rockville ought to know what sort they are."

"That is true, Porter, but—ahem!—I don't know what I can do. You see, to tell you the truth, the management of the military academy has changed hands, and the new master and I are not on speaking terms. He wished to obtain certain pupils, and they came to this school instead, and that made him very angry. He claimed that I treated him unfairly, but I did not. Even if I were to warn him against Jasniff and Merwell it is not likely that he would take the warning in good part. Besides, the military academy is not in a prosperous condition financially, and I rather think the owners will take almost any pupils they can get."

"I see, sir. Well, if that's the case, why we might as well drop the matter," answered Dave.

"I will think it over, and perhaps I'll send a letter to the master of Rockville," returned Doctor Clay, seriously. "I don't want even an enemy to harbor such lads as Jasniff and Merwell without knowing what they are, although it would be to Rockville's credit if it took those boys and made real men out of them."

As my old readers know, Oak Hall was a large building of brick and stone, shaped in the form of a cross, with the classrooms, the private office, the dining-room, and the kitchen on the ground floor. On the second floor were the majority of the school dormitories, furnished to accommodate from four to eight pupils each. The school was surrounded by a broad campus, sloping in the rear to the Leming River, on the bank of which was located the school boathouse. At one side of the campus was a neat gymnasium, and at the other were some stables and sheds, and also a newly-built garage for automobiles and motor-cycles.

Dave and his chums had their quarters in dormitories Nos. 11 and 12, two large and well-lighted apartments, having a connecting door between. Not far away was dormitory No. 13, occupied by Nat Poole and his cronies. Merwell and Jasniff had had beds in that room, but now those places were given to others.

Roger and Phil had arrived the day before, and were already settled, and now they did what they could to make Dave at home, assisting him in unpacking his trunk and his suit-case, and putting the things away in the bureau and the clothes closet. Of course Dave had brought along some pictures and banners, and these were hung up or set on the bureau—that is, all but one photograph—one of Jessie she had given him the day before. That he kept to himself, in his private drawer with a few other treasures, under lock and key.

"Hello, Dave; can I help you?" came a voice from the doorway, and Gus Plum appeared. The former bully of the Hall was a trifle thin and pale, but his eyes were clear and his voice pleasant to hear.

"Why, Gus, how are you!" cried Dave, and shook hands warmly. "Did you have a good time this summer?"

"Quite good," answered Plum. "You know I went up to Maine with Mr. Dale. He took up half a dozen fellows, and we went in for botany and geology while we were camping out."

"Well, I guess Mr. Dale is good company," answered Dave. He referred to Andrew Dale, the first assistant teacher of the school, a man well beloved by nearly all the students. Every summer this teacher took out some of the boys, and there was always a rivalry as to who should go along.

"It was better than just—er—knocking around," stammered Gus Plum. He meant carousing around with fellows of the Merwell and Jasniff sort, and Dave understood. He hesitated for a moment and looked around, to see if anybody but Phil and Roger were in the rooms. "Of course, you know Nat Poole is back," he continued, in a low voice.

"Yes,—I saw him leave Crumville."

"Dave, you want to beware of him." Gus Plum uttered the words very earnestly.

"Oh, I am not afraid of Nat—never was."

"Yes, but this is different, Dave. I suppose you know there are a lot of new fellows at Oak Hall this year."

"There are new fellows every year—the seniors go and the freshies come in."

"Yes, but this year we have more new fellows than ever. A school in Laverport broke up, and sixteen of the students were transferred

to Oak Hall—sophs, juniors, and seniors. So those fellows, added to the freshies, make quite a bunch."

"What has that got to do with Poole and me?"

"Nat Poole and one of the fellows from Laverport, a chap named Guy Frapley, are very good friends—in fact, I think they are related. This Frapley was a sort of leader at Laverport, and he has got a number of the other newcomers under his thumb. Last night I was down by the boathouse, and I heard Nat and Frapley talking about you. Nat was very anxious to do something to 'make you take a back seat,' as he termed it, and after a while Frapley consented to take the matter up with him."

"What do you suppose they'll do?" questioned Phil, who had listened to Plum's words with interest.

"I don't know exactly, but they'll do something, you can be sure of that. More than likely it will be something underhanded."

"I am not afraid of Nat Poole—nor of this Guy Frapley, either," said Dave.

"Dave has so many friends here, why should he be afraid?" asked Roger.

"Well, I only thought I'd warn you, that's all," answered the former bully, meekly. "I don't want Dave to have any more trouble if I can help it."

"It's kind of you, Gus, to tell me of this," answered Dave, heartily. "And I'll be on my guard. But I really don't think Nat Poole will cut much of a figure during this term of school. He has lost too many of his old friends."

But, for once, Dave was mistaken. Nat Poole did "cut a figure," although not quite in the manner expected, and what he and his cronies did caused Dave not a little trouble.

CHAPTER IX

THE FOOTBALL MEETING

In a few days Dave felt as much at home as ever. Nearly all of his old friends had returned to Oak Hall, and dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 were filled with as bright a crowd of lads as could well be found anywhere. In the number were Gus Plum and Chip Macklin, but the former was no longer the bully as of old, and the latter had lost his toadying manner, and was quite manly, and the other students treated them as if all had always been the best of friends.

It did Dave's heart good to see the change in Plum, and he was likewise pleased over the different way in which Macklin acted.

"I never thought it was in Gus and Chip," he said, privately, to Roger. "It shows what a fellow can do if he sets his mind to it."

"It's to your credit as much as to their own," declared the senator's son. "I don't believe Gus would have reformed if you hadn't braced him up."

"I wish I could reform Nat Poole."

"You'll never do it, Dave—but you may scare him into behaving himself."

"Have you met Guy Frapley, Roger—I mean to talk to?"

"Yes, in the gym., where Phil and I were practicing with the Indian clubs."

"What do you think of him?"

"I think he is fairly aching to become the leader of the school. He was leader at Laverport, and it breaks his heart to play second fiddle to anybody here. He and Nat are as thick as two peas. They tell me he is a great football player, so I suppose he will try to run the eleven—if the fellows will let him."

"I don't think the old players will let a new crowd run our team."

"The trouble is, some of the old players are gone, and the new crowd may count up the largest number of votes. In that case they'll be able to run things to suit themselves."

Dave had settled down to his studies in earnest, for that winter he wished to make an extra good record for himself. He loved sports,

but as he grew older he realized that he was at Oak Hall more for a mental than a physical training.

"When my time comes, I shall have a good many business interests to look after," was the way he expressed himself to Phil, who joked him about "boning like a cart horse," "and I know if I haven't the education I'll be at the mercy of anybody who wishes to take advantage of my ignorance."

"Well, you are not going to give up football, are you, Dave?" questioned the shipowner's son.

"Not if they want me on the eleven."

"Well, that depends. We have a meeting Monday afternoon, in the gym."

Dave had noticed a good many whispered conversations taking place between some of the old students and all of the new ones, and he had wondered what was going on. A hint was dropped that the football meeting would "wake things up," whatever that might mean.

"I think I know what is in the wind," said Gus Plum to Dave during a recess on Monday. "Nat Poole and Guy Frapley came to me last night and they wanted me to pledge myself to support Frapley for captain of the eleven."

"Well, they had a right to do that, Gus."

"I told them I wouldn't do it. They said if I didn't I'd get left. I told 'em that wouldn't hurt me very much, because I didn't care for playing anyway."

"I see," answered Dave, thoughtfully.

He at once sought out Roger, Phil, and Sam Day,—those who had loved to play football in the past, and who had hoped to be on the eleven the present season—and talked the matter over with them. Then the shipowner's son made a quiet canvass among all those interested in football.

"Plum is right," he declared later. "Frapley, aided by Nat Poole and his cronies, is going to carry matters with a high hand."

"It's an outrage!" cried Sam. "A stranger running the Oak Hall eleven! I shall protest!"

"It won't do any good—if Frapley gets the votes," answered Roger. "Especially if he is a good player, and they say he is."

The news that there was going to be a lively time drew a large crowd to the meeting in the gymnasium. This was called to order by the former manager of the eleven, and a call was issued for nominations for a new manager.

"I nominate John Rand!" cried Nat Poole, mentioning one of the students from Laverport.

"Second the nomination!" added Guy Frapley, promptly.

"I nominate Henry Fordham," said Roger, putting up one of the old students, who did not play, but who was a good general manager, and a youth well liked by his classmates.

Dave seconded Roger's nomination, and as there were no other names submitted, the nominations were declared closed.

"Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say a few words before we hold an election—I mean, before we vote," said Sam Day, mounting a chair.

"Oh, dry up, and let us cast our ballots!" muttered Nat Poole.

"I wish to speak in favor of Henry Fordham, whom all *old students* of Oak Hall know so well," continued Sam. "He knows——"

"Vote! vote! Let us vote!" called out several new students loudly, and it was seen that they were urged on by Guy Frapley.

In a moment half a dozen students were speaking at once, and it took several minutes for the chairman of the meeting to restore silence. Then Sam was allowed to make a short speech and he was followed by Dave, both speaking in favor of Fordham. Then a new student spoke in favor of Rand, and then the voting began.

The result was a painful surprise for Fordham, and equally painful to Dave and his chums. So well had Nat Poole, Guy Frapley, and their cohorts laid their plans that John Rand was elected manager of the coming eleven by a majority of five votes.

"It is all up with our crowd!" murmured Roger to Dave, when the result was announced. "That crowd has got votes enough to ride over us rough-shod, and it is going to do it."

And the senator's son was right, as later events speedily proved. The new football team, made up of a regular eleven and five substitutes, counted but six old Oak Hall players. Dave, Roger, Phil, and their close chums were utterly ignored. Guy Frapley was chosen captain and quarter-back, and Nat Poole was made full-back. It is

needless to say that some of the old players, who had worked so hard in the past to make Oak Hall victorious, left the meeting in disgust.

"This is the worst I was ever up against!" murmured Roger. "Talk about ingratitude! And just think that once Phil nearly lost his life to help us win!"

"And think of how hard Dave and you worked," put in a sympathizer. "It's a burning shame, that's what it is."

"Well, there is one satisfaction," said Dave, as calmly as he could, although he was as depressed as any one. "It is on their shoulders now to make good. We haven't anything on that score to worry about."

"I'll tell you what let's do!" cried Phil. "We'll organize a scrub eleven, and wax 'em out of their shoes!"

"I don't believe they'll play you—they are afraid," said Buster.

"Never mind, then we'll play somebody else. We can challenge them, anyway. If they are afraid of us we want the whole school to know it."

Phil's idea met with considerable favor, and he easily persuaded Dave, Roger, Sam, Gus Plum, and a number of others to join his scrub eleven, which was named the Old Guard. Phil was manager as well as captain, and played right half-back, while Dave was quarter-back, and Roger was center. The eleven went into practice with as much vigor as if they were training for some championship games.

As had been anticipated, the regular eleven tried to ignore the Old Guard. When a challenge to play was issued, John Rand sent back word that he could fix up his own scrub eleven without any help from outsiders. His scrub was made up of freshmen and, of course, the regular team beat them with ease.

"Never mind—they are afraid of us—and we'll let everybody know it," declared Roger. And then the challenge from the Old Guard to the regular eleven was posted up in the gymnasium, where all might see it. It was torn down over night, but a new copy was put up by the following noon.

As was to be expected, the challenge created much talk, and Phil and Frapley almost came to blows about it. Phil and his chums were accused of trying to break up the good feeling of the school in

general, and, in return, the shipowner's son very bluntly told the new captain of the school eleven that he would lead Oak Hall to defeat.

"It's time enough to talk like that after we are beaten," declared Guy Frapley, grimly. Then it was announced that the regular Oak Hall football eleven would play the opening game of the season against an eleven from Lemington on a Saturday afternoon, the contest to take place on the Lemington Athletic Grounds.

"They ought to be waxed good and proper!" said Chip Macklin.

"Who?" asked Dave.

"Our eleven, Dave. Oh, I know what you will say—that that isn't the true school spirit and all that—but just the same, Poole and Frapley and that bunch don't deserve to win."

"I've got half a notion not to go to the game," declared Sam.

"I am going," answered Dave. "I don't like that crowd, and I don't think we were treated fairly. Just the same, for the honor of Oak Hall, I am going to the game and root for our side."

"The same old Dave!" murmured Roger, in admiration. "Well, if you're going I am going too."

Lemington was situated several miles up the river, and while some of the boys decided to go to that town by the carryall and on their bicycles and motor-cycles, others decided to go up in boats.

As my old readers know, Nat Poole was the owner of a good-sized motor-boat, a craft he had had stored in the boathouse since the last summer. In this boat the dudish student frequently went for a cruise up and down the river, taking his cronies along. The fact that he owned the craft and could give them a ride, made Nat quite popular with some of the students.

"I'll take the eleven up to Lemington in my motor-boat," said Nat to the manager. "It will be a fine sail, if the weather is good." And so it was arranged.

As the weather remained warm, Dave and his chums often went out on the river for a row, and one afternoon they rowed as far as Bush Island, about two miles away. On the island were some chestnut trees, and the boys walked over to see if the nuts were fit to gather.

"I see some other fellows here!" cried Roger, and pointed to some boys in military uniforms some distance away.

"They must be fellows from Rockville Academy," answered Dave. "I didn't think they'd come as far as this after school hours."

"Well, I suppose they have as much right here as we have," was Phil's comment.

They passed on, and presently lost sight of the other crowd. Then, quarter of an hour later, they came out on the island shore, to see the other lads in a rowboat, just getting ready to leave the place.

"Why, there are Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff!" exclaimed Roger.

"Right you are," answered Dave. Then he gave another look. "Where is our boat?" he questioned, quickly.

All looked around and saw that their rowboat was missing.

"They must have taken it," cried Phil. He raised his voice: "I say, Merwell! Jasniff! Stop, I want to talk to you!"

"Not much!" called back Nick Jasniff.

"We don't want to talk to you," answered Link Merwell.

"What have you done with out boat?" questioned Roger.

"That's for you to find out!" returned Nick Jasniff. "Ta ta! Hope you have a nice time getting back to Oak Hall!"

And then he and Link Merwell and their companions took up their oars and rowed swiftly away from Bush Island.

CHAPTER X

LOOKING FOR A MISSING ROWBOAT

"We are certainly in a pickle," remarked Roger, as the Rockville cadets rounded a point of the island and disappeared from view.

"I wonder what they did with our boat," said Phil. "I don't see it anywhere on the water."

"Perhaps they took it to the other side of the island," suggested Dave.

"Would they have time to do that?"

"I don't know. This is a total surprise to me, Phil."

"They did the trick on the impulse of the moment," went on Roger. "For they didn't know we were coming here."

"And we didn't know they were here," added Dave. "Let us take a look around and see if we can spot the boat."

"All right, I'll go down the shore and you can go up," cried Phil, and set off at as rapid a gait as the nature of the ground permitted.

A hasty search did not bring the rowboat to light. The boys met on the other side of the island, and stared wonderingly at each other.

"See anything?"

"Not a thing."

"The boat must be somewhere."

"Maybe they sunk her!" cried the senator's son. "Merwell and Jasniff are just unprincipled enough to do it."

"If they did that, they must have done it close to where we tied her up. They wouldn't have time to take her away," returned Dave. "Let us go back and see if we can find any trail in the mud and sand."

They crossed the island, passing the chestnut trees as they did so. Under one of the trees Dave picked up a letter. It was addressed to Nicholas Jasniff, General Delivery, Rockville.

"Jasniff must have dropped this when he was nutting," said Dave, as he and the others looked at the address.

"What is in it?" asked Phil. "It's open; read it."

"Would that be fair, Phil?"

"I think so. Jasniff is an enemy, not a friend. It may contain some clew to his doings, and if there is anything underhanded going on we can let the authorities know."

Dave took out the single sheet that the envelope contained. On it was written, in a sprawling, heavy hand, the following:

"My Dear Jasniff:

"I got your leter and I wil do all I can to help you pervided you wil help me on that bussines I meantioned to you. I know we both can make money and hardly anny risks. Beter not come to the office but meet me at Dunns on the River.

"Yours afectenately,

"Dr. H. Montgomery."

"Why, this letter was written by that Doctor Hooker Montgomery, the man whose silk hat we knocked off!" cried Dave.

"His education seems to be extremely limited," observed Phil. "He'd never stand at the top of the spelling class, would he?"

"I was asking about him, and he's a regular fakir," said Roger. "He isn't a doctor at all, although he calls himself one. He puts up a number of medicines and calls them 'Montgomery's Wonderful Cures.' I was told that he used to do quite a business among the ignorant country folks, but lately hardly anybody patronizes him."

"And that is why he is willing to aid Jasniff in some scheme, I suppose," said Phil. "I'll wager it is something underhanded. When are they to meet?"

"It doesn't say," answered Dave. "But the postmark is a week old, so I presume the meeting is a thing of the past. I guess I'll not keep the letter," he concluded, and cast it on the ground where he had found it.

Arriving at where the rowboat had been tied up, the three chums looked around carefully, and soon saw footprints leading to a little cove, shaded by tall elderberry bushes. Pushing some of the bushes aside, Dave looked into the water and gave a cry:

"Here she is, fellows!"

"Have you really found the boat, Dave?" questioned Phil.

"Yes. She's at the bottom of the cove. They piled her full of stones and sunk her. They must have had quite a job doing it."

"And here are the oars!" exclaimed Roger, dragging them from the bushes. "Say, it's going to be cold work getting that boat into shape for use," he added, for the sun was going down and the air was keen.

"I'll do it, if you don't care to," answered Dave. "A cold plunge will do me good."

"I'll help, if you say so?" volunteered Phil.

"Never mind, Phil; I think I can do it alone. No use in more than one undressing."

The rowboat had been sunk in water three feet deep. Taking off most of his clothing, and also his shoes and socks, Dave waded into the cove and set to work taking the stones out of the craft. It was certainly cold, and only the heavy labor served to keep his blood in circulation.

"They didn't pound a hole in her, did they?" asked the senator's son, anxiously.

"I don't see any hole," answered Dave. "I'll soon know. There aren't many more stones left."

He had great difficulty in budging the bottom stone, the largest of the lot. But, once this was removed, the boat was quite buoyant and came close to the surface. Then Dave shoved the craft close to shore, and turned it over to empty it.

"As good as ever!" cried Roger, and his tones showed his relief. "Now, Dave, get into your clothes again, and Phil and I will row you back to the Hall. We'll be late—and you know what that means, if Job Haskers catches us."

"We've got a good excuse," said Phil. "But maybe Haskers won't accept it," he added, remembering only too well how harsh and unreasonable the second assistant teacher could be at times.

"I think I'll do some of the rowing myself, just to get warm," said Dave, when they got into the craft, and he took an oar; and soon Bush Island was left behind.

"This is another mark against Merwell and Jasniff," said the shipowner's son, as they pulled in the direction of the school. "I suppose they thought we'd have to stay on the island all night."

"Yes, and maybe longer," said Dave. "I fancy they wouldn't care if we had to remain there until we were almost starved."

"We'll have to get back at them somehow," came from Roger.

It was quite dark when they reached the boathouse at Oak Hall. No students were in sight, all having gone in to supper. Dave looked at his watch.

"Supper is almost over!" he cried. "We had better hurry if we want anything to eat!"

"Eat? Rather! I am as hungry as a bear!" cried Phil.

"So am I," added the senator's son.

Putting the rowboat away, the three boys started in the direction of the big school building. As they did this they saw somebody approaching them from an angle of the east wing.

"It's Haskers!" whispered Phil. "He is coming this way!"

"Let's run for it!" cried Roger. "We can get in on the other side! Quick!"

"Boys! boys! Stop!" called out Job Haskers, as they started to run. "I know you, Porter! Morr! Lawrence! Stop, I say!" And he came running after them.

"It's no use, he recognizes us!" groaned Phil, and came to a halt, and so did the others.

"What is the meaning of this? I demand to know where you have been?" cried Job Haskers, sourly, as he came up, puffing from his unusual exertions.

"We are sorry, Mr. Haskers, but we were out rowing, and we were detained at Bush Island," explained Dave.

"Did you have permission to stay away during the supper hour?"

"No, sir. We didn't intend to do so. We were——"

"Humph! that is no excuse, young man, no excuse whatever! You know the rule. Go to your rooms at once—and stay there until to-morrow morning." And Job Haskers glared coldly at the three students. He seemed always to take special delight in catching a student at some infringement of the rules, and in meting out punishment.

"We haven't had any supper yet," said Roger.

"That is not my fault, Morr. The dining-room is now about to close, and you cannot go in. It will be a lesson to you to be on hand promptly in the future."

"We have got to have something to eat!" declared Phil, stubbornly.

"Ha! don't you dare to talk back to me, Lawrence! If you do it again, I'll give you some extra lessons to learn."

"Mr. Haskers, won't you listen to us?" asked Dave, in a steady voice. "We have a good excuse to offer for being late."

"I don't want any excuses. It was your duty to return to the Hall in time for supper."

"We simply couldn't get here. We were on Bush Island, and our boat was taken away from us."

"I saw you come back here in a boat."

"We found our boat after a while,—after we had lost a good hour looking for it. Then we rowed back as fast as we could."

"Pooh! The usual story! I want no such lame excuses! Some teachers might accept them, but not I! Go to your rooms, and at once,—and don't dare to come downstairs until to-morrow morning—or I'll cut off all your holidays until Christmas!" And Job Haskers folded his arms and stood like a judge before the boys.

An angry remark arose to Dave's lips. But he checked it and turned toward the school building, and Roger and Phil followed. Job Haskers marched after them.

"Go upstairs at once!" he ordered. "No lingering in the lower hall!" For he was afraid the lads might slip him and try to get something to eat on the sly.

"Mr. Haskers, I wish to talk to Doctor Clay," said Dave.

"Doctor Clay has nothing to do with this affair! I am in charge here for the present."

"Do you mean to say that I can't see the doctor?"

"Doctor Clay is away on business. You may see him in the morning if you wish."

"I don't think he'd send us to bed supperless."

"It is your own fault. You boys have got to learn to obey the rules of this institution. Perhaps it will be a lesson well learned."

"I think it's an outrage!" muttered Phil.

"What is that, Lawrence?" cried the teacher, harshly. But Phil did not repeat his statement.

There seemed to be no help for it, and slowly the three students passed up the stairs and entered their dormitory. Job Haskers watched them out of sight, and then stalked away, his face as grim and hard as ever.

"Well, doesn't this beat the nation!" groaned Roger, as he plumped down on one of the beds.

"Evidently old Haskers hasn't forgotten what happened last term," was Phil's comment. "He is going to make it just as hard as he can for us."

"I'm as hungry as can be. I didn't have much dinner. Dave, are you going to stand for this?"

"What do you mean, Roger—staying in the room until to-morrow?"

"That and going without supper."

"I don't care so much about staying in the room," was the reply. "But I can assure you of one thing,—I am not going without my supper."

"How are you going to get it?"

"I don't know yet. But I am going to get it somehow," replied Dave, and his tone of voice showed that he meant what he said.

CHAPTER XI

A MIDNIGHT FEAST

While the three students were discussing the situation the door of the dormitory opened, and Sam Day and Shadow Hamilton entered.

"Hello, why weren't you down to supper?" asked Sam.

"We didn't get here in time," answered Roger. And then he related what had occurred on Bush Island.

"It was just like Jasniff and Merwell," said Shadow. "And like old Haskers, too! I suppose he is laughing to himself now because he made you go without your supper."

"But I am not going without it," said Dave. "That is, not if you fellows will do me a favor."

"Want me to get something from the pantry for you?" queried Sam, quickly. "I'll do it—if it can be done."

"You can't get in the pantry any more," said Phil, with a wry face. "Since Dave and I did the trick some time ago they keep the doors locked."

"And that puts me in mind of a story!" cried Shadow. "Once a little boy——"

"Quit it, Shadow!" interrupted Sam. "You don't expect Dave and Roger and Phil to listen to your yarns when they are starving, do you? Tell the story after they have filled up."

"Well, it was only a short yarn," pleaded the story-teller of the school. "But, of course, if we can do anything——"

"You can—I think," said Dave. "But you must act quickly."

"What's to be done?"

"Since I have been here I have noticed a wagon going through on the main road every evening about this time. It belongs to Rousmann, the delicatessen man of Rockville. I wish you'd stop him and see what you can buy for us." And as he finished Dave took a two-dollar bill from his pocket and held it out.

"By hookey! I'll do it!" cried Sam, readily. "Come on, Shadow! Maybe we can get enough to have a little feast to-night!"

"Not on two dollars," answered Phil. "Here's another fifty cents."

"Oh, I've got a little money of my own," returned Sam.

"So have I—thirty-five cents," added Shadow. "My allowance is behind time. And that puts me in mind of another story. Two men were——Oh, but I forgot, you are too hungry to listen to yarns. Well, I'll tell it some other time," and away he went after Sam, out into the hallway and down the broad stairs.

"If only they get there before that wagon passes!" sighed the senator's son.

"Maybe the driver won't have anything to sell. He may be sold out," came from Phil.

"Let us hope for the best," answered Dave, cheerfully. "He can't be sold out of everything. Even a loaf of bread and some sardines wouldn't go bad."

"Or some frankfurters," added Roger.

A few minutes passed, and Ben came up to the room, and the story of the adventure on the island and with Job Haskers had to be told again. Ben was as indignant as Sam and Shadow had been.

"I wouldn't stand for it!" he cried. "Why don't you report to Doctor Clay?"

"Because he is away," answered Dave. "But I may report to him to-morrow," he continued, thoughtfully.

A half-hour passed—to the hungry boys it seemed a long time—and then came a clatter of footsteps in the hallway. The door was banged open, and in came Sam and Shadow, followed by Gus Plum and Luke Watson, and each carrying a fair-sized bundle under his coat.

"We got there just in the nick of time!" panted Sam, for he was somewhat out of breath. "Fact is, I had to run after the wagon to stop it."

"And we got a dandy lot of stuff," continued Shadow. "Gus and Luke helped us to buy it."

"We are in for a spread to-night," explained Gus Plum. "But you fellows can eat all you wish right now."

The door was closed and locked, and one after another the bundles were opened. The boys who had done the purchasing had

certainly "spread themselves," as Dave said. They had obtained some fresh rolls and cake, an apple and a pumpkin pie, some cheese, and some cold ham and tongue, a bottle of pickles, and five different kinds of crackers in boxes.

"This is certainly a spread and no mistake," said Dave, as he and Phil and Roger viewed the eatables with keen satisfaction.

"Chip Macklin has gone off to a farmer's house for two quarts of milk," said Shadow. "And I told him to bring some apples, too,—if he could get them."

"We'll have more than if we had been downstairs to supper," said the shipowner's son.

"Whatever is left will do for our spread later," explained Sam.

"Whatever is left," repeated Shadow. "Say, that puts me in mind of a story—and I'm going to tell this one," he added, as several of those present gave a groan. "A little boy was looking for his shoes. He found one and looked at it thoughtfully, and then said: 'I dess you is the right one, and your brovver is the left one, but you is the left one, and your brovver ain't left 'tall, 'cause he's gone.'" And the story produced a smile all around.

In a few minutes came a triple rap on the door—a well-known signal—and Sam opened the portal, to admit Chip Macklin. The small student carried two bottles of milk under his coat, and his pockets were bulging with apples and pears.

"Hurrah! Now we can have a square meal and no mistake!" cried Dave, as glasses were produced, and the milk was poured out. "Chip, we owe you one for this."

"You're welcome," answered the little lad, with a smile. He was glad to be of service, in return for all Dave had done for him in the past.

The eatables were spread out on a studying table, and Dave and his chums proceeded to "fill up," as Phil expressed it. They made a hearty meal, and yet, when they had finished, there was a considerable portion of the food left.

"We'll not touch the pies or the fruit," said Dave. "Those can be saved for the spread later."

The boys were just clearing away the crumbs of the meal when there came a hasty knock on the door.

"Who is there?" asked Roger, going to the door, but not opening it.

"It is I, Murphy," came in the husky tones of big Jim, the monitor. "If anything is going on in there, I want to warn you that Mr. Haskers is coming up—I heard him tell an under teacher."

"Thanks, Jim—we'll be ready for him," answered the senator's son, and passed out a pear and an apple, and then the kind-hearted monitor walked away again on his rounds.

The students worked hastily and noiselessly, and in less than three minutes the remainder of the food was stowed away in a closet out of sight, and everything about the dormitory was cleaned up. Then the lads got out their books and writing materials.

"Come in!" cried Dave, when a knock sounded sharply, and the door was opened, and Job Haskers presented himself. His face showed his disappointment at finding everything as it should be.

"Oh, Mr. Haskers, you are just in time!" cried Phil, innocently. "Will you kindly show me how to do this example in algebra?"

"And will you please show me how to translate this Latin?" asked Roger, catching his cue from Phil.

"And I've got a problem in geometry that is bothering me," said Dave, smoothly.

"I have no time for lessons now," answered the teacher, harshly. "I have other duties to perform. If you will attend to the explanations given in the classrooms you will need no extra aid," and thus delivering himself, Job Haskers backed out of the dormitory as speedily as he had entered it.

"Stung that time!" murmured Ben, as he closed the door once more. "I'll wager an apple against a peanut that he thought he would catch Dave, Roger, and Phil eating on the sly."

"Or off the table," added Sam, and then Ben shied a book at his head.

For over an hour the lads in the dormitory turned their attention to their lessons. During that time some other occupants of Nos. 11 and 12 came in, and all were informed of the spread to be given at midnight. To make things more lively, some boys from No. 10 were also asked to participate.

"Of course you are going to ask Nat Poole and Guy Frapley," said Roger, with a grin.

"Not on your collar-button!" replied Sam. "They can furnish their own spreads—they and the whole crowd with 'em."

"We want to look out that they don't get wise to what we are doing," said Plum. "It would be just like Nat to give us away, if he knew."

"If he did that he ought to have his head punched," murmured Luke.

"Say, Luke, give us a little music, before it gets past hours," suggested Dave, and willingly enough Luke got out a banjo, tuned up, and rendered several favorites. While the playing was going on, the door was left open, and a small crowd congregated in the hallway to listen, for Luke was really a skillful performer. All too soon the playing had to come to an end, as the time for "lights out" arrived.

It was exactly twelve o'clock when Sam arose from where he had been resting and made a light. At once the others also got up. All were dressed, and it did not take long to bring the eatables from the closet and push two studying tables together for a "banquet board," as Roger dubbed it. He and Dave and Phil were not particularly hungry, yet they entered with vim into the proceedings. The door between Nos. 11 and 12 was open, and those invited from No. 10 came in as silently as shadows.

Soon the feast was in full swing. The pies were large, and were cut into just enough pieces to go around. The fancy crackers were passed around in their boxes, and the apples and pears were placed on a tennis racket and handed around, "like an old-fashioned contribution box," according to Plum's way of describing it.

"We ought to have a speech!" cried Ben. "I move Dave Porter be called upon to speak."

"Second the motion!" cried several others.

"Give us something on 'How to Learn Without Studying,'" suggested Shadow.

"Or 'How to Do Algebra While You Sleep,'" said Ben.

"Or 'How to Make Haskers Reform,'" suggested Luke.

"Don't ask him to speak on the impossible," broke in Plum. "You'll never get Jobey to reform—it isn't in him."

"I'm too full to make a speech," said Dave, with a smile. "Besides, we don't want any noise up here, or we'll be spotted sure."

"I know what we ought to do!" cried Phil.

"What?" asked a chorus.

"Pay old Haskers back for the mean way he treated us. Can't we do something to him while he is asleep?"

"We sure can!" answered Roger. He looked at Dave. "What shall it be?"

Dave thought for a moment, and then a broad grin overspread his features.

"I wonder if we can manage it," he said, half to himself.

"Manage what, Dave?" asked several, eagerly.

"I think we can do it—if some of you fellows will furnish a stout line. Several fishing lines twisted together will do."

"But what do you intend to do, Dave?"

"Make Job Haskers think there is an earthquake,—that is, if he is in bed and asleep, and we can get into his room."

"Oh, he must be asleep by this time," said Sam.

"And here is a stout cord. I used it for flying my big kite," added Ben.

"Then, come on, and we'll give Job Haskers a surprise. But don't make any noise, or we may get caught."

CHAPTER XII

AN EARTHQUAKE FOR JOB HASKERS

The door to the hall was cautiously opened, and the boys looked out. The coast appeared to be clear, and Dave tiptoed his way out, followed by his chums. A faint light was burning, as required by the school regulations, and this kept the students from bumping into anything.

All knew the location of the apartment occupied by Job Haskers, and it did not take them long to reach the door to it. Here they paused to listen intently.

"He is in there and asleep," whispered Dave.

"Yes, and snoring," added Roger. "That shows he won't wake up very easily."

"We'll wake him up, don't fear—if my plan works," replied Dave, with grim humor.

With great caution the door was tried and found to be unlocked. Then, scarcely daring to breathe, Dave stepped into the apartment, with Roger and Phil behind him, clutching at his arms. The light in the hallway was near by, and Dave motioned for it to be turned up, so that he could see around the room.

Job Haskers's bed had been turned around for this term, so that the head was next to the wall beside the doorway. It was a new brass bedstead, ornamental but light.

With deft fingers, Dave doubled the cord provided by Ben, and tied one end to the head railing of the brass bedstead. The other end of the cord he carried to the doorway, and threw up through the transom, which swung upon side pivots.

"Good, I see your plan now!" murmured Phil. "I reckon we'll give him an awakening all right enough!"

As soon as the boys in the hallway had secured the outer end of the doubled cord, Dave stepped out of the room again, followed by Roger and Phil.

"Why not lock the door?" whispered the senator's son. "The key is here."

"Just what I intended to do," answered Dave, in an equally low voice.

The door was closed and locked, and the students all gathered in front of the portal, each with his hand on the cord.

"I wish we could dump him out of bed," muttered Plum.

"We'll give him a little quiver first," said Dave. "He won't know what to make of it. I don't think he'll notice the cord. It is just the color of the wall."

They pulled the cord taut, and then raised the head of the bed an inch or two. Then they let it drop.

"Oh—er—who is that?" they heard Job Haskers murmur. "Is it time to get up, Swingly?" He mentioned the name of the school janitor, who had orders to rouse him when he was over-sleeping.

Of course there was no answer to the teacher's question. He waited for a moment, and then turned over in bed, as if for another snooze.

"Now we'll give him a sharp jerk," whispered Dave, and the students caught hold of the cord with vigor. Up came the head of the bed about a foot and swayed violently towards the door.

"Hi! hi! What's this?" roared Job Haskers, sitting bolt upright, and gazing about in bewilderment.

"It's the end of the world!" came, in a hollow voice, through the keyhole. "The end of the world!"

"Mercy on me! It's an earthquake, that's what it is!" burst from the befuddled teacher, and then as the bed was jerked high in the air once more, he rolled over in the blankets and slid down to the lower end, where one foot got caught between the brass bars.

"Get out of the building, Mr. Haskers!" came a cry through the keyhole. "It is going to shake to the ground!"

"Yes! yes! It must be an earthquake!" groaned the bewildered pedagogue. "Oh, will I ever get out alive, I wonder!"

The top of the bedstead was bobbing up and down, like a ship on an angry ocean. In the darkness Job Haskers was completely bewildered, and he firmly believed that an earthquake had struck Oak Hall and that the building was in danger of collapsing. With a cry of fright he tumbled out on the floor, and threw the covers, in

which he was wound up, aside. He tried to find the door, but the top of the bedstead was now in the way.

"The fire escape—it is the only way out!" he muttered to himself, and as the boys continued to jerk the bedstead around, he ran to the window and threw out a rope, fastened to a ring in the floor. Then out of the window he bounced and slid down the rope with a speed that blistered his hands.

"He has gone out of the window!" cried Roger, who had his eye glued to the keyhole. "Wait a minute, fellows!"

"Quick! We must take away the cord," said Dave, and in a trice the door of the bedroom was unlocked, the bed shoved into place, and the cord removed. Then the students scampered away, turning down the light as before.

Once on the ground Job Haskers lost no time in getting away from the building. Each instant he expected another quake that would bring that noble pile of bricks, stone, and mortar to the ground. But the quake did not come.

"Queer!" he murmured, presently. "Didn't anybody else feel that awful shock?"

"Hi, you, throw up your hands, or I'll fill ye full o' buckshot!"

The cry came from behind him, and it caused Job Haskers to leap with a new fear. He turned, and in the gloom of the night saw a man approaching with a gun pointed full at him.

"Don't—don't sho—shoot me!" he gasped.

"Up with yer hands!" came from the man. "I cotches ye that time, didn't I? Now, wot are ye, a ghost, a burglar, or a student on a lark?"

"Wh—who are yo—you?" stammered Job Haskers. "Did you—er—feel the earthquake?"

Instead of answering the questions, the man came closer, until the barrel of his shotgun was within a foot of the teacher's head. Then he gave a cry of astonishment.

"Why, if it ain't Mr. Haskers! Wot in the world are you a-doin' out this time o' night, sir?"

"Lemond!" faltered the teacher, as he recognized the driver for the Hall. "Did you—er—did you feel the earthquake?"

"Earthquake? No, sir."

"It is strange."

"Did you feel any of 'em, sir?" Horsehair had lowered his gun and was gazing fixedly at the teacher. "Say, you ain't walking in your sleep, are ye?" he questioned, abruptly.

"No, no—I—er—I am sure I am not," stammered Job Haskers, yet in secret he pinched himself to make certain. "I was—er—in bed, and I thought I felt an earthquake—the bed swayed, and I heard a cry——" The teacher stopped suddenly. "Perhaps it was those rascally boys!" he cried, abruptly.

"Boys! Did they play a joke on yer? They wouldn't be above it, sir—they are as full of 'em this term as ever, sir. How did you git out o' the building—down that rope?"

"Ye-as. You see, the bed moved—or I thought it did—and blocked the doorway, and I——But never mind, Lemond, don't say anything about this. I'll go in." And the teacher started rapidly across the campus. He was, of course, in his bare feet, and was finding his pajamas anything but warm in this frosty fall air.

"You can't get in that way, 'less you have a key!" called out Horsehair.

"I have no key," and Job Haskers stopped abruptly.

"I can let ye in the back way."

"That will do. Come, let us hurry—I am getting cold."

The back door was gained, and Job Haskers entered and felt his way up the semi-dark stairs. As he reached the upper hallway he found himself confronted by Doctor Clay, who had come in rather late, and who had been on the point of retiring when certain strange sounds had disturbed him and caused him to start an investigation.

"Why, Mr. Haskers, where have you been?" asked the doctor in astonishment. "I heard a noise, but I did not know you were stirring."

"I—er—I imagined some of the students were skylarking," faltered the assistant.

"Did you catch anybody?"

"No, sir,—they were too slick for me."

"This skylarking after hours must cease. Have you any idea who they were?"

"Not—er—exactly. I had some trouble early in the evening with Porter, Lawrence, and Morr, and they may be the ones. If you please, I'll take a look in their room."

"Do so, and if anything is wrong, have them report to me in the morning," said Doctor Clay, and retired once more to his room.

Moving swiftly through the hallway, Job Haskers reached his own room and threw open the door. He made a light, and gazed around in great perplexity. Everything was in perfect order excepting the bedclothes, which were just as he had left them. He walked slowly to the window and drew in the rope that was used for a fire escape.

"Strange! Strange!" he murmured to himself, as he scratched his head. "I was sure the bed moved. Can I have been dreaming after all? I ate a rather heavy supper, and my digestion is not as good as it used to be."

He put on his slippers and donned a dressing gown, and thus arrayed sallied forth once more, this time in the direction of the dormitory occupied by Dave and his chums. He approached on tip-toe and opened the door quickly and noiselessly.

But the students had had ample time in which to get to bed, and every one was under covers and apparently sleeping soundly. To make sure they were not shamming, the teacher came in and gazed at one after another closely. Then, with a face that was a study, he left the dormitory again and walked slowly to his own room.

"Is he gone?" asked a voice in the dormitory, after a full minute of silence.

"Yes, Phil," answered Dave. "But don't make any noise—he may come back."

"Say, that was the richest joke yet!" chuckled Ben.

"How he must have looked, sliding down that rope in his pajamas!" exclaimed Sam.

"If I dared, I'd really send in a theme to-morrow on 'Earthquakes,'" piped up Polly Vane.

"Do it, Polly; I dare you!" cried Macklin.

"I will—if you'll let me sign your name to it," answered the girlish student, but at this Chip shook his head vigorously.

"I'll bet old Haskers is as mad as a hornet," was Phil's comment. "Well, it served him right, for the way he treated us," he added.

"I guess we needn't go to the doctor to-morrow with any complaint," said the senator's son. "We have squared up."

"I'd like to know what Haskers really thinks of the shaking up," said Dave. And then he turned over to go to sleep, and the others did likewise.

The feast and the fun had tired the boys out, and the majority of them slept soundly until the rising bell rang out. Dave was the first to kick the covers aside and get up, but Ben followed immediately.

"Grand day, Dave!" cried Ben, running to the window to gaze out. "What a fine day to go nutting, if we could get away."

"Nothing but lessons to-day, Ben," answered Dave. He was bending down, looking under the bed. "Has anybody seen my shoes?" he continued, looking from one to another.

"I haven't seen them," answered Roger. He bent down to get out his own foot coverings. "Hello, my shoes are gone, too!" he cried.

"So are mine!" exclaimed Plum.

"And mine!" came quickly from several of the other boys.

"Did anybody put them in the closets?" asked Dave.

"If they did, they are not here now," answered Ben, who had entered one of the closets to look.

A hasty search was made, the boys looking into every place they could think of,—but all to no purpose. Every shoe, every boot, and every slipper belonging to them had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH SOME SHOES ARE MISSING

"What do you think of it?"

"Who took them?"

"We can't go downstairs in our bare feet."

Such were some of the remarks made, as the lads of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 looked at each other. The closets had been searched thoroughly but without success.

"See here, if anybody in these rooms hid those shoes, I want to know it!" demanded Sam, gazing around sharply.

"I hardly think a fellow would hide his own shoes, too," answered Luke.

"He might,—just to hide his own guilt."

"I believe this is the work of some outsider," declared Dave. "Most likely Nat Poole and his crowd."

"By Jove, Dave, I believe you are right!" exclaimed Phil. "It would be just like them to do it, if they got the chance."

"Did you say Nat Poole?" queried Shadow, scratching his head thoughtfully.

"I did. Most likely Nat heard of our feast, and it made him extra sore to think we were having a good time and he wasn't invited."

"That is true, and I guess——" Shadow stopped short, and a curious look crossed his face.

"What is it, Shadow? Do you know anything of this?" asked Roger.

"Why, I—er—that is, I had a dream last night," stammered the story-teller of the school. "Or, maybe it wasn't a dream after all," he went on, in confusion.

"See here, Shadow, have you been sleep-walking again, and did you make off with our shoes?" demanded Phil. He remembered only too well how poor Shadow was addicted to walking in his sleep, and how he had once walked off with a valuable collection of rare postage stamps belonging to Doctor Clay.

"I—I don't think so," stammered Shadow, and got as red as a beet. "But I had a queer dream. I forgot about it at first, but now it comes back to me. I somehow dreamed that somebody came into this room and bent over me while I was in bed, and then picked up something. I started to stop him—and then I went sound asleep again."

"Who was the person?" questioned Polly Vane.

"I don't know."

"See here, Shadow, I'll wager a new necktie that you walked off with our shoes!" declared Sam. "And if you did, please be kind enough to tell us where you put them."

"Oh, Sam! I really—I don't think I did!" stammered the sleep-walker, in much confusion.

"The feast must have been too much for you, and it set you to sleep-walking," said Roger. "Now just see if you can't remember where you went with the shoes."

"The whole bunch must have made quite a load—all one fellow could carry," said Luke.

"Yes, and he'd have to put them in a box or a sheet at that," added Plum.

"Try to think real hard," suggested Roger.

"If he did it, it is funny that he took his own shoes, too," remarked Dave.

Poor Shadow was so confused he did not know what to say or do. He sat on the edge of the bed the picture of despair.

"I—I thought I was all over sleep-walking," he murmured. "The doctor at home was treating me all summer."

"One thing is certain—we can't stay up here all morning," burst out the senator's son. "I'm going to borrow a pair of shoes somewhere."

"So am I," added Dave. "We'll hunt for the missing shoes later on."

"Say!" burst out Shadow, half desperately. "You—you won't tell Doctor Clay about this, will you?"

"Not if you did it without knowing it, Shadow," answered Dave, promptly.

"I won't say a word," answered Plum.

"I—I don't know if I did it or not," went on Shadow, his face as red as ever. "I didn't know I took those postage stamps and those class pins that time. But if I did take 'em,—and we don't find 'em—I'll buy new shoes for all hands, if it takes every dollar I can scrape up."

The boys donned their clothing and then went on a tour of some of the other dormitories. Thus several borrowed shoes, while the others had to be content with slippers and foot coverings usually worn on the athletic field.

"Not very elegant," remarked Phil, as he gazed at the slippers he had borrowed, "but 'any port in a storm,' as the sailors say. I hope we get our shoes back."

"So do I, Phil," returned Dave. "But if Shadow went off with them he may have gone a long distance. Remember, he carried those postage stamps away up the river, and used a rowboat to do it. Maybe he rowed off with our foot coverings."

"He doesn't act as if he was tired—and he would be tired if he went very far with the shoes. Why, we didn't get to sleep until about one o'clock or half-past."

"I know that. It certainly is a mystery."

With several of the boys appearing at breakfast wearing slippers the secret of what had happened could not very well be kept, and it soon was whispered around that Nos. 11 and 12 had been cleaned out of shoes, boots, and slippers during the night, and that Shadow was suspected of having walked again in his sleep. His chums tried to hush the matter up, yet enough was said to make the story-teller of the school thoroughly uncomfortable.

"I'd give ten dollars to locate those shoes!" said Shadow to Dave, later on.

"So would I," answered Dave. "We can make a hunt after school."

Half a dozen of the students joined in the search for the missing foot coverings, and the lads looked high and low, but without success.

"Only one place more that I know of," said Dave. "That is the old granary."

"I don't think they can be there, but we can look," said Shadow.

The old granary was a building located behind some of the carriage sheds. It had once held grain, but was now used for the

storage of garden implements. The lads found the door unlocked, and pushing it open they entered and gazed around in the semi-darkness.

"I don't see much that looks like shoes," remarked Roger.

"I'll strike a light," said Dave, and did so. The match flared up, and as it did so, several uttered cries.

"There they are, over in the corner!"

"We have found them at last!"

"Light a lantern and see," said Phil, and a stable lantern was quickly procured and lit. Then the boys worked their way around a mower and a harrow and some other farming implements to where they had seen the shoes.

"Sold!"

"These are a lot of old stuff thrown away long ago!"

It was true—the shoes they had located were worn out and covered with mildew. Shadow kicked them savagely.

"What a sell—and just after I was sure we had found them," he muttered.

Heavy at heart the students left the granary and put away the lantern. They had exhausted their resources, and walked back to the school in a decidedly sober mood.

"Well, all I can offer is this:" said Shadow, at last. "Each of you buy new shoes and slippers, and turn the bills over to me—and I'll pay them as quickly as I can."

"Don't you bother about my shoes, Shadow," said Dave, kindly. "I can get others easily enough."

"So can I," added Roger and Phil.

"But I would like to really know whether you walked off with them in your sleep, or if this is some trick of our rivals," continued Dave.

"You don't want to know any more than I do," declared the sleep-walker.

There seemed no help for it, and the next day all the boys paid a visit to Oakdale and purchased new shoes. They did not bother with slippers or boots, thinking that sooner or later the missing foot coverings would turn up. The shoe dealer was all attention, for never before had he had such a rush of trade.

Dave, Phil, and Roger got fitted first, and with their purchases under their arms, they quitted the shoe shop and strolled up the main street of the town.

"There are some girls we know!" cried the senator's son, presently, and pointed across the way. Coming in their direction were Mary Feversham and Vera Rockwell, two girls who lived in that vicinity, and who had come to the lads' school entertainment the year before. Vera had a brother with whom the senator's son was well acquainted.

"Why, how do you do!" cried Mary, as the boys crossed the street and tipped their caps. "So you are all back at school, eh?"

"I thought you must be back," added Vera, giving all a warm smile.

"Yes, we are back," answered Dave. "How have you been since we saw you last?"

"Very well indeed," answered Vera. "And how did you like it on the ranch? We heard you had turned into regular cowboys."

"Hardly that," said Dave. "But we went in for bronco-busting, and rounding-up, and all that."

"Somebody said you had some trouble with cattle thieves," went on Vera.

"Oh, Vera, don't mention that!" cried Mary, and blushed a little.

"Why shouldn't we?" demanded the other girl. "I don't believe those stories, and I think Mr. Porter and his friends ought to know what is being said."

"What is being said?" repeated Roger.

"Yes."

"Who is talking about us?" demanded Phil.

"Mr. Merwell,—the young man who used to go to Oak Hall. He goes to Rockville Military Academy now."

"And what did he say?" questioned Dave.

"Oh, he said a great many things—not to me but to some girls I know. He said all of you had gotten mixed up with some cattle thieves, and had tried to get out of the trouble by blaming him, but that he and his father had made you stop talking about him."

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake!" exclaimed Phil. "Isn't that Merwell to a T?"

"The shoe was on the other foot," explained Roger. "Merwell was the one who was mixed up in the affair, and he and his father had to pay for a lot of horses that—well, disappeared. We exposed him, and that is what made him mad."

"Did Mr. Merwell steal some horses?" asked Vera, in alarm.

"Not exactly—according to his story," answered Dave. "He says he took them in fun. Then the regular cattle thieves took them from him—and let him have some money. He claimed that he was going to return the horses, but didn't get the chance."

"And he and his father had to pay for the horses in the end?"

"Yes,—they paid Mr. Endicott, the owner of the ranch at which we were stopping."

"Then I guess Link Merwell was guilty," said Mary. "And after this I don't want him to even speak to me—he or that friend of his, Mr. Nick Jasniff."

"You'll do well to steer clear of the pair," warned Roger.

"It is a shame that they are allowed to talk about you as they do," said Vera. "If they keep on, they will give you a very bad name."

"I don't believe folks in Rockville will believe much of what Jasniff says," said Phil. "They'll remember his evil-doings of the past."

"He and Merwell seem to have made themselves popular at the Academy," was Mary's reply. "How they have done it I don't know. But perhaps they have money, or else——"

The girl did not finish, for just then an automobile swung around the corner and came to a halt in front of a store near which the young people had halted. The automobile contained Merwell, Jasniff, and two other students of the Academy, all attired in the cadet uniforms of that institution.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT THE GIRLS HAD TO TELL

One of the strange cadets was driving the automobile, and hardly had it come to a stop when Merwell and Jasniff bounded out on the sidewalk, directly in front of Dave and his friends.

"Why—er—hello!" stammered Jasniff, and then, recognizing the girls, he grinned broadly, and tipped his cap.

"How do you do?" said Merwell, to Mary and Vera, and at the same time ignoring Dave and his chums.

The two girls stared in astonishment, for they had not expected to see the very lads about whom they had been conversing. But they quickly recovered and turned their backs on the newcomers.

"What's the matter—don't you want to speak to me?" demanded Jasniff, a sickly look overspreading his face.

"I assuredly do not, Mr. Jasniff," answered Vera, stiffly.

"And I suppose you don't want to speak to me either," came sourly from Link Merwell.

"You are right, Mr. Merwell—I do not."

"After this you will please us best by not recognizing us," added Mary, coldly.

"Oh, I see how it is—these chaps have been filling you up with stories about us!" cried Merwell, roughly. "Well, if you want to believe them you can do it. I don't care!" And he turned on his heel and entered a nearby store.

"Some day you'll wish you hadn't made such friends of Porter & Company," said Jasniff, and he glared defiantly at Dave and his chums. "Maybe you'll find that they are not just what you thought they were," and having thus delivered himself, he, too, entered the store. In the meantime the automobile had gone on along the street to the post-office, where the two strange cadets went in to see about mail.

"Say, I think I'll lay for Merwell and Jasniff and——" began Phil, when a warning pinch on his arm from Dave caused him to break off.

There was an awkward pause, neither the boys nor the girls knowing exactly what to say or do.

"Well, we must be going," said Vera. "I promised to be home by dark."

"And I have some errands to do before I go back," added Mary. "So we'll say good-by."

"I hope we meet again," remarked Phil.

"Maybe we'll come to some of your football games," ventured Vera. "I did so enjoy some of those other games."

"We are not playing on the eleven this season," answered Dave. It gave him a little pang to make the admission.

"Oh, is that so!" Both of the girls gave the boys a studied look. "Well, we must be going." And then they hurried down the street, around a corner, and out of sight.

"Fellows, we ought to lay for those chaps!" cried Roger, as soon as the chums were alone.

"Just what I was going to suggest," broke in Phil.

"What good will it do?" asked Dave. "We can't make anything out of Merwell and Jasniff by talking, and we don't want to start a fight."

"I'd like to duck 'em in a mud pond!" muttered the shipowner's son. "It is what they deserve."

"They deserve tar and feathers!" was Roger's comment. "Why, in some places they'd be run out of town. How they ever got into Rockville Academy I can't understand."

"Money sometimes goes a great way," said Dave. "They may have literally bought their way in—that is, their parents may have done it for them."

The three students had passed to the other side of the street. Now they looked down the highway and saw the automobile go around a corner in the direction of Rockville. But the machine soon came to a halt again, although they did not know it.

"Well, I am going to lay them out for taking that boat, anyway," said the senator's son.

"Ditto here," added Phil.

"Physically or mentally?" queried Dave, with something of a smile.

"Both—if it's necessary," returned the shipowner's son, promptly. It was easy to see he was spoiling for a fight.

"I am going to see what they are doing," said Roger, after another minute had passed. "Maybe they won't come out until they think we have gone away."

He recrossed the street, and peered through one of the show windows of the store. Then, of a sudden, he made a rapid motion for his chums to join him.

"They are going out by a back way!" he cried. "The sneaks! They intend to give us the slip!"

"They shan't do it!" exclaimed Phil. "Come on!" And he set off on a run, with the others at his heels. They turned one corner and then another, and soon reached an alleyway between two houses located on a street behind the store. Here they plumped squarely into Merwell and Jasniff, each with a bundle under his arm.

"So this is the way you sneak away, eh?" demanded Phil.

"Sneak away!" blustered Merwell. "Not at all—we were only taking a short cut; ain't that so, Nick?"

"Sure," answered Jasniff, loudly. "We don't have to sneak away from anybody."

"We've a good mind to give you both a sound thrashing," cried Phil, angrily. "You had no business to touch our boat."

"And you had no business to talk about us to Miss Feversham and Miss Rockwell," added the senator's son.

"See here, you let us pass!" muttered Merwell. "Don't you dare to lay your fingers on us!" And he tried to edge to one side.

"See here, both of you," said Dave, sternly. "I want to give you a final warning. You have been talking about us; I know it, and it is useless for you to deny it. Now I want you to understand this: If you say another word against me, or against Phil or Roger, I'll see to it that you are exposed to every student at Rockville Academy."

"You won't dare!" cried Jasniff. His voice trembled a little as he spoke.

"I will dare, Nick Jasniff. I know what you are—and I know what Link Merwell is—and I don't propose to stand any more of your

underhanded work. Now you have your last warning,—and if you are wise you'll heed it."

"Say, do you want to fight?" roared Jasniff, coming forward, and sticking his chin close to Dave's face.

"I can defend myself, Jasniff,—even when a fellow tried to take a foul advantage of me, as you did that time in the gym."

"Bah! Always ringing that in. I only swung the Indian club to scare you. I can fight with my fists."

"Well, remember what I said, Jasniff. It's my last warning."

"Oh, come on—they make me sick!" cried Link Merwell, a certain nervous tremor in his voice. "We don't want to listen to their hot air!" And plucking his crony by the arm he hurried out of the alleyway into the street.

"Shall we let 'em go, Dave?" whispered Phil. "I'd just as soon pound 'em good."

"If we did that, Phil, they'd claim we were three to two and took an unfair advantage of them. Let them go. They have their final warning, and if they don't heed it—well, they will have to take the consequences."

"I could hardly keep my hands off of Merwell."

"I felt the same way," said Roger. "He deserves all we could give him."

The three chums watched Merwell and Jasniff turn another corner. They expected to see the pair walk to where the automobile was standing, but instead noted that the two cadets entered the Oakdale Hotel.

"Must be going to see somebody," suggested Phil.

"Or else they have gone in to smoke and drink and play pool," added Roger. "You'll remember Merwell liked to drink. He was the one who did his best to lead Gus Plum astray."

"Yes, I remember that," answered Dave. "I am mighty glad Gus and he are keeping apart."

The three students walked past the hotel, and looking in at an open window, saw Jasniff and Merwell talking to a man who sat in the reading room with a newspaper in his hands.

"Why, that is that Hooker Montgomery!" exclaimed Roger. "The fake doctor who sells those patent medicines."

"We'd better not let him see us, or he'll be wanting a new silk hat from us," murmured Phil. And he grinned as he thought of what had occurred on the road on the day of their arrival at Oak Hall.

"I wonder if Jasniff met him at Dunn's on the river?" said Dave. "That is what the letter requested, you'll remember."

"Wonder what business Jasniff was to aid him in?" queried the shipowner's son.

"Maybe Jasniff is going to help him to dispose of some of his marvelous remedies," suggested Roger. "I reckon he could give the ignorant farmers as good a talk about them as Montgomery himself."

"More than likely, since Montgomery is a very ignorant man," answered Dave.

"The other fellows ought to be ready to go back to school by this time," said the senator's son, after watching those in the hotel for a minute. "Let us hunt them up;" and thus, for the time being, Jasniff, Merwell, and Doctor Montgomery were dismissed from their minds. The meeting at the hotel was an important one to our friends as well as to those who participated, but how important Dave and his chums did not learn until long afterwards.

It was a comical sight to see the boys of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 walking back to the Hall, each with a shoe box under his arm. Sam Day led the procession, carrying his box up against his forearm, like a sword.

"Shoulder boxes!" he shouted, gayly. "Forward march!" And then he added: "Boom! boom! boom, boom, boom!" in imitation of a bass-drum.

"We've got boxes enough to last us for a year of picnics," cried Ben, for in Crumville, as in many other places, shoe boxes were frequently used for packing up picnic lunches.

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story!" put in Shadow, eagerly. "A girl who was going to get married had a shower, as they call 'em. Well, a wag of the town—maybe he was sore because he couldn't marry the girl himself—told all his friends, in private, that she was very anxious to get a nice bread-box. The shower was to be a

surprise, and it was, too, for when it came off the girl got exactly eleven bread-boxes."

"Oh!" came in a groan. "The worst yet."

"Not so bad," said Dave, dryly. "If she filled the boxes the married pair must have proved a well-bred couple."

"Hark to that!" roared Phil. "Say, Dave, go and take a roll!"

"When it comes to a joke, Dave is the flower of this flock," was Luke's comment.

"Anyway, he takes the cake," murmured Ben.

"Ben, say something; don't loaf on the job," came from the senator's son.

"A joke like that is pie for Roger," murmured Polly Vane.

"Even so, nobody has a right to get crusty," murmured Plum.

"Or pious!" continued Dave, and then Shadow made a pass for him with a shoe box. Then Roger started to run, and the others came after him, and away they went in a merry bunch, along the road leading to Oak Hall. Soon they came out at a point where the highway ran along the Leming River, and there halted to rest, for the run had deprived some of them of their wind.

"I hear a motor-boat," said Roger. "Wonder if it is Nat Poole's craft?"

"It is!" answered Plum. "Here he comes, right close to shore!"

The river was a good fifteen feet below the level of the roadway, and gazing down through the bushes lining the water's edge, the students beheld Nat Poole's motor-boat gliding along in a zig-zag fashion. Nat was not in the craft, which was evidently running without an occupant.

CHAPTER XV

A RUNAWAY MOTOR-BOAT

"What do you make of that?"

"The motor-boat must have run away from Nat!"

"Either that or Nat has fallen overboard!"

"Maybe Nat has been drowned!"

These and other remarks were made, as the boys on the highway gazed down at the craft that was speeding along in such an erratic fashion over the surface of the river. A closer look confirmed their first opinion, that nobody was on board.

"I'm going to try to stop her!" shouted Dave, and ran back along the highway, and disappeared into the bushes. Roger followed him closely, and some of the others trailed behind.

"I am going up the river—to see if I can find Nat!" shouted Phil, and away he sped, and Sam and Ben went along.

It was no easy matter for Dave to work his way down the bank of the stream. The bushes were thick and the footing uncertain, and once his jacket caught on a root and he had to pause to free himself. But at last he came out on a narrow strip of rocks and sand, at a point where the Leming River made a broad turn.

The water at this point was quite shallow, and here he thought the progress of the motor-boat would be stayed. His surmise was correct, the craft bringing up between several smooth rocks. The engine continued to work, pounding the boat back and forth, and threatening to sink her.

Fortunately, Dave had on a pair of gaiters he had borrowed, and they were so big that he slipped them off with ease. His socks followed, and then he rolled up his trousers to his knees, and waded into the stream.

"Be careful, or you'll slip and hurt yourself on the rocks!" sang out the senator's son.

"I'm watching out!" returned Dave.

He was leaping from one smooth stone to another, keeping in the shallow spots as much as possible. Thus he managed to get within a few yards of the motor-boat.

As he came closer he saw that the craft was pounding on the rocks worse than before. The pounding had in some way moved the gasoline control forward and also advanced the spark, and the engine was practically running "wild."

"I hope she isn't getting ready to blow up!" thought the youth, and he gazed anxiously ahead. Smoke was issuing from the motor-boat, coming from some over-heated oil.

He leaped to the next high rock, and then plunged boldly forward, soon gaining the bow of the craft. At the stern the propeller was churning the water into a white foam. The craft was trembling violently, and the hum of the machinery gave full evidence of the power it was exerting.

Fortunately, Dave's knowledge of gasoline engines now stood him in good stead, and without the loss of a second he turned off the supply of gasoline and the electric spark, and thus allowed the engine to "die." As the propeller slowed up and stopped, the water behind the craft calmed down, and then the pounding on the rocks was reduced to a gentle rub that did little but scratch the paint.

"Is she all right, Dave?" called out Roger, who stood on the rocks of the bank watching proceedings with great interest.

"I think so, although it hasn't done the engine any good to run wild. She's pretty well heated up, and the cylinders may be carbonized, or something like that."

"What are you going to do—try to run her in here?"

"No, I'll not take the risk. I only wanted to stop the engine and get rid of the risk of the boat blowing up."

"You ran a big risk doing it. She looked to me as if she might go up any instant."

"She can't get out of here—the current holds her," went on Dave. "She will be perfectly safe until Nat comes for her. I'd like to know where he is."

"Phil and some of the others went off to see."

To save the boat as much as possible, Dave took two of the wooden gratings of the flooring and tied them to ropes hanging over

the sides. In this position they acted as fenders, so that the rocks rubbed against the gratings instead of the boat proper.

"I am afraid he'll have quite a job of it, getting her out into the stream," said Dave, on coming ashore, and when he was putting on his socks and the gaiters. "She'll have to back out against the current and do a lot of turning."

"Maybe he'll have to get somebody to tow him out,—with a very long line," returned Roger.

"If only Nat didn't fall overboard," said Dave.

In the meantime, Phil and some of the others had run up the stream a distance. As they turned a point where there were several small islands the shipowner's son set up a shout.

"There is Nat now!"

"Whatever is he doing?" queried Ben.

"Swimming ashore, or trying to wade," answered Sam.

The boys on the shore came down to the water's edge and watched Nat Poole with interest. He was floundering around in water up to his waist. Sometimes he would come up on a rock, and then slip and pitch headlong. But he kept on, until he was but a few yards away.

"Hi, Nat! what's the matter?" called out Phil. "Did you fall overboard?"

"Hel—help me!" chattered the unfortunate one, and now the others realized that he was suffering greatly from the cold. "Don—don't let m—me—g-g-g—go down!"

"We'll help you!" answered Phil, promptly, and ran out on some dry rocks to a point close to poor Nat. "Come, give me your hand and I'll pull you up."

"So will I," added Ben, who had come behind the shipowner's son.

The suffering youth was only too glad to have somebody come to his aid, and he put up both hands, and those on the rocks hauled him up and then aided him to get to a safe spot on shore. He was shivering from head to feet, and his teeth chattered so that he could hardly speak.

"I wa—want t-t-to get where it is wa-wa-warm!" chattered Nat. "That wa—water is li—like i-i-i-ice!"

"Take off your wet coat," said Phil, kindly. "Here, you can have mine. I've got a sweater on." And he passed over the garment.

Nat was glad enough to don something dry, and the exchange was quickly made.

"If you'll take my advice, you'll make a run of it to the nearest farmhouse and warm up," said Ben. "If you don't you may take your death of cold."

"I—I wi—will," answered Nat.

"I'll go with you. There is a farmhouse just down the road a bit."

"We'll go back to where we left Dave and the others," said Phil. "They were after your boat," he explained.

"Did th—they st—stop h-h-her?"

"I don't know. We saw her, in the river, running wild. How did it happen?"

"I was fi—fixing the rudder li—line at the st—st—stern when all of a su—sudden we hit a r—r—rock or something and I we—went overboard," answered Nat. "Before I co-could g-g-get back the b-b-boat got away from m-m-me."

"Dave and some others went after the boat. We saw it running by itself, among the rocks."

Nat was too cold to pay attention just then to what had become of his property. He ran as fast as he could to the farmhouse, and there was taken in and allowed to dry himself in front of the fire, and was given a cup of hot tea. In the meantime Phil rejoined Dave and Roger, and told how the money-lender's son had been found.

It was after the supper-hour when all of the boys got back to Oak Hall, and Job Haskers was on the point of reading them a lecture and forcing them to do without supper when Doctor Clay appeared. To the master of the school the lads related their story, and he at once excused them for their tardiness, and told them to go directly to the dining-room, while he ordered Lemond to get out the school coach and go after Nat.

"Poole can be glad he was not drowned," said the doctor. "It was nice of you to stop the engine of his boat. But after this I want all of you to be more careful. I do not want to lose any of my boys!" And the look he gave them went to the heart of every lad present.

"What a difference between him and old Haskers!" murmured Phil.

"I'd give as much as a dollar to have Haskers leave," added Sam.

"I reckon every fellow in the school would chip in a dollar for that," was Plum's comment.

When Nat got in he was sent at once to his room, to change all of his clothes, and was then given a hot supper, which made him feel quite like himself. Later on he questioned Dave about the motor-boat, and said he would try to get the craft from among the rocks the next day, hiring a professional boatman to assist him. He did not thank Dave for his aid, nor did he thank Phil and the others.

"I guess it isn't in him to thank anybody," was Ben's comment. "Nat is one of the kind who thinks only of himself."

"He will have a hard time of it, getting his boat," said Dave, and so it proved. It took half a day to get the craft from among the rocks, and then it was found that she leaked so badly she had to be sent to a boat-builder for repairs.

That Saturday was the day scheduled for the football game with Lemington. As Nat could not take the eleven to that town in his motor-boat, as promised, the school carryall was pressed into service. This made some of the other students, who had arranged to go in the carryall, find other means of conveyance, and there was considerable grumbling.

"Poole said he would take 'em in the motor-boat," growled one student. "He ought to have seen to it that his boat was repaired on time."

The Old Guard football eleven all had bicycles or motor-cycles, and they went to the Lemington Athletic Grounds in a body on their wheels. All carried the school colors, and many also had horns and rattles.

"We'll show 'em that we can root for Oak Hall even if we are not on the eleven!" declared Dave.

Job Haskers took but little interest in athletics, declaring he thought too much time was wasted over field sports, but Andrew Dale was keenly alive to what was going on. He knew all about the trouble in the football organization, and he watched the departure of Dave and his chums with interest.

"Aren't you going, Mr. Dale?" asked Dave.

"Oh, yes, I am going in the carriage with Doctor Clay. Do you think we shall win, Porter?"

"We'll win if rooting can do it!" cried Dave.

"Then you intend to 'root,' as you call it?"

"Yes, sir—we are going to root for all we are worth."

"I am glad to know it," answered Andrew Dale; and then he turned away to attend to some school duties. Later on, when he and the doctor were on the way to the game, he mentioned the trouble in the football club, and told how Dave and his chums had been left out in the cold, and how Dave and the others were now going to cheer for and encourage the school eleven.

"Fine! Grand!" murmured the master of the school, his eye lighting up with pleasure. "That is the proper school spirit! It does Porter, Morr, and the others great credit."

"Exactly what I think, Doctor," answered the first assistant. "Many players would have remained away altogether, or gone to the game to throw cold water on the efforts of those on the gridiron. It shows a manliness that cannot be excelled."

"Yes! yes!" murmured Doctor Clay. "A fine lot of boys, truly! A fine lot! It seems a pity they were forced off the team."

"Perhaps they'll be back—before the football season is over," answered Andrew Dale, gravely.

"What do you mean, Dale?"

"Perhaps the football eleven will need them and be glad to get them back."

CHAPTER XVI

A STRUGGLE ON THE GRIDIRON

When Dave and his chums reached the athletic grounds they found the grandstand and the bleachers about half filled with people. The Lemington contingent had a good number of rooters, and they were already filling the air with their cries of encouragement. The boys looked around, but saw nothing of Vera Rockwell or Mary Feversham.

"Maybe they didn't think it worth while to come," suggested the senator's son.

"No Rockville fellows here, either," said Phil. "They play an eleven from Elmwood this afternoon."

The Lemington players were already on the field, and it was seen that they were rather light in weight, only the full-back being of good size.

"Our eleven has the advantage in weight," said Roger. "But I rather fancy those fellows are swift."

"Yes, and they may be tricky," added Ben.

As soon as Dave and his chums were seated, Dave gave the signal, and the Oak Hall cheer was given. Then followed another cheer for the school eleven, with a tooting of horns and a clacking of wooden rattles.

"Mercy! but those Oak Hall students can make a noise!" exclaimed one girl, sitting close by.

"That is what they call 'rooting'!" answered her friend. "Isn't it lovely!"

"Perfectly delicious! They ought to win, if they shout like that!"

Guy Frapley heard the racket, and walked over to the spot from whence it proceeded. He was astonished beyond measure to see Dave leading off, yelling at the top of his lungs, and waving a rattle in one hand and the school colors in the other.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, of Nat Poole.

"Oh, Porter and his crowd want to make out they don't feel stung over being out of it," grumbled Nat.

"But they are rooting harder than anybody."

"They'll be glad to see us lose."

"We are not going to lose."

"I didn't say we were," answered Nat, and walked away. Somehow, it made him angry to see Dave and his chums cheering, and in such an earnest manner. He would have been better satisfied had Dave acted grouchy or stayed away from the game.

The game was to be of two halves, of thirty minutes each, with ten minutes intermission. Oak Hall won the toss-up, and as there was no wind and no choice of goals, they kept the ball, and Lemington took the south end of the gridiron.

"Now, then, here is where Oak Hall wins!" cried Dave, loudly. "Do your level best, fellows!"

"Shove her over the line, first thing!" added Roger.

"Oak Hall! Oak Hall!" yelled Phil. "Now then, all together in the game!"

Under the inspiration of the cheering, Oak Hall made a fine kick-off, and by some spirited work carried the pigskin well down into the Lemington territory. But then the ball was lost by Nat Poole, and the opposing eleven brought it back to the center of the gridiron, and then rushed it up to the thirty-yard line of the school.

"That's the way to do it!" yelled a Lemington supporter. "You've got 'em going!"

"Send it back!" yelled Dave. "All together, for Oak Hall!" And this cry was taken up by a hundred throats.

Guy Frapley got the ball, a minute later, and made a really fine run around the Lemington left end. This brought the pigskin again to center, and there it remained for nearly five minutes, the downs on both sides availing little or nothing. A scrimmage followed, in which one Lemington player was injured, and he accused one of the Oak Hall fellows, a new player named Bemis, of foul play. This protest was sustained, and Bemis was retired and another new player named Cardell was substituted.

"Five minutes more!" was the cry, and again both elevens went at it. Dave suddenly saw the captain of the Lemingtons make a certain sign to some of his men.

"They are up to some trick!" he cried to his chums, and hardly had he spoken when the ball went into play, through center and across to the left end. It was picked up like a flash, passed to the quarter-back, who was on the watch for it, and carried toward the Oak Hall line with a rush.

"A touchdown for Lemington!"

"That's the way to do it!"

"Now, Higgins, make it a goal!"

Amid a wild cheering, the pigskin was brought out for the kick, and the goal was made.

"That's the way to do it!"

"Now for another touchdown!"

Again the pigskin was brought into play. But while it was still near the center of the field the whistle blew and the first half of the game came to an end.

Score: Lemington 6, Oak Hall 0.

It must be confessed that it was a sorry-looking eleven that straggled into the Oak Hall dressing-room to discuss the situation.

"You want more snap!" cried John Rand, the manager.

"They put up a trick on us!" grumbled Nat. "They got that touchdown by a fluke."

"Well, I wish we could make one in the same way," retorted Rand. Since being elected manager, he had had anything but an easy task of it to make the eleven pull together. Some of the old players wanted Dave, Roger, Phil, and the others back, and threatened to leave unless a change was made.

"This looks as if Oak Hall was out of it," whispered Phil to his chums, during the intermission.

"Oh, I don't know," returned Dave. "A touchdown and a goal isn't such a wonderful lead."

At the beginning of the second half it was seen that Guy Frapley and his fellow-players were determined to do something if they could. But they were excited and wild, and the captain could do little to hold them in. Several times they got confused on the signals, and once one of the new ends lost the ball on a fumble that looked almost childish. Inside of ten minutes, amid a mad yelling from the

Lemington supporters, the ball was forced over the Oak Hall line for another touchdown, and another goal was kicked. Then, five minutes later, came a goal from the field.

"Hurrah! That's the way to do it!" yelled a Lemington supporter.

"Fifteen to nothing!" cried another. "Thought Oak Hall knew how to play football!"

"They ought to play some primary school kids!"

"You shut up!" screamed Nat Poole, in sudden rage. "We know what we are doing!"

"You ought to be an ice-man,—you're slow enough," retorted the Lemingtonite, and this brought forth a laugh, and made Nat madder than ever.

Again the ball was placed in play, and this time Oak Hall did all it could to hold its own. But it was of no avail. Lemington carried the air of victory with it, and its confidence could not be withstood. Again the ball was shoved over the line for a touchdown, and again the goal was kicked, amid a cheering that was deafening.

"It's a slaughter!" murmured Roger.

"I am afraid so," answered Dave. "Too bad! I am sorry for the school!"

"So am I," said the senator's son, and Phil and Ben nodded gravely.

The last five minutes of the game only served to "rub it in," as Shadow expressed it, for Lemington scored again, this time, however, failing to kick the goal. When the whistle blew the pigskin was on the Oak Hall twenty-five yard line.

Final score: Lemington 26, Oak Hall 0.

It is perhaps needless to state that the local supporters yelled and cheered, and blew their horns, and clacked their rattles until they were exhausted. It was a great victory, for in the past Oak Hall had been a formidable rival on the gridiron. The eleven cheered for Oak Hall, and were cheered in return; and then the visitors got out of sight as quickly as possible.

"A bitter defeat truly," said Doctor Clay, while driving back to the school. "Our boys did not seem to play together at all."

"It was very ragged work," answered Andrew Dale. "But it is no more than I expected, from what I saw in the practice games. Our eleven will be able to do but little unless it improves wonderfully."

"I believe you, Dale. Don't you—ah—think they would do better if Porter and Morr and Lawrence were in the line-up?"

"I certainly do. But they have been voted out, so I was told."

"Ahem!" Doctor Clay grew thoughtful. "What does Mr. Dodsworth think about it?" The party he mentioned was the gymnastic teacher, who took quite an interest in football, although not officially.

"He thinks Porter, Morr, Lawrence, and Plum ought to be put back on the eleven. He says it is a shame that they were put off in the first place."

"I believe our school is to play Rockville Academy next."

"Yes, and I just got a message over the telephone that Rockville won from Elmwood this afternoon, twelve to four. I know Elmwood has a strong eleven, so Rockville must be extra good this season."

"Exactly so; and that means, if our eleven is not greatly strengthened before we meet Rockville, we shall suffer another defeat," responded the master of Oak Hall, rubbing his chin reflectively.

"More than likely, sir."

"Too bad! In these days some folks think football and baseball quite as important—ahem!—as—er—some studies. It is a wrong idea, assuredly,—yet I—ahem!—I think it would be a very good thing if we could show the world that our students can play football as well as do other things."

"Football is a great thing at Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, Doctor."

"Yes, indeed! I remember well how I used to witness those stirring games, and how I would yell with the rest. Why, Dale, one year we had a quarter-back that was a corker. They couldn't stop him! He got the pigskin and skinned down the field like a blue streak, and—but, ahem! that is past history now," finished the doctor, bringing himself back to his usual dignity. "But I must look into this football matter more closely," he added with a speculative sigh.

Poole, Frapley, and their crowd had arranged for a banquet that night, and many others of Oak Hall had gathered boxes and barrels

for bonfires. The banquet was a tame affair, and not a single fire was lighted.

"We are having frost early this year," said Luke, dryly.

"Yes, it came on suddenly, this afternoon," added Shadow.

"I'll wager you will hear something drop in the football team before long," went on Luke. "The school won't stand for such work as we had to-day."

"Who is to blame?"

"Rand, Frapley, Bemis, and Nat Poole."

"Then they better resign."

"Just what I say."

During the evening the talk throughout the school was largely about the game, and nearly every player was severely criticised. It was agreed that Bemis had acted in a thoroughly unsportsmanlike manner, and he was told that he would have to resign, and he agreed to do so. It was also agreed by the students generally that of the new players, Guy Frapley had done the best work.

"Give him proper support and he would be all right," said Dave. "But, in my opinion, the eleven as it now stands will never win a victory."

"And that is what I think, too," added Roger.

CHAPTER XVII

REORGANIZING THE ELEVEN

On Monday morning the students of Oak Hall were treated to a surprise. Directly after chapel service Doctor Clay came forward to make an address. He first spoke about the good work that the pupils were, generally speaking, doing, and then branched off about the football game, and the poor exhibition made on the gridiron.

"In the past I have not thought it proper for the head of this institution to take part in your football and baseball games, contenting myself with giving you an instructor in the gymnasium alone," he continued. "But I find that these sports now play a more or less prominent part in all boarding schools and colleges, and that being so, I have thought it wise to embrace all field sports in the gymnasium department. Consequently, from to-day your football elevens, your baseball nines, and your track athletics, and in fact all your sports, will be held under the supervision and direction of Mr. Dodsworth, your gymnasium instructor. He will be assisted by Mr. Dale, who, as you all know, was once a leading college football and baseball player. These two gentlemen will aid you in reorganizing your football eleven, and will do all in their power to give to Oak Hall the victories you all desire."

This announcement came as a bombshell to Rand, Frapley, Poole, and their cohorts, and it was equally surprising to all of the others who had played on the eleven.

"That means a shaking-up for us all right," said one of the players. "I can see somebody getting fired already."

"Do you suppose they intend to take the management away from me and Rand?" demanded Frapley. "I don't think that is fair. Rand was made manager by a popular vote."

"If they want me to resign, I'll do it," snapped the manager. He had been so severely criticised that he was growing tired of it.

"It's a shame that we can't run our club to suit ourselves," grumbled Nat Poole. "If the teachers are going to do it, maybe they had better do the playing too."

"Well, they'd play a heap sight better than you did, Nat," was the remark of another student.

Doctor Clay's announcement created such a stir that the students could think of little else during the day. All felt that from henceforth football, baseball, and track athletics would become a regular part of the institution.

In the afternoon a notice was posted up in the Hall and in the gymnasium, calling a special meeting of all who were interested in the football organization. The meeting was called for Tuesday afternoon at four o'clock, and the call was signed by Mr. Dodsworth and Mr. Dale.

"They are not going to let any grass grow under their feet," remarked the senator's son, as he and Dave read the notice.

"Shall you go to the meeting, Roger?"

"Of course. And you must go, too, Dave. I know Mr. Dale and Mr. Dodsworth want all the fellows to be there."

Following the posting of the notice came word that Rand had resigned the management of the eleven, and then came another notice calling for the election of a new manager.

"Let us put up Henry Fordham again," suggested Phil. "That is, if he is willing to run."

The football meeting was attended by nearly every student of Oak Hall, the gymnasium meeting room being literally packed. The only youth who was absent was John Rand.

Mr. Dale called the meeting to order, and made a neat speech, in which he advised the lads to act soberly and accordingly to their best judgment. He said the football game with Lemington had proved a great disappointment, and he sincerely trusted that the reorganized eleven would be able to lead the school to nothing but victories. He added that as Rand had resigned, they would first proceed to the election of a new manager, and then the rearranging of the eleven would be begun under the direction of Mr. Dodsworth and himself.

The teacher had scarcely finished his speech when Guy Frapley was on his feet.

"Mr. Dale, I wish to say something," he almost shouted. "As everybody here knows, I am the captain of the football eleven. What

I want to know is, whether I am to be the captain of the eleven or not. If I am to be nothing but a figurehead, why, I'd rather get out."

It was an aggressive, almost brutal, manner of expressing himself, and it produced an uproar.

"Put him out!"

"Make him resign!"

"Tell him he has got to behave himself and make good!"

"Boys! Young gentlemen! We must have quietness!" cried Andrew Dale, raising his hand. And then he rapped for order.

"I'll resign!" shouted Guy Frapley, when he could be heard. "I don't want anything more to do with the old team, anyway!" And in a rage he forced his way out of the gymnasium. Several of his friends tried to get him to return, but without avail.

The departure of Frapley brought about a semblance of order, and presently the gymnasium instructor got up to talk. What he said was directly to the point. He said that he had prepared a list of names of former football players of Oak Hall, with a record of the work of each individual. This list would be used in making up the reorganized team.

"That's the talk!" cried one student. "That's the common-sense way of going at it."

"Merit is what counts every time," added another.

When a vote was taken for a new manager, Henry Fordham was elected almost unanimously. In accepting, the new manager stated that he was glad he was going to have the assistance of Mr. Dale and Mr. Dodsworth, and he hoped that from now on the club would pull together and pile up nothing but victories. This speech was well received and loudly applauded.

Then the list of football players of past seasons was read. Dave was placed at the top of the list, with Phil, Plum, Roger, and Sam following in the order named. Nat Poole's name was sixteenth, much to his disgust.

"I suppose that means that I can't play on the eleven," he growled.

"You may become a substitute," answered Mr. Dodsworth.

"Not much! If I can't play on the eleven, I know what I'll do—I'll pack my trunk and go home!"

"Do it right away!" shouted a voice from the rear of the room.

"You'll never be missed, Poole," added another.

"All right, I'll leave!" shouted Poole, purple with rage, and then he left the meeting as abruptly as Guy Frapley had done. At the door he shook his fist at the crowd. "You just wait—I'll fix Oak Hall for this!" he added, sourly.

"How foolish!" murmured Luke. "Nat will never make any friends by acting like that."

"Do you think he'll leave Oak Hall?" questioned another boy.

"Perhaps,—if his father will let him."

Following the departure of Nat Poole came the reorganizing of the football eleven. Dave was placed in the position he had occupied the year before, and Phil, Roger, Sam, and Plum followed. Of those who had played against Lemington only five were retained—those who had been on the eleven one and two years previous. All the other players were told they would have to enter the scrub team, for a try-out for the substitute bench.

It filled Dave's heart with pleasure to get back in his old position. He was unanimously chosen as captain of the eleven, and he called for some practice every afternoon that week,—a call that was indorsed by Mr. Dodsworth, Mr. Dale, and the new manager.

"We have got to get right down to business—if we want to beat Rockville," said Dave, to the others. "I understand they put up a stiff game with Elmwood. If we are beaten, all the fellows who were put off the eleven will have the laugh on us."

"We'll do our best," cried the senator's son.

"It's a good thing we organized the Old Guard," said Phil. "That kept us in fine condition."

Practice commenced in earnest the next day, and was kept up every afternoon, under the supervision of Mr. Dale and the gymnasium instructor. Mr. Dodsworth perfected the eleven in signal work, and Andrew Dale showed them how to work several trick plays used effectively by the college he had attended.

Many of the students wondered what Guy Frapley, Nat Poole, and John Rand would do. On the day following the reorganization of the football eleven, all three students sent telegrams to their parents, and received replies the next day. Rand and Frapley left Oak Hall,

and announced that they were going to Rockville Military Academy. Nat Poole had wanted to go, too, but Aaron Poole would not permit it, for the reason that he had paid for Nat's board and tuition in advance, and he was not the man to sacrifice one cent by such a move. Later on he wrote a letter, stating that he didn't believe in any such foolishness as football anyway, and Nat had better settle down to his studies and get some good of the money that was being spent on him. This letter angered Nat exceedingly, but he could do nothing without his parent's consent, and so he settled down as best he could.

"I shouldn't wonder if Rand and Frapley become cronies of Merwell and Jasniff," said Dave to Phil. And so it proved,—the four became quite intimate, and all of them vowed that sooner or later they would "settle accounts" with Dave for the trouble he and his chums had caused them. The ringleader of the four was Nick Jasniff, and he resolved to do something that would put Dave in the deepest kind of disgrace. Not to expose himself, he matured his plans slowly and with great caution.

Although Dave was doing all in his power to make the football eleven a good one, he was not permitted to devote all his spare time to that organization. Oak Hall, as my old readers know, boasted of a secret organization known as the Gee Eyes, those words standing for the initials G and I, which in their turn stood for the words Guess It. Dave and his chums were all members of this society, which was kept up mainly for the fun of initiating new members.

"The Gee Eyes meet to-night, Dave," said Buster Beggs on Friday morning. "Big affair—initiation of six new members. You must be on hand."

"I think I had better go to bed—so as to be in good trim for the football game," answered Dave.

"Oh, no, you must come!" pleaded Buster. "Phil and Roger, and all the old crowd have promised to be there."

"Well, I'll be on hand if you'll promise not to keep us out after twelve o'clock, Buster. The eleven has got to get its sleep, remember that."

"All right, we'll try to cut it short," answered Buster Beggs, who, this term, was the leader of the society, or Right Honorable Muck-a-Muck, as he was called.

"What are you going to do?" questioned Dave.

"That's a secret, Dave. But it will make you laugh. We are going to initiate the whole six at one time."

"Very well, I'll be there."

"One thing more, Dave," went on Buster, in a low voice. "Keep this from Nat Poole."

"But he is a member," urged Dave. "He has a right to know."

"If he knew he'd tell on us sure—he is down on the whole crowd. We are going to drop him."

"I see. Well, you are leader this term, Buster, so do as you please," answered Dave, and walked off to one of his recitations. Then Buster hurried off in another direction.

As soon as the two students were gone a third boy tiptoed his way from behind a coat rack, where he had been in hiding. The lad was Nat Poole.

"I thought something was in the wind!" murmured Nat to himself. "I must find out just where they are going, and what they are going to do,—and then I'll let Doctor Clay know all about it. Maybe if Porter and his crowd are caught red-handed they'll be put in disgrace, and then they won't be able to play that game with Rockville!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INITIATION AND WHAT FOLLOWED

"Are we all ready?"

"We are."

"Then forward—and make as little noise as possible until we are out of hearing of the school."

The Gee Eyes had assembled at the boathouse, under the leadership of Buster Beggs and Ben Basswood. Three of the number had gone ahead, taking with them the six new students who were to be initiated.

The members of the society had with them their robes and other paraphernalia, consisting of boxlike headgear, stuffed clubs, wooden swords, squirt guns, and other articles too numerous to mention. They hurried off into the woods, and there donned the robes and headgear, and lit their lanterns, for the night promised to be dark.

"I hope nobody has found us out," ventured Roger. "We don't want to get caught at this." He had received an inkling of what was coming.

"Oh, I guess we are safe enough," answered Dave. "Murphy said he would let us in."

"Say, talking about being let in puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow. "A man stayed out later nights than his wife liked. One night he didn't come home until very late, and he stood on the sidewalk, afraid to let himself in. Along came a friend and asked him what he was doing. 'Please ring the bell and see if my wife is home,' said the man. So the friend rang the bell, and the next instant the door opened, and he got a broom over his head. 'Is she in?' asked the man on the sidewalk. 'Sure she is,' answered his friend. 'Go right in and you'll get a warm welcome!'" And at this story there was a general snicker.

A few minutes' walk brought the members of the Gee Eyes to a clearing in the woods. Here several lanterns had been hung up, casting a weird light of red, blue, and green. Those to be initiated

were present, and surrounding them in a big circle, the members of the society commenced to chant:

"Flabboola! flabboola!
See the victims, see!
Flabboola! flabboola!
Victim, bend your knee!
Sinky panky! flabboola!
Fall upon the ground!
Sinky panky! flabboola!
Sing without a sound!"

And then came a wild dancing around the victims, with a brandishing of clubs and swords.

"Hi! don't stab me!" roared one, as a sword was thrust suddenly in the direction of his stomach.

"Shut up!" murmured the victim next to him. "They won't hurt you."

"The Right Honorable Lord of the Reservoir will warm up the victims' backbones!" sang out Buster, in a hoarse bass voice. And then Shadow Hamilton, in his disguise, crept behind the nearest victim, and sent a stream of ice-water from a squirt-gun down the fellow's neck.

"Wow! wow!" yelled the student, trying to break away from the pair who held him. "Crimps! but that's cold!"

"'Tis for thy good we do this to thee!" said Shadow, solemnly, and then the next victim was treated to a similar dose. He submitted quietly, and so did the next fellow, but the fourth broke away, and started off in the direction of the school.

"Hi, come back here!" yelled several. "Don't you want to become a member?"

"I—I guess I've changed my mind!" stammered the youth. "I—er—I can't stand cold baths, nohow. If you—Hello, what's this!" And of a sudden he pitched over some dark object, and went headlong.

"Ouch!" came in another voice. "Ouch! What do you mean by kicking me in the ribs?" And a groan of pain followed.

"Who is behind those bushes?" asked Dave.

"Must be a spy!" returned Phil.

"A spy! A spy! Capture him!"

"Don't let him get back to the school!"

On the instant there was great excitement, and fully a dozen members of the Gee Eyes rushed forward and caught hold of the escaping victim, and the fellow over whom he had stumbled. Both were dragged forward, and the light of a lantern was turned on the unknown.

"Why, it's Nat Poole!"

"He was spying on us!"

"Maybe he was going to report us!"

"You le—let go of me!" stammered Nat. He put his hand to his side. "That fellow half killed me!" And he gave another groan.

"What were you doing in the bushes?" demanded Ben, sternly.

"Me? Why—er—nothing."

"Yes, you were."

"I'll wager a button he was going to report us!" exclaimed another student.

"It ain't so!" whined Nat. "Ain't I got a right to be here? I'm a member."

"No, you are not—you've been cast out!" answered a deep bass voice.

"If he wants to be one of us, he's got to be initiated all over again!" said Phil, in a disguised voice. "What say, boys, shall we do it?"

"Yes! yes! Put him with the others!"

"Sure thing! Nat, you are just in time!"

"We'll give you an initiation you'll never forget, a regular three-ply, dyed in the wool, warranted storm-proof initiation," added Ben, in tragic tones.

"I don't want to be initiated again!" howled the money-lender's son. "I've had enough of this society. You let me go!"

"Not to-night!" was the firm answer, and much against his will Nat was forced to go along with the crowd; and thus his plan to find out what they were going to do, and then carry the news to Doctor Clay, was nipped in the bud.

"We were lucky to catch Nat," whispered Dave to Roger, as the whole crowd proceeded through the woods, led by Buster and Ben. "I am certain he was spying on us for no good purpose."

"Exactly, Dave, and we want to watch him right along," returned the senator's son. "First thing you know, he'll be giving our football signals and tricks away to Rockville and the other schools we are going to play."

Nat had been forced to join the other victims, and the seven were marched a distance of a quarter of a mile. The crowd came out on the bank of the river, at a spot where several ice-houses had recently been erected.

"Now, we'll give you the famous slide for life!" cried Buster, and pointed to the upper portion of one of the ice-houses, where a big wooden slide led downward into the Leming River.

"I can't stand cold water!" cried the victim who had previously tried to run away.

"'Twill do you a power of good!" answered Sam, in a deep voice.

"Say, you ain't going to dump me into the river from that thing!" roared Nat Poole. "I won't stand it!"

"Then sit down to it, Nat!" came a voice from the rear.

Of a sudden the seven victims were blindfolded. Several protested weakly, but the others kept silent, for they knew it would do no good to attempt to hold back; indeed, it might make matters worse. Yet nobody in that crowd wanted a ducking, for the water was cold, and they were quite a distance from the school.

Some narrow stairs led to the upper portion of the ice-houses, and blindfolded as they were, the victims were forced to mount these and were then taken to a room in the back of one of the buildings.

"Now for Number One!" sang out Buster, and one of the victims was rushed forward to a slide.

"Hope you can swim, Carson!" said one of the hazers.

"The water isn't over ten feet deep," said another.

"Swim hard and then you won't take cold," added a third.

"If you find yourself really drowning, yell for help," put in a fourth.

"I—er—I don't think this is quite fair——" commenced poor Carson, and then he was tripped flat on his back and sent downward

with a plunge. "Oh!" he screamed, and then continued to go down, with great rapidity, for the slide had been looked over by the boys, and made as smooth as possible. He shut his mouth tightly, expecting every instant to strike the chilling waters, but of a sudden his feet struck a heap of sawdust, and into this he slid up to his knees. Then eager hands seized him, and the bandage was torn from his eyes. In the semi-darkness he saw that he had not come down the slide over the water, but down another, which ended in the sawdust pit of the ice-house. He looked decidedly sheepish.

"Have a fine swim, Carson?" asked one of his tormentors.

"What a sell!" muttered the victim. "But anyway, it's better than the river!" he added, with much satisfaction.

One after another the victims were sent down the wooden slide. Some came down silently, like martyrs, while others yelled in alarm. Nat Poole was the last to be brought forward. He was well blindfolded.

"Be careful, Nat!" cried one student, gravely. "Don't hit your head when you go down."

"And don't scratch yourself on any of the nails," added another.

"As soon as you hit the water somebody will haul you in with a boathook," came from a third.

"I—I don't want to slide into the water, I tell you!" screamed the money-lender's son. "I'll catch my death of cold!"

"You run all the way back to school and get into bed and you'll be all right!" said a fourth hazer.

"I—I can't swim very well! You let me go!" And now Nat was fairly whining.

"Can't do it, Nat! Here is where you get a first-class, A No. 1, bath!" was the cry, and then the victim was sent flat on his back on the wooden slide. He let up a shriek of agony, and another shriek as he commenced to slide down. Then he lost his nerve completely, and uttered yell after yell, only ending when he struck the sawdust with such force that he turned a complete somersault and got some sawdust in his mouth and nose.

"My, but he certainly knows how to scream!" remarked Dave, as he and the others rushed below, to join the crowd. "I hope he doesn't rouse the neighborhood."

When the cloth was removed from Nat's eyes, and he had a chance to see where he had landed, he was the maddest lad present. All the other victims were laughing at him, and the club members almost doubled up in their mirth.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" he snarled. "But you just wait!"

"Want more of the initiation?" demanded Buster.

"No, I don't! You let me go! I'm going back to the school!"

"So are we, Nat, and you'll go with us," answered Shadow. "Don't let him get away from us!" he whispered to his friends.

"Well, this winds up the initiation," said Buster, throwing off his headgear, a movement that was followed by the others. "You fellows are now full-fledged members of the Gee Eyes."

"And I'm glad it is over," answered one of the victims. "Say, but that was a dandy shoot the chutes!" he added, half in admiration.

"It is not quite as firm as it might be," said Dave. "It needs more bracing up on the sides. The carpenters aren't done, I suppose."

"I thought it was mighty shaky myself," put in Phil. "Why, once I thought it was going down with us."

"Oh, it's as sound as a dollar!" cried Shadow. "Of course, with such a crowd——"

Shadow did not finish, for from above the boys in the sawdust pit, there came a sudden ominous cracking. In the semi-darkness of the night they saw a brace snap in twain. Another brace quickly followed, and then the wooden slide commenced to sway from side to side.

"It's coming down!" yelled Roger, hoarsely. "Get out of here quick—unless you want to be killed!"

CHAPTER XIX

SNEAK AGAINST SNEAK

It was a time of extreme peril for the boys in the sawdust pit at the bottom of the wooden slide, and nobody realized this more thoroughly than did Dave. In some manner the wooden bracings had become loosened, and the ponderous slide was in danger of coming down with a mighty crash on their heads. If it did this, more than likely some of the lads would be seriously injured, if not killed.

"Jump from the pit!" yelled Dave, and caught Phil by one hand and Roger by the other. All made a wild scramble, kicking the sawdust in all directions.

"Let me get out of here!"

"Confound this robe, I'm all tangled up in it!"

"My foot is caught! Help me, won't you?"

Such were some of the cries that arose, as, in a bunch, the boys tried to get out of the sawdust pit. All succeeded but Buster Beggs, who, while on the rim of the pit, slipped and fell back,—just as another brace snapped, and the ponderous wooden slide sagged still more.

"Help me!" yelled Buster. "Don't leave me, fellows!"

"Here, give me your hand!" cried Dave, turning back, and as the hand was thrust towards him, he gave a jerk that brought Buster out in a hurry. By this time most of the boys had run to a safe distance, and Dave and Buster lost no time in following.

"All here?" demanded Ben. The lanterns had been left behind, so that they could see only with difficulty.

A rapid count was made, and it was learned that all were safe. One student had scratched his face, and another had wrenched his ankle, but in the excitement these minor injuries were scarcely noticed.

"Thank fortune we are out of that!" panted Phil.

"I'm mighty glad I wasn't killed," added Luke.

"I wonder if the slide is really coming down after all," remarked Sam. "It doesn't seem to be moving any more."

All peered forth in the semi-darkness at the big wooden affair. It had sagged in the middle, and the top had twisted several feet to one side. Another brace looked as if it was on the point of breaking and letting it down still further.

"Better get out of here," said Nat Poole. "If the owner of the ice-houses finds this out he'll make you pay for the busted slide."

"Well, I think we ought to pay for it, anyway," answered Dave, quickly. "We broke it."

"Huh! I wouldn't pay a cent unless I had to," grumbled the money-lender's son.

"What about our lanterns?" asked Roger.

"That's so!" exclaimed Ben. "They are all up in the ice-house, or down in the sawdust pit."

"We can't leave them there,—they may set fire to something," said Phil.

"We'll have to get them," decided Dave.

"Oh, but that's dangerous!" cried one of the students who had just been initiated. "Why, the slide might come down just as we were getting the lanterns!"

"Yes, and I don't want to be killed for the sake of four or five lanterns," added another.

"It's not a question of the worth of the lanterns," said Dave. "We mustn't leave them here because of the danger of fire. If we left them, and the ice-houses burnt down, we'd have a nice bill to pay!"

"Oh, don't croak so much!" growled Nat Poole. "I'm going back to school. It's cold here."

"You stay where you are, Nat!" cried Ben, catching him by the arm. "You'll go back with the rest of us, and not before."

With caution Dave, followed by Phil and Shadow, approached the ice-house, and climbed up one of the ladders nailed to the side of the building. Then they ventured out on a corner of the slide, and secured two of the lanterns.

"We'll have to go down part of the slide for that other," said the shipowner's son.

"No, don't do that, for your weight may bring the slide down," returned Dave. "I'll get a long stick and see if I can't get the lantern with that."

A stick was handy, and fixing a bent nail in the end, Dave reached down, and after a little trouble secured the lantern. Then the boys went below and secured the lanterns in the sawdust pit.

"Hi! what are you boys doing here?" demanded an unexpected voice from out of the darkness, and by the light of the lanterns the students saw a man approaching. He had a stick in one hand and an old-fashioned horse-pistol in the other.

"Who are you?" questioned Buster, as leader of the Gee Eyes.

"Who am I? I am Bill Cameron, the owner of these ice-houses, that's who I am! And I know you, in spite of them tomfoolery dresses you've got on. You're boys from Oak Hall."

"You've hit the nail on the head, Mr. Cameron!" cried Phil. "Glad to see you!" And he walked forward and held out his hand.

"Who be you?" demanded Bill Cameron, and peered at the shipowner's son curiously. "Well, I declare, if it ain't the young man as stopped the runaway hoss fer my wife! Glad to see you!" And the ice-house man shook hands cordially. "Up to some secret fun, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"I thought I heard a yellin' around the ice-houses, and I told my wife I'd dress and come over and see what it meant. Hope you ain't done no damage," the man continued, somewhat anxiously.

"We have done a little damage, I am afraid," answered Phil. "But we are willing to pay for it."

"What did ye do?"

In as few words as possible Phil and some of the others explained the situation. They were afraid Bill Cameron would be angry, but instead he broke into a laugh.

"Ain't it the greatest ever!" he cried. "You ain't done no damage at all. The carpenters put that wooden slide up wrong, and I told 'em they'd have to take it down, and they started to-day. That's what made them bracin's bust. The hull thing is comin' down,—so what you did don't hurt, nohow."

"I am very glad to hear that!" cried Phil, and the others said practically the same. Then they bade good-night to the ice-houses' owner, and hurried in the direction of Oak Hall.

"It's a good thing, Phil, that you knew Mr. Cameron," said Dave, on the way. "But you never told me about stopping a runaway horse for Mrs. Cameron."

"Oh, it wasn't much!" answered the shipowner's son, modestly. "It happened last June, just before we started for Star Ranch. The horse was running along the river road, and I got hold of him and stopped him, that's all. Mrs. Cameron was going to tell Doctor Clay about it, but I got her to keep quiet."

"Phil, you're a hero!" And Dave gave his chum's arm a squeeze that made Phil wince, but with pleasure.

Murphy, the monitor, was on the watch for them, and let them in by a back door. All lost no time in getting to their dormitories and in undressing and going to bed. Everybody in the crowd was satisfied over the initiations but Nat Poole. His plot to expose Dave and his chums had failed, and he was correspondingly sour.

"But I'll fix them yet," muttered the money-lender's son, to himself. "Just wait till they start to play Rockville, that's all!" And the thought of what he had in mind to do made him smile grimly.

It must be confessed that some of the football players felt rather sleepy the next morning. Dave was sleepy himself, and this alarmed him not a little.

"If we lose the game with Rockville to-day it will be our own fault," he said, to the crowd that had participated in the Gee Eyes' doings. "We should have gotten home at least an hour earlier than we did last night—or rather this morning." And then he made each player take a good rubbing down and just enough exercise to limber up his muscles.

Dave had not forgotten what had been said about Nat Poole, and directly after breakfast he called Chip Macklin to one side. As my old readers know, Chip had once been the sneak of the school, and he knew well how to hang around and take notice of what was going on.

"Chip, I've got some work for you," said Dave, in a low voice. "I may be mistaken—in fact, I hope for the honor of the school that I am. But I don't trust Nat Poole. He is down on some of us because

we have gotten back on the eleven, and you'll remember how chummy he used to be with Jasniff and Merwell, who are now going to Rockville,—and with Rand and Frapley, and they are now going to the academy also. I am afraid that Nat——"

"That Nat will try to sell you out?" finished Chip, his little eyes snapping expectantly.

"Yes. He may give our signals away, or something like that."

"I see. And you want me to watch—and report, if I see anything wrong?"

"Yes."

"I'll do it. I'd like to catch him—for he never treats me decently," added Chip.

It had been decided that some of the boys should go to Rockville by boats and others by carriages and on their bicycles and motor-cycles. The eleven were to go in the school carryall, and Mr. Dodsworth and Andrew Dale were to go with them.

Owing to the change in the academy management, but little had been done to the athletic field, and when the Oak Hall club arrived, they found the grounds rather uneven and poorly marked.

"Bad for really good playing," remarked Dave.

"You'll have to be on your guard," warned Andrew Dale. "This field should have been rolled down after the last storm."

The grandstand was rather a small affair, and it speedily became filled with visitors, for the annual football game between the two schools was always a great drawing card. Flags and banners were much in evidence, and so were horns and rattles.

"I wonder if any outsiders we know are present?" remarked Roger to his chums, as they walked across the field.

"Somebody is waving from the corner of the stand," answered Phil. "I think it is Miss Rockwell."

"It is, and Miss Feversham is with her, and so is Mr. Rockwell," answered Dave, and then the boys took off their caps in salutation. And then they recognized a number of other friends.

The eleven had just turned into its dressing-room, to prepare for the game, when Chip Macklin came running in all out of breath.

"I want to see Dave!" he gasped, and then, as soon as the pair had walked to a corner, he went on: "I caught Nat."

"What doing?" demanded Dave, quickly.

"Giving all of your signals away to Merwell, Jasniff, and one of the Rockville football players. He started to tell about your trick plays when he saw me standing near, and shut up."

"Where is he now?"

"In the grandstand, with some girl."

"I will attend to this at once, Chip. Come with me."

Dave led the small student out of the dressing-room, and called Andrew Dale and Mr. Dodsworth. Quickly the situation was explained. The school teacher looked shocked, and the gymnastic instructor was disgusted.

"I will take care of Poole," said Mr. Dale, in a strained voice. "Mr. Dodsworth, you had better arrange for a change of signals."

"I will," answered the gymnastic instructor. And then Andrew Dale hurried off, and Dave returned to the dressing-room, accompanied by Mr. Dodsworth. The signals were re-arranged, and so were the signs for some of the new trick plays.

"Now then, boys, let me give you a bit of advice," said Mr. Dodsworth, when they were ready to go out on the field for practice. "From what I have heard Rockville has good staying powers, and will try to tire you out. Your move is to go at them with a jump and make your points early in the game—and then hold them down. Now do your best—and don't give in until the last whistle blows!"

CHAPTER XX

THE GREAT GAME WITH ROCKVILLE

"Dave, I think I see a chance of catching Rockville napping," said Roger, just before the practice began.

"You mean, if they try to take advantage of our signals?"

"Yes. If they feel sure we are going to do one thing and we do another, they'll get left."

"Well, they'll deserve to get left—if they try to profit by any such work."

"Maybe the eleven won't stand for it."

"Oh, I don't know. Rockville is hungry for a victory over us, and they may think all is fair in love and war and football," broke in Phil.

As each eleven came on the gridiron it was roundly cheered. The Rockville supporters at once commenced their well-known slogan:

"Rockville!
Rockville!
You'll get your fill
Of Rockville!"

And immediately Oak Hall replied with its own well-known cry:

"Baseball!
Football!
Oak Hall
Has the call!
Biff! Boom! Bang! Whoop!"

And then from both sides arose a great din of horns and rattles. In the rear of the field were several automobiles and they, too, let off their horns and screech whistles, adding to the noise.

The practice at an end, the toss-up followed, and this was won by Rockville, and they elected to take the ball. Out on the gridiron spread the two elevens, each player eager to do his best. Then the whistle blew, there came a kicking of the pigskin, and the great game was on.

The play was fast and furious from the start, and in a very few minutes Dave and his chums understood that to gain a victory was going to be no easy thing. Rockville had the advantage in weight, and long practice had put every man in the pink of condition.

But the trick that Nat Poole had tried to play bore unexpected results. The kick-off was a good one, but the pigskin was caught by Phil and he brought it back almost to the center of the gridiron, being aided by clever interference on the part of Roger and Plum. Then the signal was given to carry the ball through the center. The Rockville players thought it was a signal to run around the left end, and moved accordingly. Up the field came the pigskin, and before Rockville could recover from the error made, Plum had the ball within four yards of the goal line. Here, however, he was downed so heavily that the wind was knocked completely out of him.

"That's the way to do it! Hurrah for Oak Hall!"

"Now, shove it over, fellows!"

"They didn't follow their signals at all!" whispered one player to the Rockville captain.

"I know it," was the low answer. "Don't depend on the signals after this."

But the damage had been done, and two minutes later Oak Hall obtained a touchdown, Roger carrying the ball over the line. Dave made the kick, and the pigskin sailed neatly between the posts. Then what a cheering went up, and what a noise from the horns and rattles!

"That's the way to do it!"

"First blood for Oak Hall! Now keep up the good work!"

As quickly as possible the ball was brought once more into play, and now the contest waged fast and furious. Back and forth went the pigskin, first in the possession of one eleven, and then in the possession of the other. There was a fine run around the right end by Roger, and another by a player for Rockville. Then came a mix-up, and each side had to retire a player, while Rockville was penalized several yards for an off-side play.

"Five minutes more!" came the warning, and then in a fury Rockville tried to form a flying wedge—such a move being permissible that year. The shock was terrific, and in spite of all their

efforts to stand firm, Oak Hall broke, and the pigskin was carried over the line. Then the goal was kicked—and the whistle blew, and the first half of the great game came to an end.

Score: Oak Hall 6, Rockville 6.

Panting for breath, for that last shock had been a telling one, the Oak Hall players filed into the dressing-room, there to rest and to receive such attention as they needed.

"Well, it is still our game as much as theirs," said Dave, trying to cheer up his men. "But we want to go at 'em hammer and tongs in the second half."

"Try that right-end trick as early as possible," advised Mr. Dodsworth. "I don't think they'll be looking for it. That mix-up on signals bothered them some."

"Did Mr. Dale see Poole?" asked Roger.

"Yes, and Poole was sent back to the school in care of one of the carriage drivers," answered the gymnastic instructor.

Down in the grandstand the supporters of Rockville and of Oak Hall were having lively discussions over the merits of the two elevens. Among the Rockville students were Jasniff, Merwell, and Frapley.

"I hope we wax 'em in the second half!" said Merwell to Jasniff.

"How much money did you put up, Link?" asked Jasniff.

"All I could scrape up—thirty-five dollars."

"And I put up forty dollars."

"With the Oak Hall fellows?"

"No, with some sports from the town."

"Just what I did. Of course, I hope we don't lose! If we do I'll be in a hole until my next remittance comes."

"Oh, Rockville has got to win!" said Jasniff, loudly. "We can't help but do it."

"This is Oak Hall's game!" cried a voice from the other end of the grandstand, and then a cheer went up, followed by another cheer from the local supporters.

"Say, when do we get back at Dave Porter?" asked Merwell, while the cheering was going on. "I'm getting tired of waiting."

"We'll get back at him very soon now," answered Jasniff. "If what Doctor Montgomery tells me is true, everything will be ready about Thanksgiving time."

"Can you depend on the doctor?"

"I think so. He is almost down and out, and will do anything for money," answered Nick Jasniff, and then the talk came to an end, as the second half of the game began.

Both elevens had been urged to do their best, and the play was as spirited as before. Rockville was unusually aggressive, and one of the players tackled Phil unfairly, giving his shoulder a severe wrench. A protest was at once made by both Phil and Dave, and amid a general wrangle the Rockville man was retired.

"Never mind, they are going to put Ross in!" was the cry. "He'll show 'em what he can do!" Ross had been a favorite player in years gone by, but had not been allowed to play before because he was behind in his studies. Now, however, it was seen that he was sorely needed, and the Rockville faculty gave the desired permission to fill the vacancy.

Ten minutes of play found the pigskin near the center of the field. Then, for the first time, Dave saw a chance to use the right-end trick which Mr. Dodsworth had suggested, and gave the necessary signal. At once the entire eleven was on the alert.

The trick consisted in sending the ball over to the right, back to center, and then to the right again, some players meanwhile rushing to the left as a blind. The movements were made with rapidity, and Rockville was caught napping. Up came the pigskin in Plum's arms, and he turned it over to another player, who in turn passed it to Dave. Then Dave saw a clear space and dove for it. He was followed and tackled, but shook himself loose, and dropped on the ball directly over the goal line.

A roar went up.

"Another touchdown for Oak Hall!"

"Now for another goal!"

Amid a wild cheering the try for goal was made. But a keen wind had sprung up, and the goal was missed by a few inches.

"Never mind, that makes the score eleven to six in Oak Hall's favor."

Once again the ball was brought into play. There were but seven minutes of time left, and Rockville played like demons, hurling themselves again and again at their opponents. But Dave felt that enough had been accomplished, and gave the signal to be on the defensive, and thus Rockville was held back, and the most it could do was to get the ball on Oak Hall's thirty-five yard line. And then the fateful whistle sounded, and the great game came to a close.

Final score: Oak Hall 11, Rockville Academy 6.

It was a well-earned victory, and the Oak Hall eleven were warmly praised by their friends and the public in general, while many condemned the military academy for the roughness shown.

"Oh, it was too lovely for anything!" said Vera Rockwell, when Phil and Roger sauntered up, waiting for the carryall to take the eleven back to Oak Hall.

"It was indeed!" added Mary Feversham. "We compliment you, and we compliment Mr. Porter, too," she added, her eyes beaming brightly.

"A well-fought game," was Mr. Rockwell's comment; and then the boys passed on, to join their fellows.

Of course the majority of the Rockville supporters felt blue over the outcome of the game, and they lost no time in leaving the grandstand and disappearing from view. Jasniff and Merwell went also, but in another direction.

"This leaves me high and dry," growled Merwell. "I won't have a cent to spend for two weeks."

"Let us see if we can't borrow some money," suggested Jasniff.

"I'd like to know who from? All the fellows who bet have lost their money."

"Then we'll have to hit somebody who didn't bet—some of the goody-goody fellows," and he laughed bitterly.

"Like Porter, eh?"

"Yes, Porter never bets, nor drinks, nor smokes. I can't understand how he makes himself popular, can you?"

"It's his smooth way. But some day he'll be found out and dropped," answered Merwell.

"He'll be dropped when we work our little game against him," returned Jasniff, with an evil look in his eyes.

Never had the carryall contained a happier crowd of students than those who rode back to Oak Hall after the game. They sang, cheered, and whistled to their hearts' content, and nearly drove Horsehair wild with their antics, climbing out of the windows and over the roof of the turnout.

"Bless my heart, but you must be careful!" pleaded the driver. "I don't want to hurt no-buddy on this trip!"

"Oh, Horsehair, we can't hold ourselves down!" answered Phil. "Such a victory isn't gained every day."

"Yes, sir, I know, sir. But them hosses don't know nothin' about football, an' fust thing you know they'll run away," pleaded the carryall driver.

"We'll take a chance," put in Roger, brightly. "Now, then, all together!" And out on the air rolled the old school song to the tune of Auld Lang Syne, and then followed a cheering that could be heard for half a mile.

"Bonfires to-night!" announced Buster Beggs. "The biggest yet."

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story——" began Shadow, but what he wanted to tell was lost in a tooting of horns and a clacking of rattles that lasted until Oak Hall was reached.

CHAPTER XXI

THANKSGIVING, AND A SNOWBALLING CONTEST

The celebration that night was a grand affair, and Doctor Clay allowed the students to remain out until midnight. Many bonfires were lighted, and the boys danced around, sang songs, and played many practical jokes on each other and on Horsehair and Pop Swingly. Shadow was in his element, and was permitted to tell a dozen or more of his yarns, much to his own satisfaction if not of his listeners.

The only boys who felt blue were Nat Poole and the lads who had played against Lemington and then been put off the eleven. Nat had received a sharp lecture from the doctor and then been sent to his room, to remain there until the following morning. He wanted to pack up and go home, fearing the jeers of his fellow-students when they learned of his meanness, but he did not dare to make this move, for his father had written him a sharp letter, telling him to finish out the term at Oak Hall or otherwise to go to work,—and Nat did not want to go to work.

Of course the victory over Rockville made Dave and his chums feel good. The whole eleven were warmly congratulated by the doctor, and by Mr. Dale and Mr. Dodsworth.

The game with the military academy was followed by a number of other contests, and the school made a fine record for itself, winning six games out of eight. The two games lost were with college boys, and these players were all considerably heavier than the Oak Hall lads. The last game took place on Thanksgiving Day, and was witnessed by Dave's father and Mr. Wadsworth, and also by Laura and Jessie. Oak Hall won this contest by a score of 18 to 11.

"Oh, it was grand, Dave!" cried Jessie, after the boys had left the gridiron. "That run you made was the best ever!"

"You all did well," said Laura.

"It makes my blood tingle, and I feel like getting into the game myself," said Oliver Wadsworth. "It was a clean-cut contest from start to finish."

Phil and some of the other boys were going home, and soon said good-by. Mr. Porter and Mr. Wadsworth went off with Doctor Clay, and that left Dave and Roger with the two girls. As Senator Morr was at home from Washington, it was decided that the young folks should pay Roger's home a visit for the rest of the day, Mr. Porter and Mr. Wadsworth coming there in the evening to take Laura and Jessie back to Crumville.

The young folks made a jolly party as they boarded the train. They turned over one of the double seats and sat facing each other, and laughed and chatted until Hemson was reached. Here a carriage awaited them, and they were driven to the Morr mansion, where they received a warm greeting from the senator and his wife.

The girls had much to tell about themselves, and then asked about matters at the school. They were indignant to learn that Nat Poole had exposed the football signals.

"It is just like him—the sneak!" cried Jessie. "Oh, Dave, I hope you don't have anything more to do with him."

"I am willing to let him alone if he will let me alone."

"Do you hear anything from Link Merwell?" questioned Laura.

"Not much. But I understand he and Nick Jasniff have it in for me."

"Then, Dave, you must be on your guard," cautioned his sister. "I think Merwell is a regular snake in the grass—his actions at the ranch prove it—and Jasniff is no better."

"Jasniff is worse," said Roger. "He is a brute."

The boys and girls spent a happy evening together, and all too soon Mr. Porter and Mr. Wadsworth arrived to take Laura and Jessie back to Crumville. The boys hated to see them go, and went to the depot with them. There was some warm handshaking, and then the train rolled away, and the boys went back to the house.

"Splendid girls, both of them," was Roger's comment, and Dave quite agreed with him. But he was thinking more about Jessie than his sister,—and it is quite likely Roger was thinking more about Laura.

The boys remained at Roger's home until Saturday afternoon, and then returned to Oak Hall. The air was heavy and very cold, and they

were glad to get out of the carryall, rush into the school, and warm up.

"Feels like snow to me," said Dave; and he was right. It started to snow that night, and kept it up for the greater part of Sunday, so that by Monday the ground was covered to the depth of a foot or more.

"Hurrah, for a snowballing match!" cried Buster. "Everybody in the line after school."

"Let us choose sides," suggested Ben. "Instead of having an Army of the North and an Army of the South, we can have——"

"An Army of Red and an Army of Blue," finished Dave. "What do you say to the red sweaters against the blue sweaters?"

As many lads of the school wore red sweaters, and about an equal number wore blue, the idea caught on instantly, and at the noon recess the two armies, of Red and of Blue, were hastily organized. Each numbered twenty-five recruits, and Roger was made the leader on one side and Sam Day the leader on the other. With Roger went Dave and Phil, while Ben, Buster, and Shadow sided with Sam. Roger's side was the Army of Red, and they made themselves a big red flag, with the initials O. H. on it. Not to be outdone, Sam's army made a big blue flag, also with the school initials.

It was decided that the Army of Blue was to take a position in the woods, and that the Army of Red was to try to dislodge them and force them to retreat. If either army was driven back two hundred yards it must give up its flag and count itself beaten.

After school half an hour was allowed for getting ready, and most of that time was consumed in making snowballs and in fortifying the edge of the woods by throwing up a snowbank. Then a bugle belonging to one of the students sounded out, and the great snowball battle began.

It was certainly a hot contest, and the snowballs flew in all directions, and many a "soldier" received one in the body or in the head. Sam had placed his followers with care, and try their best the Army of Red could not dislodge them.

"I have a scheme," said Phil, after the battle had lasted for fully half an hour, and while the boys were pausing to manufacture fresh "ammunition" in the shape of snowballs. "Let us rush up and then pretend to retreat. They'll think they have us on the run, and as soon

as they leave the woods and that snowbank, we can turn on 'em again, and wallop 'em."

"If you try that, be sure of one thing," said Dave. "Have plenty of snowballs on hand. Otherwise that fake retreat may become a real one."

"We'll make a lot of snowballs," said Roger. "Pitch in, everybody!"

In a little while, the Army of Red was ready for the movement Phil had suggested. Then Roger explained just how it was to be carried out. They were to advance on the left wing of the Blues and then retreat in the direction of the road. As soon as the Blues came from cover, they were to drive them—if they could be driven—to the upper edge of the woods and across the field beyond.

"Now then, all together!" cried the senator's son. "And make them think you are really retreating, at first."

Forward went the Army of Red, throwing snowballs wildly. Then came a shower of balls in return, and several of the Reds were seen to fall, as if knocked down. Then came a pause, and several lads started to go back.

"Stop! Don't run!" yelled Roger. "Don't run!" But as this was part of the deception, those in retreat kept on backing away.

"Hurrah! we've got 'em on the run!" came from the woods, and in a trice several of the Army of Blue appeared on the top of the snowbank. "Come on, let us chase 'em!"

Over the snowbank came the Army of Blue, carrying all the snowballs it could manage. The Army of Red continued to retreat, each boy loaded down with ammunition. Then, just as the edge of the woods was cleared, a loud whistle sounded out.

It was the signal to turn, and like one man the Army of Red faced about, and let fly a heavy volley of snowballs, directly in the face of the enemy. The Blues were taken completely by surprise, and almost dazed. Then came another volley of snowballs, and a dozen lads were struck, in the head and elsewhere.

"Wow!" yelled one boy. "Say, what are we up against?"

"Let 'em have it!" came the rallying yell of the Reds. "Down with 'em! Drive 'em to cover!" And on they came with a rush, throwing their snowballs with all the accuracy possible. The severe onslaught

demoralized the other army for the time being, and two boys broke and ran—then half a dozen more—and then the whole army.

"Stop! Turn and face 'em!" yelled Sam. "Give it to 'em hot!" But this was not to be, for the reason that the Blues were out of ammunition. They ran close to the woods, but were driven from that cover by a flank movement, and then took to the field, trying to manufacture snowballs as they ran.

"We've got 'em going—don't let up!" cried Dave, and, having stopped to make a few more snowballs, he pushed on, with Roger and half a dozen others beside him. Phil carried the flag, and all made for where the enemy had its flag of blue. Then came an exchange of snowballs at close range, and poor Phil was hit in the face. He dropped the flag, and Dave picked it up.

"Much hurt, Phil?" asked Roger, anxiously.

"I guess not," was the plucky reply. "Go on and wax 'em!" And then Phil turned back for a moment to catch his breath.

At the edge of the field was a ridge, and back of this a deep hollow. Sam decided to take a stand behind the ridge, and so directed his followers.

"But look out for the holes," said one of the boys. "Some nasty ones around here."

The battle soon waged as fiercely as ever. On came the Army of Red with a fresh supply of ammunition, and snowballs flew in all directions. Poor Sam was struck in the ear, and the carrier of the flag was hit in the arm and in the mouth. Down went the flag, and before the carrier could pick it up, three of the enemy pounced upon him, and while two held him, the third captured the all-important trophy.

"Hurrah! We've got their flag! Now drive 'em along!" was the cry.

"We must get the flag back!" called out Sam. "Now then, all together!" And again the battle went on.

"Now, for a final rush!" said Roger, after the blue flag had been taken to the rear. "We are going to win! Come on!" And he led the way.

Near the top of the ridge, the Red and the Blue fought fiercely, for all the boys were now thoroughly warmed up. Back and forth surged the long lines, and for several minutes it looked as if the Blues might succeed in driving the Reds back. Once Dave came close to losing the

flag, and only saved it by sending two of the enemy sprawling headlong in the snow.

At last the Reds managed to reach the top of the ridge, and from that point send down a fierce shower of snowballs. The Blues could not withstand this fire, and broke and ran.

"Hurrah! the victory is ours!" yelled several of the Reds.

"Let us clinch it, and make 'em cry for mercy!" shouted one of the victorious army, and forward he went, and nearly all of the others after him.

"Be careful!" cried Dave. "There are a lot of holes around here! Somebody may break a leg."

His voice was drowned by the shouts of those who had won, and over the ridge and towards the hollow poured the victors and vanquished—the latter trying to dodge the fresh shower of snowballs.

"It's all over—let up!" yelled one boy of the Army of Blue. "Let up, can't you?"

"One last shower, fellows!" cried Roger. "Now then, all together!"

The snowballs were delivered, and then came a pause, as all realized that the battle was at an end. Then, from the far end of the hollow, came an unexpected yell:

"Help! help! I am down in a hole and can't get out! Help!"

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH THE SHOES COME BACK

"Somebody is in trouble!"

"Who is it?"

"Where is he?"

"It is Tom Hally!" cried Roger, mentioning one of the new boys at Oak Hall. "He must have fallen into one of the holes near the big hollow."

"Come on and see what is the matter," said Dave, and dropping the flag, he sped in the direction of the cries, and a dozen others followed.

When they reached the spot from which the cries for help had proceeded they could see nothing of Tom Hally.

"He was here a minute ago—I saw him!" declared a student named Messmer. "He must have gone down out of sight!"

"Be careful that somebody doesn't go down on top of him," cautioned Roger.

He had hardly spoken when there came a cry from Messmer, and, looking in his direction, the other boys were horrified to see him sink into the snow up to his waist.

"Hi! hi! help me!" yelled Messmer. "Quick, something has me by the foot!"

"Maybe it's Hally, at the bottom of the hole!" burst out Dave.

"Let us make a chain and haul him out," suggested Phil.

This suggestion was considered a good one, and in a twinkling a long line was formed, the boys taking hold of each other's hands. Dave was at one end of the line, and he approached Messmer with caution.

"Help me!" gasped Messmer. "Something is dragging me down!"

"Take hold of my hand," answered Dave. "Hold tight!"

Messmer did as requested, and then Dave gave the other boys the signal to haul away.

"But be careful," he added. "Otherwise the line may break, and some more of us will go in the hole."

The students hauled steadily and cautiously, and slowly but surely Messmer came out of the snowy hole. As his feet came into view it was seen that a pair of hands were clasped around one of his ankles.

"Tom Hally is there!" shouted Dave. "Be extra careful, or he may slip back!"

He had hardly spoken when Messmer's foot came up with a jerk. The unfortunate boy below had let go, being probably too exhausted to keep hold.

"Oh, Dave, what shall we do?" gasped Roger. He stood next in the life line.

"Make two lines!" cried Dave. "Here, you get hold of one of my feet, and Messmer can get hold of the other. Now don't let go, whatever you do. I'll go down after Hally."

"But the danger——" began Ben.

"We can't leave Hally to smother to death there, Ben. Now then, hold tight," answered Dave.

The two lines were formed, each end boy holding tight to one of Dave's ankles. Then Dave threw himself down in the snow and wormed his way to the edge of the hole. Several feet below he saw one of Tom Hally's hands sticking up, the fingers working convulsively. He made a clutch and got a firm grip of the wrist.

"Haul away!" he called. "But be easy, or the edge of the hole may cave in!"

Under Dave's directions the boys hauled away with care, and presently poor Tom Hally came to the surface of the snow, and was dragged to a safe spot. He was all but exhausted, and too weak to stand.

"Here, we'll carry you to the school!" cried Roger, and he and some others made a "chair," and thus the unfortunate lad was carried to Oak Hall, where he was placed in a rocking chair in front of a fire.

"I went down all of a sudden," he explained, when he could talk. "I yelled for all I was worth, and I saw some of you running towards me. Then I went out of sight, and the next I knew Messmer's feet were on my head. I caught hold of one foot and was dragged almost

to the surface. Then my strength gave out,—and I hardly know what I did after that."

"Dave pulled you out," answered Phil. "He saw one of your hands sticking out of the snow, and he got us fellows to form two lines, with him on the end."

"I am very thankful," said Tom Hally, and he gave Dave's hand a warm squeeze. "I shall never go near that hollow again!"

"It's a dangerous place in the winter time," said Roger. "We should have known better than to have retreated in that direction."

"Well, the Army of the Red won!" cried one of the students. "Say, wasn't it a dandy battle!"

"It certainly was!" answered several others.

Doctor Clay was much alarmed to learn that Hally and Messmer had gone down in a hole in the snow, and he came to see how the former was getting along. Then he praised Dave and his chums for their bravery in effecting a rescue.

In the past Hally, who was a rather silent student, had had little to say to the other boys, but now he spoke to Dave, and asked him quite a number of questions concerning himself and the other occupants of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12.

"I'd like to be in with your bunch," said he, wistfully. "I don't like our crowd very well."

"Where are you?" asked Dave.

"In No. 13—with Nat Poole and his crowd."

"They aren't very much of Nat's crowd any more, are they?"

"Oh, several boys still stick to him. But he makes me sick."

"Well, I am sorry, Hally, but our rooms are filled up," said Dave.

"Poole is down on you, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"He told me you and he had had a lot of trouble."

"So we have—but I claim it was mostly Nat's fault. He does some pretty mean things."

"So he does, for a fact," and Tom Hally nodded earnestly. "He is down on Maurice Hamilton too, isn't he?"

"Yes, but Shadow never did him any harm. It's just Nat's mean disposition," returned Dave; and there the conversation had to come to an end.

But that talk, coupled with the fact that Dave and his chums had so bravely gone to Tom Hally's rescue, produced an unexpected result. Two days later, when the occupants of dormitories Nos. 11 and 12 got up, they were surprised to find, just inside of one of the doors, a big pasteboard box, securely tied with a heavy cord.

"Why, what's this?" asked Phil, who was the first to see the box.

"Must be a Christmas box!" cried Dave. "And yet it is rather early in the season for that."

"Is it addressed to anybody?" questioned Ben.

"Nothing on it," announced Roger, after an inspection. "Maybe the box was placed in this room by mistake."

"Let us open it and see what is inside," suggested Polly Vane.

"I second that motion," added Luke. "Hope it's got some nice Christmas pies in it."

"Maybe it's a trick," cautioned Shadow. "Go slow on opening it."

The boys pushed the box to the center of the dormitory with care, and then Roger cut the cord with his pocketknife.

"You open it," said Phil to Dave.

"I am not afraid," answered Dave, and took off the cover.

And then what a shout went up!

"Our shoes, and boots, and slippers!"

"Where in the world did this come from!"

"Say, I thought my shoes were gone for good!"

"Are they all here?"

"I guess so. Let us sort 'em out and see."

Hastily the box was turned over, and the contents dumped on the floor. Then began a general sorting out, lasting for several minutes.

"One of my gym. shoes is missing," announced Phil.

"Perhaps one of the other fellows has it," suggested Dave, and the shipowner's son started a fresh search. But it was of no avail. Every shoe, slipper, and boot that had been taken had been returned excepting one of Phil's foot coverings.

"Well, I don't care much," said Phil. "These shoes were about worn out, anyway."

"Where do you suppose this box came from?" asked Ben, and then he gazed curiously at Shadow, and the others did the same.

"I—I suppose you think—that is, you imagine I—er—I had something to do with this," stammered the boy who had on several occasions walked in his sleep.

"Do you know anything about it, Shadow?" asked Dave.

"Not the first thing!"

"Did you dream of anything last night?"

"Yes, I dreamed about a—er—a——" stammered the sleep-walker. "I—er——Oh, it wasn't about shoes, or anything like that."

"Well, what was it?" demanded Roger, sternly.

"It was about a party, if you must know. I dreamt I took a girl, and we had a nice time dancing and playing games. There weren't any shoes in it," and poor Shadow got redder than ever.

Dave looked the box over with care. It was a common pasteboard box, with nothing on it in the way of writing or advertising.

"This certainly is a mystery," he said, slowly. "First the shoes disappear, and now they come back. I give it up."

"Somebody has been playing a trick on us!" declared Roger. "The question is, who?"

"I don't know of anybody who would do such a thing, excepting it was Nat Poole," declared Ben.

"Well, there is no use of taxing Nat with it," declared Dave. "For he would deny it point-blank, unless you could prove it against him."

The boys talked the affair over until it was time to go down to breakfast, but they could reach no conclusion regarding the mystery.

"Maybe it will never be explained," said Buster.

"Well, even so, I am glad to get my shoes and slippers back," lisped Polly Vane.

A few days after the restoration of the foot coverings there came a thaw and then a sudden cold snap. Ice began to form on the river, and soon it was thick enough for skating, much to the joy of the students, for nearly all of them loved to skate. Some of the boys had ice-boats, and these were also brought out for use.

"I understand that Rockville is going to put out a strong ice-hockey team this winter," said Roger to Dave one day. "They are going to challenge us, too."

"Well, we'll have to make up a team to beat 'em," answered Dave.

"That won't be so easy," declared another student. "They have some great skaters and hockey players at the military academy this season. They've got one player who is a star."

"Who is that?"

"Will Mallory. He came from down East, and he is the slickest ice-hockey player you ever set eyes on."

"Well, if they challenge us we'll do our best," declared Dave, and some others said the same.

The next day, after school, Dave had occasion to go to Oakdale on an errand. Roger was going along, but at the last minute had to stay behind, so Dave went alone.

He had scarcely passed out of the school grounds when he noticed that he was being followed. A tall, thin man had stepped from behind some oak trees, and was coming after him.

"I wonder what that chap was doing around the school?" the youth asked himself.

He walked along rapidly, and the man did the same. Then Dave slackened his pace, and the follower did likewise.

"He doesn't want to catch up to me, that's sure," thought the youth. "Maybe he is afraid I'll recognize him. Wonder who he is?"

He turned and looked back. But the man had his overcoat pulled up and his soft hat pulled far down, and Dave could see little of his face.

"This is a mystery," mused Dave. "I am going to speak to him," and he stopped short and waited for the mysterious individual to come up.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOOKER MONTGOMERY'S STRANGE REQUEST

The stranger approached slowly, as if hoping Dave would go on before he came up. Once he looked towards the fields on either side of the road, as if thinking to turn off. But no side road was at hand, so he had to either come on or turn back.

"Why, it is Doctor Montgomery!" said the lad to himself, as he recognized the man. Then, as he got still closer, Dave saw that the so-styled doctor looked shabby and dissipated. His nose was exceedingly red, as if he had been drinking, and his overcoat was much worn and so were his shoes.

"How do you do?" he said, somewhat gruffly, as he came up to where Dave was standing.

"How are you?" returned Dave, coldly, and stepped aside, as if to let the doctor pass. But instead of doing this the traveling physician came to a somewhat unsteady halt.

"Your name is Dave Porter, isn't it?" he queried, trying hard to steady a voice that liquor had rendered nervous.

"It is."

"I guess you know me, Doctor Montgomery."

"Yes."

"Going to Oakdale?"

"I am."

"So am I. If you don't mind I'll walk with you. I want to talk to you."

"What do you wish?" demanded Dave. The road was rather a lonely one, and he did not fancy the doctor for a companion.

"I've been wanting to see you for some time, Porter," answered Hooker Montgomery, hesitatingly, as if not knowing how to begin. "Fact is, I went up to the school hoping to meet you."

"Why didn't you call for me if you wanted to see me?"

"Well—er—the fact is, Doctor Clay and I are not on good terms, that's why. To tell you the truth, I once sold some of my medicines to

some of his hired help, and he didn't like it. He thinks my medicines are not—er—reliable. But they are, sir, they are—more reliable than those of most physicians!" And Hooker Montgomery tried to draw himself up and look dignified. But, to Dave, the effort was a failure. He could read the fellow thoroughly, and knew him to be what is commonly called a fakir, pure and simple.

"What did you want of me?" asked Dave, as they walked on in the direction of Oakdale.

"I wished to see you on an important business matter."

"Business? What business?"

"I will come to that presently, Porter. But it is important, very important, I can assure you. I was going to ask you to call at a certain place in Rockville and see me about it."

"What place?"

"A boarding-house at which I am stopping. It is a very nice place, located on the river, and kept by a lady named Dunn—Mrs. Margaret Dunn."

At once Dave remembered the letter picked up on Bush Island—the letter written by Doctor Montgomery, and asking Jasniff to meet him at Dunn's on the river. In that communication the doctor had said he would aid Jasniff all he could, provided the Rockville student would assist him in some transaction involving little risk—which would mean that there must be something "shady" about it.

"Can't you explain the business to me without my going to Rockville?" he asked.

"I cannot. I have some things at the boarding-house—some letters and documents—I wish to show you. Day after to-morrow is Saturday. Can't you come to Rockville in the afternoon and see me? I can assure you, sir, it is very important, very important indeed!" And Doctor Montgomery gave Dave a mysterious look.

"Do the letters and documents concern me personally?"

"They concern you, and—shall I tell you? Yes, I will! They concern you and your sister. But don't ask me to say more now. I will explain all when you come to see me."

Dave began to think rapidly. This fellow was friendly with Jasniff and probably with Merwell also. Once Merwell had caused Laura

Porter much annoyance by holding certain letters she had written. Was it possible Merwell still had some of her letters, and was he planning to make more trouble because of them?

"I don't understand this business, Doctor Montgomery," he said, frankly. "If it was so important why didn't you write to me, or telephone?"

"I will explain. This is important to you and your sister. It would hurt your reputation to make anything public. I want to do things on the quiet, see? Acting entirely in your interests, Porter. You will understand it all when you call and—er—see the letters and documents, and the photographs, especially the photographs."

"All right then—I'll come—if I can get off."

"About three o'clock in the afternoon?"

"Between three and four."

"Very good, sir, very good indeed. You will not regret coming, I can assure you, sir. But one thing more. Let me caution you to say nothing to your school friends of this visit. I wish you to come entirely alone."

"Why alone?" demanded Dave, suspiciously.

"Because I wish to protect myself as well as you and your sister. I want no witnesses to our meeting, as I wish to avoid all trouble. I shall be alone, and I wish you to be alone also."

"This is a mighty strange proceeding."

"Possibly, Porter. But you will understand everything when you call. You need not be afraid. At present I am the only boarder Mrs. Dunn has, and she is old and somewhat deaf. The house is on the river road, the fourth place above the sawmill. It is painted light yellow. You can't miss it."

"And you won't tell me any more at present?"

"I cannot. But on Saturday afternoon, if you will come to me alone, you shall know all."

"Very well."

"And one thing more, Porter. I am going to do you and your family a great favor."

"Well?"

"I am a poor man. I could have made money out of my remedies had I charged as some physicians do, but instead I wished to aid humanity, and so sold my priceless medicines for a song. Yes, I am poor, sir, and I need money. If I aid you——" Hooker Montgomery paused suggestively.

"If you really do me a favor, you shall be well paid for it, Doctor Montgomery," replied Dave, promptly.

"You mean that?" And now the doctor's voice took on a sudden note of keen interest.

"I do."

"They tell me your folks are rich."

"We are well off."

"Ah, ahem! Very good! Then if I do a very great favor for you probably you will—er—appreciate it."

"Yes, sir."

"Then it is settled, Porter, and I shall look for you about three o'clock on Saturday sure. And you are to come entirely alone."

"I understand. But, listen, Doctor Montgomery," went on Dave, and his voice grew stern. "There is to be no underhanded work in this. If there is—well, you'll get the worst of it."

"Oh, no; nothing of that sort, I can assure you, sir! You have absolutely nothing to fear," answered the man hurriedly, but his eyes were rather shifty as he spoke.

"All right, I'll be on hand,—if I can get away."

They had now gained a crossroads, and here the doctor halted. He looked at Dave as if on the point of speaking again, then simply jerked his head in an attempted dignified fashion, and hurried off, around a bend and out of sight.

It would be hard to analyze Dave's feelings as he proceeded on his errand to Oakdale. He wondered if Doctor Montgomery was acting on his own account or for Merwell and Jasniff, and he also wondered what the mysterious letters and documents and photographs could be. Was it possible that Laura had once given her photograph to Merwell, or had it taken when in that rascal's company? If the latter was true, Merwell would know that the Porters would give a good deal to get the picture, and have the negative destroyed.

"Perhaps it is only a scheme to get me to Rockville and to some place where Jasniff and Merwell can lay hands on me," he mused. "They'd like nothing better than to black my eyes and pound me to a jelly. If I go there alone I'll have to keep my eyes wide open."

Then Dave remembered what the doctor had said about being a poor man and needing money. Perhaps the fellow thought to "bleed him," not only in the interest of Jasniff and Merwell, but also for himself.

"He'll not get a cent out of me unless he has something of real value to turn over to me," Dave decided. "If it's only a blackmailing scheme, he'll find me as sharp as himself." He could make nothing of the fact that the doctor had at first tried to avoid him.

He was half tempted to tell Roger and Phil about the affair, but at last decided to see it through alone. If there really was something in it about private letters and photographs he would prefer that his chums know nothing of it.

All that evening and throughout Friday, Dave was very thoughtful. His chums noticed it, and Roger and Phil both asked what was wrong.

"Nothing wrong," he answered, with a faint smile.

"You've got something on your mind, Dave," went on the senator's son. "Struck a new girl, or has Jessie struck a new fellow?"

"Not as bad as that, Roger. I was just wondering if I should buy a red necktie or a blue one."

"Rats! It's a girl, I'll wager a new hat."

"Or else Dave is thinking out some new essay with which to capture a prize," suggested Phil.

"Don't you worry about me," answered Dave. "Come on out and have a skate," and thus the subject was dismissed, for the time being.

The Leming River was in fine condition for skating, and fully two score of students were out, some cutting fancy figures, and a few racing. Among the number was Nat Poole, clad in a new crimson sweater and wearing a brand new pair of long hockey skates.

"Nat is training for hockey," said Roger. "He says he is going to organize a team."

"Well, we'll organize one, too," answered Dave. "I always did like field hockey, and I know I'd like it on the ice."

"Come on, Dave!" shouted Ben, circling up on his skates, and doing a "spread eagle."

"Come on where?"

"Get into the race! We want you, and Phil, and Roger, too."

"What race is that?"

"Mr. Dodsworth wants all the big boys in it. It's a race up the river for a mile, and back to the boathouse. The winner gets a silver lead-pencil sharpener."

"All right, I'm in that!" cried the shipowner's son. "I need a sharpener."

"So do I," added Roger. "How about it, Dave?"

"I'll go in, although my skates are not as sharp as they might be."

A crowd had gathered to see the race, and in a few minutes the contestants were lined up by the gymnastic teacher. The starters numbered fourteen, and included Nat Poole, Dave, Roger, Phil, Shadow, Ben, and Plum.

"All ready?" asked Mr. Dodsworth. "Then go!" And away went the long line, the skates flashing brightly in the clear sunlight, and the onlookers cheering, and uttering words of encouragement to their favorites.

CHAPTER XXIV

A RACE ON SKATES

"Go it, everybody!"

"May the best skater win!"

"Don't try to skate too fast, Ben. Remember, the race is two miles long!"

"Hello, there goes one fellow down!"

"It's Luke Watson. He has lost his skate."

The last report was correct, and as the skate could not be adjusted without the loss of some time, Luke gave up, and watched the others.

Nat Poole was exceedingly anxious to win the race, and he had been partly instrumental in getting up the contest. His new skates were of the best, and it must be admitted that Nat was no mean skater.

Phil had good skates and so had Roger. Dave's skates were only fair, and were very much in need of sharpening.

Away went Nat at top speed, soon drawing half a dozen yards ahead of his competitors. Behind him came a student named Powers, and then followed Ben, Roger, Phil, Dave, and the others.

"I don't think I can win!" sang out Dave to his chums. "These skates slip too much. But I'll do my best."

"Come on, you slow-coaches!" cried Ben, merrily, and then he shot forward until he was abreast of Nat. Seeing this, the money-lender's son put on an extra burst of speed, and went ahead again.

"Say, Nat Poole is certainly skating well!" cried one of the onlookers. "He'll make a record if he keeps it up."

"I don't think he can keep it up," answered another.

In a very few minutes the turning point was gained, and Nat made a sharp curve and started back. The turn brought him directly in front of Dave.

"Clear the track!" he roared. "Clear the track, I say!"

"Clear the track yourself!" answered Dave. Nevertheless, as Nat came closer, he swerved a little to one side so that the money-lender's son might pass. As Nat swept on he swung his arms freely, and one fist took Dave in the side.

"Foul! foul!" cried several who saw the move.

"It was his own fault!" Nat retorted. "I told him to get out of the way!" And off he started for the finishing line.

Dave said nothing, but kept on, reaching the turning point a few seconds later. Phil and Roger were just ahead of him, and Plum was beside him.

"Go on and win!" he shouted. "I can't keep up with these skates!"

"Here goes for a finish!" yelled Phil, and darted ahead, with Roger at his heels. Then Plum flashed forward, and soon the three were side by side, with Dave about three yards to the rear, followed by Powers.

Coming down the homestretch, Nat Poole thought he had it all to himself. He was glad of it, for he had set such a fast pace at the start that he was becoming winded, and he had to fairly gasp for breath. He looked over his shoulder, and as nobody was near he slackened his speed a little.

"Keep it up, Nat!" yelled one of his supporters. "Go it, old man!"

"Morr and Lawrence are crawling up!"

"So is Plum!"

These last cries startled Nat, and he sought to strike out as he had at the start. But his wind was now completely gone—and the finishing line was still a quarter of a mile away.

"There goes Morr to the front!"

"Lawrence is after him, and so is Plum!"

"Here comes Basswood!"

"What's the matter with Porter? He is dropping behind."

"He said his skates were dull."

"Oh, that's only an excuse!" sneered one of the students who had been put off of the football eleven that term.

"It's true," answered Tom Hally. "I saw the skates myself. Can't you see how he slips when he strikes out?"

On and on went the skaters. Nat was still ahead, but now Roger and Phil came up on one side, and Gus Plum on the other, while Ben came up close in the rear. Behind Ben was Dave, determined to see the race out even if he did not win.

With the finishing line but a hundred feet away, Phil, Roger, and Gus Plum shot to the front. Then Ben followed. Nat Poole tried to keep up, but could not. Then of a sudden Dave went ahead also.

"Nat is dropping behind!"

"He put on too much steam at the start!"

"There goes Porter ahead of him!"

"See, Morr, Lawrence, and Plum are even!"

"Yes, and there comes Ben Basswood up to them!"

"Here they come! Clear the way, everybody!"

With a rush the skaters came on. For one brief instant Roger was ahead, but then the others put on a burst of speed, and over the line they came, amid a great yelling and cheering.

"A tie between Morr, Plum, and Lawrence!"

"And Basswood and Porter tied for second place!"

"Nat Poole wasn't in it, after all."

"My skate got loose," grumbled Nat, as he came up slowly. "If it hadn't been for that I would have won."

"That's an old excuse, Nat!" shouted a boy in the rear of the crowd. "Invent something new!" And a laugh went up, that angered the money-lender's son greatly. He took his defeat bitterly, and lost no time in leaving the ice and disappearing from view.

"A fine race!" declared Mr. Dodsworth, "But I don't know how I am to award the prize."

"Cut it in three parts," suggested Buster.

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow. "An old Irishman was dying and wanted to make his will. 'How do ye want to lave yer money, Pat' asked his friend. 'Sure,' says Pat; 'I want to lave it all to me woif an' me four childer, equal loike, so ivery wan gits a quarter!'"

"We might have another race," suggested Mr. Dodsworth. "That is, if you are not too tired—I mean, of course, a race between those who were tied."

"Oh, let us cut sticks for it," suggested Phil.

"That will suit me," said Plum.

"Me, too," said the senator's son. "I am too tired to race again."

So the three lads drew sticks for the prize, and Gus Plum won.

"Hello! I'm in luck!" cried Gus, and looked much pleased. The silver lead-pencil sharpener was passed over to him, and he thanked the gymnastic instructor warmly for it.

"I am glad he got it, since it pleases him," said Phil to Roger, and the senator's son nodded in agreement.

The only boy who felt sore over the race was Nat Poole, and he continued to declare that he would have won had his skate not come loose.

"But just wait," he said, to some of the students. "I'll show 'em what I can do when we get to playing hockey." And that very night he started in to organize an ice-hockey team. He did not consult Mr. Dodsworth or Andrew Dale, fearing that they would not favor his selection of players.

"They have nothing to do with hockey," Nat explained to his friends. "All they have to look after is baseball and football, and track athletics. Doctor Clay didn't say a word about ice hockey, or field hockey, either." This was true, the master of the Hall having probably forgotten all about those sports. Nevertheless, it was understood by the majority of the students that all games and contests held with parties outside of Oak Hall were to come under the supervision of the gymnastic instructor and Andrew Dale.

"What are you going to do with yourself to-morrow afternoon?" asked Roger of Dave, on going to bed Friday.

"I have a little business to attend to in Rockville, Roger."

"Is that so? Want me to go along?"

This was a question Dave had dreaded to have asked, and he hardly knew how to answer. He determined to be as frank as possible.

"No, Roger. I am sorry, but the party I am going to see asked me to come alone."

"Oh, all right. I just thought I'd mention it."

"If it hadn't been for that I should like very much to have you and Phil along," continued Dave, earnestly. "But I can't take anybody."

"Must be going to see a girl," and the senator's son looked at his chum quizzically.

"No, it is not a girl. Now please don't ask me any more questions."

"Just as you say, Dave," answered Roger, and then began to get ready to go to bed. He could not help but wonder what the business was, and why Dave was so secretive about it.

In the morning Dave had to go through the same kind of a scene with Phil. The shipowner's son was as much mystified as Roger, and after Dave had departed, the pair walked into the warm gymnasium to talk the matter over.

"Dave has something on his mind," said Roger. "I noticed it yesterday."

"So did I, Roger. What is it, do you suppose?"

"I don't know, excepting it may be about Merwell and Jasniff. He said it wasn't about those girls."

"Do you think he is going to meet Merwell and Jasniff in Rockville?"

"Possibly. I can't think of anything else."

"If Dave got into trouble, I'd like to be on hand to help him."

"So would I. But I guess Dave knows how to take care of himself." And then the subject was dropped, and the two students began to exercise with some Indian clubs.

In the meantime, Dave was on his way to Rockville. As the road was clear of snow he used his bicycle, and soon covered the distance to the town. He passed along the river road to the sawmill, and then kept his eyes open for Mrs. Dunn's house.

"This must be the place," he said to himself, as he reached a dilapidated residence, located in what had once been a fine flower garden, but which was now a tangle of rank bushes and weeds. The gate was off, and leaping from his wheel, he trundled his bicycle along the choked-up garden path to the front piazza. Then leaving his wheel against a tree, he mounted the steps and rang the old-fashioned turn bell.

Dave had approached the house boldly, thinking that possibly somebody might be watching him from behind the blinds of the windows, all of which were closed. Yet he was on his guard, and in the lining of his overcoat he carried a stout stick, with which to defend himself should such a course be necessary.

No one answered his first summons, and he rang the rusty bell a second time. Then the front door was opened, and Doctor Montgomery showed himself.

"Ah, how do you do!" he said, with a bland smile. "Walk right in, Mr. Porter. I see you are on time."

Dave hesitated for a moment, and then entered the broad hallway of the house. In front of him was a long flight of stairs leading to the second floor, and on either side were doors leading to the parlor and to a dining-room.

"Mrs. Dunn isn't feeling very well, so I had to come to the door myself," explained Hooker Montgomery, smoothly. "She used to take some drug-store medicine and it did her no good. Now she is taking my remedies, and she will soon be herself." He said this so naturally that Dave was thrown a little off his guard. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Dunn was not at home, having gone away to visit a sister in Albany. It was because of her absence that the tricky doctor had invited Dave to come to the house. Had she been at home his schemes would have necessitated meeting Dave somewhere else.

"Doctor, I haven't much time to spare, so I hope you will get at the bottom of what you want without delay," said Dave, after the door had been closed and locked by the physician. It was so dark in the hall he could hardly see.

"I'll not take much of your time, sir,—not over half an hour at the most," was the reply from Hooker Montgomery. "But all of the documents and letters and photographs are in my room, on the second floor. Kindly come up there and look at them." And the man started up the stairs. Dave hesitated for a moment, wondering if it would be best to go up, and then followed.

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

At the head of the stairs the doctor paused, and then opened a door leading to a back bedroom. The apartment had two windows, but the blinds were closed, what little light there was coming in through the turned-down slats.

"I have to shut off a good deal of light on account of my eyes," explained the doctor, as he saw Dave glance at the blinds. "My eyes are very weak, and I am told that the sunlight is very bad for them."

"I am sorry to hear that," answered Dave.

He hardly knew what to say or how to act. His reception had not been what he had anticipated, and he could not imagine what was coming next.

"Here are some of the documents I wish you to look over first—and then we'll talk business," said Hooker Montgomery, pointing to a mass of legal-looking papers lying on the bed. "You can take them to the window if you wish," and he sank down in a rocking-chair, as if tired out, and placed both hands over his eyes.

Curious to know what the documents might contain of importance to him, Dave took some of them up and stepped close to one of the windows. The writing was poor, and it was hard to make out what had been written.

His face was bent closely over one of the pages when of a sudden he felt some unusual movement behind him. He started to turn, but before he could do so, a big bag was thrown over his head and arms, and tied around his waist. At the same instant he was tackled around the legs, and his ankles were tied together.

Of course he struggled, and for several minutes his would-be captors had all they could do to hold him. But he had been taken so completely off his guard that resistance proved useless. Soon a rope was passed around the bag and over his arms, and further struggling was out of the question.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a muffled tone, for inside of the bag it was all he could do to breathe. The covering was so heavy he could not see a thing.

No answer was vouchsafed to his question. He was backed up against the bed, and made to sit down, and then he heard his captors leave the room, locking the door after them.

Dave was both chagrined and angry—chagrined to think that he had been taken in so easily, and angry to think that he was a prisoner and at his captors' mercy.

"This must be the work of Merwell and Jasniff," he thought. "They simply hired the doctor to get me here. There is nothing in the story of documents, letters, and photographs. What a fool I was to walk into the trap!"

And then he wondered when his captors would return, and what they proposed to do with him.

For fully a quarter of an hour Dave waited, straining his ears to catch every sound. From below came a murmur of voices, but what was said he could not learn. Once he thought he recognized Jasniff's rough tones, but he was not sure.

Tired of sitting on the edge of the bed, Dave got up and tried to move around. Then he made the discovery that his ankles were tied to a rope that was secured to the bed, and that the latter was stationary.

"I'm a prisoner, and no mistake," he reasoned, grimly. "I wonder how long they intend to keep me here?"

The room was cold, and he was glad that he had his overcoat on. His cap had fallen off inside the bag, but his thick hair and the bag prevented his catching cold in the head.

"Guess I'll wake them up a bit," he thought, and so commenced to stamp on the floor. Then he stamped louder, until he felt he must be knocking the plaster from the ceiling below. He was in the midst of the stamping when the door of the room was thrown open and somebody came in.

"Stop that noise, or I'll knock you down!" said a sharp voice, and at the same instant a strong hand was placed on his shoulder, and he was given a vigorous shake.

Dave was surprised, for the voice was not that of Doctor Montgomery, neither did it belong to Merwell nor Jasniff. Yet, in some way, the voice sounded familiar.

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded Dave, as he stopped his stamping.

"You'll find that out later, Porter. Now keep quiet,—if you know when you are well off."

"I want to know now. You have no right to treat me in this fashion. I'll have you and Doctor Montgomery put in jail for it."

"You shut up!" cried the stranger, and he gave Dave a shove that sent him back on the bed. "You make any more noise and I'll quiet you in a way you won't like!" And then the fellow left the room again, and the door was locked as before.

Feeling that he might be attacked and seriously injured if he kept up the noise, Dave remained quiet, and thus the remainder of the afternoon passed. As night came on the room became dark and extra cold, and he shivered in spite of himself.

"If they leave me here all night I'll be frozen stiff," he thought, grimly. "Oh, why didn't I tell Roger and Phil where I was going! They might come to the rescue!"

After another wait Dave heard more talking below, and then three persons came upstairs and into the room.

"Now, you keep real quiet and you won't get hurt," said the person who had spoken before. "If you start to raise a row—well, you'll wish you hadn't, that's all."

"What are you going to do?"

"Keep quiet, and you'll find out before very long."

"Do you know this is a very high-handed proceeding?"

"Shut up!"

The tone was extra sharp, and Dave received a rough shake of the shoulder. Not knowing but what he might be knocked down, he relapsed into silence.

Presently his feet were unfastened, and he was led out of the room and down the stairs. Then the party made its way to the rear of the house, and went outside.

"Now we are going to give you a little sleigh-ride for your health," said the person who had spoken before.

As there was no snow on the ground Dave felt this must mean a ride on the river, and he was not mistaken. A horse and a low box-sleigh were at hand, and into the turnout Dave was lifted, the fellow who had spoken getting on one side of him and somebody else on the other. Then still another party took up the reins, and started to drive off, over the ice, which was just thick enough to bear the weight of such an outfit.

Although Dave's arms were tied to his sides, he could move his hands a little, and he managed to get hold of a good-sized pin, which had been fastened to a corner of his overcoat. As the sleigh moved over the smooth surface of the river he resolved to make an effort to learn the identity of the silent fellow beside him, and so moved the pin around, and shoved it towards the individual as far as possible.

"Ouch!" came the sudden exclamation, as the point of the pin reached its mark, and the fellow leaped partly to his feet. "What in thunder——" And then the speaker broke off short.

"I know you, Link Merwell!" cried Dave. "I thought all along it was you."

"I'm not Merwell!" growled the fellow, in a deep voice. "Don't you dare to stick me with that pin again, or I'll mash you!" And then he refused to say any more. But he gave Dave's arm such a pinch that it was black and blue for a long time afterwards.

With the bag over his head, Dave could not hear very well, yet he felt tolerably certain that the fellow was Link Merwell, and if this was so, then most likely the driver of the sleigh was Nick Jasniff. But who the third party could be was still a mystery.

"Some old enemy I have forgotten," reasoned the captive. And then he wondered where he was being taken, and for what purpose.

After a ride of half an hour the sleigh came to a halt, and Dave was ordered to get out. Then he was marched up a steep bank and up some steps. A door was opened, and all of the party entered a building of some sort. He was placed in a room and tied fast to a ring fastened in the floor.

"Now you behave yourself and you'll soon be freed and treated to a hot supper," said the man who appeared to be the spokesman for the

crowd. "But if you make a row you'll not be freed, and you'll not get a mouthful."

Then Dave was left alone once more, and all three of his captors apparently left the building.

The room was warm, and for this the captive was grateful. A chair had been placed for him to sit upon, so he was fairly comfortable. An hour passed and during that time all was silent. Then somebody came in and started to release his arms and take the bag from his head.

It was a man, tall and muscular, and Dave felt sure he had seen him before, but where he could not remember. The man wore a mask, made of a handkerchief with holes cut in it for his eyes.

"Sorry I can't let you go just yet," he said. "But here is something to eat and to drink." And he pointed to a table, upon which rested a lamp, for it was now late in the evening and dark. On the table was a cup of hot tea and several cheese sandwiches and a small baker's pie.

"Well, I'm hungry, that's certain," said Dave, grimly. "And if I've got to stay here I might as well eat."

"That's the sensible way to talk," answered the man.

"When are you going to let me go?"

"I can't say yet—most likely in the morning."

"Why did you bring me here?"

"Just for fun."

"You've taken a lot of trouble for your fun," said Dave. He did not believe the man's statement.

"Eat your supper, Porter," growled the man, and sank down on a chair close to the door. "No funny work now, mind you!" And he brandished the very stick Dave had carried for self-protection.

There was no help for it, and sitting down to the table Dave began to eat and to drink. The sandwiches were fresh, and so was the pie, and as the ride in the keen air had given him an appetite, he disposed of them quickly. The tea tasted rather bitter, but he was dry and speedily drained the cup. The man watched him drink, with evident satisfaction.

"Now you had better lie down and try and get a little rest," said the fellow of the mask. "When I want you I'll call you." And so speaking he left the room, locking the door after him.

As soon as the man was gone Dave tried to loosen the rope that bound his feet together. It was a hard task and took some time, and bending over seemed to make his head swim. When he straightened up his head grew even more dizzy, and almost before he knew it he was staggering around.

"What a queer sensation!" was his thought. "What in the world is the matter with me?" And then like a flash came the answer. "That tea! It must have been drugged!"

The captive was right in his surmise. The tea had been drugged, and soon poor Dave felt so dizzy he had to rest on the bed. He tried several times to rouse up, and then his senses forsook him completely.

Dave had been unconscious for about a quarter of an hour when the man came in, looked at him, and shook him. Then he went below.

"Well, we've got him," he said to the others. "He is practically dead to the world."

"Good!" was the answer. "Better bring him down right away. We want to get this job over."

CHAPTER XXVI

A DASH FOR LIBERTY

When Dave regained his senses he found himself in the tonneau of a big automobile that was speeding swiftly over a dark country road. On either side of him sat a person who was masked, and in front were two persons whose faces he could not see. His hands were tied behind him, and his ankles were made fast to the foot-rest in the bottom of the tonneau.

He wondered where he was being taken, but knew it would be useless to ask any questions. How long he had been unconscious he did not know, but felt it must have been a considerable time, for it was now night, and whenever they passed a farmhouse it was without lights, showing the occupants had gone to bed.

Dave fully realized that he was in a position of peril. His enemies had treated him in an outrageous fashion, and what they proposed to do next there was no telling. He felt that he must escape if it could possibly be accomplished.

He had roused up a little, but now deemed it best to let the others think he was still unconscious. Accordingly, he uttered a deep sigh, and then slipped further down on the seat, and let his head fall forward on his breast.

"Pretty well dosed," he heard one of the party murmur, and now he was sure he recognized Nick Jasniff's voice.

"Say, Shime, I hope you didn't give him too much of the drug," said another of the party, and Dave felt certain it was Link Merwell who was speaking. "If he shouldn't recover——"

"Oh, he'll come around all right enough," growled the man called Shime. He was running the automobile, and now Dave was able to place him as a fellow who worked around a livery stable and garage in Rockville. Shime was a drinking man, and his reputation was far from an enviable one.

"How much further have we to go?" asked Jasniff, after a few minutes of silence.

"Not far," answered the driver of the automobile. "We'll take to the side road now. Hold fast, it's pretty rough," and then the touring car turned off the main highway and began bumping over the rocks and ruts of a narrow wood road. The way was uphill, and the driver had to throw in his second speed to gain the top of the rise. Then the car made a sharp turn, and halted in front of a stone building.

"Is this the place?" asked Jasniff.

"Yes," answered Shime. "Wait till I light a lantern, and then you can bring him in."

"I shall have to care for him when we are in the house," said the fourth person of the party who had carried Dave off. It was Doctor Montgomery, and his breath was thick from liquor.

Still thinking he might get a chance to escape if he made out that he was unconscious, Dave hung limp in the automobile, and allowed his captors to lift him out and place him on the ground. Then he was carried into the stone building and placed on a bench.

"You certainly dosed him strongly," said Hooker Montgomery. "I had better make an examination. Loosen up his hands and feet."

A little bit alarmed, Jasniff and Merwell set to work and released Dave from his bonds. In the meantime Shime had lit a lantern, and placed it on a rough table. Doctor Montgomery got out a medicine case, and began to mix up a potion in a glass.

"This ought to bring him around," he said, in a thick, unsteady voice.

Dave did not dare to look around, but by the draught in the room he knew that the door must have been left open, probably to give him more air. He did not think the disreputable physician was in any condition to administer his medicines, and he did not propose to swallow any if he could avoid it.

"I must escape," he thought, and with a moan, as if in great pain, he twisted around, and opened his eyes for an instant.

That instant was long enough for him to locate the doorway, and beyond he made out a stretch of woodland, lit up by the lamps of the automobile. Between him and the doorway stood Merwell and Jasniff, with Shime and the doctor on the other side.

"Shall I hold his head, doctor?" asked Merwell. "Maybe he won't be able to swallow if——"

Merwell got no further, for just then Dave leaped to his feet with an agility that surprised even himself. Stiff though he was, he ran at Merwell, hurling him flat. Then he bumped into Jasniff, who made a weak attempt to stop him. The two swung around, and Jasniff was sent crashing into the table, knocking over the lantern. Then Dave leaped for the doorway.

"Stop him!"

"He must not get away!"

"Ouch! Don't step on me!" came from Link Merwell. He was on his back, and Jasniff's foot had landed on his stomach.

The four rascals had been taken completely by surprise. As the lantern fell it went out, and in his endeavor to get to the doorway, Shime bumped into Jasniff. The doctor ran into the bench, and his glass of medicine went splashing into Merwell's face, eliciting another protest from that bully.

Dave did not care about what happened in the building. His one thought was to get away, for he fully realized that in a hand-to-hand encounter he would be no match for his four enemies.

Had he had time he might have jumped into the automobile, and started up the machine. But he was afraid to risk this, and so ran down the wood road a short distance, and then plunged into the bushes. He did not stop there, but kept on, until he calculated that he was a full quarter of a mile from the stone building.

"I don't think they can follow me to here, at least not in the darkness," he told himself.

He stopped to rest and to consider what he had best do next. The effects of the drug were now entirely gone, and he felt once more like himself.

"I ought to have the whole crowd locked up," he reasoned. "But it would be the testimony of one against four, and they would most likely deny everything."

He went on again, and presently came out on the main highway. As he did this he saw the flash of some lamps in the distance. He crouched down behind some bushes, and a minute later saw the automobile whizz by, with his enemies in it.

"They are going back," he reasoned. "I suppose now I have gotten away from them, Merwell and Jasniff will return to the academy as

fast as they can, and Shime and the doctor will return to Rockville; and they'll all play the innocent."

As he walked on, Dave wondered what the plot against him was. He felt convinced that carrying him off was only the beginning of it.

"Well, whatever it was, I nipped it in the bud," he thought. "Perhaps some day I'll find out all about it,—some day when I can corner one or another of that rascally bunch. I take it that Shime and Montgomery are simply in the employ of Jasniff and Merwell. Both of them are hard drinkers and willing to do almost anything to get a few dollars."

Not far down the highway Dave passed a signboard which told him that Rockville was ten miles away.

"I can't walk ten miles," he thought. "I had better see if I can't get accommodations at some farmhouse, and then drive over to the school after breakfast."

With this idea in view he kept on, until he reached a spot where the railroad crossed the highway. As he did this he saw a freight train standing near a siding where a milk car was to be taken on.

"Does this train go to Oakdale?" he asked, of one of the hands.

"Yes, but it isn't a passenger train," was the reply.

"Can't you take me along?" questioned Dave. "I wish to get to Oakdale very much, and without delay."

The train hand looked Dave over by the light of his lantern. He saw that the youth was no tramp.

"All right, get in the caboose," he said. "But it will cost you a smoke."

"I haven't any cigars, but you can buy yourself some," answered Dave, and passed over a quarter of a dollar, which the train hand pocketed with satisfaction.

Soon the train was under way, and in less than half an hour they reached the siding at Oakdale, and there Dave jumped off. By his watch the lad saw that it was three o'clock Sunday morning. Without delay he struck off on foot for the school.

As he hurried on he wondered what he had best do on arriving at Oak Hall. Should he rouse up Doctor Clay and tell the master the

whole story, or would it be better to say nothing and await developments?

"If I say anything there will be a great hullabaloo, but it won't prove anything," he reasoned. "Merwell and Jasniff will deny everything, and so will Shime, and that fake doctor might take it into his head to sue me for slander. No, I'll fight my own battles, and see if I can't corner them on my own hook. But I'll tell Phil and Roger."

Arriving at the school grounds, Dave wondered how he was going to get in without being observed. He tried all the doors, to find each locked.

"If I ring the bell I'll have to explain matters," he said to himself. "I'll see if I can't rouse up some of the fellows."

He walked around to the window of No. 11, and threw several handsful of gravel up against the glass. At first there was no response, but presently the window was raised, and Roger's head appeared.

"Is that you, Dave?" asked the senator's son, in a low voice.

"Yes, Roger. Will you slip down and let me in."

"Sure thing. Will the side door do?"

"Yes."

No more was said, and the window was closed. Dave hurried to the door mentioned, and a moment later Roger opened it, and he entered. Then both hurried upstairs, making as little noise as possible.

"What kept you so long?" asked the senator's son, while Dave was undressing.

"I'll tell you and Phil in the morning," was Dave's reply. "I've got a yarn to spin you will hardly believe." And then he went to bed. But it was a long time before he was able to drop asleep, and then his dreams were little short of a nightmare.

It was not until Sunday afternoon that Dave got a chance to tell his two chums the particulars of what had occurred. They listened with keen attention to all he said, and the face of each plainly expressed his amazement.

"That's the worst ever!" was Roger's comment. "What were they going to do with you, Dave?"

"I don't know."

"I believe it was some deep-laid plot," said Phil. "Your getting away spoiled it all."

"For them, yes,—but not for me," answered Dave, with something of a grin. "I don't know what I escaped, but I am mighty glad I got away."

"What about your bicycle?" asked the senator's son. "Aren't you going to try to get that back?"

"Certainly,—and I am going to interview that Doctor Montgomery, too,—if I can catch him. But I want you two to go along," answered Dave.

He was glad to take it easy for the rest of the day. On Monday, after school, the three boys went to Rockville on bicycles, Dave borrowing a wheel belonging to Buster. They rode straight to the Dunn house, to find it locked up tightly. In the yard was Dave's machine, standing against the tree as he had left it.

"I guess the doctor has come and gone," said Dave, after trying all the doors. "Most likely he'll make himself scarce for a while."

"Why not interview that fellow Shime?" suggested Phil.

"I will," answered Dave, and taking the extra wheel along, the three students rode around to the Rockville livery stable and garage. Here Dave asked the proprietor about Shime.

"He has gone," said the man, sourly. "Day before yesterday he took one of my best autos for a joy ride. When he came back this morning I discharged him. He took his things and got out—and I don't know where he went to."

This was as much as the garage owner could tell, and with it Dave had to be content. He and his chums turned away; and a little later set out on the return to Oak Hall.

CHAPTER XXVII

A GAME OF ICE HOCKEY

"I reckon you scared them pretty thoroughly, Dave."

"I am glad of it if I did," answered Dave. "I hope I scared them so much that they never bother me again."

Several days had passed, and in that time Dave had learned many things. From Rockville had come the news that Doctor Montgomery had left rather suddenly, without stating where he was going, and Dave had likewise learned that Shime had not shown himself since his discharge by the garage owner. And now from the military academy came word that Merwell and Jasniff had obtained leave of absence for a week.

"They say Doctor Montgomery must have been getting ready to leave," said Phil, who had been to Rockville. "He owes a board bill at the hotel as well as at his boarding-house. Mrs. Dunn is back, and is very angry to think the doctor got away during her absence."

"I suppose Merwell and Jasniff think the affair will blow over by the time they return," said Roger. "Well, Dave, you can do as you please, but if I were you I'd try to corner them."

"If I did that, Roger, they'd try to squirm out of it somehow. What I'd like to do best of all would be to give Merwell and Jasniff a good thrashing."

"Well, they deserve that, Dave."

"I believe they were going to place you in some kind of an awkward position," came from Phil. "Maybe they were going to commit some crime and try to fasten it on you."

"Well, whatever it was, they got left," declared Dave.

"By the way, did you see the notice Nat Poole posted up in the gym.?" asked Roger, during a pause.

"No. What is it?"

"He has lost a watch-chain charm, and he offers a dollar reward for its return."

"As if the fellows wouldn't return it without a reward, if it was found!" exclaimed Phil. "That just shows Nat's natural meanness of mind!"

"Nat is busy organizing his ice-hockey team," said Roger. "They are going out to practice this afternoon."

"Which puts me in mind that we were going to organize a hockey team also," returned Dave. "I guess the sooner we get at it the better."

The ice on the river was clear and smooth, ideal for hockey playing, and that season ice hockey was taken up in earnest at both Oak Hall and Rockville. Nat Poole had little difficulty in organizing a team, he being the captain and playing rover. The others on his team were made up of those who had played with him on the football eleven and some new students at the Hall.

Dave had studied the play and the players with care, and he finally made up a team as follows:

Goal, Sam Day.
Point, Dave Porter, *captain*.
Cover Point, Phil Lawrence.
Center, Roger Morr.
Rover, Gus Plum.
Left Wing, Maurice Hamilton.
Right Wing, Ben Basswood.
Substitutes: Tom Atwood, Luke Watson, and Henry Babcock.

"You have got to play as if you meant it, if you want to win any games," said Dave to his fellow-players, and so much in earnest did he become that, between ice hockey and his studies, he completely forgot about the adventure which had followed his visit to Doctor Montgomery.

Nat Poole could not help but boast of what his team could do, and when a challenge came to Oak Hall from Rockville to play a game he wanted to accept it without delay. But before he could do so, Mr. Dodsworth interfered.

"We have two hockey teams in this school," said the instructor. "Your seven, and that of which Dave Porter is captain. I think it

would be no more than fair that you play a game between you, and that the winner be permitted to accept the Rockville challenge."

This did not suit Nat at all, as he wanted matters entirely his own way. But nearly every boy in the school sided with Mr. Dodsworth, so at last the money-lender's son had to agree to play the game with Dave's team, and it was decided that this game should take place, weather permitting, the following Saturday, and that the game with Rockville should come off one week later.

"To hear Nat Poole talk you would think he had won the game already," said Roger, to the others on Dave's seven. "He makes me sick!"

"Speaking of having it won already, puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow. "A little girl went in the pantry and stayed quite a while. When she came out she asked her mother: 'Ma, can I have a cruller?' 'Yes, my dear,' answered ma. Then she saw that the little girl wasn't eating anything, so she asked: 'Why don't you take a cruller, Alice?' 'Oh,' says Alice; 'I had that when I first went to the pantry!'"

"Wow!" murmured Sam. "That joke came from the ark!"

"It was told to Pharaoh by Napoleon, when they were hunting for the North Pole," added Plum.

"Well, I don't think it hits Nat Poole's case," was Sam's comment. "He won't get any cruller in this game."

"Right you are!" cried Plum.

Plum was as anxious as anybody to defeat the money-lender's son. Since the former bully had turned over a new leaf Nat was constantly saying mean things about him, and it was only Gus's grim determination to "keep the peace" that kept him from pitching into Nat "rough-shod." In keeping his hands off Nat, Plum had a harder battle to fight than if he had attacked the money-lender's son bodily.

It had to be admitted that, as the day for the contest between the two Oak Hall sevens approached, Poole's team was in good shape. Nat had drilled them with care, and had profited by the work of two of the players who had been on another boarding-school seven the winter previous. One of these players knew several sharp tricks, and it was hoped that these tricks would help to defeat Dave's seven.

The game was to be played under the inter-scholastic rules of that year, with two halves of twenty minutes each, and an intermission of

ten minutes. Mr. Dodsworth was the referee, and the accustomed goal umpires and timekeepers were also selected. The "field" had already been marked on the ice, and the goal nets set, so that everything was in readiness for the match. Each player had the regulation ice-hockey stick, and wore regulation hockey skates, well sharpened for the occasion.

"Well, we've got our work cut out for us," said Phil, as he came out for practice.

"Beware of off-side plays," warned Dave. "Don't give Poole's crowd a chance to claim off-play or fouls—and don't let them do anything unfair without a protest."

Just before the play was to start Chip Macklin beckoned to Dave.

"Look out for Bolton," he whispered, as Dave skated up.

"Why do you say that, Chip?"

"I heard him and Nat whispering together. Bolton said their side must win—he had a bet on it with somebody. Then Nat advised him to take chances—which means that they may club you, or kick you with their skates."

"We'll be on the lookout," answered Dave, and he immediately let the others know what Poole and Bolton had in mind to do.

Amid a cheering for both sides, the puck was brought out and placed on the ice, directly in the center of the field, and between the sticks of two of the players. Then the whistle blew, and the contest commenced.

Back and forth over the smooth ice flew the rubber disc, first towards one goal and then towards the other. Dave got it and carried it far down the field, and then turned it over to Plum. Gus lost it to Poole, who knocked it over to a player named Foss. It came dangerously close to Dave's goal, but was sent spinning forward again by Sam, and then followed a turning and twisting back and forth, in the midst of which Nat Poole went flat on his back, and Phil went sprawling over him.

"Foul! foul!" yelled Nat, as he scrambled up. "You did that on purpose!"

"I did not!" answered Phil, with flashing eyes. "I guess you fell on purpose!"

"There was no foul!" decided Mr. Dodsworth. "It was simply an accident all around." And then the play was resumed.

At the end of eight minutes of play Dave's team rushed the puck forward once more. Nat's team tried its best to send the disc back, but lost it by a bad fumble by Bolton. Then straight into the goal net flew the puck.

"Hurrah! One goal for Porter's team!"

"That's the way to do it!"

"Humph! They got that by a fluke!" growled Bolton.

"They got it because of your error!" answered one of the students at the side line.

Again the puck was placed in the center of the field, and once more the struggle was renewed. This time the disc was again forced close to the Porter goal, but without avail. Sam sent it back, and Dave shot it to Phil, who whizzed the puck over to Shadow. Then came a mix-up, and the puck flew close to the Poole goal.

"Back with it!" was the cry. "Don't let 'em score another goal!"

A player named Gardener had the puck. He was about to send it to Bolton, when Phil interfered and sent the disc over to Ben Basswood. As Ben swept over the ice with the disc Bolton rushed forward, swinging his hockey stick viciously.

"Look out!" yelled somebody, and many saw a swing of the stick that came dangerously close to Phil's head.

"Bolton, you try that again, and I'll knock you down!" said Phil, his eyes flashing fire as he spoke.

"My—er—my stick slipped," stammered Bolton, and turned away quickly. Before more could be said a cheer went up.

"Another goal for the Porter team!"

"That's the way to play ice hockey!"

It was true, Ben had made the second goal. With five minutes more of the half to play the puck was placed in position once again.

"Say, we've got to do something!" growled Nat Poole.

"All right, do it," answered one of the team, who had seen Nat make several errors, and who was growing disgusted.

Both Nat and Bolton were ugly, and showed it in every movement. The puck was worked down into the Porter territory, but again

without avail, and as it commenced to move in the opposite direction Nat and Bolton grew furious. Nat gave his follower a meaning look, and a minute later Bolton swung his hockey stick around, almost on a line with Dave's shoulder.

Had the blow landed as intended, Dave would have been seriously lamed, and possibly his arm might have been broken. But Roger was close at hand, and in a flash the senator's son thrust out his hockey stick, so that the blow glanced off, doing little harm.

"Time!" called Roger, and it was granted, and both teams at once gathered around Dave and Bolton.

"Bolton, that was done on purpose; you can't deny it!" cried Roger. "You did your best to injure Dave."

"I did not!" roared Bolton, growing red in the face.

"He did! He did!" was the general cry. "Put him out!"

There was a great hubbub, in the midst of which Mr. Dodsworth consulted with Andrew Dale, who was assistant referee. Then Mr. Dodsworth came forward.

"Bolton," he said, clearly and coldly; "you are retired."

"Can't I play any more?" growled the student.

"No. Your conduct is unworthy of a gentleman, and you must leave the field. The game will proceed."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DISCOVERY OF INTEREST

It was a stinging rebuke, and everybody within hearing felt its effect. There was a sudden hush, and then Bolton turned and skated away, muttering savagely under his breath.

Once more the game proceeded, but before the puck could be gotten within striking distance of either goal the whistle blew; and the first half of the game came to an end.

"Wonder what Nat Poole thinks of his team now?" remarked Roger, as the boys gathered in a group to discuss the plays made.

"He is as mad as hops," reported Plum. "He says Bolton was not to blame, and that it wasn't fair for Mr. Dodsworth to rule him off."

"They ought to be satisfied," said Messmer, who was close by. "Langley, the substitute, is as good as Bolton, if not better."

"Say, we must keep them from scoring in the second half!" cried Ben. "That will break Nat's heart. He has been blowing constantly that he was going to do us up."

"Look out for tricks," cautioned Dave. "They may have something up their sleeve they haven't tried yet—although I doubt it."

Promptly on time the second half of the game started. As soon as the puck was put into action it was seen that Nat's team had adopted new tactics. This was to "worry" the disc along close to the side line, and in such a manner that Dave's seven had to either miss it or run the risk of off-side plays.

"Get it out, fellows!" cried Dave, and then gave a signal to bring it back. This was not expected by the Poole players, and before they realized what was occurring, the Porter seven had the puck nearly to the goal net. Here a fierce fight occurred, and the disc went back and forth with astonishing rapidity. But at last Dave got it and made a goal so swiftly and so neatly it brought forth tremendous applause.

"Another for Porter's side!"

"Say, they are piling 'em up, aren't they?"

"Come, Nat! Get in the game and show us what you can do!"

With a glum face Nat Poole ordered his team to their places, and again the try for a goal started. But the seven was now thoroughly demoralized, and another goal was made by the Porters in less than four minutes. Then followed three minutes of ragged work near the middle of the field, and then the whistle blew and it was all over.

"And a regular slaughter for Nat Poole's team," was the comment of one of the students.

"It knocked us out to take Bolton out of the game," grumbled Nat. "That wasn't fair."

"Bolton wasn't any better than the rest," answered Phil. "Nat, you were beaten fairly and squarely, and you know it."

"Oh, shut up!" growled the money-lender's son, and hurried away out of sight as soon as possible.

"Well, young gentlemen," said Mr. Dodsworth to Dave and his followers, "you did very well, and I am proud of you."

"Mr. Dodsworth, do you think we stand any chance of beating Rockville?" asked Dave, earnestly.

"I do, yes. But it will be no easy work."

"Not as easy as to-day, eh?" put in Ben, with a grin.

"By no means, Basswood. I have seen the Rockville seven play two games, and they are very quick and clever. No, you must not look for any walk-over. If you win it will only be by good, clean-cut work."

"Then I can send an acceptance of their challenge?" questioned Dave.

"Yes, and you had better do it at once," answered the instructor; and the letter was sent by special messenger within the hour.

That evening the boys celebrated their victory by lighting a number of bonfires along the river. They were allowed to be out an hour later than usual, and skated and had a good time generally. Nat Poole and his cronies were not in evidence, but nobody missed them.

"I hope we don't get snow," remarked Dave, on retiring. "A heavy fall would knock out the game with Rockville."

"Oh, they could clear the ice," answered Phil. "But I'd like to see it stay clear."

But this was not to be. All day Sunday the sky was overcast, and by Monday morning it was snowing furiously, blotting out the landscape on all sides.

"Here is where we stay indoors and do some studying," remarked Roger, making a wry face.

"Good chance to catch up," was Ben's comment. "I've got to bone at some Latin anyway."

"And I have a theme to finish," added Dave. "Let us do all the studying we can," he went on. "Then, if it clears off, we'll have so much more time outdoors."

This proposal was accepted by the lads of Nos. 11 and 12, and soon nearly all of them were at work over their lessons. The exception was Luke Watson, who said he was ahead in his studies for once.

"I am going to put my clothing in order," said Luke. "My closet and my bureau drawers are something fierce. I hardly know where to find a necktie or a shoe any more."

"You ought to follow Polly's example," suggested Dave. "He has everything as neat as a pin."

"It's easy enough," said the girlish student. "All you've got to do is to put everything in its proper place at the start, and then put it back after you have used it."

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story," began Shadow. "Once two boys——"

"Drop it!"

"We are studying, not listening to stories!"

"Throw a book at him if he opens his mouth again!"

"All right, if you don't want to hear it," murmured Shadow, and turned to his own lessons.

Luke arranged his bureau drawers to his satisfaction, and then went to his clothing closet. Out came several suits of clothing, some shoes and slippers, and a quantity of other things.

"I don't see why I am keeping these old slippers," he murmured, half to himself. "I haven't worn 'em this term. Guess I'll turn 'em over to Pop Swingly. He might get a little good out of 'em."

"Did you speak to me, Luke?" asked Dave, looking up from his books.

"No. I was musing over these old slippers. I am going to give 'em away."

"Maybe some poor person would be glad to get them."

"I don't know any poor person around here. I'll turn 'em over to Pop Swingly. He can——Hello, what's this?"

Luke had turned the slippers over in his hand, and from the toe of one of them had dropped a small, shining object. Luke picked it up with interest.

"Why, it's a watch charm!" exclaimed Dave, coming forward.

"So it is! How did that get in my slipper?"

"What's that?" cried Shadow, coming over, while some of the other students did the same.

"Luke just found this watch charm stuck in the toe of one of his old slippers," explained Dave.

"That is Nat Poole's charm—the one he lost from his watch-chain!" cried Ben.

"Are you sure, Ben?"

"Pretty sure, yes. I've seen it often enough to know it."

"Yes, it looks like Nat's charm," said Roger.

"And was that charm in your slipper?" questioned Shadow, excitedly.

"Yes, it just dropped out."

"Were those slippers taken at the time all our shoes and boots and slippers disappeared?" continued Shadow.

"Yes. Say, Shadow, you don't think——"

"Yes, I do!" shouted the lad who had the reputation of walking in his sleep. "I think Nat Poole took those shoes, slippers, and boots, and then got scared in some way and returned them. And when he boxed 'em up he caught his watch charm in the slipper, and the charm dropped inside."

"It looks reasonable," was Dave's comment.

"You let me have that charm and I'll find out about this," went on Shadow. "I'll show him he can't do such a thing and then shove it off on me, and make folks believe I took the shoes while I was walking in my sleep!"

"Going after Nat now?" asked Buster.

"Yes."

"Do you want anybody along?" asked Dave. "Better have witnesses to this."

"All right; Dave, you come along,—and you too, Phil. I guess you want to know what became of that missing gym. shoe."

"So I do," answered the shipowner's son.

"Where is Nat?" asked Roger.

"I don't know, but I'll soon find out," answered Shadow, with determination. He had been deeply chagrined over the disappearance of the shoes, boots, and slippers, and had felt it keenly when he was suspected of having walked in his sleep once again and made off with the foot coverings.

The three students left the dormitory, and from another lad learned that Nat was in the library. They sent a small boy after him, stating that he was wanted at once at the "den," a room where the students sometimes congregated, but which just then was deserted.

Wondering what was coming, the money-lender's son soon put in an appearance. He had not been told who wished to see him, and his face fell when he saw Shadow, Dave, and Phil.

"What do you want?" he asked, surlily. "I am busy this afternoon."

"Nat, is this your watch charm, the one you lost?" questioned Shadow, holding out the piece in his hand.

"Sure it is!" cried the money-lender's son. "Where did you find it?"

"Found it just where you lost it—in Luke Watson's slipper."

"Eh?" And Nat looked startled.

"Nat, we have found you out!" cried Shadow, sternly. "You needn't attempt to deny it. You took those shoes, boots, and slippers."

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"I—I did not."

"Yes, you did."

"Don't you know you were seen?" asked Phil, with a wink at his chums.

It was only a chance shot, but it told in a most unexpected way.

"Say, has Tom Hally been talking about me?" roared Nat, in sudden rage. "If he has I'll—I'll——"

"Now, take it easy," advised Dave. "Nat, don't you realize that this is a serious matter?"

"I don't care! I'll fix Hally, see if I don't!"

At that moment the door opened, and the boy who had been rescued from the hole in the snowy hollow came in with several chums.

"Hally, come here!" called Phil.

"Say, did you give me away, after all?" demanded Nat Poole, rushing forward and catching Tom Hally by the arm.

"Let go of me!" returned Hally. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, you do, you sneak!"

"I'm no sneak!" And Tom Hally's eyes flashed dangerously.

"Hally, tell me, did Nat Poole take our shoes and boots and slippers that night?" demanded Dave.

"He did." Hally grew red in the face. "I wasn't going to mention it, but now you ask me a direct question I'll not tell a falsehood. He took the shoes and hid them in the trunk room. I caught him doing it, but I thought it was only a joke, and so kept silent. Then, after you fellows rescued me from the hole in the snow, I made Nat send the shoes back. At first I was going to tell on him, but, somehow, I didn't want to play the sneak."

"I understand," answered Dave. He turned to Shadow. "This clears you."

"So it does, Shadow, and I am mighty glad of it," put in Phil.

"Yes, it clears me," answered the student who was known as a sleep-walker. "Or at least, I will be cleared—after I am done with Nat Poole," and Shadow looked at the money-lender's son in a manner that was full of grim significance.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOOKER MONTGOMERY'S REVELATION

"What do you want?" demanded Nat, and his voice trembled a little, for he realized that he was cornered.

"In the first place, I think you'll have to restore Phil's missing gym. shoe," remarked Dave dryly. "How about it, Phil?"

"That's so," answered the shipowner's son.

"I've got the shoe in my closet," growled Nat. "It dropped out when I was packing the box. I'll get it now."

"No, you don't!" cried Shadow. "You can get the shoe any time. We will settle the rest of this affair before you leave."

"I—er—I don't understand?" stammered the money-lender's son. "You've got your shoes back. What more do you want? Can't you stand for a joke?"

"Not that kind of a joke, Nat. You put me in a false light—made everybody think I had walked off with the shoes in my sleep—and you made the whole crowd buy new shoes. We ought to make you pay that bill."

"I won't pay a cent! You—you've got the new shoes."

"Well, you've got to settle with me anyway," went on Shadow, firmly. "You can take your choice of two things. If you won't explain to the whole crowd how the thing happened, and won't apologize to me, why I'm going to give you a sound thrashing, that's all."

"Humph!"

"No 'humph' about it. You can take your choice."

"I won't apologize to you, or to anybody."

"Then you'll get a sound thrashing, Nat Poole."

"I am not afraid of you!"

"You won't apologize?"

"No!"

"Very well, then. Remember, I am going to give you the thrashing of your life the very first chance I get," declared Shadow, and then,

without another word he left the "den," and Dave and Phil went with him.

"Are you going to do what you just said, Shadow?" questioned Phil.

"Indeed I am! I'll teach him that he can't put off his dirty tricks on me!" declared the sleep-walker.

"When will you meet him?"

"I don't know. I'll lay for him some day when he goes to town."

"He'll keep out of your way most likely," declared Dave.

"Never mind, I'll catch him some time," declared Shadow, grimly.

A little later the missing shoe was returned to Phil. Nat Poole showed himself only during class hours, and it was plain to see that Shadow's threat had scared him. He and Bolton talked of "squaring up" with Dave, Shadow, and the others, but nothing came of the discussion.

"You are not afraid of Hamilton, are you?" asked Bolton of Nat.

"Of course I ain't!" cried the money-lender's son.

"Then why don't you challenge him to a regular fight?"

"Why, I—er—that is, it wouldn't do," stammered Nat. "Shadow would be just mean enough to let one of the teachers or the doctor hear about it, and I might be expelled. My father has been very strict lately, so I don't dare do anything to worry him. But if he attacks me I'll defend myself, don't you fear!" added Nat, boastfully. It may be added here that Nat and Shadow met the very next afternoon, back of the boathouse, and though the money-lender's son tried to get away, Shadow pounced upon him and knocked him down, and ended up by blackening Nat's left eye, and making his nose bleed. Later on, Nat tried to "square himself" with his friends by stating that Shadow had attacked him while he was feeling sick, but it is doubtful if anybody believed this statement.

By Wednesday the storm cleared away, and the air became clear and bracing. Word was sent in from Rockville that, unless another storm followed, the ice on the river would be cleared off for the game of hockey as scheduled.

"Well, we must get into practice," said Dave, and that very afternoon a portion of the river near the Oak Hall boathouse was

scraped clear, and the seven got to work, under the eyes of Mr. Dodsworth and Andrew Dale.

"Rockville will do its best to win," said Roger. "If for no other reason than to wipe out the football defeat."

"And we must do our best to down 'em!" cried Dave.

"I am going for a sleigh ride to-morrow," announced Phil. "I've hired a big sleigh from Oakdale, and I want the whole bunch to go."

"Bully for Phil!" cried Ben. "A sleigh ride will suit me first-rate."

"Where will you go?" asked Shadow.

"I thought of going to Hopperville and back. That is about as far as we can go between four o'clock and ten. I'll telephone to the Hopperville Hotel to have supper ready for us."

"Phil, you're a brick!" cried Roger.

"Will the doctor let us go?" asked Ben.

"Yes, I asked him before I hired the sleigh."

The thought of a sleigh ride was a pleasant one, and Phil had little difficulty in making up a party of eight, including Roger, Dave, and Ben.

"It will be moonlight," said Dave. "And that will make the riding extra fine."

It was a merry crowd that climbed into the big sleigh on the following afternoon. The turnout was filled with straw, so that they might keep warm, and was drawn by four good horses.

"Now then, let her go!" cried Phil, and the driver cracked his whip, and they were off, the envy of all the students who had been left behind.

The road to Hopperville lay through Oakdale and Rockville, and as each town was passed the boys set up a cheer and blew the horns that had been brought along. Some folks cheered them in return, and just as they were leaving the town where the military academy was located, some cadets rushed from around a corner and pelted them with snowballs.

"Never mind!" yelled Roger, as he dodged. "You'll get yours next Saturday!"

It was dark by the time Hopperville was reached and all of the boys were glad enough to jump out of the sleigh and go into the hotel

to warm up before sitting down to supper. The horses and the turnout were taken around to the stables.

The hotel was located on a corner, and across the side street was another hotel—a resort that did not bear a particularly good reputation. It had a bar attached to it, and it was whispered that sporty men often went to the resort to gamble.

The reading-room of one hotel faced the other, and as Dave, Roger, and Phil entered one apartment they noticed that the one across the way was lit up, and that the window curtains had not been lowered. Then Dave gave a sudden cry of surprise.

"Look at that man over there, Phil!"

"Why, it is Doctor Montgomery!" answered the shipowner's son.

"Montgomery!" cried Roger. "I thought he had cleared out from these parts."

"I am going over to talk to him," said Dave.

"Want us to go along?" came from both of the others.

"You might as well."

"Say, why don't you scare him?" suggested Phil. "If you do that, you may get him to tell all about the plot against you."

"Oh, I'll do that—don't fear," answered Dave.

As supper would not be ready for half an hour, the three lads excused themselves, and hurried across the street. They found Hooker Montgomery still alone, reading a sensational newspaper.

"Well, doctor, how are you?" said Dave, coolly, as he dropped in a chair beside the so-styled physician.

"Why—ah—who—ahem!—where did you come from?" stammered Hooker Montgomery. He was so taken back that he knew not what to say. He had not dreamed that Dave and his chums would visit Hopperville, which was somewhat out of the regular line of travel.

"I guess you didn't think I'd find you," continued Dave.

"Were you—ahem!—looking for me?" asked the doctor, weakly. And now the boys noticed that he looked more dissipated than ever, and that his garments were decidedly shabby.

"See here, Doctor Montgomery, I am not going to beat around the bush with you," said Dave, sternly. "You played me a mean trick, and you know that I can put you in prison for it."

"Why, I—ahem!—I—that is——"

"You kidnapped me, and that is a serious offense."

"No! no! I did nothing of the sort!" cried the man, and his face showed actual misery. "Oh, Porter, don't blame me for it! I made a big mistake! I was a fool to listen to those others! But I needed money—times were very hard—and they said it was only a schoolboy trick—that is, that is what they said first. But afterwards——" The pretended doctor did not finish.

"Who said it was a trick?"

"Those two young men, Merwell and Jasniff. They were angry at you because of something of which I know nothing. They wanted to get you in their power for a lark—that was the story they first told. They promised me twenty dollars if I would aid them—and I never got a cent—not a cent!" added Hooker Montgomery, almost tearfully. "Oh, don't prosecute me! I am down and out! My practice has been ruined—some folks even want me arrested for practicing without a state certificate—and those rascals never came to my aid! And after all I did for them!"

Dave was a good judge of character, and he saw at once that Hooker Montgomery was assuredly in a pitiable condition. Drink had made him lose his practice and his ability to induce people to buy his medicines, and now he had relied upon Merwell and Jasniff to aid him, and they had failed to do so. Evidently the man was not so much of a rascal as he was weak-minded.

"So Merwell and Jasniff promised to pay you if you aided them?" said Dave.

"Yes."

"But you got me to come to your boarding-house."

"So I did, but it was those two fellows who put me up to it."

"Where did Shime come in?"

"Oh, he only furnished the auto for a consideration. He was under Jasniff's thumb—and now he is down and out, too."

"You say it was the plot of Jasniff and Merwell to get me in their power. Why did they want to do this?"

"If I tell you, Mr. Porter, will you—ahem!—will you prosecute me?" asked Hooker Montgomery, tremblingly.

"I may prosecute you if you don't tell me."

"As I said before, I didn't understand their plot at first. They said it was only a schoolboy trick. But it was not,—as I found out later. It was a villainous plan to get you into serious trouble."

"What trouble?"

"I don't know all of the particulars, but I know some. From that old stone building you were to be taken to some town near by. I heard them say something about breaking into a jewelry factory, and you were to be drugged and left in the factory. I think they were going to make it appear as if you had broken into the factory, and that an explosion to blow open a safe had stunned you."

"Can that be true?" burst from Roger.

"What cold-blooded plotting?" was Phil's comment.

"I can't give you any details, for I was—ahem!—sick at the time and did not quite understand," went on Hooker Montgomery, and Dave reasoned, and rightfully, that he had been under the influence of liquor. "Of course, they'll deny the whole thing. But that is what they plotted to do to you."

"Where are Merwell and Jasniff now? Do you know?"

"Yes, they are in this town. That is why I came here—to see them and get some money, if I could, for I am dead broke. But they wouldn't see me."

"Here!" cried Dave, in astonishment. "Where?"

"At the residence of one of Merwell's relatives, on the other side of town. Do you want to see them?" And a sudden look of interest dawned in Hooker Montgomery's fishy eyes.

"I do."

"Going to have it out with them?"

"Yes."

"Good for you, sir! I'll show you where you can find them!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE ENEMY RUNS AWAY

In a very few minutes Dave and his chums were on the way to find Merwell and Jasniff. As the party walked along Hooker Montgomery told more about his dealings with the rascally students. It was plain to Dave that the so-styled doctor had been nothing but a weak tool, and in a way the youth had to pity the poor wretch whom dissipation had so dragged down.

In less than five minutes the party arrived at a small residence set well back in a garden. The walk was unshoveled, and they had to pick their way through the snow. When they rang the doorbell a tall, thin elderly woman answered their summons.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Slater," said Hooker Montgomery. "I'd like to see Mr. Merwell and Mr. Jasniff."

"They have gone," was the sharp answer, and Mrs. Slater looked as if she wished to shut the door in the faces of the callers.

"When will they be back?"

"They won't be back."

"Will you kindly tell me where they have gone?" questioned Dave.

"Who are you?" And the woman eyed Dave suspiciously.

"My name is David Porter, and I wish to see Merwell and Jasniff very much."

"Porter! Then you must be that young villain Link told me about—the one who made so much trouble for him out on the ranch!" exclaimed Mrs. Slater. "Well, you can't see Link, or his friend. They have gone, and they won't be back."

"Have they gone to Rockville Academy?"

"You can find that out for yourself!" cried Mrs. Slater, and then slammed the door shut, and locked it.

"Very accommodating lady, I must say!" murmured Phil, sarcastically.

"Very essence of politeness," added Roger.

"Well, if they have gone, there is no use of our staying here," declared Dave. "Come on." And he led the way back to the hotel. Here they had another talk with Hooker Montgomery.

"If you'll promise not to prosecute me I'll appear against Merwell and Jasniff any time you want me," said the so-called doctor. And there the matter rested; and the boys went back to join their companions and help to make way with the generous supper that was awaiting the whole party.

"What place do you suppose Merwell and Jasniff were going to rob?" asked Roger of Dave, on the way back to Oak Hall.

"I am sure I don't know, Roger. Montgomery didn't say. More than likely those rascals didn't tell him."

"What are you going to do next, go up to Rockville after Link and Nick?"

"I've been thinking I'd go up there early next Saturday, before the hockey game. Want to go along?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. I guess Phil will go, too—if you ask him."

"I'll do it. I don't think I can manage the two alone."

"Going to have them arrested?"

"That depends on how they act. One thing is certain, I am not going to stand for any more of their underhanded work," answered Dave, grimly.

The day of the game dawned clear and bright. The contest was scheduled for three o'clock, and Dave, Phil, and Roger got permission to go to Rockville in the morning. They said they would meet their fellow-players on the river later.

Arriving at Rockville, the three chums put up at the hotel, where they rested from the long skate, and then had dinner. Then they started in the direction of the military school.

The street on which they were walking ran past the railroad station, and as they passed the platform Roger happened to look at the people assembled, waiting for a train. He gave a shout:

"There is Merwell now!"

"Where?" asked Dave and Phil.

"Just went into the waiting-room."

The three lads quickened their pace and hurried into the waiting-room. They saw Merwell and Jasniff at the ticket window, just picking up some tickets and change.

"I want to see you fellows," said Dave, coldly, and placed a hand on a shoulder of each of the rascals.

Merwell and Jasniff wheeled around, and the face of each turned pale.

"Wha—what do you want, Porter?" stammered Merwell.

"Ah, don't talk to him," blustered Jasniff. "Let go of me!" And he tore himself loose.

"Jasniff, you've got to talk to me," answered Dave. "If you won't talk I'll call an officer."

"Don't you do that!" cried Merwell, in increased alarm. "You let me go! It's a—a—mistake! I haven't done anything!" And he commenced to back towards the door.

"Merwell, you and Jasniff played me a dirty trick!" declared Dave. "I don't know whether to have you arrested or to take it out of you. I gave you a sound thrashing once, but it doesn't seem to have done you much good."

"You—you let me alone, Porter!"

"Where are you going?" asked Roger.

"Don't you tell them!" burst out Jasniff, quickly. "It's none of their business!" And he looked knowingly at Merwell.

"I guess I had better call an officer," suggested Phil, just by way of intimidating the rascally students.

"No—no—don't do it!" cried Link Merwell. "Come on, Nick, there is the train!"

He leaped past the others, and out of a back door of the station. As Dave, Phil, and Roger went after him, Jasniff went out of the front door.

A train had come to a stop, and a number of passengers were getting off and on. Link Merwell darted into the midst of the crowd, and mounting one of the platforms, entered the car.

"Going after him?" asked Phil.

"No. What's the use?"

"Where is Jasniff?" asked Roger.

"There he goes!" cried Dave, and pointed to the end of the train, which the student named had just boarded.

The train was now moving, and as it swept by, the three lads on the platform saw Link Merwell peer anxiously out of a window at them. Then, as the last car rolled by, they beheld Nick Jasniff in the doorway. He shook his fist at them.

"Just wait, Dave Porter!" he yelled, defiantly. "Just wait, that's all!" And then the train disappeared swiftly from view.

"Wonder if they are running away from the academy?" came from Phil.

"It looks like it to me," answered Dave. "I guess they are pretty badly scared. Maybe they know that Doctor Montgomery had turned against them."

"Well, if they only stay away it won't be so bad," said the senator's son.

"I might telegraph ahead and have them held," said Dave. "But I guess it isn't worth while."

"Do you know what I think?" said Phil. "I think they were at that Mrs. Slater's house the night we called, and what we said scared them." And in this surmise Phil was correct.

An hour later found the three chums down on the river, where they were met by the other members of the hockey team. A great crowd was assembling, and in the number were Vera Rockwell, Mary Feversham, and a number of other people they knew.

The boys from Oak Hall had come in sleighs and on skates, and they had brought their horns, rattles, and banners with them. The Rockville cadets were also alive to the occasion, and the combined din from both sides was deafening.

"Here is where we do up Oak Hall!"

"Here is where Rockville gets another defeat!"

"Remember, this is for the championship of the Leming River!"

So the cries rang on, drowned ever and anon by the tooting of horns and the clacking of rattles. Soon came a short practice, and then the two sevens lined up for the great contest.

At a glance it was easy to see that the Rockville team was a fine one. Every player was tall and thin, and an exceptionally swift skater.

They had been well drilled into team work, and sent the puck from one player to another in a manner that brought forth many favorable comments.

"We sure have our work cut out for us!" whispered Ben to Dave. "They are the swiftest bunch I have yet seen on skates."

"And their captain is certainly a star," added Shadow. "I never saw a fellow turn quicker or send the puck with more force."

"We've got to fight and fight hard!" cried Dave. "I want every fellow on the job, first, last, and all the time!"

CHAPTER XXXI

ANOTHER VICTORY—CONCLUSION

"That's the way to do it!"

"What did I tell you? Oak Hall won't be in this game!"

"This will wipe out that football defeat!"

So the cries rang out. The great ice-hockey contest was but six minutes old, and amid a wild yelling and cheering Rockville had carried the puck down into the Oak Hall territory, and Mallory, their star player, had made a swift and safe goal.

"Wasn't that going some!"

"Three cheers for Mallory!" And the cheers were given with a will.

"Oak Hall! Oak Hall!" came the answering cry, and then the supporters of that school burst out into a new slogan:

"Ice hockey!
Nice jockey!
Oak Hall
Has the call!
Wa! wa! wa! wa! Whoop!"

"Oh, what a shame that Rockville scored!" sighed Vera Rockwell.

"Never mind, the game isn't ended yet," returned Mary Feversham.

"No," came from a Rockville cadet, sitting near. "When it is the score will be about forty to nothing, in our favor." And this remark caused some cadets to smile, and made both of the girls turn very red.

"Aren't they horrid!" whispered Mary.

"Don't mind them," answered her friend. "But, oh, I do so hope Oak Hall wins!" And then both girls waved their Oak Hall banners vigorously, by way of encouragement to the team.

Once more the puck was put into play in the center of the field of ice, and again Rockville sent it flying near to the Oak Hall goal. But this time it came back, and now the fight was on for several minutes

near the left side line. There was a little rough play on both sides, and the referee called time.

"I want no more such work," he said, almost sternly.

"I was hit in the side by somebody," growled Plum.

"I was hit in the back," came from a Rockville player.

"If there is any more such work I'll call the game," said the referee, and then the whistle blew to start again.

This time Oak Hall worked with vigor, and presently had the rubber disc down close to the Rockville goal. But alas for their hopes! Just as Ben was on the point of striking for the net, a Rockville player stole the puck from him, rapped it to another player, who sent it whirling to Mallory, and in a twinkling it was down at the other end of the field.

"Another goal for Rockville!"

"What did I tell you? Boys, this is a walk-over for our school!" cried Guy Frapley, who was on hand and as anxious as anybody to see Oak Hall defeated.

"Oak Hall may be able to play football, but they don't know how to play ice hockey!" added John Rand, who was with him and equally anxious to see Dave and his friends lose.

The supporters of Oak Hall had little to say. The only lad who felt happy was Nat Poole.

"Here is where Dave Porter and his crowd get what is coming to them," thought the money-lender's son. It pleased him greatly to think his school might be beaten. Which shows how really mean-spirited Nat was.

Again the game proceeded, and now the contest waged in earnest. In a mix-up near the center of the field, one of the Rockville players named Devine crashed into Plum, and both went down in a heap, with two other players on top. The puck went sailing toward the Oak Hall goal, and though Dave did his best to stop it, the goal was made an instant later.

"Time! time! Somebody is hurt!"

"That goal ought not to count!"

A babble of voices sounded out, and slowly the players untangled themselves. Then it was learned that Plum had been hurt on the

shoulder, and one of the Rockville players had gotten cut in the ankle, and both had to retire. Luke Watson took Plum's place. It was decided that the goal had been made unfairly, after time was called and allowed, and so it was not counted.

But even this did not help Oak Hall in the first half of the contest. Rockville went at it hammer and tongs again, and soon scored a legitimate third goal, amid a cheering that was tremendous. Then the whistle blew, and the first half of the game became a thing of the past.

"We are up against it and no mistake," remarked Roger, dolefully, as he and the other players sat down on a bench in the boathouse to rest.

"We are too slow," answered Dave. "We simply must put more ginger in our playing."

"Yes, and we've got to take more chances," added Sam. "Might as well do it—we can't lose anything," he added, bitterly.

When the call sounded to start the second half of the game, the Oak Hall seven came forward with a do-or-die look on their set faces. Rockville, on the other hand, wore a happy smile, as if the victory was already a sure thing.

For a minute the playing was uncertain. Then came a surprise, for Oak Hall "broke loose," to use Messmer's way of expressing it. The puck was fairly stolen from Mallory himself by Dave, and sent forward, and to the right and the left, in a manner that was bewildering.

"Send it back, Rockville!"

"Don't let them score!"

"Back with it! Back!"

"Go it, Oak Hall! Whack it, Hamilton!"

"Now for the goal, Morr!"

"There she goes!"

"Hurrah! Score one for Oak Hall!"

"Now then, you've struck your gait, fellows! Keep up the good work!"

It was true. Oak Hall had scored on a beautiful strike by Roger, aided by Shadow. But Dave had started the thing by getting the rubber away from Mallory, much to that star player's chagrin.

The goal warmed the hearts of the Oak Hall seven wonderfully, and when the puck was again placed in position, they went for it like hungry cats after a mouse. The exchange of blows was rapid, and the disc was stolen and recovered half a dozen times in as many seconds. Then came a long drive by Ben, and another by Dave, and then a Rockville player sent it out of bounds. Bringing it back gave the lads time to recover their breath, and again they went at it with a determination that was terrific.

"Oh, somebody will be killed!" cried Vera, as several came together with a crash.

"What a rough game!" murmured Mary. "But look, Dave Porter has the rubber!"

"Yes, and he is carrying it to the Rockville goal!"

"Oh, look at the others after him!"

Dave had the puck, and with almost a clear field ahead of him he was "worrying" it along, while the whole of the Rockville team was following on his heels. He waited until they were almost on him, then made a half turn, raised his stick, and let drive with all his power.

"Say, look at that!"

"What a beautiful drive!"

"Another goal for Oak Hall!"

"Three cheers for Dave Porter!" came from some of the Oak Hall supporters, and the cheers went echoing far and wide across the river. Vera and Mary cheered with the rest, and so did a number of other girls.

"Now then, Oak Hall, tie the score!"

"We will!" murmured Roger.

"That's the talk!" cried Dave. "Everybody in the game now, and on the jump!"

Fearing they were losing their hold on the game, Mallory spoke to the others of his team. He gave the signal for a trick play on the left side. But Dave was on the alert, and the trick was blocked, and then

Dave gave a signal to try the same trick on Rockville. Neither Mallory nor his followers dreamed this would be done, and they were so neatly caught that every old ice-hockey player who witnessed the play had to smile. The trick took the puck halfway down into the Rockville territory, and though the cadets worked hard to send it back, it was not to be, and Phil knocked the goal that tied the score.

"A tie! A tie!"

"Now, Oak Hall, one more to win!"

"Rockville! Rockville! One more! One more!"

By this time everybody was thoroughly worked up over the contest. All who had been seated were on their feet and cheering wildly for their favorites.

"Whatever you do, don't let them score again!" said Dave, to his players. "Keep the rubber away from our goal."

"We'll send it down to their goal," answered Shadow.

"So we will!" cried Ben.

"This is our game—we have got to have it," was Phil's response.

"It's win or bust," muttered Roger.

Once more the puck was placed in position. Rockville now played as they had never played before, and twice the disc came dangerously close to the Oak Hall goal. But each time Luke Watson drove it back. Then it came forward swiftly to the other end of the field. Here there was a battle-royal between Mallory and Roger. Dave came whizzing up, and managed to steal the rubber, and sent it to Ben. He got it within three yards of the goal, and then Shadow took hold, and landed it safely in the net.

"Hurrah! One more for Oak Hall!"

"That makes the score four to three!"

"Wake up, Rockville! Six minutes more to play!"

"Now hold 'em!" cautioned Dave, as the puck was brought forth once more. "Hold 'em, I tell you!"

"We'll do more!" answered Roger, grimly. "That is, if we get the chance."

"Of course—but don't run any risks."

Back and forth flew the rubber disc. Rockville was wild to tie the score. This made one of the players take a "long chance." Roger saw

it, and in a twinkling he rushed forward and upset the fellow's calculations, and sent the puck again into the Rockville territory. Then came a rush of players, and back and forth swung the human mass. Then of a sudden the rubber disc flew up into the air, to land almost at Sam Day's feet.

It was Sam's chance, and like a flash he improved it. Down the icy field went the rubber with Sam behind it.

"Stop him!"

"Send it back!"

Dave was behind Sam, and now he swept ahead. Then came a mix-up with Mallory. But Dave got the puck and sent it straight for the net.

"Another goal for Oak Hall!"

"Two minutes more to play!"

"Rockville can't win now!"

With saddened faces Rockville lined up once more, and again the disc was put in action. The fight was hot, and the puck moved rapidly in the center of the field. Then the whistle blew, and the wonderful contest came to an end.

Final score: Oak Hall 5, Rockville 3.

It was assuredly a well-earned victory, and Dave and his team were warmly praised by all their followers. Even Doctor Clay came up to shake each player by the hand.

"I am proud of you," he said. "This will be quite a feather in the Oak Hall cap."

"Can we celebrate to-night, Doctor?" asked Roger, quickly.

"You can—up to twelve o'clock. But please don't wreck the school building," and the master of Oak Hall smiled indulgently.

"Oh, it was just too lovely for anything!" cried Vera.

"The best ever!" added Mary.

"I got a number of good snap-shots of the game," said Polly Vane, who was quite an amateur photographer. "I'll have the pictures developed and printed, and give each of you copies to take home."

"That will be splendid, Polly," answered Dave. Later on Dave received his set of pictures, and took them to Crumville, where he showed them to Jessie and the others with much pride.

"That contest was harder than the one on the gridiron," remarked Phil, when they were returning to Oak Hall in one of the big sleighs.

"Rockville meant to win," said Buster. "And it looked as if they would win, at first."

"They have a star player in Mallory," said Ben. "But one star doesn't make a team."

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story," began Shadow. "Once three fellows——" But then he broke off short, as a handful of soft snow thrown by Roger took him full in the mouth.

"Keep your stories for to-night, Shadow!" cried Dave. "Now for a song!" And then the crowd in the sleigh began singing at the top of their lungs.

It was assuredly a grand victory, and that evening the whole school celebrated, with bonfires, singing, and dancing. Dave was called on for a speech. Plum took part in the celebration, for he was not seriously injured.

"And now for the holidays and home!" said Dave, on the following Monday morning. "Just two weeks more of the grind, boys!"

"They'll soon slip by," said Phil.

"Dave, do you imagine that Merwell and Jasniff will return to Rockville?" continued the shipowner's son.

"I don't know—perhaps, after a while—when they think I will drop the charge against them."

"Perhaps they are too scared to come back," said Phil.

"They are bad eggs," murmured Dave. But how bad, he was still to learn. He was to meet Merwell and Jasniff again, and what that pair did to injure him and those he so dearly loved will be told in another volume of this series, to be entitled: "Dave Porter on Cave Island; or, A Schoolboy's Mysterious Mission." In that book we shall meet Dave and many others of our characters again, and learn the particulars of a happening at Crumville that was as dismaying as it was perplexing.

"Well, let us forget Merwell and Jasniff," said Roger. "Say, that hockey victory has made me feel two years younger."

"That and a letter he got from Laura," murmured Phil.

"Humph, as if I didn't see the letter you got from Belle Endicott," retorted the senator's son.

"Dave got a letter, too—from Jessie," went on Phil. "Perhaps——"

"Hi, you fellows, get through grinding, and come for a skate!" shouted Ben, bursting into the dormitory. "The ice was never better."

"That's the talk!" cried Dave, throwing down his Latin grammar. "First fellow to get his skates on gets a ginger snap!"

And off he ran, with the others at his heels. And here for the present we will say good-by to Dave Porter, his chums, and his rivals.

THE END

THE END

Dave Porter and His Rivals; or, The Chums and Foes of Oak Hall

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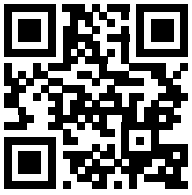

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