WARD HILL THE SENIOR

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Author: Everett T. Tomlinson

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Ward Hill *the* Senior

BY
EVERETT T. TOMLINSON
Author of
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The Blue and Buff Series
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Etc.

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PREFACE

A school has been very correctly termed a little world of itself. Within it the temptations and struggles and triumphs are as real as those in the larger world outside. They differ in form, not in character, and become for many a man the foundation upon which later success or failure has been built.

It is perhaps wise for me to explain that the boys whose lives in the Weston school have been outlined in this book are "real" boys, and that every fact recorded actually occurred much as it has been described. If the results of the struggles and successes shall prove to be a stimulus to other boys who may be facing similar problems, and if the failures shall serve the purpose of a warning

word and teach the younger readers what things are to be avoided and how they are to be overcome, the author will certainly feel well repaid for his labor.

Unfolding life is ever a marvelous sight, and the interest with which we follow those who are trending now the paths once familiar to us never fails those still young in heart while old in years.

The recently developed interest in the work and lives of the younger people, is one of the marvels of this closing century. Greater than any of the discoveries of science, nobler than any of the great movements of the times is that renewed interest in the possibilities of the young life all about us, undeveloped it is true, but filled with the promise of power.

So many times our eyes are opened when it is too late to behold the vision. We may preach, and warn, and urge, and exhort, and scold, but nothing will take the place of actual experience. It is natural for each young heart to wish to learn and test life for itself.

However, I am not without hope, that the friendship and sympathy for Ward Hill and his friends may not be entirely without their unspoken lessons, and that before my readers there may arise for each one the vision of the man who is yet to be.

When all our platitudes are ignored or forgotten it is still true that youth is the seed-sowing time, and what a man sows, as well as the measure of his sowing, determines the character and the abundance of the harvest he will reap. We do well, then, to strive at least to scatter the seed at the time when the seed can be sown. The soils may vary, the seed is the same.

I trust that the interest, the pride, the sorrow, and pleasure which the writer has felt, as he has followed the courses of these boys, may in a degree, at least, be shared by his readers, and also may not be entirely without their effects in inspiring a desire to profit by their examples.

Elizabeth, N. J.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

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CHAPTER I
WAITING

The little station at Rockford was the scene of the customary bustle and stir which appear in most country villages just before the arrival of the "afternoon train." The village idlers were assembled for the little break which came in the dull routine of the day. The shrill whistle of the approaching locomotive always brought a slight thrill in the hearts of these stolid watchers, as if something in the stir of the great region beyond their horizon was coming, if but for a moment; and when the train departed, so long as the cloud of smoke and dust remained behind it, it served to quicken the dull minds by the suggestions of the possibilities that lay in that unknown world so far away.

Doubtless the village idlers (the busy people of the little town had another term by which they called them) never realized that it was their imaginations to which the arrival of the morning and afternoon trains appealed, and yet it was that very faculty which was daily stirred, and for the arousing of which they waited with all the eagerness with which a toper is said to long for his morning dram. There was the excitement of waiting for the locomotive's shriek and the first puff of smoke that marked the approach of the cars in the distance, and this was followed by the departure, which left them in a state of curiosity and suspense, not entirely unlike that which the old Greek dramas imparted to the breathless audiences that followed them in their vast theatres. Then too there were the few passengers who were soon to leave Rockford, as well as the people who were waiting for the arrival of friends; and as a matter of course the ever-present small boy was very much in evidence, and as he "walked the rails" or leaped across the track, his delight seemed to be increased by the warning word which some one of the assembly occasionally gave him. At frequent intervals some farmer would drive up to the pen which joined the freight house, and with

ungentle hands roughly push out the calves he had brought in his great wagon-box, and compel them to join the bleating herd soon to be carried away to the great city. Their piteous cries could be constantly heard by the waiting people, but they attracted little attention, although some occasionally expressed their disgust and anger at the brutal methods, which are all too common, of supplying the toiling people of the great cities with their meat. The thoughts of the coming train however, which now as usual was twenty minutes behind time, did not apparently permit any one long to dwell upon the sufferings, present or prospective, of the brute creation. They were all too eager for the "afternoon train" to come.

Among those who were waiting was Ward Hill. Apparently he was taking but little interest in what was going on about him. He nodded or quietly responded to the greetings he received from the waiting people, but that was all. Back and forth along the gravel path which led across the country road to the station, he walked, but he seldom took his eyes from the distant bend in the road where the smoke of the coming locomotive, he was well aware, would first appear. For Ward was expecting a friend to arrive by that same "afternoon train." Early that morning he had received a telegram, a most unusual experience in his life. Even now he could feel the thrill as he tore open the yellow envelope and read the words:

Am coming on afternoon train. Meet me at the station. SPECK.

Once more he took the message from his pocket and re-read it. He smiled as he placed it again in his coat and a softer expression came over his face. However the other boys in that far-away Weston school might feel toward him, Speck, or John Hobart, as his name had appeared in the catalogue, at least was true to him.

"Dear old Speck," thought Ward, as a vision of the school and his experiences there in the preceding year rose before his mind. And yet it was evident that the recollection was not entirely pleasing. To Ward it had largely been a year of failure. He thought of his own high hopes when he had entered, and then the picture of his gradual but sure descent could not be forgotten. How he had neglected his work and been drawn into the company of those who were no credit to the school, to their parents, or to themselves! How he had failed at the very time when he had been most eager to show what he could do! He had won no prize, had failed in the final examinations, and by his one attempt to do right, had incurred the anger of "the fellows," and at last had departed from Weston feeling very like an outcast. The bright spots had been the friendship of Jack Hobart,

and the strong confidence which Mr. Crane, the teacher of Latin, had expressed in his ability to recover himself and in a measure make good the time he had lost. All summer long that final interview with Mr. Crane had been his inspiration, and Ward had worked faithfully in his endeavor to make up the work he had lost.

There had been times when he had felt that he must give it all up. The days when his friend Henry Boyd and some of his companions had come for him to go with them sailing down the bay and out along the shore of the ocean, which he could see every morning from the window of his room in his father's house, had been the most difficult for him, but somehow he had roused himself and kept steadily at his task. Then too, there had been days when the sun had been almost like a ball of fire, and the very air he breathed had seemed almost like the hot breath of a furnace, and it had required the exertion of all his will power to continue at his studies. And will power had never been Ward Hill's strongest point.

His father had not spoken to him all summer long concerning his work, for he had gently informed Ward, at the close of his disastrous year at Weston, that the future lay entirely with him. He was willing to do his utmost for the boy whom he loved, but he never should insist now upon his return. If he made up his work and desired to go on, he would sacrifice and do his utmost for him, but as for sending him when he himself had no desire to go–that was an impossibility.

Ward had felt the justice of his father's words, but his heart had been none the less hungry for the words of encouragement which were not spoken. He little realized how difficult it had been for his father to remain silent, and with what tender solicitude he had watched the course of his only boy; but Mr. Hill had been governed largely by the advice of his friend, Dr. Gray, the head of the Weston school, who had keenly realized the crisis which had come in the lad's life. The issues of life have always to be settled by us alone, and all the advice and sympathy of the very best of our friends can never take the place of that decision and exertion which must come, if ever success is to be won, from the individual soul itself.

And Ward had done his best. All summer long he had kept steadily at his task. An occasional letter from Mr. Crane had given him some encouragement at the time when he had needed it most; for there was no man whom he respected more and none, with the single exception of his own father–whom Ward, in spite of his failures, dearly loved–for whom he cherished a stronger feeling of affection. After all, perhaps Ward Hill was learning what we all come to know sooner or later, that there is no such thing as a genuine love which does not have a feeling of deep respect as its basis.

And yet what a summer it had been! It had brought almost no pleasure to him. The other boys had been free to come and go as they chose, but for Ward

there was only the steady grind of work–work which was all unnecessary he knew, for if he had only been reasonably faithful to his duties in the school, he too might have had the summer to spend as every vacation ought to be spent. For him there had been no sailing parties, no fishing trips, nothing but the hard and steady work. Even his friend Henry Boyd had soon let him alone when he saw that Ward was not inclined to join with his companions in the sports of the summer days.

Ward had been almost inclined to blame his friend for his neglect, although he well knew he was himself the only one at fault; but then that is a tendency which seems to be in the hearts of us all. It is almost always some one else who is at fault, we fondly believe, for our own shortcomings and failures. Few of us have the moral courage to look squarely at ourselves and to call everything by its proper name. However, Ward had not cherished any ill will, and perhaps smarting under the sense of his failures, had preferred to be let alone.

He glanced up at the pastures that stretched away beyond the station at Rockford. How the grass had withered and curled beneath the influence of the hot August sun! A fitting picture, he thought, of his own summer vacation. All his plans had been thwarted and every hope blasted by the failure he had made at Weston. The fields all parched and sere seemed something like his own life. And Ward felt quite like a youthful misanthrope, only it is likely he had never heard that word used, or never had thought of its meaning.

But July had gone and the most of August had now passed. The time when he must return to Weston, if he returned at all, would soon be at hand. And Ward Hill had not yet fully decided that question. There were times when he thought he certainly would go back and redeem himself, but when he thought of the unpopularity which had overtaken him near the close of the year, and of what he must face if he should return, his heart almost failed him, and it seemed to the troubled boy as if he never could enter Weston again. The only source of comfort he had was the knowledge that the work at last had been completed and he felt reasonably sure of his ability to pass the examination in which he had failed, and now could go on with his class in case he decided to enter the school again.

His thoughts were interrupted by the distant whistle of the engine, and the far-away cloud of smoke and dust proclaimed the approach of the train.

In a moment signs of life began to appear about the little station. The man who for years had carried the mails picked up the mail pouch and approached the place where he knew by long experience the mail car would stop. The station-master put on his cap, his sole badge of office, the small boys ceased from their antics, those who were to leave Rockford gathered up their bags and bundles, and all came out from the station and stood waiting for the approaching train.

Ward too was thoroughly interested now, and took his stand a little apart from the crowd. On came the rumbling cars, gradually slackening their speed, and at last directly in front of him they came to a rest, the locomotive still puffing as though to add its part to the little station's excitement.

And there was Jack, standing upon the platform and gazing eagerly about him for his friend. In a moment he spied him, and flinging his traveling bag before him upon the ground, he leaped lightly from the platform and made a dash for Ward.

In a moment he had flung his arm about the neck of his friend and was shaking him eagerly by the hand. Ward, who was a somewhat reserved lad and never very demonstrative in his displays of affection, instead of feeling somewhat abashed by the exuberance of his friend, was greatly touched, and for a moment his eyes were filled with tears. Jack was so different from all the boys he had ever known. No matter what he might say or do, no one could take any exception to him.

"I say, Ward," said Jack eagerly, "this is the best sight my poor old eyes have looked upon all summer. You don't know how I have looked forward to this day and how glad I am to see you."

"And I am just as glad to see you," said Ward, returning the pressure of his friend's hand.

"Glad? Well, I should say! That's a fine word to use in welcoming your long-lost friend and brother after he's taken the dirtiest ride he ever took in his life, and all just to look into your eyes again. Glad? Why don't you say you're teetotally overcome, so to speak. Say you're wild with joy and you 'would that your tongue could utter the thoughts that arise in you.' Isn't that what the doctor used to say was the proper thing in our English class?"

"I believe so," replied Ward, laughing more heartily than he had all summer.

"Well, say it then! It seems to me you're trying to put it that you would that your tongue could stammer the thoughts that surge up in your massive brain. Why the very calves of Rockford are glad I've come," he added, as there came a louder blast of lamenting from the pen. "I say, Ward, what are they there for? Are they calves which you have specially fattened up for the return of the prodigal?"

"They're fatter now than they will ever be again, I'm afraid," said Ward smiling.

"It was mighty kind of you to have a whole yard full waiting for me. I didn't expect to have but one. But, then, that's always the way with Ward Hill. He's capable of doing a heap more than he ever lets on. But I say, old fellow, you don't know how glad I am to see you. It's driven every freckle on my face out of sight."

And the impulsive Speck again held his friend out at arm's length and gave him a look in which all his boyish love seemed to find expression.

Ward picked up his friend's traveling bag and together the boys started up the quaint winding street of the old village, on their way to his home, Jack meanwhile chattering on of all his summer experiences, and of what he had heard from the other boys.

"Here we are!" he shouted as they came in sight of Ward's home. "It's just the same, only better than it was. Hold on a minute, Ward," he added as they stopped by the gate. "I've got one thing to say to you, and I want to say it right now. You're going back to Weston, aren't you? Your letters haven't been very satisfactory, and I must know. Tell me. Tell me, quick!"

"I don't know," replied Ward evasively. "We'll talk about that later. Here's mother waiting for you."

The boys turned quickly and walking rapidly up the flower-bordered path were warmly welcomed by Mrs. Hill, and then at once entered the house.

CHAPTER II
WARD HILL'S DECISION

After dinner that same evening Henry Boyd came over and joined them, and for a long time the three boys sat on the vine-shielded piazza and talked about the experiences of the preceding year at Weston. At times their laughter could have been heard far up the street, for Jack Hobart was not one to permit quiet long to reign where he was.

Ward's father and mother, who had not remained with the boys after they saw that the conversation had turned to school topics, were none the less rejoiced at the change which the coming of Jack wrought in their boy. His laugh was the merriest of the three, and for a time it seemed as if the gloom which had rested over Ward all summer long had disappeared.

"I've heard from lots of the fellows," Jack was saying, "and I can tell you we're going to have the best year at Weston we have ever seen. Why, even Tim Pickard is coming back."

"Tim?" said Henry quickly, "Why, I thought he had been expelled and never could come back again."

"Oh, Tim's made it all up with Dr. Gray. He's seen the error of his ways and wants to turn over a new leaf. He's promised all sorts of things and has been studying hard with a tutor. I really think Tim means what he says too. He's

not such a bad fellow, you know, after all. He's had too much money and his mother's dead, you know, and so there was no one to look after him besides his father, and he was too much interested in stocks and things to give any attention to his own flesh and blood. I believe he has written some such stuff to the doctor and promises to do his part too in looking after Tim. He's even said he'd see to it that Tim shall have only a dollar a week for spending money. Poor Tim!" added Jack with a laugh.

"If he'll only keep it up," said Henry soberly.

"Yes, if he'll only keep it up," repeated Jack. "That's the rub, I know. Tim means what he says now; no doubt about that. He's even going to take a room alone down at Ma Perrins', so that he'll be out of the way of temptation and me." And Jack's merry laugh rang out at the words. "Honestly, I don't know about his holding out though. I have my own opinion about that, but I don't mean to prophesy evil of any fellow. And then Tim's going to have some things in his favor you must remember. For example, he'll be out from under the influence of your humble servant, and that's no small thing, I'd have you know."

A silence for a brief time followed Jack's words. Ward felt that Jack in his words about Tim Pickard was really taking that means to inform him of some of the problems which would face him upon his return to Weston. That is, if he should return, for Ward was not yet decided as to what he would do.

Tim Pickard had been his most bitter enemy. Even now he could see his coarse face and hear his brutal laugh. Could he ever go back and face him? The very peacefulness of Rockford came out just then the stronger by way of contrast with the difficulties he would have to face in the school. The croaking of the distant frogs rose on the air, the fireflies were flitting about in the yard, and the soft mellow light of the moon was beginning to appear. It was the very perfection of quiet and peace. Here there were no "Tangs," no Tim Pickards, no enmities and jealousies; while the presence of his father and mother seemed to him like a shield from everything that was evil. It was so much more easy to keep out of trouble in Rockford than it was in Weston. And yet Ward knew that both his father and mother were intensely eager for him to return to the school and redeem himself. Which was better for him, to go back and face all the possible temptations and difficulties of the school life, or to remain where he was and be free from them all? In his heart Ward knew the answer. To remain in Rockford would be virtually playing the part of a coward. He would not have to meet and struggle with certain forms of evil there, but it would be a confession that he was afraid. He would lose more than he would gain, there could be no doubt as to that, but the struggle to decide was no easy matter.

Ward Hill had not yet learned the lesson that whether we do right or wrong depends far more upon ourselves than upon our surroundings. He might remain

away from all his troubles, and yet he would also stay away from all that would aid him also. At first Ward had pleaded that he might be permitted to go to some other school, but his father had been firm upon that point. He had told Ward that he would do his utmost and his best for him, but if the lad wished to go on with his studies it must be at Weston and no other place for the coming year. And Ward had realized the justice and truth of his father's demand, and had hot again urged his request.

"I say, fellows," said Jack, breaking in upon the silence, "whom do you suppose I saw this summer?"

"I can't imagine," said Henry. "Perhaps it was Big Smith."

"Good guess, Henry. It was that same and no other. Yes, sir; I was with my family up in the country, and it seems it was right where Big Smith lived, but I'd forgotten all about it, if I ever knew. Well, one day I was walking down the street of the city–it's a place about the size of Rockford, you know–and there I came upon his majesty as big as life, yes, as big as Big Smith. He made a great time over me, beat Ward's reception all to pieces, if he did have all the fatted calves in the country out to greet me upon my arrival."

"Was he the same at home that he was in Western?" inquired Ward.

"Yes, just the same, only different. He had the same pompous way with him, but I tell you, fellows, Big Smith isn't so bad after all. He's just one of those chaps that's been spoiled by living in a little place, where everybody thought he was a great man because he'd once been away to school. He'd never had a fair chance to size himself up, so to speak, and when he got with a crowd of fellows he didn't know just what to make of it when they didn't all fall down before him."

Jack suddenly stopped, realizing then for the first time what he had said. Both of his companions were from a little place too, which he had just declared was not unlike Big Smith's home. Perhaps they too had suffered somewhat from the same cause which had brought about Big Smith's unpopularity. Ward, at least, realized in a measure the truth of Jack's words as applied to himself, and he felt his cheeks burn. But the dusk hid him from the sight of his companions and he said nothing.

"You know, of course, you fellows," said Jack, striving to break a part of the force of his own words, as he felt rather than saw that an unfortunate turn in the conversation had arisen, "that I don't mean that Big Smith's ever had any such homes as you have. He's had all the disadvantages without the advantages you have here, and you have all the advantages without his disadvantages. I don't think you fellows half appreciate what you've got here. But Big Smith's a horse of another color. And yet I never saw such a change come over a fellow in my life as there has in him. I couldn't hardly believe my own ears when I heard him talk."

"Why, what did he say?" said Ward quietly.

"Well, he told me about a talk he had with Mr. Crane before he left Weston, or it may have been a talk Mr. Crane had with him–I'm not sure which it was. It seems that Mr. Crane sent for him and they had a long confab. Mr. Crane got him to talking about himself, and finally led him on until he had expressed his opinion about some of the other fellows too. Finally, after he'd told of some things one of the other boys had done, Mr. Crane turned to him and said in that abrupt way of his, 'Smith, that fellow is making a fool of himself, isn't he?' Big Smith fell into the trap and I can hear his graveyard voice as he said, 'Yes, he is, and a big one too.' Upon that Mr. Crane jumped up out of his chair and looking Big Smith squarely in the face said, 'Well, Smith, that's just what you are doing too!' And then he turned and walked straight out of the room. Big Smith laughed while he was telling me all about it, and said he was never cut up about anything so in all his life, but he'd been thinking of it all summer, and had about made up his mind that Mr. Crane had the right of it. Why, fellows, I almost gasped for breath. Think of Big Smith getting off anything like that. It doesn't seem possible to me even now. Why, if Big Smith can reform there's a chance for Tim Pickard, and there must be for me."

"Then he's going back to Weston, is he?" inquired Henry.

"Yes, sir, and he says he's going to make Ward and you just bestir yourselves or he will come up to you."

"That won't be very much of a task, so far as I'm concerned," said Henry; "but if he overtakes Ward, he'll have to rise somewhat earlier in the morning than he has been accustomed to do."

Ward said nothing. He was thinking of that conversation Jack had reported as having taken place between Big Smith and Mr. Crane. Perhaps he himself was the very one of whom Big Smith had made the remark that he had 'been making a fool of himself.' And it was true; that was the worst thing about it. He had played the fool, for a lad of any brains at all would never have done as he had, he thought bitterly.

"Did you see Pond? You know he lives in the same place in which Big Smith does," said Henry.

"No, I didn't see him," replied Jack; "but I hear he's off working somewhere. At least that's what Big Smith said. I hope he'll come back; he's one of the very best fellows in the Weston school."

"That he is," said Ward eagerly; "but he's not coming back before Christmas, if he does then."

"Why not? Have you heard from him?" inquired Jack.

"Yes, he's written me two or three times. He's the only fellow I've heard from, except Jack here and Mr. Crane, though he isn't exactly a fellow."

"Oh, yes he is. Mr. Crane's one of the best fellows I ever met, if he does call me up and set me down hard in the Latin room," said Jack with a laugh. "What did Pond write you?"

"He wrote me that he'd have to stay out for the first term and try to earn some money. His younger brother is coming though."

"That will be Big Pond and Little Pond then," said Jack. "I wonder whether the fresh Pond is as good a ball player as Big Pond is? We want to fix the Burrs this fall."

"I don't believe he's as much good as that," said Ward, "because his brother has written me that he's a slight, delicate little chap, and he wants me to take him under my wing till he himself comes back."

"Couldn't be under better, my boy, couldn't be under better," said Jack. "But I don't want his coming to interfere with one of the plans I've made."

"What's that?" inquired Ward.

"Why, I want you to room with me. You see, I'll be left all alone now that Tim's going down to Ma Perrins. I need your feathers to cover me a good deal more than Little Pond ever could."

Jack spoke eagerly and his strong desire was clearly apparent in his words. Ward was deeply touched, but after a brief hesitation, he said slowly: "No, Jack, I can't do it. I hope you don't feel hurt, or think it's because I don't want to. But I've been thinking it all over, as we've been sitting here. At first I didn't see how I could go back to Weston, anyhow. I thought I'd go up just to pass my examinations and clear up last year's work, but since you've been talking here I've decided to go back, and pitch into the work and do my level best."

"Good for you, Ward Hill!" said Jack eagerly, springing up from the steps of the piazza upon which he had been seated, and slapping his friend delightedly upon the back. "Good for you! Why, do you know that's just what I came up here for? I was so afraid you weren't going to come that I just couldn't stand it, so I put straight for Rockford. Of course I'm sorry you aren't willing to room with your humble servant, though I don't know as I can find it in my heart to blame you for that. The other thing's so good though, that I'm not going to shed a tear. We'll do up the Burrs in fine style now."

"Hear me out," said Ward quietly. "I think I'd better go straight back just as I was, and if Henry here doesn't mind, I'd like to go in with him and take the same old room in West Hall and make a fresh start. If Henry doesn't feel like doing that, that will change matters a bit."

"I'm only too glad to do it," said Henry warmly. He said nothing about Ward's declining Jack's offer for he thought he understood exactly how he felt about it. He was so rejoiced over Ward's decision to return that he was eager to do all in his power to aid him now.

"That fixes it, then," said Jack enthusiastically. "Come, fellows, let's let off one of the school yells!" The three arose and gave the Weston cheer together.

The noise brought Ward's father and mother to the door, and as they appeared Jack shouted: "Ward's going back with us, Mrs. Hill! He's going to room with Henry and we'll whip the Burrs and lead the class and do all sorts of things!"

The Hill household was a happy one that night. Ward's decision had wonderfully pleased his father and mother, and he himself was surprised at the relief which had come to him. Better than ever before he realized that it meant a severe struggle for him, but the present weight at least was lifted from his heart, and in the joy which comes from facing and overcoming a difficult problem, Ward Hill was happier than he had been for many weeks past.

On the following day the three boys had a sail on the bay, and then the "afternoon train" carried Jack out of Rockford.

"Never mind fattening up any more calves for me!" he called from his place on the rear platform of the last car. "It's all right and I'll see you in a few days at Weston!"

Two weeks later, just as the sun disappeared behind the western hills, Ward and Henry alighted from the coach in Weston as it stopped before the entrance to West Hall, and running lightly up the stairway, soon entered "seventeen," the same room in which they had begun their experiences of the preceding year.

CHAPTER III

MR. CRANE'S EXAMINATION

Along with all the excitement attending the return of the boys to the school there was a feeling of depression in Ward's heart which he could not entirely shake off. The walls of the room seemed more bare than they did in the preceding year, and the undefined dread of meeting his former companions pressed heavily upon him, now that he found himself once more in the old familiar place and under the necessity of facing not only them but himself as well.

The cloud which had rested upon him when he left Weston, while it had never disappeared, had nevertheless been somewhat dim and hazy when he had been away from it all, and had had the presence of his father and mother to strengthen him; but now he was alone, and all his former feelings returned. How long it would be before he would see Rockford again! And what experiences

were likely to be his before the fall term was ended.

Heavy as his heart was, however, Ward did not refer to his feelings, but busied himself in arranging the few articles of furniture which comprised their possessions, and soon the room took on its old and familiar appearance. Up the stairs and through the halls the other boys were rushing, and the sound of the heavy trunks as they were deposited in the rooms could be continually heard. Their own door was closed and no one entered to disturb them, a fact over which Ward secretly rejoiced, for he was dreading far more than he cared to express, his first meeting with his fellows.

"There," said Henry at last, "I don't see that we can do anything more to-night. I think we'd better go over and report to the doctor now, don't you?"

"Yes," said Ward gloomily. "It's got to be done, and the sooner it's over the better."

Henry glanced keenly at his friend, but made no further response, and in a few moments the boys left West Hall and went over to Dr. Gray's house. The reception room seemed to be almost filled with boys and their parents, and Ward was surprised as he noted that many were evidently new-comers.

As he took his seat he busied himself for a time in carefully observing his companions and it was not long before he had satisfied himself that among the new arrivals he would find some who would be congenial to himself. His thoughts and observations were both interrupted by the entrance of the principal, who at once advanced and shook the hands of Ward and Henry, and after they had delivered the letter they had brought, they quickly departed.

As they came out again into the broad, shaded street, Ward determined to carry out a plan he had formed, which was nothing less than to seek out Mr. Crane at once, and ascertain when his examination upon the work in which he had failed was to take place. He said nothing concerning it to Henry, however, and merely remarking that he would soon be back in the room, turned and abruptly left his chum.

As he walked slowly over toward East Hall, the building over which Mr. Crane had charge and in which he had his room, his feeling of anxiety increased. Perhaps after all he would be unable to pass his examination. He had worked faithfully all summer long and had felt confident when he left home that he could easily make up the lost work, but now that the testing time had come all his fears returned. There was one thing certain any way, he thought, and that was if he should succeed in passing Mr. Crane's tests now, never again would he be found in such a predicament. He thought again of the teacher's words about its being so much more easy to keep up than to catch up.

"He's right," said Ward aloud. "He's right. He always is. I almost wish Mr. Crane would let me room with him. I think I could do right there so much more

easily."

He smiled as he thought of the suggestion and realized how absurd it was. After all, if he could room with the man whom he so highly respected and loved, would he be any better for it? It would be Mr. Crane's "right" and not his. No, he must brace himself to meet his problems himself. Ward Hill's future lay in Ward Hill's hands.

Just then he came around the bend in the path and East Hall was right before him. From every window a light was streaming, and it was evident that there was to be no lack of boys at Weston this year. Now and then a burst of laughter could be heard, and occasionally the words of a song rose on the still air. The building seemed to be teeming with life and spirits, and somehow in the presence of it all Ward felt a wave of lonesomeness sweeping over him. The East Hall boys all had good rooms, plenty of money, and no lack of friends. His own room seemed to him bare and chill; money he knew he must use sparingly; and as for friends, he did not know whether any besides Jack and Henry were left for him among the boys of the Weston school.

He was now by the stone steps which led up to the first hall, and Mr. Crane's room was the first one on the left. Summoning all his courage, Ward resolutely approached the door and rapped.

It was opened by Mr. Crane himself, and as he quickly recognized the lad standing before him, he held forth his hand and said cordially: "Why, Hill, I'm delighted to see you. Come in."

Ward entered and seated himself in the chair indicated by his teacher. He was in almost the very same place where he had been ten weeks before, and all the memories of that scene came pressing back upon him. The recollection was not over-pleasing, and the troubled boy was hardly able to speak. He had thought many times of the very words he would use when he first saw Mr. Crane again, but they were gone from him now.

Mr. Crane, apparently not noticing Ward's embarrassment, began to speak of the experiences of the summer.

"I took a long tramp among the Northern hills," he said. "It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience to me. I was alone the most of the time, and more than once I wished that you were with me. I think you would have enjoyed it, and I knew that I did."

Ward listened as Mr. Crane went on with his descriptions, and for a moment almost forgot the purpose of his visit. Soon it all came back, however, and unable to restrain himself longer, he broke out with the words:

"I know I should have enjoyed it, Mr. Crane, but I didn't have just that kind of a summer. I spent every forenoon in going over my work. I only had two days off all summer long, and yet I've not felt so bad as I thought I should. At least

I don't now, for I think I can pass up on my examinations; that is, if they're no harder than those you gave at the end of the year."

"They'll be no harder," replied Mr. Crane, with a smile. "Now tell me about the work you've done."

And Ward entered into a detailed account of all the studying he had done during the summer vacation.

Mr. Crane listened attentively, occasionally interrupting to ask some question that occurred to him, and at last when the troubled lad had finished his story, he quietly said:

"And now you think that you can pass any examination I can give you on the work?"

"Hardly that," said Ward quickly; "but I do think, Mr. Crane, that I can pass any examination which isn't any tougher–I mean harder–than the one you gave the class last June."

"Very well, Hill, I shall take your word for it. You ought to know as much about it as any one, and if you think you understand the work, I'm satisfied."

"I don't understand you," faltered Ward. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, Hill. All I want of an examination is to satisfy myself that a boy can go on with his class. From what you have told me of your studying, and from what I know of you, I am satisfied you can do that, and that is all I want. Of course I shall expect good work from you, Hill, and you'll not disappoint me."

"Why, Mr. Crane," said Ward starting up from his seat. "And I'm not to take an examination? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"I never expected anything like that," said Ward much moved. "I can't tell you how much I thank you, Mr. Crane. It's not that I'm afraid of the examination," he added hastily, "but I never even dreamed of your doing any such thing."

"I trust you are not too much disappointed. If you are, I can very readily arrange to meet your wishes," replied Mr. Crane smilingly. "I've told you, however, just how I feel about it, and if I'm content, why, it seems to me you ought to be."

"I am! I am!" said Ward hastily, as he bade Mr. Crane good-night and departed for his room in West Hall.

How different everything appeared now! The very stars in the heavens seemed to share in his joy. The songs and laughter that came through the open windows of the great dormitory behind him now seemed to voice his own feelings. In his eagerness he began to run and as he entered West Hall he mounted the steps two at a time and burst into his room.

"Oh, Henry—-"

He suddenly stopped as he saw that there were three boys besides Henry

in the room. One was Jack, and in a moment that impulsive lad was welcoming him.

"I say, Ward," said Jack, "I'm just in. I didn't stop over in East Hall longer than to leave my grip before I put straight for your room. Behold, I looked for you and you were not. You've been looking me up, I know. That's just what you've been doing. I don't believe I'd have come back to Weston if you hadn't come!"

"I've been over to see Mr. Crane and fix up my conditions," said Ward.

"Got 'em all fixed?"

"Yes, every one."

"Good for you, Ward! Good for you! Oh, I say, I haven't introduced the new fellows to, you. This," he added turning to a well-grown lad, evidently of about their own age, "this is Lucius Berry. He's going to enter our class, and from what I hear he's going to make you hustle to get the valedic."

Ward greeted the new member of the class cordially, and then Jack said, "This is Pond's baby brother."

The lad flushed at Jack's words, and Ward hastened to take him by the hand and assure him of a warm welcome. He was a slight, delicate boy, and while he bore a striking resemblance to his older brother, of whom almost every boy in the Weston school was very fond, it was also evident that he was not nearly so strong and well as he. Ward wondered that he should ever have been permitted to leave home, and as he thought of the experiences through which the sensitive lad was bound to pass if he remained through the year, his own heart went out to him and he resolved that so far as it lay within his power he would do his utmost for him.

For a half-hour the boys sat and talked together. The prospects of the nine, the new members of the school, the rooms they were to have, were all gone over, and Ward in the new joy which had come to him at Mr. Crane's words was thoroughly happy.

"Little Pond," as Pond's younger brother was at once dubbed, explained that his brother expected to return at the opening of the following term and that meanwhile he was working in the home village store to secure the means.

"He's got the best kind of stuff in him!" said Jack enthusiastically. "Talk about money giving a fellow his place in the Weston school! Why, Pond's the most popular boy that's been here in years. I think I'd be glad to change places with him myself, that is, if he'd give me his brains in the bargain. Just imagine me if you can, calling out, 'Yes, this calico is five cents a yard. Those eggs are fresh, for Mrs. Green brought them, and she never has any but the best, you know. Clothespins? Yes, I think we have a few, and I'll measure you off a few yards of this cotton cloth if you say the word.'"

The boys all laughed as Jack went through the motions as if he were a clerk in a country store and were measuring off the goods some good woman had decided to purchase. "But I say, fellows, it's hard for the nine, though, with Pond gone. But Berry here is a good player. He was the captain of the nine in the school he came from before he learned of the advantages of the Weston school. There only can you find such fellows as Jack Hobart and Ward Hill, and such teachers as Blake and Big Smith, for I'm of the opinion that Dr. Gray will call Big Smith into the faculty this fall. He'll have to do it, or Big Smith will fire the doctor."

Jack thrust his thumbs into his hip pockets and strutted about the room as he talked, and to Ward his manner and bearing seemed irresistibly droll. But then, Ward Hill was in a mood to enjoy almost anything that night.

"I say, Berry," said Jack stopping suddenly before the new boy, "your name's Lucius, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Berry. "I've told you so once or twice already."

"So you have. So you have," said Jack. "But somehow, I forget so easily. Why, I've actually been known to forget the case and gender of a noun in Mr. Crane's class, haven't I, Ward? Lucius, Lucius," he added as if he were puzzled by the name. "I have it now. You shall be no more Lucius. From this time forth your name shall be Luscious. Luscious Berry! Oh, what a name!"

All the boys laughed heartily at Berry's new name, Berry himself joined good-naturedly in the laugh as he said: "I thought I'd shaken that name off when I came to Weston. It's the very same name they gave me in the other school."

"Jack," said Ward suddenly, "has Tim Pickard come back?"

"Yes," said Jack, sobered in a moment. "Yes, Tim's here. He's going to room alone at Ma Perrins', you know, this year."

Ward's face clouded and he knew from the change in Jack's manner that something was wrong, though he could not determine just what it was. The fun, however, was gone, and in a few minutes Jack rose and said: "Come on, Luscious, we'll have to go over to our room. He's to room with me, you know," he added turning to Ward. "He's come all properly recommended and all that sort of thing, so I've agreed to take him in. Good-night, Henry. Good-night, Puddle–a little Pond's a puddle, isn't it? Good-night, Ward. Your vertebrae are in their proper tension I hope, and your upper lip is sufficiently rigid, my dear young friend, I trust."

The boys were gone, but Jack's last words were not lost upon Ward. He understood his friend so well that he was satisfied Jack knew of some coming trial for him. And Ward tried to prepare himself for the trouble which he feared was soon coming, although he had slight conception that night of how soon it

was to come.

CHAPTER IV
A CALL FOR HELP

"I'm going down to Mr. Blake's room a minute," said Henry when Jack and his new room-mate had departed. "I sha'n't be gone long."

"All right," replied Ward, as he turned to talk with the younger Pond, who had remained as if he had something he wished to speak about. "Well, Pond," he added, after he had seated himself near him, "how do you like Weston?"

"I think I shall like it after I've become better acquainted. Of course, I've heard my brother tell so many things about it, that it doesn't seem exactly like a new place to me. And he's told so many things too about the boys, that it almost seems to me as if I had always known them."

"I'm afraid you haven't always heard good things then, if he's told you about the boys. I'm sure the list of good things wouldn't be very long in my case."

"He told me he liked you better than any boy in the school," said young Pond eagerly. "I never heard him say one word against you, except that you didn't work very hard. He declared he never would have been able to lead the class if you had put in half the time he did, on your studies."

"That's kind of him," said Ward laughingly, although he was touched by the evident earnestness of the boy before him. "Is this the first time you've ever been away from home?"

"Yes. And I fear I'm going to be homesick too."

"Oh, you mustn't mind that!" said Ward as philosophically as if such feelings were an every-day matter in his life. "You'll get over that all right."

"That's what my brother said. And he told me too, that I should need some one to look after me a bit and help to keep me out of the clutches of the 'Tangs,' or some such things. I don't know just what he meant, only he said if I would come to you, that you would help me till he came back next term."

For a moment Ward was silent. The "Tangs" had not once been mentioned during the summer, and both Henry and Jack had been silent concerning them. But Ward, although he did not know what course Jack would follow, had decided that for himself safety lay only in breaking with them. But his heart was not

entirely free from fears or misgivings when he thought of the possible consequences for himself. And here was Pond's younger brother coming to him with the utmost confidence for protection against the very boys whom he most feared himself. He glanced again at the lad before him. What a slight, delicate little fellow he was. And yet what a bright, eager expression he had. He would have no difficulty in his classes; Ward felt certain of that; but what would he do if the boys began to trouble him?

"You come to me, Pond, whenever you're in trouble, and I'll do my best for you," he finally said, unable to resist the unspoken as well as the spoken appeal of the slight boy before him.

"Thank you! Thank you!" replied Pond, rising from his chair and departing just as Henry returned.

It was late on the following morning when Ward and Henry started to go to the dining hall, and they met many of the boys who already had eaten their breakfast. Ward secretly felt relieved at the fact, for the meeting with the boys was what troubled him most. He had been in trouble when the preceding year had closed, and unpopularity was something of which Ward Hill stood in greater fear than of anything else. How he would be received now was the constantly pressing question, but its solution would soon come, for "chapel" would bring all the boys together, and he would not long be left in doubt as to his position among his fellows then.

The chapel bell was ringing when Ward and Henry hastily left the Hall, or "hash house" as the building was commonly known, and they hastened back to their rooms to secure their books before they ran swiftly up the walk which led to the chapel. Even then there was the usual delay on the part of some of the students, and Jack Hobart was leading a band of delinquents as the bell began to give out the sharp short strokes that indicated the end of its summons.

"String out there! String out, you fellows!" called Jack, as he caught sight of Ward and Henry, meanwhile striving hard to button his collar and adjust his tie.

This time Ward understood the meaning of the hail far better than when he had first heard it in the preceding year, and ceasing to run, he approached the building more slowly, thus giving Jack and the other delinquents an opportunity to overtake them and secure their seats before the bell ceased to be rung and the doors were closed.

Their seats now were in the section which belonged to the seniors. Last year how he had looked up to the boys who occupied these seats. Ned Butler was there then, and others whom Ward had deeply respected. Was any one looking up to him as he had looked up to that marvelous class which had been graduated in the preceding June? Just then he caught a glimpse of young Pond, who was

evidently far from feeling at his ease in the midst of the strange scene.

But Dr. Gray then arose and the low murmur which had filled the chapel became hushed as the exercises were begun. Then followed a talk from the doctor concerning the work of the year which lay before them, and Ward could not repress a smile as Jack Hobart looked solemnly at him and held up four fingers of one hand, thereby indicating that this was the fourth occasion on which he had listened to the same "lecture" from the good old man. However, the words were well worthy of repetition and Ward was soon interested and listened attentively. Directions were given the new boys concerning the rooms and places in which they were to report, and then each class was told what was to be expected of it on that day, and the boys arose and started toward the doors. Ward now knew that the testing time had come, and he would soon understand just what he had to expect from his old companions. Summoning all his resolution as he passed out, he saw Tim Pickard standing with a group of boys, and at once turned and approached him holding out his hand and endeavoring to appear calm and indifferent.

"Hello, Tim. Glad to see you back again."

Tim Pickard turned and looked insolently at Ward. There was not a gleam of recognition or pleasure expressed upon his face. He looked at Ward just a moment and then, ignoring the outstretched hand and the salutation alike, he turned again to the boys before him and resumed his conversation with them.

Ward's face flushed crimson, and at first he felt as if he could not control the feeling of anger which surged up in his heart. Who was Tim Pickard, that he should treat him in such a manner? Had he not been expelled from the school? Did not every fellow in the school know just what he was? Had any one forgotten the escapades of the coarse-fibred boy? Ward's heart sank quickly, however, when he thought of his own record in the preceding year. If Dr.. Gray was willing to receive Tim Pickard back into the school for another trial, who was he to complain? And how much better after all was he than Tim?

Ward caught the words "sneak" and "bootlick," which Tim had uttered as he had turned again to his companions, and realized then just what he would have to face. Tim Pickard's anger, the enmity of the "Tangs," and a series of petty annoyances which would be bound to follow him now perhaps all through the school year, must be met.

It seemed to the troubled boy as if every one in his class was against him, for he received but a friendly nod or a slight recognition as he hurried into the Latin room and took his old familiar place. Jack already was in the chair next to his and Ward at once perceived from the expression on his face that he was aware of the state of the feeling in the school.

"Never mind, Ward," he whispered, as his classmate took his seat; "just you

keep in mind what I told you about the condition of your vertebrae, and the region of your upper lip. It'll all come out right."

To do Ward Hill justice we must say that there was a feeling in his heart which did not promise to be altogether bad. It is true he was hurt and angry as he recognized what lay before him, perhaps more angry than hurt, but he was determined now not to be crushed, or "downed," as he termed it. Mr. Crane kept the class but a few moments, only long enough to assign lessons and to make a few general suggestions, and then dismissed them.

As they filed out of the room, Jack said: "Ward, will you come over to my room now?"

"No," replied Ward quietly. "I think I'll go over to West and get a little start in my work. If I'm to be valedic, you know, I must begin early." Ward smiled slightly as he spoke, but he could not entirely conceal the depression which now swept over him. "Never mind, Speck, don't worry about me," he quickly added as he saw the sympathy expressed upon his friend's face; "I'm going to come through it all right. I'm not for giving up yet, anyway. I'll come over to see you after a bit; but just now I think I'll go to my room."

"All right," said Jack heartily, evidently appreciating Ward's desire to be alone.

Ward walked slowly over toward West Hall. He felt as if nearly all his companions would be against him now. Tim Pickard, in spite of his well-known character, was still a good deal of a leader, and his wealth and success as an athlete added greatly to his power over the boys. He could not repress the wish that Doctor Gray had not permitted Tim to return, for he must have known what every boy in the Weston school thought of him, and must also have known that there was very slight prospect of Tim's ever advancing. But here he was, and Ward must face the conditions which were before him. There was to be no escape now.

He entered his room and at once began to study. It was difficult for him to hold himself to his work, but he succeeded in a measure, and when two hours later Henry entered, Ward had much of his work done. So far as his class work was concerned he could look forward with confidence to what was to come on the morrow.

Throughout the day Ward found that his only consolation was in busying himself in some work. When he went down to the boarding hall he had but little to say to his companions, and returned at once to his room.

The day somehow passed and after the evening meal, when he had seated himself before his study table to write his first letter home, Big Smith suddenly entered the room, and said:

"Why, Ward, I haven't seen you to speak to you before. Where have you

kept yourself?"

"I haven't been very far away," replied Ward with a smile.

His heart had never been drawn to the boy before him, but in times like the present even the friendship of Big Smith was not to be lightly cast aside. Ward Hill could endure anything better than the ill-will of his fellows.

"Well, I'm glad to see you," said Big Smith solemnly. "I sincerely trust you are going to do better this year than you did last."

"I hope so too," said Ward; "and I'm not without hope," he added solemnly, and striving to imitate exactly the tones Big Smith had used, "that you too will be able to improve."

"Let us hope so. Let us hope so. Doubtless there is room for us all. But, Ward, I'm not so much afraid of you as I am of Tim Pickard. I don't see why the doctor ever permitted him to return. I shouldn't, I'm sure of that."

Ward's face flushed and an angry retort rose upon his lips, but he restrained himself, and Big Smith continued:

"Yes, I confess, I'm not overmuch rejoiced over Tim's return. He's a good man for the nine, we all know that; but I fear he may be a disturbing element in the school. Not with me," he hastily added, "but I fear for you, Ward, I do, indeed."

Still Ward managed in some way to keep silent, though, as he afterward explained it, he never understood just how it was done.

"Even now," continued Big Smith, "I hear that Timothy is at work again. My brother informs me that he and some of his cronies have beguiled young Pond down on the ball ground and are tormenting him there."

"What? What's that, you say?" said Ward quickly, leaping from his seat as he spoke, and without waiting for his question to be answered he seized his hat and ran swiftly out of the room. Down the stairs he rushed, three steps at a jump, and out along the pathway that led to the ball ground.

One thought possessed him now–Little Pond was in trouble. Ward recalled his own promise to aid him, and now that the lad was suffering at the hands of Tim Pickard two feelings drove him on. One was his compassion for Pond and the other was his anger at Tim.

It was dusk, the sun having disappeared, but the darkness not as yet having settled over all. He ran swiftly forward and as he came near the ball ground he stopped as he heard a shout of laughter coming from that direction. It seemed to him he could hear Tim Pickard's voice above the others, but he did not stop to question as he again ran swiftly forward.

He soon came to the brow of the low hill that looked down upon the field. There he stopped for a moment and looked before him. He could see that four or five boys were there and there was something in the midst which at first he could not make out. Soon, however, he could see what it was. It was a baby carriage

and some one was lying strapped upon it.

"Look out now, gentlemen," he heard some one of the boys call. "We have here the finest specimen of the infant terrible ever yet seen. *Genus homo*, order—"

"Don't! Please don't!" Ward heard some one pleadingly say. The voice was that of young Pond and the other speaker he now knew was Tim Pickard.

The pleadings were not heeded, however, and with a rush the boys started with the baby carriage over the rough ground.

Again Ward could hear the pleadings of the frightened lad and the sound was more than he could bear. In an instant he started down the hillside at his highest speed and ran swiftly on toward the noisy group.

CHAPTER V
A WARNING

Ward had drawn near the group before his presence was discovered. The deepening dusk and the sheltered position of the ball ground had made the boys who were tormenting Little Pond almost reckless, so secure did they feel from detection. As a consequence he was close upon them before any one perceived him.

"Now shake the infant up! Bye, baby, bye! That's a good little boy. We'll give him a good ride, so we will!"

There was no mistaking that voice, it could be none other than Tim Pickard's, and Ward could see that he was holding the handle of the carriage and was preparing to make another rush with the unfortunate lad who lay stretched upon it.

"Look out! Look out!" called one of the boys suddenly, as he caught sight of the approaching form. "Some one's coming. Let's get out of this!"

In an instant Tim's companions scattered and fled in the darkness, while Tim himself looked about him in surprise, as if he were not yet able to account for the sudden departure of his friends.

Ward was close upon him now, and without hesitating an instant he rushed upon the tormentor of Little Pond with such force that he was sent headlong and rolled over and over upon the ground before he could regain his foothold.

Ward had not fully realized what he would have to meet in the struggle, for he had thought that he would be set upon by all the assembled mischief-makers

together; but the cry of Little Pond had banished all other thoughts from his mind, and he had gone recklessly to the aid of the lad. He had not counted at all upon the results which quickly followed.

As soon as Tim could recover himself he ran swiftly off in the darkness in the direction in which his companions had disappeared, and in a moment no one was left upon the scene except Ward and the lad, who still was lying fast bound and in an exceedingly uncomfortable position upon the top of the baby carriage.

Doubtless the fears in the heart of Tim and his companions had either exaggerated the number of those who were approaching, or they had thought some of the teachers were making a descent upon them, and in the latter event Tim most of all would have found a very serious problem to face.

At any rate, they had all disappeared so quickly that Ward could hardly believe at first that he was left alone. He waited a moment to see if any would return, his blood boiling, and the feeling of anger in his heart making him almost reckless of any consequences that might befall him for his hasty but generous action.

As soon as he was satisfied that no one was coming back he turned to young Pond, and as he unbound the straps by which he had been held fast, he said:

"What's the meaning of this? How came you to be here?"

"I don't know. I was walking along the path over by the chapel when three fellows rushed at me, and before I knew what they were about they were rushing me down here upon the ball ground. One of them tied his handkerchief over my mouth, but I tore it off. I didn't want to cry out, but I couldn't help it. They didn't seem to think any one could hear me and so left it off."

"Are you hurt?"

"Not much, though my back pains me. You see, they picked me up and tied me in the carriage so that my head and shoulders hung over the back, and every time they made a rush it seemed to me as if they would break me straight in two."

"How long have you been here?"

"I don't know; it seems as if it must have been days, but I don't suppose it was more than half an hour. I thought they'd never stop."

"Do you know who the fellows were?"

"Yes."

"Who were they?"

"I don't think I'll tell, Ward. It wouldn't do any good; and besides, I may be mistaken, you know. No, I'd rather not tell you if you don't mind."

"You don't need to," said Ward quietly. "I know who they were. At least I know who one was, and I rather think he'll not forget his tumble very soon, either. But come on now, it's time we were in our rooms. There goes the study bell now, and we'll be marked late if we don't look out. Come on."

Both boys started quickly toward West Hall, and on their way they met a group of five boys, one of whom was Tim Pickard. They too were heading for their rooms, but the recognition was mutual, and Ward instantly realized that his own troubles were likely to be multiplied by that fact. However, he said nothing to his companion. In a few moments they entered West Hall; but the bell had ceased ringing several minutes before, and as they went up the stairway they met Mr. Blake face to face.

"Late are you, Hill?" said the teacher. "I'm sorry to see that so early in the term. And you have one of the younger boys with you too!" he added as he saw who Ward's companion was. "That's too bad, Hill, that's too bad. You ought not to get the little fellows into trouble too. It's quite enough for you to get into it yourself. If this happens again, Hill, I shall report it to Dr. Gray."

It had been in Ward's heart to explain the cause of his tardiness, or at least to try to shield his companion, but as Mr. Blake talked on, he resolutely shut his lips together and without a word of explanation went on up to his room, while Little Pond also departed to his.

As Ward entered the room Henry looked up in surprise, and Ward felt that there was an implied rebuke in his glance. Repressing the feeling of anger which at first arose, he soon explained to his chum the exciting scene he had just witnessed, and as he finished, Henry said:

"That was a mean trick! They might have broken the little fellow's back. It was Tim Pickard at the bottom of it, I suppose."

"Yes," said Ward quietly.

"Well, never mind, Ward," said Henry quickly. "Probably he'll turn his attention to you now; but I think you'll be able to stand it."

"I shall try to," said Ward with a smile, as he seated himself at his study table, and taking up his books began his preparation of the lessons for the following day. And he studied hard all that evening. His heart was still hot and his feelings were bitter whenever he thought of the brutal treatment of Little Pond, and yet he did not once pause to consider that a year before this time he might have been one of the very boys to be foremost in such a scrape, and call it good fun. Now, however, it seemed to him like a very cowardly act. He had felt a very strong personal liking for the elder Pond, and the letters he had received from him, as well as the appeal of the little fellow himself, had worked strongly upon his own heart. Besides all that, it was such an entirely unusual experience for him to be approached for aid that it was a new motive in his heart which was stirred now. Hitherto, he had been the one to seek help. Now he was a senior, and the feeling of respect with which he had looked to the older boys when he had entered the Weston school must be very like that which Pond's brother now felt toward him.

Ward enjoyed the feeling too. The cry of Little Pond for aid came back

to him frequently and he had fully resolved before the evening passed that he would "see the little fellow through," which was the way in which he expressed his determination to see that the lad was not put upon or tormented by Tim Pickard or any of his boon companions.

Still, when the morning came Ward was hardly prepared for the consequences which soon followed his action.

When he entered the post office he found a letter awaiting him there, which evidently had been written by some boy, for the handwriting plainly showed that, and the postmark was Weston.

He hastily tore open the envelope and then read the enclosed letter, which was as follows:

WESTON SCHOOL, September 18, 19–

To WARD HILL, SNEAK:

You are hereby notified that you have been expelled from the ancient and venerable order of "Orang-outangs." You have promised never to betray any of the secrets of the order, but probably you will not keep your word any better in this case than you do in others. We want to warn you though, that your best plan is to leave the school at once. Don't delay, for delays are dangerous. Your life will not be safe. You will be snubbed by the fellows and you will find that everybody, except a few sneaks, in the whole school is down on you. If you stay it will be at your own peril. Take the advice and follow the warning of the

COMMITTEE.

As Ward looked up after finishing the reading of the letter he saw Tim Pickard standing in the doorway and regarding him with ill-concealed hatred. Ward laughed aloud as he saw the boy, and approaching him and holding out the letter which he had just read, he said:

"There, Tim, you'd better take your letter; I don't want it. You may be able to scare the little fellows in the dark as you did Little Pond last night, but you can't scare me. As for you and the 'Tangs,' you know I don't care that for them," and he snapped his fingers derisively as he spoke. "You know as well as I do that I had made up my mind never to have anything more to do with such fellows. Perhaps, if you don't want the letter, Dr. Gray might care for it," he added as Tim made no movement to receive it.

Ward was sorry for the words the moment he had uttered them, but they were gone beyond recall now. He had not the slightest inclination to give the letter to the principal, and he knew that Tim Pickard was aware of that fact too; but Tim instantly snatched the letter from his hand and giving Ward a look of intense hatred turned quickly on his heel and departed.

Ward was inclined to laugh at the entire matter. As for the "Tangs," he was glad that the break had come. He had known that his only safety lay in cutting loose from them, but just how it was to be done he had not been able to decide. It had been a topic of conversation to which neither he nor Jack had referred since the vacation had begun, and now that the break at last had really come, Ward felt relieved.

As for their threats, he cared little for them. The most they could do would be a series of petty annoyances, and in the present state of his feelings that seemed a very small matter.

Of Tim Pickard's hatred for him he had no doubt, but that the brutal leader would be able to annoy him seriously he had no fear. He had all those lessons yet to learn, along with some others that were not indicated in the "course of study" as mapped out in the catalogue of the Weston school.

When he entered the Latin room that morning and took his seat beside Jack, he felt rather than perceived that a change of some kind had come over his companion. It was nothing that Jack said, nor was it clearly apparent in his manner, and yet there was an indefinable something about him that led Ward to think that a change of some kind had come. For the first time Ward's heart misgave him. Perhaps he had been too bold after all. Could he afford to incur the loss of Jack's friendship for the sake of a little fellow whom he had never met until a few days before this time?

His thoughts, however, were soon recalled, and he was giving his entire attention to the work of the class. His own lesson had been thoroughly prepared and when he took his seat after Mr. Crane had called upon him to recite he felt that he had done well.

Mr. Crane, however, made no comment, and there was no change in the quiet manner with which he conducted his recitation. Ward was a trifle disappointed, as he felt that such work as he was doing was entitled to a little more recognition than he had received. However, he gave his attention to the lesson, and when the class rose to leave the room he turned to Jack and said:

"It's this afternoon the nine practises, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Jack evasively.

The conversation ceased abruptly, and as Ward passed with the class out to Dr. Gray's recitation room, he several times perceived that he himself was the subject of conversation among the boys.

Striving hard not to appear to notice it, and yet with a sinking heart realizing that somehow the boys appeared to avoid him, he apparently was taking his last glimpse at his lesson before entering the recitation room. And yet his thoughts were not of the lesson. Even Jack he noticed was walking by the side of Berry–Luscious Berry–and if one might judge from his manner the conversation was highly interesting. With a heavy heart Ward entered the room, and as soon as the recitation was ended departed alone for his room in West Hall. Once there, he seated himself and in a kind of dull misery began to think over his situation. The fellows were "cutting" him, there was no doubt of that, he thought, and even the new boys were looking at him with suspicion. And yet it was possible for him even now to win back all he had lost; all he would have to do would be to go in with the "Tangs" again and enter heartily into their sports and pranks and he would soon have his position restored.

But what would that position be? One which would prevent him from doing good work, first of all, and that was something he was eager to do, at least for the present. Soon he would forfeit the good opinion of Mr. Crane and Dr. Gray, and his steps would begin to slide. He might win a certain amount of popularity from such fellows as Tim, but what would it all amount to?

Then why should he feel called upon to defend Little Pond? He had been compelled to fight his own battles when he had entered the school and it had done him good, or at least so Ward thought. Little Pond would soon learn to take his own part, and meanwhile a little attention from Tim might not do him any real harm.

Ward Hill was seriously troubled. He did not fully realize it, but the greatest pain in his own heart was over the loss of his popularity among his fellows.

For this his heart hungered, and as his struggle went on, more than once his decision wavered. He was now at the dividing of the ways. He had been traveling along a road thus far which, while uneven, had been for the most part unbroken. Now the road forked, and if he went on he must choose either the one branch or the other.

That afternoon was to be the first day of practice for the school nine. A notice to that effect had been posted upon the bulletin board, and while no personal invitation had been given him to come, Ward decided to go. He must learn the exact condition of affairs, both for his own sake and to know how to meet the boys, and there would be no better place than on the ballground.

Accordingly, when the study hour was over, he closed his books and started for the place, from which as he approached he could hear already the shouts of

the fellows in the game.

CHAPTER VI
THE BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE

A single glance as he came within sight of the field at once showed Ward that the nine were already in their places, and were playing against a scrub team. Henry was guarding first base, Jack was on second, and his own position in left field was held by the new boy, Ripley.

Ward understood it all now; it was the intention of Tim Pickard and his friends to "freeze him out."

He thought for a moment bitterly of the success he had had in the game with the Burrs in the preceding year, and how in their enthusiasm after the game was ended, his mates had carried him about on their shoulders, and the cheers for Ward Hill had been given with a will.

And it had all been sweet to Ward too. Vanity seemed to have been intended as a part of the original make-up of every son of Adam, and while many times it becomes a source of weakness, more frequently it is an element of power. Almost every boy is prone to look upon his own father, for example, with a confidence and admiration he gives no other man, and rightly too. The belief in one's own ability to do things is no slight element in the possible success which he may achieve. But out of proportion, or not in its proper place, or when permitted to become a controlling power, vanity never fails to become a source of weakness.

This had been as true with Ward Hill as it had been with Big Smith, although the manner in which it became manifest was so different. To measure one's self justly, to decide honestly what can be done and what cannot, is ever an element of power, and one of the very best lessons, as it is almost the first of the necessary ones, to be gained as a boy goes out from his own home, where his good qualities have frequently been exaggerated and his poorer ones ignored; and to learn that there are other boys as bright as he, is a difficult but necessary process. A school is the most thoroughly and the most honestly democratic place in all this world, and if a boy finds that there he is not popular with his mates, instead of blaming them he needs very carefully and honestly to look within himself to discover the causes. It is frequently said that the source of Caesar's success was his ability to discover what he could not do and to govern himself accord-

ingly; while the cause of Napoleon's downfall is said to have been his inability to perceive what Caesar saw. But Ward Hill that afternoon was not thinking either of Caesar or Napoleon. He was troubled most of all about Ward Hill and the fact that he had been left off the Weston nine.

His mortification was not diminished when he discovered that both Henry and Jack were in their regular positions. Now he understood the meaning of the change in Jack's manner. While he was angry he was not inclined to blame him, for he understood clearly the disposition of the light-hearted lad, and knew that he was never one to stand long against an appeal of almost any kind.

But Henry's action troubled him. He had professed so warm a friendship, and apparently had been so eager to have their former relations restored, that he could not understand now why he should not have spoken to him before of the change in the nine. Perhaps Ward's bitterness was a little more intense from the consciousness he had that there was no better player in the Weston school than he knew himself to be. That, however, did not alter the fact that he had been left out, and doubtless intentionally too.

Ward's first impulse was to turn quickly and leave, before his presence had been discovered. Suddenly changing his decision, he quietly turned about and striving to appear unconcerned advanced and joined the line of boys who were watching the game. He tried desperately to ignore the glances which were cast at him from the boys in the line, but he could not entirely succeed. Nor could he fail to hear some of the words which were spoken to some of the new boys concerning himself.

Just then the side was out, and as the members of the nine came slowly in from the field Tim Pickard spied him. His face lighted up with a malicious smile as he turned to his companions and said: "Here's Ward Hill, fellows. He used to be a decent sort of a player. Can't we find a place for him on the scrubs? The nine needs all the practice it can get, and he'll help us out."

"I don't care to play to-day," said Ward quietly, although he felt his cheeks flush as he spoke.

His mortification was not diminished when he saw a sardonic grin appear upon Tim's face and the brutal boy turn and wink meaningly at his fellows.

Ward stood his ground boldly, however, although in his heart he felt that he was something of a martyr. It was not just clear to him what the cause of his suffering was, but his disappointment and mortification, with which was mingled a feeling of anger, were uppermost. Not yet did he clearly see that he was reaping the harvest of the seed he had sown in the preceding year. All that came to him now was the consciousness that he was being treated unjustly, and his whole soul rebelled, although he felt entirely powerless to change the condition of affairs.

"Never you mind, Ward," said Jack consolingly, as he sought his friend's

side as soon as the game was resumed, "it's all going to come out right in the end."

Ward smiled a little bitterly, but made no other reply.

"Tim's got backing enough to keep you off from the nine now, but it won't last long. We've just got to have you when it comes to the game with the Burrs, and that's all there is about it. Tim knows that as well as any one, and if he wants to he can't keep the fellows back then."

"Perhaps he can't, but it takes two to make a bargain. Maybe I sha'n't be so eager as you seem to think I will. I can't do as some of the fellows do, be just the same to everybody, no matter how they act toward me."

"I know it," said Jack quietly as he picked up a bat, having heard his name called, and advanced to face the pitcher.

"It's a shame, Ward!" said Henry who now came up to him. "It's a shame, that's what it is! I didn't know anything about it till I came down on the field. I supposed of course you were to have your regular place on the nine. If there's no place for you, there's no place for me either. Tim Pickard might as well understand that now as at any other time."

Ward's feelings were somewhat soothed by Henry's words, and he deeply regretted the manner in which he had just spoken to Jack.

It was too late then to recall his words, and he turned to his chum and said: "No, old fellow, you're not going to leave the nine on my account. That would make it all the worse for me, don't you see? You keep on for a while, anyway. I'm going up to see Mr. Crane now. I think I've had all the exercise I want, at least for to-day."

Henry said nothing more, though he was strongly inclined to leave with Ward. He understood thoroughly the sensitive nature of his friend and appreciated fully the suffering which he must be undergoing now. But somehow he felt powerless to aid him, and after watching him until he disappeared from sight he turned with a sigh and waited for his turn to bat to come.

Ward walked proudly away from the field. He was determined to permit no one to witness his shame, for he felt humiliated and angry. How was it, he thought, that such fellows as Tim Pickard could hold and wield such an influence on the boys? He was not liked, of that he was certain, and yet in spite of that fact no one in the school apparently had more followers. Why had Dr. Gray permitted such a fellow to re-enter the school? He had been expelled once; why should he not have been kept away entirely? The school certainly would be the better for his absence.

Ward Hill had yet to learn that "Tim Pickards" were not confined to the Weston school, but that in every place and condition some one stands who apparently blocks our way and prevents us from being our best and truest selves.

However, Ward was honest enough to feel the force of the thought which immediately followed. Perhaps if Dr. Gray had been only just, more boys than Tim Pickard might have been prevented from coming back to the Weston school. Where would he himself be but for Dr. Gray's kindness?

The thought did not tend to lessen his own bitterness, however, and when at last he entered East Hall and rapped upon the door of Mr. Crane's room the lad felt utterly wretched. It did seem as if all things were working together for bad, as far as he was concerned.

Mr. Crane quickly opened the door, and if he read the expression of misery upon Ward's face he was too wise to mention it. He greeted him cordially, and as Ward took the proffered seat, he at once began to talk cheerfully of the life and work of the school.

He spoke quietly–for Mr. Crane was never one to bestow praise cheaply–concerning the work which Ward was doing, and succeeded in drawing from the troubled lad so many of his opinions on matters pertaining to his home life and experiences in Rockford, that in spite of himself Ward felt his anger and mortification disappearing for the time, and was soon feeling quite at his ease.

As soon as he perceived that the cloud had passed, Mr. Crane led the conversation on to the subjects which he knew were in Ward's mind, and although he did not speak one word directly of them, Ward found himself wondering how much and what the teacher really knew of his troubles. He seemed to understand boys almost instinctively, and as Ward listened, his admiration for the quiet, self-possessed man increased each moment.

"In school life," said Mr. Crane, "there are always two forces which mostly aid a fellow when he is in trouble, or is trying to build himself up after a fall. One of these is to feel that there is some one looking up to him and perhaps depending upon him in many ways. Dr. Arnold was accustomed to say that the tone of the school life at Rugby was always largely determined by the older boys themselves. What they were and what they did became the standards for the younger fellows. I think the great teacher was exactly right. I have seen many a fellow here who was careless, and perhaps worse, when he was in the lower classes, completely changed when he became a senior. The very fact that he knew the younger boys were looking up to him, as he himself had looked up to those who had been above him when he first entered the school, has served to draw out his very best qualities. Yes, I am convinced that there is nothing which so helps a boy to become a man as to feel that he is responsible for some one besides himself."

Ward sat silent as Mr. Crane talked, wondering all the while whether he had learned anything directly concerning him. Certainly he was describing the very condition which had appealed very strongly to Ward after Little Pond's con-

versation with him a few nights before this time.

"What was the other thing which helped a fellow, Mr. Crane?" said Ward at last, looking up at his teacher as he spoke. "You said there were two."

"Yes, there's another great help, and that is his anger."

"His anger? I don't think I understand you, Mr. Crane."

"What I mean is this. At times the only force which will rouse one and compel him to do his level best is to be aroused by some strong feeling of anger."

"But I thought that was something which was wrong," replied Ward. "I never heard any one speak like that before."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Crane quietly, yet smiling as he spoke. "And yet I firmly believe no boy, or man either for that matter, ever yet did a great thing without having a feeling of strong anger at the time. I'm not talking of your irritable men, nor of bad-tempered men. But there are some things which thoroughly arouse a good man, and the better he is the more will he be aroused. One who evidently knew of what he was speaking boldly encouraged us all to 'abhor that which is evil.' The picture of the peaceful Man of Nazareth in the temple with a scourge in his hands often comes up before me. Do you know, Hill, I have never cared much for the faces some men have painted as being that of that wonderful Man. For myself, I should like to see just how he looked, that quiet, dignified, gentle soul, when he was aroused as he was in the temple. It would be an inspiration to me, I know, in some of the conflicts that go on within me at times."

As Ward still sat silent, Mr. Crane after glancing quietly and keenly at him, went on. "Yes, Hill, that's exactly what I mean. No man does his level best until he is thoroughly aroused, and nothing rouses him like a just anger. Why, think of Washington at Monmouth, when he first discovered the cowardice or treachery of Lee. His anger must have been as terrible as it was sublime, and what a wonderful effort he made then and there. Or you can think of Martin Luther in his anger. What would he ever have accomplished if he had not been roused almost to madness by the sight and knowledge of what was going on about him? It is true of every great man and of every good man too, for when you sum it all up no one ever becomes a good man–I don't mean 'goody-goody,' but I do mean a good man–without being at the same time a great man too."

"Do you mean a fellow is to be angry at what he sees inside of himself or what he sees going on around him?" asked Ward quickly.

"In a sense I mean both," replied Mr. Crane. "There isn't one of us who doesn't do things, or is tempted at least to do them, for which he despises himself, and in my opinion he never rises much above them till he comes to have this feeling of anger of which I've just been speaking."

"I think I understand what you mean, Mr. Crane," said Ward rising from

his chair. "I never looked at it so before, but you've helped me, helped me more than I can tell you. I think it was just to hear you say what you have been saying to me that I must have come here, Mr. Crane."

"Come again then, Hill. Come whenever you wish. I shall always be pleased to see you."

Ward, as he walked slowly on toward West Hall, of course could not see the smile on Mr. Crane's face as he stood by the window in his room and watched the departing lad, nor perhaps would he have understood it if he had seen it. But Mr. Crane apparently was not displeased at the effect of his words on his pupil, and soon resumed the work which had been interrupted by his entrance.

Ward was thinking deeply as he walked along the path. A new and unusual expression was upon his face, and as he ran up the stairs and stopped before his door, he took the key from his pocket, and said aloud to himself, "Ward Hill–the senior." Just what he meant by the expression he did not explain, perhaps he did not know.

He unlocked the door and started to open it. There was a slight resistance, and leaning against it he pushed the harder.

The door then flew open, but the opening was followed by a crash which might have been heard throughout the building. Chairs, tables, pitchers, lamps, and all the various belongings of the room, had been piled against the door and fallen in a confused mass all about. The room was in complete disorder. The carpet had been torn up, and even the curtains taken from the windows. The bedding was in the middle of the room, and the water from the pitchers had been poured over it. Even the beds had been taken apart and the pieces were scattered about over the floor.

CHAPTER VII

THE TROUBLES ARE INCREASED

For a moment Ward was speechless as he gazed at the scene of confusion before him. Whoever had done the work had done it thoroughly, for not an article of furniture nor a picture on the wall had been left in its proper place. It was confusion worse confounded upon which he gazed.

Quickly recovering himself, Ward pushed his way into the room and closed the door behind him. As he examined the heaps and piles before him more care-

fully, he became more and more angry. It was such a senseless, malicious trick to play on him, that Ward felt the indignity the more. It was true he had known of such things having been done before in the rooms of other boys, and he had not thought much about it at the time, or had only laughed good-naturedly when he had heard of the deed; but it was an entirely different affair when it came home to himself.

"I think even Mr. Crane would be satisfied that I am angry enough now," Ward thought, smiling bitterly; "but I don't see that it is going to help me very much. If the fellow who did it was here, why then I might turn my anger to advantage."

But even then Mr. Crane's lesson came home to him. "I'll do as he suggested," thought Ward, "and I'll just turn in and set these things aright before I have time to get over it."

Angry as Ward was he realized that the mischief must be repaired, and that he must be the one to repair it.

But first of all he began to investigate the manner in which the mischief-maker had entered the room. The outside windows were fastened on the inner side, and no one could have entered through them, even if he had had the hardihood to make the attempt. The door had been locked when he had returned, but he soon satisfied himself that some one must have had a key and used it in his absence.

Naturally his first thought was of Tim Pickard, but Tim was down on the ballground and must have been there long before Ward had gone. Tim himself then could not have done it. Who was it? Ward thought over the boys who would have been most likely to be the guilty ones, but he could not arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. So many of the boys now were against him that it might have been any one of twenty whom he could name.

It was impossible for Ward to banish the thought of Tim Pickard as having been the prime instigator, however. He would be too shrewd to be directly implicated in the matter, Ward was well aware of that, but Tim could work indirectly. There were too many of the boys who were willing to curry favor with him by any means for him not to be able to find some one to "pull his chestnuts out of the fire for him," as Ward expressed it.

Satisfied that he must wait for a solution of the mystery, Ward took off his coat and resolutely set to work to restore the room to something like its former state. He quickly moved the furniture, and then after spreading out the carpet began to tack it to the floor.

He worked on steadily and as quietly as possible, for he had no desire to be disturbed in his labors or enter into any explanations which a visitor might desire to have made. Several times some one rapped upon his door, but Ward did

not heed the interruption. He paused in his work long enough to satisfy himself that the visitor had departed, and then resumed his labor.

Never before had he worked so hard or so rapidly. He grimly thought of what Mr. Crane had said concerning anger as a motive for exerting one's self, and certainly, he thought, in the present case it was working remarkably well. In much less time than he had deemed it possible the carpet had been tacked to the floor, and then Ward at once began to restore the furniture to its proper place. This last was an easy task, and as Ward glanced at his watch he was surprised to see that he had been working but little more than an hour. No one would suspect now from the appearance of the room that it had been "stacked," to use the Weston term for the upsetting of a boy's room. He then spread out the bedding in such a manner as to permit it to become dry, and just as he turned to enter the study room again, some one knocked on the door.

Satisfied that no one would suspect what had occurred, but with his anger not one whit abated, Ward advanced to the door and slipping back the bolt, opened it.

"Oh, it's you, Little Pond, is it?" he said as Pond's brother entered the room. "What's up?" he hastily inquired, as he detected the trace of tears in the lad's eyes.

"Some one's been in my room and upset everything in it. They've even poured water all over my bed, and I don't know what I'll do. I've been working hard for an hour to straighten things out, but I don't think I've succeeded very well," and the lad's voice almost broke as he spoke.

"Never mind, Pond," said Ward quickly, forgetting for a moment his own experience and anger at the sight of the trembling lad before him. "I'll go up and help you, and we'll have it all straightened out before you know it. You mustn't mind such a little thing as having your room stacked. It's what every new boy has to expect."

Ward spoke quite bravely. His new role as "Ward Hill the senior" was already beginning to have its effect upon him, and in the impulse to help another, he almost forgot his own anger over what a little while before he had considered an outrage.

"You haven't told any one about it, have you?" inquired Ward.

"No; that is, I haven't to any one except Big Smith."

"And what did Big Smith say?"

"Oh, he said just what you did, not to mind it."

"That was kind of him," remarked Ward drily. "He didn't speak about being willing to come up and help you set the room up again, did he?"

"Why, no; is he the one who does that?"

"Not exactly. It's strange how many duties he has to do just when any one else happens to want anything of him. Why, there he is now," he quickly added

as they came out of the room and Ward carefully locked the door behind him. "I say, Big Smith, I want you. Come up into Little Pond's room and help set it up. The poor little homesick chap has had it stacked, and can't fix it alone."

"I should like to, Ward, I really should, but I've some work to do, and I feel it to be my duty to attend to that first. I'll come up as soon as I can."

"No, you won't, you'll come now," said Ward angrily. "You're not going to leave the little chap in any such way."

"But, Ward, I can't," protested Big Smith, "I really can't. I must do my work first."

"You'd better come. Such fellows as you sometimes have to neglect their 'duties' to set their own rooms up. You'll have your own room stacked the first thing you know."

"Do you think so?" said Big Smith hastily. "I don't see why any one should want to bother me in that way. But I'll come up. Perhaps I ought to, though I do not wish to."

"Come along, then," said Ward; and the three boys at once proceeded to Pond's room, and by their combined efforts the few belongings were soon restored to their former places.

"I hope this stacking business isn't going to become the fashion," said Big Smith solemnly. "It will be a very serious inconvenience to me if I should have to rearrange my room very often. It would interfere with my plans very sadly. Do you know, Ward, I heard some one in your room this afternoon? I thought it was you at first, but when I saw you a little later coming up the path, of course I knew it wasn't. Since I've been up here I've been thinking that your room might have been stacked too. You've been there, of course, and it must be all right, or you'd have spoken of it."

"My room's all right," replied Ward evasively, though his face flushed slightly as he spoke. He had no desire that Big Smith should learn of his misfortune. It was bad enough as it was, without having the report of it spread broadcast, as would be the case if Big Smith learned of it. "Have any of the East Hall fellows been over here this afternoon?" he added.

"No," said Big Smith slowly, "I haven't seen any. Let me see, though, I did see Jack Hobart talking with Professor Mike a minute, but that was out in front of West. I don't think he came in. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Ward slowly. He was thinking of that interview between Jack and the janitor, or Professor Mike, as he was familiarly known by the boys. Evidently he was troubled by the thought too, for he was silent for a time, and apparently not aware of the presence of his companions.

"You're all right now, Little Pond," he said at last. "You can go and attend to that 'duty' of yours, Big Smith, and I'll go to my room, for I've a little work that

ought to be done. Now don't forget," he added turning to Pond, "to keep your door locked. Yes, lock it every time you go out; it's the only safe way."

"It was locked this afternoon," said Pond. "That's what I can't understand. I don't see how any one could get in."

"It is strange," said Ward thoughtfully, as he departed. "Well, we'll hope for better things next time. I shouldn't say much about it to any one, though."

Ward started down the stairs, and in the lower hall, the one into which his own room opened, he saw the janitor.

"Mike, come in here a minute," he said, opening the door into his room as he spoke.

The good-natured old Irishman followed him, and as Ward closed the door said: "I'll be after havin' yez know that me name's not Moike, but Perfessor. Oi'm the perfessor of dust and ashes, I'd be havin' ye understand. Oi'm nixt to the principal, Oi am, and indade and Oi've been here longer nor the doctor has."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Ward quickly, in no mood to enter into the standing joke of "Professor Mike." "What I want to know is this, has any one had your keys this afternoon?"

"Me keys, is it? What for should I be after givin' up the badge of me own office, I'd loike to know? Me and me keys are foriver togither. We're one and the same, now and foriver. What for should you be after axin' me such a question as that?"

Ward thought he perceived from the janitor's manner that he was rendered somewhat uneasy by the question, and resolving to chance all upon one question, he said:

"Mike, what did you let Jack Hobart have your keys for?"

"Jack Hobart have me keys? Is he that b'y they call 'Speck,' what has a room over in East Hall? Is he that same?"

"He is that same. Now tell me about your letting him have your keys."

"Indade, and Oi did not let him have me keys."

"All right then, Mike. That's all I wanted to know," and Ward made as if he were about to shut the door.

"Hold on a bit, will yez?" said Mike, evidently somewhat disturbed. "Oi did not let Speck have me keys, as Oi'm tellin' yez. But that's not sayin' as how I might not have lint them to the lad a bit of a minute is it?"

"You know what I meant, Mike," said Ward, his trouble all returning instantly. "When did you let him have them? How long did he keep them? Who was with him?"

"Listin to the lad, will yez. Jist listin to the quistions he can ask, faster nor any man can count 'em, and he the perfessor of dust and ashes at that. Now thin, I'll be after tellin' yez all about it," said the janitor more soberly and evidently

troubled more than he cared to show. "Jack Hobart came to me and he sez, sez he, 'Me room's locked Mike and I can't git in,' which same is true. Sez I, 'Why don't yez take yer key then, and unlock the door, me bye.' 'That same's what I'd loike to do,' sez Jack, 'but I've lost me key and Jacob's gone to his dinner.' Ah, that's what comes of having a haything for a perfessor of dust and ashes instid of a white man loike mesilf. So whin the lad asked me to lind him the loan of me keys, I did that same. He didn't be after havin' 'em more nor tin minutes, and I shouldn't be surprised at all, at all, if he didn't have 'em a speck over nine. There's bin no harm done, Oi'm thinkin'?"

Mike could not conceal his anxiety. He had violated a strict rule of the school in lending his bunch of keys to any one. He himself ought to have gone and tried the keys himself if any one used them, and this Ward knew as well as Mike.

"Mike," he said solemnly, "you've got yourself into trouble. There have been some rooms stacked in West Hall this afternoon, and you're the one to blame for it too. You had no right to let any fellow in this school have your keys."

"Indade and that same is true," said the troubled Michael. "Now, Mr. Ward, you'll not be after reportin' it to the doctor, Oi'm thinkin'? The principal has enough to think of without addin' to his cares and burdens. Yez will not be after doin' that, I know, Mr. Ward?"

The janitor could not entirely conceal his fears, and Ward quickly resolving to make use of them for his own advantage, said, "Not yet, Mike, anyway. But those East Hall fellows must not come over here and stack our rooms. Now if you'll promise to keep quiet and help me find out who does the mischief, it'll be all right. But you'll have to keep a careful watch. If the thing happens again, Dr. Gray ought to know of it."

"Oi'll trap 'em, me lad. Oi'll help yez to fix 'em! I will that."

"All right then, Mike. But mind, now, you'll have to keep both eyes open."

Michael departed troubled and yet elated over Ward's words, just as Henry entered the room. Ward at first had thought he would not tell his room-mate of what had occurred, but changing his mind, he soon told Henry all about it.

His room-mate's anger was great when he had listened to the story, and many were his expressions of sympathy. He too realized that Ward was likely to have a long and bitter struggle in the school now, and to the boy's credit be it said, he did not once think of the trouble it might bring upon him as Ward's chum.

His words were comforting to the troubled Ward, who could bear the ill will of his fellows least of all. Indeed, the heaviness in Ward's heart arose most of all from his loss of popularity, and how he would bear it not even he himself could tell.

He soon went with Henry to the dining hall, but was silent most of the time. The slight on the ball-field, the loss of his position on the nine, and the "stacking" of his room, had all combined to render him somewhat heavy-hearted and disinclined to enter into conversation with any one.

Henry understood his friend's mood and neither of them spoke on their way back to their room when supper was over. They climbed the stairs together, and then Ward took his key from his pocket to open the door.

As he pushed it back an exclamation of anger burst from his lips. The room had again been "stacked" in their absence, and a scene of indescribable confusion, very similar to that which Ward had faced in the afternoon, again lay before them.

CHAPTER VIII
PERPLEXITY

An exclamation of anger burst forth from Ward's lips, and even Henry's ordinary calm was somewhat disturbed by the sight. Chairs, tables, bedding, and carpets were all piled in one indiscriminate mass in the center of the room. The dim light from the hall only served to increase the impression of confusion.

"Well, Henry," said Ward ruefully, when they entered the room and had carefully shut the door, "it's too bad that you have to be punished too for my sins. Whoever did this, evidently intended to make a thorough piece of work of it. Isn't it a sight to behold!"

"Never mind me, Ward," said Henry quietly. "I'm ready to take my share; all I'm sorry about is that somebody has such a mean spirit. What fun there can be in tearing everything to pieces like this I cannot see for my part."

"It hasn't been done for the fun of it; you can rest easy about that," replied Ward. "I wish the one who did it was here now. I'd make him take a hand in fixing up the room again. Hello, the lamp's broken!" he added angrily as he found the broken lamp in the midst of the heap on the floor. "Yes, and they've poured the oil all over everything too. It's a good deal worse than it was this afternoon and that was bad enough. We'll have to borrow a lamp, I'm thinking."

"No, mine's all right," said Henry quickly, as he drew forth his own lamp from the border of the confused mass.

In a moment he had lighted it, and both boys stood for a moment and gazed ruefully at the wreck before them. Ward was almost too angry to speak now. All

his quiet labor in the afternoon had been useless, and now a task even worse than the one which he had faced then was before him.

"We might as well go at it now as any time," said Henry quietly, removing his coat as he spoke, and preparing to begin the work. "It's got to be done, Ward, and the sooner we do it the better. Come on, old fellow, we'll soon have it all straightened out."

Ward made no reply, but he at once prepared to follow his room-mate's example, and soon both boys were busily at work. Several times there came a rap on their door, but they did not heed it, for neither was in a mood to welcome callers.

They continued eagerly at the task, working rapidly, and it was not long before the room began to take on once more something of its former appearance. The study bell had rung, however, before their labors were ended, and the rap on the door which soon came they recognized at once as Mr. Blake's.

Ward himself opened the door in response to the summons, and as he stood facing the tall teacher the flush on his face caused by his anger and his exertions had not entirely disappeared.

"I'm surprised, Hill, not to find you at your studies. A senior ought not to set an example like this. I shall wait to see that you begin your work promptly and properly."

Ward was too angry to offer any explanation. He bade Mr. Blake enter, and as he offered him a chair, he saw that Henry had at last succeeded in partially adjusting the last remaining belongings of the room.

"We're all right now, Mr. Blake," said Henry quietly. "There were some things which had to be attended to before we could begin to study."

"You ought not to take the study hours for such work," responded Mr. Blake, rising as he spoke. "I've heard you pounding up here for some time, and hoped you'd settle down so as not to disturb the others. You ought to bear in mind that there are other boys as well as yourselves in West Hall, and some of them I'm glad to say manifest a disposition to work."

As Mr. Blake went out of the room Ward could restrain himself no longer. "That's always the way with that man!" he said angrily. "No matter what you do, or how hard you try, it's all the same. He has to put in his word and it's always the wrong word at the right time too. I wish he didn't have charge of West Hall."

"Oh, well, never mind, Ward. He doesn't understand us very well, that's a fact; but so long as we know he doesn't, we know about what to expect. We'll get to work now and forget all about Mr. Blake, and that the room ever was stacked. It doesn't look how as if it had been troubled. You can't see anything wrong about it, can you?"

"No, but I can smell it," said Ward half-laughingly, for the odor of the

kerosene which had been spilled was only too apparent in the room.

However, the boys soon seated themselves by Henry's table and began their work for the evening. It was some time before Ward could bring his thoughts to bear upon the work in hand, but at last he succeeded and studied hard all the evening.

"There, I haven't my work all done," he said when at last the bell was rung indicating that the end of the study hour had come. "I must have more time. I'm going down to ask Mr. Blake for permission to sit up a little longer."

"Let me go," said Henry quickly, but Ward was out of the room by this time and made no reply.

In response to his request Mr. Blake shook his head and refused permission. Ward went slowly back to his room thoroughly angry. The teacher's manner betrayed his suspicion of the boy, and Ward did not take time to consider that Mr. Blake did not know anything of the new resolution he had formed, or of the struggle which was going on in his own mind.

He closed the door with a slam as he came back and expressed his opinion in no mild terms of the man who was in charge of West Hall. Henry strove to soothe the angry feelings of his room-mate, but without avail, and when at last the boys retired for the night, Ward's anger had steadily increased.

"Even Mr. Crane would be satisfied now," he thought as he drew the bed-clothes up around him. "I've got enough anger, as he called it, to supply every boy in West Hall."

But he was too tired to cherish his feelings for any length of time and was soon asleep.

He was awake long before the breakfast hour, and hastily arising resumed his studying. By the time Henry had joined him he had his work all done, and felt that he was thoroughly ready for the tasks of the day. The fact gave him much satisfaction, and when they started toward the dining hall much of his anger had disappeared, so far as any outward manifestation of it was concerned; but deep down in his heart Ward was thinking of his own troubles. Perhaps he even tried to cherish the feeling of anger a trifle, for it was so much more easy to work and face the school when he was aroused, than it was when only the fact of his own unpopularity was most apparent.

However, he had decided upon one course of action, at least, and that was what he would have to say to Jack Hobart. A fine friend he was! After all his protestations of friendship, to go over to West Hall and get the keys to his room! For Ward had not a doubt in his mind that Jack had been the one to carry out the scheme which he believed Tim Pickard had concocted. Not that Jack had "stacked" the room himself. Ward did not for a moment believe that. But he knew Jack Hobart so well that he was certain he would strive to keep in the

good graces of all the school, and if he saw the tide setting too strongly against him Ward somehow felt that Jack would desert him. Had he not done that very thing in the preceding year? It was true he had professed to be sorry, but what did "feeling sorry" amount to, since he failed to stand beside him when troubles came?

Jack had expected trouble to come too, and Ward thought somewhat bitterly of his friend's words, and how he had declared that his vertebræ and upper lip should manifest their power in the time of trial. And the trying time had come.

Ward thought of the scene a few days before this time at the Rockford Station, when Jack had come on the afternoon train. How eager he had been then for him to come back to the Weston school! And what strong words concerning his own friendship he had used too! And Ward had believed him; that was the worst of it all.

But the "Tangs" had declared against him, and the troubled boy could not entirely shake off the feeling that Jack had not broken with them, and that his own troubles were mainly to be traced to that body. Doubtless they were compelling Jack to bear his share now, and were hoping to increase his own troubles by that very fact.

Ward's heart was filled with these somewhat bitter reflections as he entered the Latin room. How cool all the boys were to him! Scarcely any one had a word for him now, and only a few months before they had been free enough with their applause and words of praise.

Jack was already in his seat when Ward entered and his beaming face showed that he evidently was waiting for him to come.

"I say, valedic," said Jack, as Ward took his seat, "just translate a bit of this stuff for me, will you? It's too much for me. My massive brain is not equal for the task."

"There won't be time," said Ward coldly. "Here's Mr. Crane now."

Jack looked at him a moment in surprise and Ward noticed somewhat bitterly that he was evidently pained too. What a hypocrite he must be! or else Ward must have been mistaken in supposing Jack was concerned in the upsetting of his room. But that was hardly possible. Had not Mike himself said he had loaned his bunch of keys to him? Surely no other one then could be at fault.

The recitation now began and as Ward was soon called upon to recite, all other thoughts were immediately banished from his mind. He did his work well and noted the quiet smile upon Mr. Crane's face as he took his seat. It was the mark of approval which he always gave when the work was done to his complete satisfaction.

Ward's troubles, however, soon returned. Of what advantage was it all for

him to do well in his classes when apparently the hand of every fellow in the school seemed to be turned against him? Outside of Henry and Little Pond it did not seem as if he had a friend left. He wished he had not come back to the school. But he had come, there was no escape from that fact, and all that remained now was to be as brave as possible and not be overcome by his enemies.

And yet how easy it would be to put an end to all his annoyances and once more be at peace with the boys. There was his place on the nine too; he knew he could have it again. All he would have to do to regain that and also to have the popularity which once was his, was to go in with the "Tangs" once more.

Ward glanced up at Mr. Crane. How he did respect the man! How kind he had been during the summer, and how sincere his interest was now! Then too, there was Little Pond, who placed such implicit confidence in him. He was almost irritated by the dependence of the lad, and yet he liked the little fellow in spite of it all. No, he could not yield now, Ward thought. He had begun, and he must carry the struggle through to the end.

When the hour came to a close, Ward realized that although he had made a good recitation himself, he had not heard much of what had been said by either Mr. Crane or the boys. He had been busied with his own thoughts and fighting again the battle which seemed as if it never was to cease.

"I say, Jack," he said as the boys rose to pass out of the room, "I want to see you."

"I'm glad of it, Ward," replied Jack as he joined Ward, and they walked together across the campus toward Dr. Gray's room. "I'd begun to think you never wanted to see me again. I've been racking my brains to see what the difficulty was."

"Jack," said Ward, apparently ignoring his declaration, "what did you get Professor Mike's keys for yesterday?"

"What did I get Mike's keys for?" repeated Jack, a look of astonishment creeping over his face as he spoke. "I don't know what you mean. I haven't had his keys."

His astonishment apparently was sincere and for the first time Ward's heart misgave him. Could it be that he had been mistaken? But there was the janitor's own declaration. He himself had said he had loaned the keys to Jack, and certainly he could have no motive in saying so if it had not been true. He had implicated himself by the statement as it was, and had openly confessed to violating one of the strictest of Dr. Gray's rules by doing so. No, Mike must have told the truth; there could be no other explanation.

"You haven't had Mike's keys?" said Ward, slowly turning and looking Jack full in the face.

"No; honor bright, I haven't had 'em, Ward. No, hold on! Let me see! Come

to think of it, I did ask him for them yesterday, that's a fact, but I'd forgotten all about it till you brought it back to my benighted mind."

"Oh, then you did have them," said Ward bitterly, not able to repress the sneer on his face as he spoke.

"Why, yes," said Jack. "The way of it was this, I was over by West Hall. The fact is, Ward, I was there to get you to go down to the ball ground. One of the boys wanted to get a bat which was up in my room, but Luscious had my keys and I asked Mike for his. There was no harm in that, was there, Ward?"

"Who was the fellow that you gave them to, or did you go yourself?"

"No, I didn't go myself; but I see there's something wrong, so I don't believe I ought to tell you who the chap was. I'm afraid there's something off color."

"Very well," said Ward; "of course you can do as you please about that. I think, though, I may be able to get along without your information. You'd made so many protests that you were my friend that I didn't know but you'd be willing to help me out in this. But I sha'n't trouble you if you don't want to tell me."

Ward could see a look of pain come over Jack's face as he spoke, but his own heart was hard and bitter, and apparently he cared but little for the effect his words might produce.

"I say, Ward, old fellow," said Jack quietly, "don't talk like that. It hurts me. I was just going to say something to you, but the way you act makes me think you wouldn't care to hear it."

They were now at the entrance to the recitation room and the conversation naturally ceased. Ward was sadly perplexed. Jack's astonishment and evident pain at his words troubled him greatly.

Jack was willing to enter into conversation when the recitation was over, but Ward hastened out of the room and gave him no opportunity. The truth was he was so troubled by Jack's manner that he was afraid he would give in to him and in his anger he had resolved not to do that.

When he opened the door into his room, his anger, knew no bounds when again he discovered that the room was in confusion. Twice during the rest of that week the same thing occurred, and both Ward and Henry were desperate. Something must be done.

"Mike," said Ward sharply to the janitor, whom he met alone in the hall on Friday afternoon, "our room is stacked every day and you're no good as a watch. I believe some one has taken the key to my room from your ring. Look and see, will you?"

The "professor of dust and ashes" fumbled at the huge bunch he carried, and very much crestfallen at last said, "Indade and yer right, Mister Ward. The key's not here at all, at all."

"That's what I thought. Now see if 'twenty-three' is gone too." Twenty-

three was the number of Little Pond's room.

"Be jabbers and that's gone too. Ye'll not be after tellin' the principal, will yez?" said Mike anxiously.

"I don't know. I'll see about that later. Mike, can you put a new lock on my door and on Pond's this afternoon? I mean while we're here and no one will see you at the work?"

"Indade, and I can that," replied the anxious janitor.

"Well, do it then right away. I've got a plan for catching the rascals and I want the new lock on right off. If you can do that now, it will help me and I sha'n't have to see the doctor."

Mike departed and returned with two new locks, which he at once placed on the doors, Ward meanwhile keeping watch to see that the work of the janitor was not discovered, and cautioning him about keeping his duplicate key.

With a feeling of elation, Ward at once prepared to put his newly formed plan into execution.

CHAPTER IX
AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK

Ward at once left his room and went to search for Little Pond. He met the lad coming across the campus, and in response to his invitation, the little fellow immediately returned with him, and for a long time they sat together in Pond's room and talked over the plan which Ward had formed.

"You see it's this way," said Ward. "We can't let this thing go on forever, for it's beginning to tell on us already. What with setting the room to rights and never knowing what to expect, it doesn't leave very much time for studying, and that's what I want this term. Now Mike has put a new lock on my door and on yours too, so these fellows won't be able to break in for a day or two, anyway."

"Then I don't see what you can do," said Pond. "If they can't get in, they can't do any mischief, and if they don't do any mischief, you can't catch them."

"That's all true; but what I want is to find out who the fellows are. I know well enough now, but I want the proof, you see. Now, my plan is this. They won't have any keys to the new locks, so they can't get in now if they try, and I don't think they'll try to-day. But to-morrow is Saturday, and in the afternoon we don't have any recitations, you know. Well, I'm going off up to the glen to-

morrow afternoon and I'll take pains to let it be known that I sha'n't be in my room. That'll leave the coast all clear, you see, and I think somebody will be pretty sure to come up and try to get in while I'm away. Then I want you to stay in your room and keep watch. You can have your door just a little bit ajar, and whenever you hear any one coming up the stairs, you can keep an eye on them. You can see them without being seen yourself, and if they go and try to get in my room, or come up to yours, why, then we'll know who it is that's doing the work, though I don't think there's any difficulty now in picking out the ones who have been the prime movers in it."

"All right, Ward," replied Pond; "I'll do it."

"You see it's as much to your advantage as it is to mine," said Ward, as he rose to depart. "We don't want this thing kept up any longer, and I think if we can catch the fellows now, we'll put an end to it, though it may break out somewhere else in a worse way."

Satisfied with what he had done, Ward ran down the stairs, and just as he was unlocking the door of his room, Henry and Jack Hobart came up together into the hall. Ward's first impulse was to turn and leave the building. He had no desire to meet Jack then, but quickly changing his purpose, he unlocked the door and waited for the two boys to enter.

"Hello, Ward!" said Jack. "We've been talking about you, and finally decided we'd better stop that and come straight over here and talk to you."

Ward made no reply, and as Henry was apparently busied in arranging the papers and books on his table, Jack felt that the burden of the conversation was resting upon himself.

Ward noticed that he was somewhat constrained in his manner, nor was he displeased to see it. For was not Jack the one who had obtained Mike's key? And while he might not be the one who had wrought the mischief in his room, still he was so thoroughly satisfied in his own mind that Jack was aware of what was going on and had lent his influence to further it, that it was with something of a feeling of satisfaction he noted the evident uneasiness of his visitor.

"The way of it is this," said Jack, breaking in upon the awkward silence. "We need you on the nine, Ward, there's no mistake about that. If we are going to have any show against the Burrs this fall, we've just got to have your help. There's no mistake about that, and that's what I've come over to talk with you about."

"Did Tim Pickard send you?" asked Ward, making no effort to conceal the sneer on his face.

"No," said Jack quietly, "and that's where the mischief comes in. There's no doubt that Tim's down on you, Ward. You don't need me to tell you that."

"Hardly."

"But Tim isn't the whole of the Weston school. It's true he's got a lot of the fellows under his thumb and they'll do just what he tells them to. That's the way he succeeded in shutting you off from the nine. He pretended to call a meeting, but he never told Henry here nor me about it. He claims he had a majority there and that they voted not to have you on the nine this fall. He couldn't have done it if we'd been there, and Tim knows it too."

Ward still made no reply save to glance at Jack, who was now talking eagerly and apparently had overcome his recent feeling of embarrassment.

"Henry and I have been talking it over," continued Jack, "and we've about decided that we've found a way out, and that's what I came over especially to explain. Now, Ward, if you'll go in with us I think we'll have it fixed up in no time."

"I can't go in when I don't know what it is you want me to go into."

"It's this, Ward. Henry and I have decided that we sha'n't play on the nine unless you are taken on too."

"What?" said Ward abruptly.

He could hardly believe the words he had just heard. That Jack, who had taken Professor Mike's key, and who plainly must be aware of the troubles which were besetting him now on every side, should be the one to make such a proposition as that to which he had just listened seemed to Ward almost incredible. It would completely change every plan in his mind if Jack meant what he had said, and so far as appearances went, the boy seemed to be thoroughly in earnest.

"Yes," said Jack, "that's just what I mean. I don't believe that even Tim would care to lose both Henry and me just now, for he'd know he'd have the whole school down on him at once. It's bad enough to lose you, and there are a lot of the fellows who don't like it a little bit. Tim knows it, but he won't let on. Now, if Henry and I just quit too, it'll place Tim in a box too tight even for him."

"Then your plan is to force Tim to take me on the nine by threatening to leave yourselves if he doesn't, is it?" said Ward slowly.

"That's it, that's it," said Jack eagerly. "He'll have to come to time then."

"Well, I don't think I shall do it," said Ward deliberately. "Not that I shouldn't like to play on the nine. I'm not foolish enough to deny that, for I should, of course; but I don't care to force myself in where I'm not wanted."

"That isn't it, Ward," said Jack still more eagerly. "You are wanted–that is, nearly every fellow in the school wants you except Tim Pickard. Now, the question is whether you're going to let one fellow like Tim stand against the whole school. Why, I think even Luscious will go into the scheme and help squeeze Tim."

Ward felt that in spite of all his efforts his heart was becoming softer. Always susceptible to praise, the words of Jack were like balm to his troubled soul.

He longed, far more than any one knew, to be at peace with the boys, and if once he were restored to his position on the nine, he felt confident he could easily regain his popularity.

But his anger at Tim was still strong, though Jack puzzled him sadly. Could it be that he had a share in the schemes which were then afoot? The mystery of the stolen key certainly indicated something of the kind, and yet with all his faults Jack Hobart would not lie, Ward felt assured of that. The thought of Jack's honesty suddenly brought Ward to a quick determination. He would speak to him without reserve of his troubles and see how he received his words.

"Jack," he said abruptly, "did you know that we'd had our room stacked almost every day since we came back to Weston?"

"No," said Jack in genuine surprise; "I didn't know a thing about it. You've kept it to yourself pretty well, not even to mention it to me."

"Well, it's been stacked, that's sure. I think we've spent more time tacking down our carpet and setting up our beds than we have in studying; haven't we, Henry?"

Henry glanced up in surprise that Ward should mention their trouble, but he smiled and nodded his head by way of reply, though he did not speak.

"Ward, that's tough," said Jack soberly. "I'm sorry you didn't tell me about it, for maybe I could have helped you. Have you any idea who it is that's doing it?"

"Yes," said Ward sharply; "but I'm only waiting for positive proof, and I think I'm close on to the track of that. One thing I've found out for sure, and that's some help."

"What's that?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only that Mike has lost two of his keys and we know who took them. It wasn't very much of a trick to find that out, you know." Ward spoke quietly, but he was watching keenly to see what the effect of his words upon Jack would be.

Suddenly Jack looked up and his face flushed deeply. "Ward," said he, "was that the reason you asked me the other day if I had borrowed Mike's bunch of keys?"

"Yes," said Ward quietly.

"Well, old fellow, I don't know what I can say, if you really think I'd do such a thing. I did ask for the loan of the keys, that's a fact, but I didn't use them myself." Jack acted as if he were about to say more, but hesitated and became silent.

Ward was puzzled and his manner clearly betrayed the fact. The silence in the room was decidedly awkward for all concerned, and the boys shifted uneasily in their seats.

Jack was the first to speak, as he said: "It looks queer, I know, Ward, but I don't want to tell you who took the keys. There's something crooked, and I'm going to help you out of the scrape if I can. I'd tell you in a minute, I would honestly, who took the keys from me, but I am just sure he didn't stack your room. But I'll help you find out and I'll help you straighten out the fellow too."

"I think the 'Tangs' may have had something to do with it," said Ward.

It was the first time the name of the secret organization had been mentioned since he had left school at the close of the preceding year. Somehow it had been a tabooed subject and neither had referred to it in their letters or conversation. Jack had considered it a subject on which Ward might be somewhat sensitive, and Ward had been uncertain as to what Jack's plans would be.

"What makes you think the 'Tangs' had anything to do with it?" said Jack, after a pause of a moment, in which the uneasiness of the boys was still marked.

"Because I received one of their gentle little epistles before this trouble began."

"I haven't heard a word of the 'Tangs' since I came back to school," said Jack thoughtfully. "I didn't know they'd started up again, and I'm sure I hoped the thing was dead. It is dead so far as I'm concerned, for I've washed my hands of the whole business. I told Tim so before I came back to school, and if he knows when he's well off he'll let it alone too. He's got enough to do to keep himself straight with the faculty without going into the 'Tangs' again. But, Ward, I mean just what I say; I'm going to take off my coat and help you to find out about this matter, and if we once catch the fellow we'll give him a dose that'll cure him, I know."

"Thank you."

"You don't appear to be very enthusiastic," said Jack quietly.

It was evident that he was hurt by Ward's apparent lack of confidence in him; but his affection for his friend was so genuine and strong that he plainly was not to be put off by any of Ward's rebuffs.

"We'll talk about that later," said Jack as he rose to depart. "What I want to know now is whether you'll come down on the ball-ground to-morrow afternoon, and then Henry and I'll speak our little piece to Tim and we'll have it out. Tim'll give in, I know he will, for he isn't over happy as it is. He knows how a good many of the fellows feel, and besides that he wants the nine strengthened."

"I can't do it, Speck," said Ward at last, using the familiar nickname by which he had been accustomed to call his friend, for the first time in several days. "It's mighty good of you; but, you see, I just couldn't go on the nine in any such way as that."

"Then Henry and I'll quit too," said Jack emphatically.

"No, you won't. That would certainly spoil it all. I want you both to keep

right on. There's no necessity for you to give up because I can't go in, and besides I've something else in mind just now, and if you both leave it'll spoil it all. I couldn't come down to-morrow, anyway, for I've planned to go and spend the afternoon up at the glen. Honest, Speck, I do thank you for your offer. It's mighty good of you, but I don't want you to do it yet, anyway. Maybe a little later I'll come in, but not just yet."

"All right, Ward. Have it your own way. You always do, somehow. Well, I must go over and see how Luscious is making out. He's a fine fellow, Luscious is, and he's going to push you for the valedic, as sure's you live."

"He's a good worker; any one can see that," said Ward as Jack departed.

"The plot thickens," he added turning to Henry. "For the life of me I can't see the way out as yet."

"I feel sure of one thing," said Henry, "and that is, that Jack's had nothing to do with it."

"I hope you're right," replied Ward thoughtfully; "but it's strange about those keys."

"Yes; but Jack can explain it, and he will before long."

Ward then explained the plan he had formed with Little Pond, and Henry agreed with him that it would be better for him and Jack to go down to the ball-ground, in view of what Ward had it in mind to do, and to appear as if they were not suspicious of any one or of any thing.

Accordingly, on the following afternoon Ward started out with Big Smith for a tramp to the glen, one of the favorite resorts of the Weston boys. He had taken pains to speak of his intended absence in the hearing of several of the boys of whom he had felt somewhat suspicious, and after having conferred with Little Pond, who promised to observe all his directions, the two boys departed from West Hall.

Ward's heart was much lighter than it had been for several days now. Puzzled as he was over Jack's part in the affair, the evident affection he had recently displayed led Ward to believe that still he was not entirely without friends. Even Big Smith was not to be despised, and Ward was surprised to observe the many changes which had come over the strange lad. His assumption had not entirely disappeared, and his former complete ignorance that there was any one else in the world of quite as much importance as he, was not yet all gone. But Big Smith was learning some of the lessons which in another form Ward Hill himself was also compelled to learn.

That morning Doctor Gray in his chapel talk had referred to the story of Wellington, when at one time he had visited the great English school at Eton, and after watching the eager crowd of boys in their struggles and games, had said, "Here Waterloo was won."

Ward was thinking of the words all that afternoon. If Wellington had really won the victory of Waterloo at Eton, then Napoleon must have lost it under similar conditions, he thought, and he wondered whether Weston might not be solving some such problems also. As for himself, Ward Hill fully appreciated the fact that he was in the midst of a struggle, and to the lad's credit be it said, out of it all came a stronger determination that his battle should not be lost.

He had enjoyed the afternoon thoroughly, and when he returned he ran eagerly up to Little Pond's room to learn whether he had discovered anything or not.

"Yes," said Pond, "I've found out some things. Come in and I'll tell you all about it."

Ward eagerly followed his little friend into his room, and taking a seat, turned to listen to what Pond had to tell him.

CHAPTER X
THE SCENE IN RIPLEY'S ROOM

"I kept the door open a little," began Pond, "so that I could hear any one who might come up the stairs. Most of the fellows were down on the ball-ground or had gone off on the hills, so there wasn't very much going on. I think I'd been waiting more than an hour before I heard a sound that was in any way suspicious, and I'll own up I began to be a little tired. I thought there wasn't any one going to come and I'd about made up my mind there wasn't any use in watching any longer, and I was just about to get a book and go to reading when I heard a step on the lower stairway. Of course there wasn't anything very bad in that, for I knew some of the fellows would be running in and out on a half-holiday, but there was something a little strange in this particular case. The fellow would come up two or three steps–and he didn't make very much noise about it either–and then he'd stop a minute before he came on."

"Was there only one?" inquired Ward, deeply interested in what Pond was relating.

"Only one then. Well, the fellow came up to the floor on which your room is and then he stopped. I couldn't see him of course, as he'd gone up to your door, I judged. I didn't just know what to do, and when I'd made up my mind to go out and take a peep over the railing, I heard the fellow come back to the head of the

stairs and give a low whistle. You'd better believe I was excited about that time, but I managed somehow to keep quiet and wait. Pretty soon another fellow came up the stairs, and then I heard them go through the hall and stop, as I thought, before your door."

"Go on, go on," said Ward quickly, as Pond seemed to hesitate a moment.

"Well, I crept out of my room, and I wasn't making very much noise either, you can believe, and as I went down the stairway a few steps, trying hard all the time to keep perfectly quiet, I bent over and took a peep at your hall. There were two chaps right in front of your door."

"What were they doing?"

"They were working at the lock with a key which one of them took out of his pocket. Somehow the key didn't work very well, for I've a notion that Mike hadn't told them about the new locks he'd put on your door and mine."

"Too bad," said Ward. "Well, what did they do then?"

"One of them happened to look up and he saw me peeking at them. I tried to dodge back so that they couldn't see me, but I was too late; they'd spied me. They made a rush through the hall and up the stairs to my room, but I'd got inside before they'd come, and bolted the door. They coaxed and teased me to open up for 'em, but I wasn't to be caught by any such chaff as that, and then they began to threaten me with all sorts of terrible things. They tried too, to open my door with a key, but it wasn't of any use, and if they had had a key that would have fitted the lock it wouldn't have helped them any, for the door was bolted on the inside, you see."

"Who were the fellows?"

"One of 'em was Ripley; he rooms over in East I think, but I didn't know who the other was. I could tell him if I saw him again, though, I'm sure of that."

Ward sat silent for a moment. He knew Ripley well. He was in the class below him. He had never regarded him as a vicious boy, and the worst thing he knew about him was that he belonged to the "Tangs." He also recalled the fact that he was a great admirer of Tim Pickard, and while he was not an intimate friend, he had seen him many times in Tim's company. He was a boy Tim could easily influence and would follow any orders the leader might give him.

The mystery was becoming somewhat cleared now. Doubtless Tim was the one to whom Jack had given Mike's bunch of keys, and he had not only gone to Jack's room and obtained the bat they wanted, but he had taken the keys to Ward's and Pond's rooms from the ring at the same time. It was all clear now, and Ward felt a great relief as he satisfied himself that Jack was innocent of any knowledge or share in the stacking of his room.

"You've done well, Little Pond," said Ward warmly, as he rose to depart. "I think we can put a stop to this particular line of fun now. I think I'll go over and

begin the operation at once."

"Where are you going, Ward? Can't I go with you?" called Little Pond from the head of the stairway; but Ward was already in the lower hall and made no reply. He wanted to be alone now and while his heart was hot within him to carry out the further plan he had already quickly formed.

The eager boy walked swiftly across the campus toward East Hall. He was not at all sure that he would find Ripley in his room, but he would at least find out whether he was or not, and as the bell for supper would soon be rung he wished to do that much before he went to the dining hall.

As he drew near East Hall he saw a crowd of boys returning from the ball-ground. Their presence in the building might greatly complicate matters, so he increased his speed and leaping up two steps at a time he ran up the stairs to the third floor and rapped on the door of Ripley's room.

Ripley himself opened the door, but as soon as he saw who his caller was, he tried to shut the door in his face. Ward, however, was too quick for him, and slipped into the room, and then he himself shut the door and instantly bolted it.

He was thoroughly angry now. Ripley plainly betrayed his guilt and alarm by his manner, and as Ward looked at him a moment in silence the first impulse in his heart was to mete out a summary and just punishment for the sneaking outrage of which he had been guilty.

As Ward glanced about the well-furnished room and contrasted it with his own somewhat bare apartments in West Hall, his bitterness increased. Was it not enough that he should be compelled to go without many of the things which such a fellow as Ripley had for the asking, without also having to suffer all the petty annoyances which the latter chose to inflict upon him? His anger was clearly manifest, for the troubled lad was in a towering rage, and as he realized that the boy he thought had stacked his room so many times was at last in his power, his first and natural impulse was to express his feelings in a manner which Ripley might not enjoy, but which he would certainly remember.

Ripley evidently was alarmed. His pale face and trembling hands plainly revealed that. He stood watching his caller, and not a word had as yet been spoken.

Suddenly Ripley started toward the open window. Ward instantly suspected that he was about to call to the crowd of boys who were then on the ground below and stood talking together near the entrance.

Before the boy could reach the place, however, or open his lips to call to his friends, Ward leaped before him, and standing with his back to the window, he said to the frightened lad before him:

"None of that, Ripley; keep away from these windows. I'll fix it so that they won't do you any good," he quickly added, as he instantly turned and removed

the prop which held the window up. The sash fell and Ripley perceived that it would be useless to call for help, and that he stood alone before the angry young senior.

"Now, Ripley, I've come over to have it out with you." Ward spoke slowly and in a low tone of voice, but the very quietness of his manner increased the alarm of the boy before him.

"I-I d-don't know what you mean, Ward Hill; what have I done?"

"What have you done?" retorted Ward, his voice rising as his anger broke forth. "What haven't you done? Who's stacked my room almost every day? Who's poured kerosene over my bedding? Who's done the thousand and one contemptible things that no one but a sneak and a coward would ever think of doing?" Ward's anger was rapidly increasing and as he enumerated his woes, each fresh mention of them served to enrage him the more.

"I never stacked your room, Ward Hill; I've never been in it since I've been in the Weston school; I never touched your bedclothes or your lamp; I haven't been in West Hall but once since I came back to school this fall. Honest, Ward, I'm telling you the truth; I am, Ward. Won't you believe me?"

All the fear of the lad seemed to speak in his words and voice, and for a moment Ward was almost staggered. And yet had not Little Pond told him less than half an hour before that he had seen this very lad trying to get into his room? Had Pond been mistaken? No, it could not be possible. The very manner of Ripley betrayed his guilt.

"Ripley," said Ward more slowly, "you were seen in West Hall this very afternoon when you were trying to get into my room. You can't deny that." He waited a moment, but the boy before him did not speak.

"If the truth was known," continued Ward, "I believe you've got the very key you tried to use in your pocket now. What were you doing there?" he added sternly.

"I was there this afternoon, but it was my first turn–I mean the first time I'd been there. I haven't been in West Hall before this term."

Ward hesitated. Possibly Ripley was speaking truly. He knew that Tim was shrewd and it might be that he had used different boys to do his bidding at various times. The expression which Ripley had unconsciously let slip, that it was his first turn, might understood in that light. However, his disposition had been clearly manifest, even by his own confession, and Ward's feeling of anger instantly returned.

"Ripley, you've got that key to my room I believe in your pocket now. Hand it over to me and I'll let you off this time."

"Not if I know myself," replied Ripley, his courage having evidently in a measure returned as he perceived Ward's momentary hesitation.

"You won't give it to me?"

"No, I won't give it to you," replied Ripley still more boldly.

"Then I'll take it."

And as he spoke Ward quickly sprang forward and grasped the boy by the shoulder.

Instantly all of Ripley's fears returned. Before Ward fairly realized what was occurring he had emitted three or four shrieks for help.

"Help! help! Come! come! Help me! Help! Help!"

If Ward had not been so angry and startled by the unexpected sounds he would have laughed. He had not harmed the boy, for he had only grasped him roughly by the shoulder. But evidently Ripley was thoroughly alarmed by Ward's manner and believed that his last hour had come.

In a moment there was a rush of boys up the stairway and they were pounding upon the door eagerly striving to open it or break it in.

Taking advantage of Ward's momentary confusion, Ripley slipped from his grasp and hastily drew back the bolt of the door and flung it wide open. A dozen or more boys rushed into the room, Tim Pickard at their head, and stopped a moment in surprise as they gazed at the two boys.

Scarcely a word had been uttered, however, before Ward heard some one speaking in the doorway. He instantly recognized the voice as that of Mr. Crane, and his anger gave way to a feeling of embarrassment.

"What's the meaning of this?" said Mr. Crane quietly, though his manner was somewhat stern. "I want you all to go immediately to your own rooms."

The boys started to obey at once, Ward being the last to pass Mr. Crane, who stood holding the door open for them to go through.

"I'm surprised, Hill," he said quietly as Ward passed him. "You will come and explain this later to me, I am sure."

"I'm ready to explain it now," said Ward eagerly.

"Not now, Hill," said Mr. Crane, smiling for the first time as he marked the eagerness of the lad. "Come over to-morrow evening."

"I'll come," said Ward quickly. "I don't want you to think too badly of me, Mr. Crane."

"And I don't want to. I hardly think I shall have to," he added, as he noted Ward's manner.

"May I go down to Speck's room now–I mean Jack's–I mean Jack Hobart's?"

"Yes, if you think it will be safe?" said Mr. Crane quietly. "From the sounds that came from this room I thought that murder at least was being committed, and I don't want to hear a repetition of these ear-splitting screeches."

Ward left the teacher and going down to Jack's room was speedily admitted.

Then he soon related the entire story before Jack and his chum Berry.

The boys listened soberly and when at last the story was ended, Jack said: "Well, Ward, it's a relief to me that you've dug the thing out. You made one mistake, though."

"What's that?"

"You ought never to have tried to chastise Ripley when he was in East Hall. Don't you know by this time that there's no fooling in any building Mr. Crane has charge of?"

"I wasn't going to chastise Ripley. All I was going to do was to take the key away from him. Of course that isn't any good, now that there's a new lock on my door; but it would be positive proof that Ripley had a hand in it, you see."

"And what good would that do you, I'd like to know? Suppose you did have the proof; you wouldn't take it over to the doctor, would you?"

"No, I don't suppose I would," said Ward slowly. "I never told on a fellow yet."

"And you're not going to begin now. It's hard lines for you, old fellow, I know that as well as you do; but it's just one of the things a chap's got to straighten out for himself. He can't report it, you know; that would only make a bad matter worse."

"I suppose you're right," said Ward soberly. He was thinking of his evening interview with Mr. Crane. He had intended to relate the circumstances just as they were, and felt positive that the teacher would sympathize with him rather than blame him.

Jack's words, however, he at once realized were true. In accordance with the false code of honor of the school, he could not cure his evils by seeking outside help. And the boys he knew were merciless in carrying out their own ideas of justice and honor.

"No, Ward; you've got to look at it just as it is. Some of the fellows are down on you, but I don't believe it'll last. I don't honestly. How can it with such a fellow as I know Ward Hill to be? It's against all reason."

"And meanwhile I'm to sit down meekly and thank these fellows who upset my room every day, am I?"

"Not at all. Not at all. But Ripley isn't the one to blame. You've got to go to the fountain head of all the trouble, as Dr. Gray so kindly informs us every day in the chapel."

"Well, Tim Pickard's the one at the bottom of it all," said Ward.

"So he is, my young friend, and he's the one to fix. Now I'm sure, with the help of Luscious here and your humble servant, you can do it, and do it this very night too."

"I don't see how," said Ward gloomily.

"No you don't; but if you'll listen with both ears I'll explain the little project I have in mind, and soon the weary valedic will put his enemies to flight, or words to that effect."

And Jack at once began to explain his "project."

CHAPTER XI
JACK HOBART'S PROJECT

"There's no other way out of it," began Jack, "except for you to take the matter into your own hands, Ward. You can't report it to the teachers, and you can't be expected to let it go on without doing something to protect yourself. I think even Mr. Crane wouldn't expect anything less than that of you."

"But I don't see just what I'm to do," protested Ward. "Of course I know now that Tim Pickard is the one who's stirring the trouble up, though I've been satisfied all the time that he was the ringleader. I don't see what I can do, unless I fight him."

"That's one way out of it," replied Jack, who perhaps was not entirely averse to a settlement of troubles by that primitive and brutal method. "But you don't need to do that just yet. You can hold that till later, though I'm not sure but you might save yourself a deal of trouble by pitching into Tim now. It may have to come to that in the end. Still, I think it would be better to try my plan first."

Ward smiled as he thought of Jack in the role of a peacemaker. He appreciated fully Jack's spirit and life, and he well knew how he enjoyed anything that partook of the nature of tests of physical strength in the school. His last words, in which with apparent reluctance he had counseled his friend to postpone the method his boyish heart decidedly preferred, had been spoken in a tone which made Berry laugh aloud.

"Let's hear your plan, Jack," said Ward.

"It's nothing more than giving Tim a dose of his own medicine."

"What do you mean? that I'm to stack his room?"

"That's exactly my meaning. You grasp it quickly, as Mr. Blake sometimes tells me–no, I mean you, Ward–in his classes. Yes, sir, that's the thing for you to do, for it's the only thing a fellow like Tim Pickard will appreciate. 'Hoist with his own petard.' Isn't that something you've heard somewhere, sometime?"

"I think I have heard the expression before. How am I to do it, Jack?"

"Just as easily as falling off a log. Tim rooms down at Ma Perrins', as you know, and has a room all to himself. Now to-night after supper, my friend, here, Luscious, will send for him to come up to our room. I think it very likely that Luscious will have something to say about the nine, and Tim won't wait long after hearing that Luscious Berry has something to say about that, for if he's interested in anything it's the work and the prospects of the nine, you know."

"Yes, I know," replied Ward somewhat gloomily. Tim Pickard's work and interest in the nine was a subject on which he had very strong feelings at that time.

"Well, Luscious will get him up here and he'll hold him with his glittering eye, *à la* ancient mariner, and he'll have so many bright speeches to make, that Tim won't be able to get away from him. Meanwhile you and I'll step down to Tim's room and rearrange it for him, don't you see? I'm going into this with you, Ward, and see if I can't help you to put a stop to these rascally proceedings."

"Yes, but—-"

"There isn't a 'but' about it," interrupted Jack. "I know what you were going to say, but it isn't worth saying, Ward. I know all the fine phrases about 'stooping' and 'belittling yourself,' and all that sort of stuff, but it's no time for indulging in such nonsense. Here you are bothered to death by Tim's pranks. You don't want to bother him, or have anything to do with him, for the matter of that. I understand all these things. But you can't study; you won't be the valedic; you can't report the trouble to the faculty. What can you do? Just nothing, but take the matter into your own hands and do the thing that will put a stop in the shortest time to all this nonsense. Do you see the point?"

"Yes, I see—-"

"Well, I'm glad for once in your life that you're able to see the point."

"And I'm glad that for once in your life you can make a point clear," said Ward with a laugh.

"Well done, my friend, I've hopes of you yet. Now, I say it's all fair to feed Tim with his own food and from his own spoon. Why my father was telling me the last time I was home about a trick a fellow named Bram Martling played in the 'neutral ground,' away back in the Revolution. It seems that this same Bram, which is short as I understand it for Abraham, was a young officer in the Continental army, and once when he came home he found the Tories and British had been burning the houses around there just for the fun of seeing 'em burn, I fancy. Well, Bram was pretty well stirred up when he found out what was going on, so he just quietly got a dozen young fellows together, and they met over by Wolfert's Roost on the Hudson, and took two whaleboats and pulled down to Morningside Heights in the night. Then they crept up and set fire to Oliver De Lancy's great house, and got away without one of them being caught. They

thought 'twas a great deed in those days, and made out that the aforesaid Bram was quite a hero. But he stopped the Tories from burning houses after that, let me tell you. It makes all the difference in the world whether you are the burner or the burnee."

"And you think—-?"

"Be silent, my young friend. This fable, which I have just related for your special benefit, teaches that in bad things as well as in good it is much more pleasant to give than to receive. Now, for your own good, and for the good of Tim Pickard too, you are simply compelled to let him know just how good it is to have one's room stacked. It must be done thoroughly and at once. Who was it that said, 'if 'twere well done when it is done, then 'twere well if it were done quickly'?"

"I guess it was Shakespeare," said Ward laughing; "but you got the quotation twisted a bit. The way it reads is—-"

"Oh, bother the way it reads, you know what I mean. Now, Luscious, you tell Ward if you don't think what I've said is true."

"I think, Ward," said Berry, "that Jack's right. I don't see that you can do anything else. You've got to put a stop to the racket and Jack's plan is a good one."

For a moment Ward did not speak. Somehow he knew that Henry would not go into the scheme, and he had a very decided opinion that Mr. Crane would not approve. Indeed, the teacher had at one time said to him that it was a good deal better to suffer wrong than to do it. One wrong did not make another wrong right. Ward needed no one to tell him that.

Yet there was the trouble all the time threatening to become worse and it was certainly bad enough as it was, and Henry and Little Pond were both made to suffer too for his unpopularity. Jack's plan might work well. Who could say? The specious reasoning of boys who would not intentionally do anything very bad also appealed to him.

But more than all was Jack's evident friendship and interest. Ward was well aware of the risks the impulsive lad would be incurring in entering into the project with him. Tim Pickard's enmity in the Weston school was no light matter, and Jack, even more than Ward, fed upon the good will of his companions. Jack might feel hurt if he should refuse now to enter into the project, when his only motive for proposing it had been the desire to aid him. Ward felt that he could not refuse.

"Well, Jack," he said at last, "I'm obliged to you, and I think your suggestion is worth trying."

"Good for you, old man," said Jack eagerly, rising from his chair as he spoke. "Now we'll do it this very night. You go right up to your room just as soon as

you've had your supper, and as soon as Luscious and I have had ours I'll have him bring Tim back with him to our room. Then, when the coasts are clear, I'll make a break for your room and we'll soon fix Tim's room out in great shape. There goes the bell now. Your afflictions will soon be over, the wicked will cease to trouble you, and the weary valedic will be at rest."

The boys at once left East Hall, Ward going to the dining hall and Jack and Berry starting toward Mrs. Perrins', where they both took their meals.

Somehow, Ward had no feeling of elation. Again and again he tried to persuade himself that Jack's scheme was all right and that now he would put an end to all his difficulties. But there were misgivings in his heart all the time. Try as he would to convince himself that he was taking a legitimate and justifiable method of protecting himself, he could not shake off the feeling that if he should be discovered in the act, or if Mr. Crane should learn of it, the affair would appear in a far different light.

However, he did not mention the plan or his own misgivings to his roommate, and it was with a feeling of relief he heard Henry say to him, when together they left the dining hall, "I'm going over to Dr. Gray's a little while, Ward. Will you come too?"

"No, I think not at present," said Ward. "I guess I'll go over to our room and keep out visitors. I don't want to have to tack down carpets to-night."

"I don't believe they'll trouble us now that we've a new lock on the door," said Henry, laughing as he spoke. He did not urge Ward to accompany him and soon departed.

Ward walked slowly on toward West Hall and entered his room. He had not been there long before Jack came, and he at once followed him out of the building.

"It's all right, Ward," said Jack eagerly. "Luscious has taken Tim up to our room and he'll keep him there for an hour."

"But how shall we get into his room?" inquired Ward.

"Oh, that's all easy enough. Ma doesn't keep the front door locked, and if she happens to see me come in, she'll only think I've come back for something I left. It'll be all right; you needn't have any fears about that."

"Jack," said Ward slowly, "I've been thinking this thing over and I don't want you to get your fingers burned."

"That's good of you," and Jack laughed. "Any one to hear you talk would think I was the fellow in trouble. Don't bother your head about me. I'll be all right."

"That isn't just what I mean. I think you'd better stay down by the door or out in the hall and let me go up to Tim's room alone. There isn't any use in your going, and besides that, I think you can help more if you stay there and keep

watch."

"Maybe you're right," replied Jack thoughtfully. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Ward, I'll stay in the hall and wait for you to go up and fix the room and then I'll come in for the finishing touches. I don't believe you know how to do the thing up in the latest and most approved manner."

The boys were now in front of Mrs. Perrins' house, and glancing quickly up and down the street to make sure that they were not observed, they quickly crossed over the street and approached the door.

Having found this unlocked, they entered and stood for a moment in the hallway. One of the servants was in the dining room and glanced up at them as they came in, but at once recognizing Jack, she paid no further attention to them and went on with her duties.

"It's all right," whispered Jack. "Go right up to Tim's room, it's the one right over the dining room, you know. I'll be up too in a few minutes and help you to put the finishing touches on."

Ward turned and started at once up the stairway. A heavy carpet was on the floor and deadened the sound of his footsteps. The lad was excited and his heart was beating rapidly, but his presence was not discovered and he soon made his way swiftly and silently to the door of Tim's room.

Suppose the door should be locked! Ward had not thought of that, nor had Jack mentioned it. He almost wished that it was; but as he turned the knob, the door opened and he at once entered, gently closing the door behind him.

And now he was in Tim Pickard's room. The lamp upon the table was burning, and the room seemed to be flooded with a soft and mellow light which served to increase the luxurious appearance of all about him.

What an elegantly furnished room it was! In spite of his excitement, Ward could not fail to notice that. Pictures were hanging on the walls, the floor had a rich, soft carpet upon it, a little fire was burning in the open grate, just sufficient to take away the chill of the early autumn air. The study table was covered with books and papers, the chairs were beautifully upholstered, and the bed, which stood in one corner of the room, was not much like the rude little affair in his own room, Ward thought.

Indeed, for a moment Ward stopped and looked about him, deeply impressed by the contrast to his room in West Hall. And why should Tim Pickard, with all his money and comforts, wish to torment him by a series of petty and constant annoyances?

The thought made Ward's heart bitter and hard. It was unjust, mean, contemptible. Jack was right. The only way in which he could defend himself was to let Tim understand just what it meant for a fellow to have his room all upset.

Hark! What was that? Ward stopped and listened intently as he heard

some one moving in the hall. Suppose he should be discovered in the room! He felt like a thief. What could he say or do to explain his presence if he should be discovered?

The sound of the footsteps passed and Ward breathed more freely. What he was to do, he must do quickly. Where should he begin? He started toward the bed to tear that in pieces, but quickly changing his purpose, he turned again to the study table. That was the proper spot at which to begin.

As he approached, the light of the lamp fell full upon the photograph of a woman's face looking up at him from a beautiful frame on the table. It almost seemed to him as if the eyes could see him and were looking at him with a reproving, reproachful glance. That must be Tim's mother, he thought. He knew that she was dead, for Tim had told him many a time of the fact that his father–"the governor," as Tim called him–was the only one he had to look after him or to whom he had to report.

Perhaps if his mother were alive, Tim would be a different fellow. It seemed to Ward, as he stood gazing at the picture, as if the woman were pleading with him. For a moment he thought of another woman in the far-away village of Rockford. His mother was living, and he had no such excuse as Tim had for failing to do what he knew was right. And how grieved she would be if she knew he had been stealing like a thief into another fellow's room. Ward almost started, for it seemed as if he could hear the sound of her voice. And there was the face of Tim's dead mother still looking up at him.

"I can't do it! I can't do it! I'd be no better than Tim Pickard if I did. I'd be doing the very same thing which made me so mad when he did it," groaned Ward.

The troubled boy quickly turned to leave the room Jack might think what he chose; he simply could not bring himself to do what he had planned.

As he approached the door, his heart seemed almost to cease to beat. Some one was coming. He could hear the footsteps as they came nearer the door. The frightened boy looked quickly about him for a place of concealment, but none could be found. In a moment the door was opened and Tim himself was standing before him with a look of mingled anger and astonishment plainly expressed upon his face.

CHAPTER XII

MR. CRANE'S WORDS

"What are you doing here?" said Tim angrily, as soon as he recovered from his surprise.

"I came over to stack your room."

"You did? You did?" said Tim, as if he could hardly believe what he had heard.

His astonishment arose not from the fact that Ward should have come for the purpose which he so calmly expressed, but from the fact that he should have stated it so boldly. The one part Tim could readily understand, but the other was something he could not comprehend. To him there was but one explanation, and that was that Ward was somehow openly defying him, and Tim's anger was correspondingly increased.

With all his faults Tim Pickard was no coward, as the word is ordinarily used. That is, he had no fears of a physical contest, and as he stood in the doorway before him Ward readily perceived what a fine specimen of young manhood in its bodily form Tim was. Tall, with broad shoulders and with the fire and force of vigorous health manifest in every phase of his bearing, he would not be an antagonist whom most boys would care to meet.

Ward himself was no weakling. Though he was not so large as Tim, his compact and well-knit frame betokened physical powers of no mean order. And his quiet bearing served to increase the impression of his fearlessness too, and for a moment the two seniors stood quietly facing each other, each being conscious of the fact that a contest between them would be no light affair.

"Well, why don't you stack it then?" said Tim at last with a sneer. "Here's the room and you've got my full consent to go ahead–if you can."

"I'm not going to stack it," said Ward quietly.

"Oh, you're not? Well, that's kind of you, I must say," laughed Tim. "Well, if you're not going to stack it, will you leave or shall I put you out? I don't want any sneaking hypocrite prowling around here."

"I shall leave, but you won't put me out," replied Ward, his face flushing as he spoke.

"Well, leave then, will you? You can't do it too soon to suit me."

Ward did not stir.

Tim's face flushed with anger and he advanced a step nearer the table, and Ward braced himself for the conflict which now appeared to be inevitable.

Before anything could be done, however, the door was suddenly pushed open and Jack burst into the room. A hasty glance at the two boys revealed at once to him the condition of affairs, and taking a position between the two, he said:

"Here now, quit this, will you?"

"You don't suppose I'm going to sit down quietly and let a fellow go to work

stacking my room, do you?" said Tim. "This sneak says that was just what he came for."

"No, I don't believe you'd do any such thing," replied Jack; "neither do I think you would think Ward Hill would be likely to do any such thing, either. If he came over here to stack your room, it's no more than you deserve, and he'd be only paying off old scores."

"I never stacked his room," replied Tim evasively.

"No, you never had the nerve to do that openly, but you can set such fellows as Ripley and Choate and a lot of others up to it. Oh, you needn't beg off, Tim Pickard. I know you through and through, and so does Ward Hill too; and if he came over here to set your room up, he knows, and I know, and you know, and I know you know that we know, you're only being paid off in your own coin."

Tim was silent, and Jack quickly perceiving his advantage, went on. "Now, look here, you fellows. You can't get into any scrap here, not so long as I'm in the room. The first thing you know Ma Perrins would be at the door, and you know she would report the thing at once to Doctor Gray. Then what would happen? You, Tim, aren't in very good shape for receiving an invitation to come up and confer with him about 'the best interests of the school,' as he puts it. You know what would follow mighty sudden. And Ward here isn't in just the best position in the world for a faculty meeting, though I think he'd be in a good deal better one than you, Tim, for he's only trying to protect himself. Even a worm will turn, and I don't believe Doctor Gray would blame a fellow too much for taking the law into his own hands and trying to put a stop to having his room stacked every day of his life."

"But I haven't stacked his room, I'm telling you," interrupted Tim.

"Oh, give that ancient and antiquated aphorism a period of relaxation, will you, Tim? That doesn't work here, let me tell you. I know what I'm talking about."

"But I don't see what this sneak thinks he's going to gain by stacking my room," persisted Tim. "I shouldn't have to set it up again myself. I'm no West Hall pauper. I don't have to take care of my own room. Thank fortune, I've got some one to do my dirty work for me."

"Yes, that's what you're always doing, Tim Pickard," retorted Jack angrily, as he saw Ward flush at the brutal words; "you're always getting some one to do that for you. But let me tell you one thing, this stacking of Ward's room has got to be stopped."

"Who's going to stop it, I'd like to know?" replied Tim boldly.

"Oh, there's more than one way of doing that," replied Jack quietly. "Now, if you don't want to be sent home again for good and all, you'll see to it that Ward Hill's room isn't troubled again. That's all I've got to say about it."

"What'll you do? Go and report it to Doctor Gray?"

"I'm not telling what'll be done, but I am telling you that it isn't going to happen again. I know you and you know me, and you know too that I don't talk for the fun of hearing my own voice. Come on, Ward," he added, "you'll not be bothered any more after this. Good-bye, Tim," he called out as he and Ward together left the room.

But Tim made no response.

Neither of the boys spoke until they were in front of East Hall, then as Ward turned to go to his own room, Jack said, "What was the trouble? You had time enough to rip the carpet apart, to say nothing of upsetting everything in the room."

"I can't explain it, Jack; I don't know just why I didn't, but I couldn't do it, and that's all there was about it. When I got into the room, it all came over me what a mean, contemptible thing it was, and how I felt toward Tim for his work in West Hall; and on his table was a picture of his dead mother appearing to look reproachfully at me. It seemed to me that I couldn't do it, and if I did I'd be doing the very thing that set me so against him. And so I couldn't, and that's all there is about it."

"You're a queer chap," said Jack thoughtfully. "I thought I knew you pretty well, but I've got to give you up, I'm afraid. Ma Perrins came out into the hall while I was on guard there, and as I saw she looked a little surprised to see me, I went into the parlor with her just to quiet her fears and give you a chance to put in your fine work. I was horrified when I saw Tim rush into the house like a young whirlwind, and before I could call to him he was up the stairs as if he'd been shot out of a gun. You'd better believe I cut short my interview with Ma and made a break for Tim's room. I was half afraid I'd find only a few small pieces of you and Tim left, and that I'd have to beg the loan of one of Ma's platters to bring you home on. But I can't make you out, Ward. I hardly know now why you didn't fix Tim's room so that it would have been a living monument of your ability in that line. That's what I'd have done."

As Ward made no reply, Jack added: "Well, never mind, old fellow! Perhaps it's just as well. Tim won't bother you again, that is, I mean you won't have your room stacked again. You can rest easy about that."

"Thank you, Jack. You've been a good friend to me, and I need friends too."

"Don't mention it," replied Jack impulsively, as he reached forth his hand and shook Ward's warmly. "Good-night."

"Good-night, Jack."

When Ward, returned to his room, Henry was there and working over his lessons. At first he was tempted to tell his room-mate all about his experience, but fearing that Henry like Jack might misunderstand him he remained silent,

and soon took his seat at his own table and began to work on his lessons.

It was some time, however, before he could bring his mind to bear upon his task. The scene in Tim Pickard's room kept rising before him. His anger and the part Jack had taken were still vivid. What a good fellow Jack was, Ward thought, and he appreciated his aid the more when he realized what it might mean for the impulsive lad to bring upon himself the anger of the "Tangs." And yet how fearless he had been, and in what a manly way he had taken his stand. Even then Ward could almost hear his words as he told Tim that the trouble in West Hall must cease. Would Tim heed? Somehow Ward felt that he would, at least in so far as the stacking of his room was concerned; but in other ways doubtless he would be made aware that Tim had not forgotten him. And Tim was one who never forgot.

At last he succeeded in banishing from his mind for the time, the recollection of the scene in Mrs. Perrins' house, and gave himself wholly to his work. On the following night Ward started to go to Mr. Crane's room. Somehow he dreaded the interview, and yet go he must. Mr. Crane he knew would expect him to come, and that scene in Ripley's room must be explained to his satisfaction.

Ward had thought over the matter many times, but as yet had arrived at no satisfactory course for him to follow. One thing was certain, and that was that he could not tell Mr. Crane about Tim Pickard. That was against the school's code of honor, and Ward's own feelings forbade it as well.

He was still undecided what to do when he rapped on Mr. Crane's door and was at once admitted by the teacher himself.

Apparently Mr. Crane had not changed, nor did he seem in any way suspicious of the boy before him. And yet that very quietness was most impressive to Ward, and had ever been the one element in the teacher's character and bearing which had most influenced him.

After a few general words Ward felt that he could bear it no longer, and breaking in somewhat abruptly, he said:

"Mr. Crane I want to put a case before you."

"Yes?" said Mr. Crane, lifting his eyes inquiringly, but not otherwise changing his manner.

"I want to know just what you would do. You seem to understand boys so well."

"I don't just know what I should do, if I didn't understand a little more clearly than I do now what was expected of me," answered Mr. Crane, smiling slightly as he spoke.

"Well, it's just this way. Suppose a fellow–I mean a boy–had come up to the Weston school, and was here a year. Suppose too, that he hadn't done very well. He'd neglected his work and was a great disappointment to his father and

mother, and to his teachers, to say nothing of himself. Then suppose he'd fallen in with a set of the fellows–I mean boys–who were up to all sorts of mischief and he'd gone in with them, though all the time he didn't feel right about it. Then suppose he'd failed in his examinations at the end of the year, but that he tried to make them up during the summer. We'll say he came back to school and was able to go on with his class. When he came back he tried to break off with his old associates, but he didn't find it a very easy thing to do. They wouldn't believe in him, and when at last they found he really was trying to do differently, then they tried to make his life a burden to him."

Ward stopped a moment as if he expected some kind of a reply, but as Mr. Crane was silent he resumed his story.

"Well, if it didn't sound too much like telling tales, we'll suppose these fellows–I mean students–tried to do all they could to make life a burden for the boy. They put him off from the nine, they prejudiced the minds of the new boys against him, and some of the old ones too. But that wasn't all. They played all kinds of tricks on him, and worst of all they began to stack his room. I don't know that you understand what that means?" added Ward quickly.

"I think I understand," said Mr. Crane quietly.

"Well, this boy–I mean fellow–no, I don't, I mean boy–would find his room all upset every day. His carpet would be torn up, he'd find that water had been poured on his bed, and sometimes the oil from his lamp would be added too. The fellow–boy I mean–really wanted to study, but he had to take lots of his time from his lessons to set his room to rights. Finally he went at it and found out who was doing the mischief. He discovered that some one had a key to his room, but he found out too, that the fellow–I mean boy–who had the key wasn't the one who was stacking his room. He kept out of it himself, but set other fellows–I mean boys–up to it. And the worst of it all was that they were picking on Little P–I mean on a little fellow who rather looked up to this boy for help.

"Well, finally the boy fixed a trap and caught the one who was trying to get into his room that day. He went over to his room and started to make him give up the key–but–but–he was interrupted, and somehow he didn't do it. Then he went down to the fellow's room–the one at the bottom of it all–and was going to stack his room well, so as to let him know how it felt. But when he got there he somehow couldn't bring himself to do it, and while he was hesitating, the fellow in whose room he was came back and there was a great row.

"No, there was no fight," he hastily added, as he saw the question in the teacher's eyes; "but the fellow didn't know but the boy was trying to stack his room. Now, there's the story, Mr. Crane. I wish you'd tell me what you would do if you were that boy."

For a few moments Mr. Crane was silent, but at last he said: "Hill, I'll try to

be entirely frank with you. In the first place, I think I should honor the boy who had gained the victory over himself in that fellow's room. He couldn't afford to do the very same thing he despised in the other fellow."

Ward's face flushed with pleasure, for he felt that praise from Mr. Crane was praise indeed.

"I'm not done yet," resumed Mr. Crane quietly. "Then, if I were that boy, I think I should begin to question myself and see if there was any just cause for the school being down upon me. It may have been that that boy was somewhat conceited, and a little selfish. He was all the time perhaps thinking how the school ought to appreciate everything he did, and he did not have quite the necessary courage to face calmly the results of his own misdeeds."

"But, Mr. Crane," protested Ward, "the fellow knew he'd done wrong. He wasn't trying to crawl."

"Perhaps so, but it is also possible that he thought he ought to be praised unduly for simply turning about and doing his duty. In the main, Hill, boys are just; and while doubtless injustice creeps in at times, it is still true that if a fellow has trouble, he ought not only to think of that, but of what he may be doing to bring it upon himself."

"Then you think the boy ought to keep still and let his room be stacked every day, do you?"

"Not at all; I want him to cure that in the right way, but I want him also to think not only of the stacking, but of the reason for its being stacked."

"It was stacked because he broke with the fellows he'd been going with," said Ward bitterly.

"In part, yes; but in part, no. Think it over, Hill, and come and see me again in a week."

"Good-night, Mr. Crane," said Ward somewhat abruptly, as he left the room.

He felt hurt and humiliated. Somehow he had thought Mr. Crane would speak very differently. Was that to be the reward for trying to do better? It seemed to him that he had been abused and misunderstood, and in no very amiable frame of mind Ward walked back to West Hall.

CHAPTER XIII
A FAITHFUL FRIEND

For two days Ward Hill continued in no enviable frame of mind. He felt hurt and humiliated by the words of Mr. Crane, and also felt that he had been hard and somewhat unjust in his judgment.

It was true that he had not referred to the disturbance in Ripley's room, but to Ward that seemed a trifling matter now. The struggle through which he was passing was uppermost in his thoughts, and before that, all else seemed insignificant and small.

And to Ward Hill it was a struggle of no small character. The stand which near the close of the preceding year he had taken for Henry had brought upon him the enmity of his former associates, and they had succeeded not only in annoying him themselves, but also in creating a prejudice against him in the school.

Henry, it was true, remained his true friend, but he was a boy who was never demonstrative, and Ward somehow felt the need of continued praise. In this particular he did not differ from other sensitive and bright lads; but in his own home and in the little village of Rockford, he had been so looked up to by all his associates that he had come to regard such feelings toward him as but his just and natural right.

Jack Hobart's good will he highly prized and also prized more than he himself was aware all the good-natured references to the possibilities of his becoming the valedictorian of the class; but Ward Hill, like many another when he finds himself beset with perplexities and difficulties, was more prone to dwell upon his lacks than upon his possessions, and consequently he was thinking much more of the words of implied blame which Mr. Crane had spoken, than he was of the encouragement and appreciation he had received.

And it was just because Mr. Crane thoroughly understood Ward that he had spoken as he did at the time of Ward's indirect statement. He had understood clearly that in the case which Ward had stated, he was speaking of himself. The disguise was very thin, and the teacher had listened attentively and with a full sense of what it all meant to the eager, impulsive boy.

But he had also seen, what Ward himself had failed to see, that as yet he had not faced his situation with the true spirit. It was his vanity which was suffering more than his sense of justice and right. Eager for the praise of the boys and his teachers, he had not as yet come to perceive that there was something deeper, stronger, better. It was with no lack of appreciation of the efforts Ward certainly was making to do better work in his classes and to cut himself loose from the more disorderly elements of the Weston school, that Mr. Crane had spoken, but because he clearly perceived that as yet the troubled boy was governed only by his feelings, and that deep down below all his desires to improve there lay a motive which must be purified before anything like a radical or permanent change

in his life could be produced.

He had not failed to notice the pain his words produced, but as we are informed that "faithful are the wounds of a friend," he had resolved for the sake of the boy, whom he sincerely loved and whose brightness he was in no wise backward in acknowledging, that what he needed most was not praise and sympathy, but frankness and a true picture of himself.

Not the least of Ward's troubles arose from the fact that in his own heart there was a perception of the fact that the basis of all his regard for Mr. Crane was his confidence in the teacher's candor and sincerity. Ward felt that come what might Mr. Crane never said pleasing things just for the pleasure of saying them, or for the pleasure his praise might impart. In all this he was in marked contrast to Mr. Blake whose words of praise were so plentiful as to be cheap, and were bestowed so indiscriminately that they were slightly valued. Mr. Crane, on the contrary, was ever ready to speak a word of encouragement to any boy whom he perceived to be doing his best, but he never praised at the expense of truth. And perhaps it was because of the dim consciousness that there was too much truth in what he had heard, that Ward's bitterness was somewhat increased.

He could not conceal from himself the fact that in the preceding year, when he had been received into the "Tangs" and made much of by a class of boys whose ideals, home training, and lives had been very different from his own, that he had been somewhat elated by the attentions he had received and that his manner and bearing toward the other boys in the school had gradually undergone a marked change.

He had become somewhat overbearing and condescending in his dealings with them. He had assumed airs that did not become him and rejected many of the overtures of friendship that had been offered him. And as a consequence he had not gained them, and now he had lost the others. Did Mr. Crane know anything of that? Ward almost felt that he must, but the knowledge did not tend to increase his peace of mind at the time. In fact, Ward Hill wanted what he did not need, and needed what he did not want.

For two days, as we have said, the struggle went on in Ward's soul. At times he would be bitter and hard, feeling that it made no difference what he attempted to do, the hand of nearly every one was certain to be against him. Then again, his better self would assert itself and he would be able to see things in their true light.

To Henry he did not speak of his troubles. He worked faithfully and hard over his lessons, and knew that he was doing well in his classes; but somehow the knowledge did not bring him the satisfaction he had expected. He could not forget or ignore Mr. Crane's words, and the recollection of them was ever a disturbing element in his mind.

When the two days had passed, he sought out Jack, having resolved to seek his opinion, half hoping that his friend, who ever had good words for all, would have something to say to him which would be a comfort to his troubled soul.

It was in his room that he found his friend and after stating, as clearly and fully as he could recall, the conversation with Mr. Crane, he said abruptly: "Now, Jack, I want you to tell me just what you think. Am I a prig, like Big Smith? Do you think Mr. Crane was right? Am I to blame for what's coming to me?"

"Ward, I don't know," said Jack soberly after a brief silence.

Ward felt hurt and somewhat humiliated by his friend's reply. He was so anxious to be absolved from all blame that he had eagerly looked forward to Jack as a consoler. And now Jack's manner, far more than his words, seemed to imply that he too thought something was wrong with himself.

"It seems to me," said Ward, unable entirely to conceal his disappointment, "that a fellow who stands up for Henry as I did when the 'Tangs' got after him, isn't altogether bad. And why is Tim Pickard so down on me? If I'd gone into his scrapes, or if even now I'd go in again, he'd be all right, and you know it. I'd have my place on the nine and the fellows in the school wouldn't all be down on me as they now are."

"I don't know what to say to you," said Jack slowly. "You know how I feel, old fellow, and there isn't a chap in the school who would be so glad to have you take the place I know belongs to you as I would. I know Tim's to blame, but then you know how it was with Big Pond. He didn't go in with Tim and the 'Tangs,' and yet there hasn't been a fellow in school for years whom every one liked as they did Pond. Now I know him and I know you, and for the life of me I can't see just where the fault lies."

"Only you know they liked Pond and don't like me."

"It isn't as strong as that. It isn't that the fellows dislike you, Ward. That isn't it."

"It's that they don't like me," said Ward bitterly, determined to say the words which he perceived that Jack would not.

"I think it'll come out all right, Ward, if you'll have patience and wait. It isn't very pleasant, I know," he hastily added as he saw an expression of pain and mortification sweep over Ward's face, "but it'll all come right, I'm sure."

"And meanwhile I'm to sit still and bear it all like a martyr on a pole."

"No, not that–not that–but—-"

"But what?"

"But I wish you'd take a little more pains to make the fellows like you."

"Don't you remember, though, what the doctor said about the fellows that tried to do the popular act, how they never succeeded and the school was always down on them?"

"Yes, I remember, and it's true too, but that doesn't mean that a fellow's not to take a little trouble to be agreeable–I mean to go out of his way. Forgive me, Ward. It hurts me worse than it does you, but you asked me the honest question and I'm trying hard, honestly I am, to see a way out of it. Now there's Big Smith. He's never in a scrape. He doesn't know what the word mischief means, but then he isn't over popular, you know."

"Yes, I know; but I hope I'm not like Big Smith. I suppose I'll have to take it out in being respected, even if I'm not liked."

"That's where you're wrong, Ward. I tell you a fellow's got to be respected or he's not liked. He's got to have something the other fellows don't have or they don't look up to him and don't care much for him, either. No, sir! I don't believe a fellow can be respected and not be liked. Speaking of that, and the doctor's words, don't you remember what he said about 'speaking the truth in love'? that it wasn't enough for a fellow to be true, and speak the truth too, for that matter, but that the way in which he did it counted for as much or more than what he said? I usually take a nap when the doctor gets to preaching, but I was thinking that morning and so kept awake."

"Thinking of me, maybe?" said Ward, looking keenly at Jack as he spoke.

"Why, yes, to tell the truth I was thinking of you, Ward; but I fancy I'd been in a good deal better business to have been thinking of myself."

"Jack, what would you advise me to do?"

"I told you, Ward, I don't know what to tell you. Still, if you want me to, I'll tell you one or two things I've thought of."

"Go ahead," said Ward, striving to appear calm, though there was a sinking of the heart as he spoke.

"Well, to begin with, old fellow, there isn't a boy in the class who can learn his lessons with as little work as you can. Why, you can see right through a thing that takes my old head an hour to find out. But, Ward," he added hesitatingly, "I've sometimes thought you were a little quick to poke fun at the fellows who are not so quick-witted as you are. And then you aren't over ready to give a fellow a lift when he's in trouble. Now, for example, there's Big Smith. I saw him come up to you before class yesterday and say, 'Ward, how do you translate this passage?' And maybe you remember what you said to him."

"No, I don't," replied Ward. "He's such a shirk I've no patience with him. What did I say, Jack?"

"Why you turned him off with a curt, 'How do I translate that place? Why, I translate it right,' and then you turned on your heel and walked off."

"But I don't want to drag Big Smith through by letting him hang on to my coat tails. I work to get what I have, and why shouldn't the other fellows work too, I'd like to know? Every tub ought to stand on its own bottom."

"That's all true enough, but it wouldn't cost you anything to give another fellow a lift; you can do it too, I know, for you've lifted me right out of the mire every time I asked you."

"Yes, but I like you, Jack."

"But I thought it was of the other fellows and the school you were talking just now."

"So I was, Jack," replied Ward slowly. Perhaps he was beginning to see what his friend had in mind. "But go on, give me another. I'm good for it."

"Well," said Jack hesitatingly, "I've thought about the nine, Ward. Henry and I were perfectly willing to keep off till they'd take you on, but you wouldn't have that."

"No, sir! I'd never go on the nine if I had to get on in that way."

"That's all right and I don't know that I blame you, though I think by a little squeezing Tim would have come around all right. But I did think you might have gone on the scrub."

"Go on the scrub!" said Ward quickly. "What? Go on the scrub when I'd been put off from the nine? Not much! Not as long as the court knows itself." And Ward rose from his seat and in his anger began to pace back and forth in the room.

"You don't see what I'm driving at. Now it looks to me like this. If you'd taken the thing good-naturedly and made out that you weren't hit so hard, I think the most of the fellows in the school would have taken your part in no time. As it is, you just keep away from them, and if Tim tells them that you've gone back on everything, why they don't know but it's true, you see. Now if you'd swallowed your pride and gone in with the fellows, whether you were on the nine or not, why it wouldn't have been any time before every one of them would be willing to swear that you were one of the best fellows in the school, as well as one of the best players, and Tim would be forced to give you back your place. Ripley has it now, but he doesn't size up to your knees, when it comes to playing ball."

"Yes, but think what Tim Pickard would say if he should see me on the scrub nine. He'd think he'd got me just where he wanted me, and that I was all cut up about being put off the nine, and was trying to force my way back again."

"Tim might be a little disagreeable at first; but you know if you braced up and either laughed at him or paid no attention to what he said, how soon he'd cool off. Now look here, Ward, how many times has your room been stacked since we had our little interview with Timothy down at Ma Perrins'?"

"Not once."

"Exactly. And if you meet Tim and the boys in the same way down on the ball ground you'd see how soon he'd crawl there. Oh, I know Tim Pickard all the way up and all the way down, from the top of his head to the sole of his foot."

"But, I don't want to get on the nine in any such way," protested Ward.

"Never mind the nine, just come down and go in with the fellows, that's all I'm telling you. You can't run off up to the glen or away off to the Hopper, and think all the school is going to come trailing after you. If you're going to catch fish, you've got to go where the fish are, haven't you? And if you think the fellows are all down on you, you can't fix things straight by going off and talking with the whispering breezes and echoing hills, and all that sort of stuff."

Ward soon departed and went to his own room. His heart was smarting from the effect of Jack's words, but somehow he could not feel angry with him. Who could? The light-hearted, generous lad made friends on every side, for no one could long withstand his sunny ways.

That night Ward sat for a long time at his study table, with his head resting upon his hands and his books unopened before him. He was thinking of Mr. Crane's words and what Jack had said.

At last he arrived at a quick decision, and with the decision once made he opened his books and resolutely began the preparation of his lessons for the following day.

CHAPTER XIV
WARD HUMBLES HIMSELF

For a long time after he had retired that night Ward rolled and tossed upon his bed, and it seemed to the troubled boy as if sleep would never come. The words of Jack kept sounding in his ears, and do what he would he could not forget them.

His heart was heavy too, with the consciousness that the words were true and that he knew he was in a measure at fault. Perhaps that after all was the source of his deepest suffering, for Ward Hill was one of the few boys who could not entirely deceive himself.

Again and again he tried to persuade himself that his present suffering all came because he had broken with his former associates in the school. That a measure of truth lay in that fact he could readily persuade himself to believe, but not all of it could be traced to that source. Jack's references to his unwillingness to aid the other boys and his tendency to have but slight sympathy for those who did not learn as easily as he, had touched him in a tender spot and his own conscience accused him.

Then too, he knew that he had withdrawn from the fellowship of many in the school, and had been accustomed to pride himself somewhat upon that very fact. He was not dependent upon any one. If the fellows did not care for him, why, he did not intend to hang his harp on the willows and sit down and mourn over his slights. He would show every one in the school that he could live without his company if needs be. With such statements he had endeavored to bolster up his courage and by an air of bravado, if not of true independence, he would show his own superiority. No one should ever hear him "whine."

Yet, despite his efforts, his heart had been heavy all the time. He yearned for the love and good will of his companions. No one in the school more desired to be popular than he. And few too would suffer from the lack of popularity as he did.

And his heart had been heavy when he at last had closed his books when the bell was rung that night and he had put out his light and crept into his bed. He was tormented by a dull, heavy feeling of misery. He felt lonely and forlorn. Both Mr. Crane and Jack had virtually admitted that he was not very well liked by the school, and both also evidently thought he was not entirely blameless in the matter.

As the truth gradually came to be seen by him, he was sincere enough to acknowledge it to be true and had sufficient strength to rouse himself to face its difficulties. He would follow Jack's suggestions.

On the following morning he said to Jack as they left the chapel together: "I'm going to follow your advice, and am coming down to play on the scrub against the nine this afternoon. The only thing I'm afraid of is that Tim Pickard will think I'm crawling. You know I'm not trying to get back my place on the team."

"That's all right, Ward," replied Jack enthusiastically. "Never you mind Tim, you just go ahead. It'll be all right and I'll see that you have a place on the scrub."

As a consequence of Jack's efforts, when in the afternoon Ward went down to the ball ground, Ford, who was acting as the captain of the scrub nine, which was formed to give the regular nine practice every day, said to him, "Ward, will you take a hand with us this afternoon?"

"Yes," replied Ward quietly.

"All right; play 'short' then, will you?"

As Ward threw aside his coat and walked out upon the field to take the position assigned him, he was conscious that many of the boys who had assembled to watch the nine at its practice were talking of him. His face burned, but he tried hard not to appear aware of the curiosity which his appearance on the field had aroused. The sneer on Tim Pickard's face was the hardest for him to bear; and when he overheard the words which Tim uttered, evidently intended for Ward's

special benefit, about "sneaks" and "trying to curry favor and crawl back on the team," he was sorely tempted to leave the field instantly.

But catching a meaning look just then from Jack, he resolutely ignored all that he had heard and seen, and well aware that Tim would be highly delighted even then to have him abandon the game, he tried hard to give his entire attention to the work before him.

It was the first game in which Ward had played since he had come back to Weston and he felt sadly his lack of practice. But endeavoring to make up by his efforts what he lacked in practice, he succeeded beyond his hopes in acquitting himself creditably. He handled the ball quickly and threw with all his old-time swiftness.

Indeed, he thought more than once of that long throw of his in the game with the Burrs in the preceding year, which had saved the game and won for him the wild applause of his fellows. The recollection served to intensify the difficulties of his present position. How sadly had it all been changed since the preceding year! He was, however, too busy in the game to dwell long upon the misery which the thought produced.

When it came to be his turn to bat and he stood facing Tim, who was the pitcher of the Weston nine, he could easily perceive the expression of hatred upon his face. Tim exerted himself to the utmost and sent in the ball with all the speed and curves he could summon. Perhaps his manifest desire to place Ward at a disadvantage served to rouse the latter all the more. At any rate he stood calmly facing Tim, apparently unmoved by all his efforts to annoy him.

It became evident to others as well as to Ward that Tim in his anger was trying to hit him with the ball. He sent in two or three at his swiftest speed and Ward had all he could do to dodge them successfully.

"Oh, hold on, Tim!" called Jack in a low voice from his position at short stop. "What are you trying to do? You want to remember that we're not alone here."

Somehow Jack always seemed to have a strange influence over the captain of the nine, an influence which no other exerted, or even tried to use. And the effect of the words became at once apparent as Tim's speed slackened and the next ball came in directly over the plate.

Just then Ward obtained a glimpse of Mr. Crane, who had come upon the grounds and taken his position in the front line of the spectators, where he stood watching the game. Perhaps the sight of the teacher, or Jack's words, or the change which came over Tim, served to arouse Ward still more. He never knew just what the cause was; but as he saw the ball coming swiftly toward him, he caught it squarely on the end of his bat and sent it far out over the heads of the waiting fielders.

As Ward swiftly cleared the bases, sending in two men before him, he was dimly conscious that a faint cheer had arisen from the spectators. He gave no heed to that, however, nor yet to the words with which Jack hailed him as he ran swiftly past him. Somehow the heavy hit which he had made served in a measure to relieve his feelings, and as he halted upon the third base he wiped his dripping face with his handkerchief and for the first time turned and looked about him.

Jack's face was beaming and Ward could easily see he had risen in the estimation of the spectators. The sight produced a thrill of pleasure in his heart, but he was soon recalled to the necessities of the game and gave himself fully to that. When at last he succeeded in stealing home, the applause again broke out, but Ward held himself aloof from the boys, well satisfied with what he had done.

Twice more during the game Ward succeeded in hitting squarely the swiftly thrown balls of the pitcher, and when at last the game was ended, the scrub nine for the first time that season had succeeded in making a creditable showing against the school nine, and Ward knew the success in large measure had been due to his efforts.

"Tell you what, Tim," said Jack, as the members of the nine picked up their bats and started for their rooms, "we'll have to put up the scrub against the Burrs, I'm thinking. If we don't look out they'll be playing all around us."

Tim made no reply, but a savage scowl crept over his face. He prided himself upon his prowess as a pitcher, and indeed it was freely acknowledged that there was no one in the school in any way to be compared with him. Indeed, it was this fact that chiefly enabled Tim to retain his position as the captain of the nine, for the boys well knew that without him they would be so sadly crippled as to be unable to make a good showing against any team.

The fact that Ward Hill, whom he disliked so intensely, had succeeded in successfully batting him that day was gall to the angry boy. He made no reply to Jack's words, and sullenly departed from the field.

Ward did not wait for any of his friends to accompany him as he too started from the ball ground. Jack's beaming face pleased him greatly, and the words that he overheard some of the boys say about it's being "a shame that Hill was not on the nine," seemed also to comfort him; but without waiting to speak to any one he drew on his coat and started to go.

As he came to the border of the grounds he was surprised as Mr. Crane joined him and said: "You've done well to-day, Hill, and I congratulate you."

"Thank you," said Ward simply, though his face flushed with pleasure at the words.

"You haven't been over to see me yet," continued Mr. Crane. "Can't you come up to my room for a few minutes now?"

"I'm hardly fit for that," said Ward, glancing ruefully at his soiled hands.

He knew also that his hair was in disorder and that his face bore many tokens of his recent exertions.

"I understand all that," said Mr. Crane quietly. "If you can spare a few minutes now I should be very glad to have you come. You bear only the honorable signs of battle, and I shall forget them. I want only a few minutes with you."

"I'll come," said Ward simply, as he turned and walked with the teacher, and was soon seated in his room.

"Now, Hill," said Mr. Crane as soon as he too had taken his seat, "I don't want you to think that I'm asking more than I ought, and if you feel that I am you are at liberty not to answer me. But I should be glad to have you tell me why you went down to the ball ground this afternoon and played on the scrub nine. You haven't done that before, have you?"

"No," said Ward quietly.

He was silent a moment, and then, as he looked up, he felt rather than saw that Mr. Crane was regarding him intently. His interest was so apparent that almost before he realized what he was doing Ward had related all his recent troubles to him. He did not mention any names, but he told him of his own feelings when he had listened to his words of the previous interview; also of what "a friend"–for so he referred to Jack–had said to him in the same line. He held nothing back. His own bitterness, his feeling that he had been misunderstood, his discouragement and all came out.

"Hill," said Mr. Crane when Ward at last ended, "I'm greatly pleased with you. You haven't done anything since you came to Weston that has given me such genuine pleasure as that which you have done to-day."

"Why, Mr. Crane," said Ward quickly, his face flushing as he spoke and a very suspicious moisture appearing in his eyes, "I didn't know you cared so much about the game. I thought you would be more pleased over my work in the classes."

"I am pleased with both, Hill. I am delighted at the improvement in your class work, and I am no less pleased over what I have seen to-day."

As Ward appeared somewhat mystified and looked questioningly at him, Mr. Crane continued, "The class work is important. You know I would be the last to belittle that. But there are many other things to be learned in a school like this. I have been here many years now, and I have had an opportunity to judge of the relative success of the boys as they have gone up to college and out into life, and I must say that many of my old standards of judgment have been revised."

"And you don't think that standing high in the class is first then?" said Ward eagerly.

"Yes, with you I do, Hill; but first, not all. I want to see every boy do his best, his particular rank in class then becomes a secondary matter. There are

some boys who are older when they enter, or much more mature when they are of the same age as their fellows, and of course they do the work more easily and gain a higher standing without much effort. But some students show elements of growth and promise, and although they may not stand so high as some of the others, I can see by the very impetus they receive from working faithfully that they are bound to outstrip the others in the race of life. Then too, school work only tests a man on one side of his mental make-up. His memory may be strong and he may also be able to perceive and receive, but his ability to create or to carry out plans is not tested in the least, or to a very slight degree. So when he gets out into the world and finds that the world is much more prone to ask of him what he can furnish or add to the stock it already has, or what he can do in carrying out his plans, than it is to ask him about his ability to soak in as a sponge does, he doesn't know just what to make of it. Creative ability and executive ability are but slightly tested in school life, and these are the qualities of success far more than mere receptive power. I don't know that I make myself clear, using these long words," added Mr. Crane smilingly.

"I think I understand you," said Ward slowly; "but I'd never thought of it in that way before. I always thought if a fellow did well in school he'd be likely to outside."

"And so he will," said Mr. Crane quickly. "You see I didn't make myself clear after all. I think success in the main is in him, not in his surroundings, and if he has ability and exerts it in school it will tell there as well as in any other place. If a boy has ability and applies himself he will succeed in school if success is in him. But on the other hand, because a boy has the special kind of ability to succeed in school work it does not always follow that the same qualities will make his life-work a success. And that is the very reason why I am always glad to see a boy tested and meet the test on every side of his life, even while he is in school."

"And you think I have been tested?"

"Yes; and I think you are meeting the tests. School life and school work are two different things. I want not less of one but more of the other. The discipline of hard study is what you need, Hill; and you need also the discipline which only the boys can give you. No teacher can give it, however much he may try. It's life, not books. Now no discipline for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward—-"

"Yes, yes, I see," said Ward quickly. "And you think I am learning? Tell me honestly just what you think, Mr. Crane."

"I think you are learning and are doing well in the school life as well as in the school work," replied Mr. Crane cordially, as he rose from his chair, a signal

which Ward at once understood.

CHAPTER XV
OUTSIDE LESSONS

"Now, Hill," said Mr. Crane, as Ward stopped for a moment in the doorway, "I trust I have not said too much to you."

The teacher's kindly tones and grave manner impressed Ward even more than what he had been saying, and with a face that beamed in spite of the marks which the dust of the ball-ground had left, the boy, far more light-hearted than he had been for many weeks now, said: "You have done me lots of good, Mr. Crane."

"Let us hope that it will prove to be so. I rejoice with you that the muskets of Lexington have been heard, now let us see to it that the guns of Yorktown shall also be heard. Or to put it in another way, the victory of a Bull Run does not always mean that the same parties are in similar conditions at Appomattox. The declaration of independence did not of itself make the colonies free. They had to prove their right and ability to be free; but still the declaration had to come first. You have fought at Lexington, and have declared your independence, and I think too you have had your Trenton and Princeton. Now if Valley Forge and Benedict Arnold come along why you will not forget what followed them. But I don't mean to stand here and croak of possible ills. I am confident now, Hill, that you are beginning to be master of yourself, and that is what the discipline and training of a school course and school life are for. Come and see me again soon, Hill. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Crane," said Ward; and then he started directly across the campus toward his room to prepare for supper.

Somehow he was feeling strangely elated. He could not see that there had been any radical change in himself or in his relations with his fellows, but the trial of the afternoon on the ball-ground had been passed, and he had played a game which certainly must have proven to all that whether he was on the nine or not, there was no one in the school who could do better.

And he could not fail to see too the change which already had become manifest in the feelings of many of the boys toward him. The surprise with which they had first observed him when he went out on the field, the sneers of Tim Pickard, reflected in a measure by some of his boon companions, the remarks

which his appearance had called forth, had all soon changed, that is, all save Tim's malice, which had given place to an expression of intense and bitter hatred.

Still Ward thought he could endure that. His vigorous body was still tingling from the effects of his exercise, and the words of Mr. Crane were still sounding in his ears. Added to all that was the evident pleasure of the spectators which his ability as a player had aroused, and the cordial encouragement of the one teacher in the school whom he most respected and loved. Ward was beginning to feel as if life were not such a heavy burden after all.

"Well, Ward, that was a great game you put up this afternoon," said Henry, as his room-mate entered the room. "The way in which you batted Tim almost broke him up."

"Did it?" said Ward lightly, as he at once began to wash.

"It did that, and it tickled the rest of us, or rather some of us, mightily too. Tim will soon have to give you back your place on the nine."

"No, he'll not do that," replied Ward quickly. "Tim's got enough of the nine under his thumb to have his say, and I know he'd rather leave than have me on the team."

"But surely, Ward, after to-day's work you'll not object to Jack's proposal?"

"Jack's proposal? I don't know just what you mean."

"Why, that he and I should tell Tim that he must take you back or we'd leave the nine."

"No. I never should agree to that," replied Ward quietly. "I'd never want to get on the nine in that way. I'd stay off forever before I'd do that. Not that I don't thank you," he hastily added, as he saw an expression of genuine disappointment creeping over his room-mate's face. "It's mighty good of you and Jack, and I'll never forget it, either. But, you see, even if I were willing to go on in that way, Tim still has the most of the nine, and I think the most of the school too, on his side, and I think it would break up the team. And with the game coming on with the Burrs so soon now, that would never do, you see."

"Still, I wish you were on the nine, Ward," said Henry. "I want you, and the nine needs you."

"Oh, well," replied Ward, speaking far more lightly than he felt, "it'll all come out right in the end. Jordan's a hard road to travel, but I've got to take things as they come."

"You're doing great work in the classes, anyway, Ward. Dr. Gray told me the other night that your reports were great so far in the term."

"Did he say that?" said Ward eagerly, his hunger for praise returning in an instant.

"Yes, that's just what he said."

"Well, that's enough without making the nine."

Ward's prophecy proved to be correct. Unknown to him Henry and Jack went and had a talk with Tim Pickard, but the captain of the nine utterly refused to listen to any plea in Ward's behalf. He threatened, if they persisted in pressing his claims, to throw up his own position and take with him the four members of the team whom he controlled, and with the aid of whose votes he was always able to have his own way, as with his own vote they made a majority.

Neither of the boys informed Ward of their efforts on his behalf, fearing that the failure might serve to dampen the returning ardor which he now displayed.

And Ward longed to be on the nine too. Conscious of his own ability as a player, and eager as he was for the excitement of the games and the applause of his fellows, it was no slight disappointment to feel that he was shut off from it all, and that he was powerless to change the conditions that surrounded him.

He did not go down to the grounds every day, for that seemed to him too much as if he were pushing for his former place on the nine. Still, he went there frequently and willingly taking any position assigned him on the scrub team, threw himself into the game with all his heart.

Meanwhile he did not neglect his lessons. Come what might, he was resolved to do well in them. As the days passed his own pleasure increased as he saw that no one in the class was doing better than he. Berry thus far was his most dangerous competitor, for "Luscious" was a bright fellow and not one to shirk his work. His influence on Jack too, was becoming apparent, and Jack's class work was far better than any he had ever done in the course of his three years at Weston.

Jack seemed to rejoice in his own success too, and made many sly references to the honors he was hoping to win. Indeed, he was accustomed now to refer to himself and Ward and Luscious when the three by chance were together as the "three valedics."

"And the greater of the three–ah, that's a secret. That's to be revealed in the forthcoming chapters, as the books say," he would laughingly add.

Another change also became manifest in Ward. There was no more surprised boy in all the Weston school than Big Smith, when one morning on his way to the Latin room Ward overtook him and walked on by his side.

"Got your lesson, Smith?" said Ward.

"No, not all of it. I fear I'm like the men that toiled all night and took nothing. I've been studying hours and hours on one passage here, but somehow I can't get it."

"Which is it?" said Ward cordially. "Perhaps I can give you a lift."

"If you only would, Ward," said Big Smith eagerly, as he opened the book at the difficult passage.

Ward translated the passage, and when he had finished, Big Smith said:

"I don't understand how it is, Ward, that you can do these things and I can't. My brain is larger than yours," and Big Smith removed his hat and thoughtfully stroked his hair as he spoke. "Now I've always heard that the size of a man's head was the measure of his ability, and I know my hat is two sizes larger than yours, Ward. And yet you could read that place and I couldn't," he added ruefully. "How do you account for it, Ward?"

"Quality, not quantity," said Ward with a laugh, who was light-hearted in the consciousness of having helped another, a comparatively new experience for him.

The consequences of that act made Ward afterward somewhat dubious as to the real benefits he had bestowed on his classmate. Almost every evening Big Smith obtained permission from Mr. Blake to go up to Ward's room, and for a long time he would remain there and listen to Ward as he translated the difficult passages for him.

At last his presence during the study hour became a burden. "Big Smith is an unmitigated nuisance," Henry declared. The boys posted great notices on their door which bore such alarming headlines as "Smallpox within," "This is my busy day," "No one admitted except on business," "Danger," and other similar mild and suggestive devices. But Big Smith calmly ignored them all, and every night when the study hour was about half done would appear, and with his unmoved and benign countenance ask for the aid which Ward never refused him now.

At last Henry declared it could be borne no longer, and as Ward knew how hard the work was for his chum and how Big Smith's interruptions confused him, he uttered no protest when Henry boldly told the intruder one night that if he wanted help he must come for it out of study hours.

"But I don't ask you for help, Henry," replied Big Smith in apparent surprise.

"I know that; but you're imposing on Ward's good nature, and I can't study when you two fellows are talking. Besides, I don't think it's the square thing for you to take Ward's work into class as your own."

"But I don't," protested Big Smith warmly. "I never in my life took his work into class."

"Why don't you get a pony, Big Smith? That would be the easiest way out of it."

"Me get a pony? Do you think I'd use a translation? Not much. I'm thankful for one thing, and that is, I never have used a pony, as you call it, yet."

"What do you call it when you come up here and get Ward to read your Latin and Greek to you, I'd like to know."

"That? Oh, that's not a pony. That's just Ward Hill."

Both his hearers laughed in spite of their efforts to restrain themselves, Big Smith meanwhile looking from one to the other as if he were not quite able to

see the joke.

"No, Big Smith," said Henry at last, "I don't want to be small or mean, but I have to work hard for all I get, and when you come up here in study hours you just break me all up. I don't mind it any other time; but it doesn't seem to me just the square thing to break in on another fellow's time. I wouldn't do it; it doesn't seem to me that Mr. Blake ought to let you do it, either. What are the study hours for?"

"I'm sure I don't want to come here if I'm not wanted," replied Big Smith soberly.

"That's not it; that's not it at all," protested Henry. "It's only for a quiet study hour I'm arguing. I don't think you ought to break in on another fellow's work. Now, do you?"

"But," said Big Smith in his most solemn tones, "all my teachers say I've been doing a great deal better work of late. I'm sure you wouldn't want me to drop back in my work or stand lower in the class, would you?"

With a hopeless sigh Henry turned again to his work. It seemed as if it were almost impossible to impress the conception of the needs of any one else on Big Smith's mind.

Ward, however, finally adjusted matters to the satisfaction of both by promising his aid to Big Smith after breakfast each morning, in the hour between breakfast time and chapel. In his new desire to follow out Jack's suggestion and make himself familiar and helpful to his companions, he never once thought of the harm he might be doing Big Smith. Indeed he went much further, and soon a number of the boys in the class joined Big Smith each morning and listened to Ward as he read aloud the lessons of the day.

And Ward was thinking only of the aid he was giving, not at all of the harm the others might receive. But then we are told in many ways outside the realm of physics that the reaction is always equal to the action. Perhaps Ward Hill, however, was yet to learn that lesson–a lesson which certainly each must learn for himself and not for another.

Meanwhile, through all these days Ward's room not been touched. Whoever had done the "stacking" had now, at least for a time, ceased from his labors. That there was still a very bitter feeling against him on the part of many he well knew, nor could he attribute it all to the immediate circle of the "Tangs."

Ward felt the prejudice keenly, but he resolutely held himself to his work, and by the aid he gave the boys in their lessons and by mingling with them more than he had done of late, he was hoping to win his way back to the position he had once held in the school.

Nor was this born of a weak desire for popularity alone. That was true in part, but only in part; but Ward Hill, as we have said, was one of those few

persons who cannot deceive themselves.

And he had realized the truthfulness of Jack's and Mr. Crane's words, and was now resolutely trying to set himself right. While he longed for and keenly enjoyed the praise and good-will of his fellows, still unless he felt in his heart that they were true and deserved he did not feel thoroughly happy in receiving them. So perhaps a dual motive was at work at this time on Ward's heart–the eager longing for the praise of the school and the equally strong desire to feel that it was true and merited. Let us not blame him too harshly. Purely good motives are sadly lacking in this world of ours. And then, even a gold coin contains some alloy, but the most of us are not inclined to reject the use which can be made of it because of the baser metal it contains.

Little Pond was now doing nobly. He looked up to Ward with unbounded confidence. Ward more than once found himself wondering whether he had ever looked up to a senior in that way. Still he rejoiced in the little fellow's success and felt strongly drawn to him, although he knew in his heart that his days of trial were not all past.

And now the approaching game with the Burrs became the absorbing topic of the school. The nine was working vigorously and Ward went down more frequently to play on the team which was to give them their daily practice.

No one knew how heavy his heart was and with what unutterable longing he desired his place on the team. Still he held himself resolutely to the line he had marked out. He studied faithfully, tried to make himself friendly with the boys, and apparently threw himself heartily into the task of giving the nine the practice they sadly needed. And no one heard him complain, and not even to Jack did he mention his desire for his former position, a position now filled by Ripley. And yet somehow he had the feeling that Jack understood, although neither made any reference to it now.

So matters stood on the day before the great game. The final preparations had been completed, the last practice of the nine had occurred, and throughout the school there was the strong though subdued excitement which always preceded the great game.

But Ward Hill, with a heavy heart and a kind of dull misery, looked forward to the morrow.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT GAME

The following morning dawned clear and bright, and many a boy in the Weston school gave a sigh of relief when first he looked from his windows. The rugged hills, now covered with the highly tinted autumn foliage, displayed patches of clouds resting on their summits or creeping far up along the wooded slopes. The sun, however, would soon burn away all such slight affairs as these gray-colored floating clouds or stretches of fog, and the boys were rejoicing.

The games with the Burrs were the great events of the school year. Not only were the schools themselves of equally high standing, and in a sense rivals, but the advantage for a few years now in the ball games had been with the Burrs, and the Weston boys consequently were especially eager to win this time. As the game was to be played upon their own grounds they had a slight advantage, but all were somewhat nervous and the excitement ran correspondingly high.

There were to be recitations in the morning only. It was almost impossible for the eager lads to hold themselves to their work, but the teachers were somewhat lenient with them, and some of the ludicrous mistakes were passed over with a smile.

Indeed, it was whispered that the teachers themselves were not far behind the boys in sharing the excitement which pervaded the school, and were as desirous that the nine should win as were the players themselves.

Soon after noon autos could be seen coming along the pretty valley roads or making their way over the hillsides. But whether from hill or valley made no difference, for there was one destination for them all and that was the ball ground. Old and young, men and women, boys and girls were there, and the assembled crowd gave promise of being unusually large.

The great busses filled with the boys and girls from the neighboring school began to put in an appearance, for the rival school was co-educational in its methods, and the girls were apparently as eager and excited as their brothers. Long streamers and banners floated out from behind the well-filled machines and many of the girls were waving flags or long ribbons of the school colors, handily adjusted to a cane or some similar device.

A crowd of the Weston boys was waiting in front of the chapel for the Burr nine to come, for it was known that they were to have a special auto.

Some of the members of the Weston nine, clad in their bright new uniforms, mingled with the crowd and as a committee were waiting to welcome and conduct the visiting nine to the dressing rooms. Their efforts to appear calm and unmindful of the attention they attracted provoked a smile from some of the waiting boys, but no one begrudged them the honors which were theirs, and as they joined in the shouts and laughter which continually arose, or stopped to converse about the prospects of the nine in the coming game, the interest steadily increased.

"There they are! There they come!" suddenly some one in the crowd shouted, and in a moment the sound of the horn carried by the Burrs could be heard in the distance. In a brief time the huge auto drew up before the crowd and the Burr nine leaped nimbly out upon the ground.

"Hello, Shackford," said Tim Pickard advancing and grasping the outstretched hand of the rival captain. "Glad to see you. If we have as big a game as we have crowd, there will be something to see before night comes."

Tim proceeded to shake hands with each member of the team and then at once started with them to lead the way to the rooms which had been assigned to the visitors.

The waiting crowd parted and stood watching with undisguised curiosity the opposing nine as they filed past them following Tim. Certainly they were a sturdy lot, and the low murmurs which could be heard among the Weston boys as the others withdrew were not entirely those of confidence in the success of their own team.

Meanwhile Ward Hill had gone down to the ball ground and lay on the grass in the rear of the field in a place from which he could easily follow the progress of the game.

Beside him were Henry and Jack, both in uniforms, the latter sitting erect and occasionally pounding the ground before him with the bat he was holding in his hands. Not one of the trio was happy, and Ward least so of the three, although he was striving manfully to appear unmindful of the excitement which, though subdued, was still apparent on all sides of them.

"It's tough, Ward," said Jack; "I want to win this game, but I never went into one with such a mean feeling as I've got now. It's a shame you're not to play. It's worse than a shame. The nine needs you and I know how you feel, old fellow. Say, Ward," he added, suddenly leaping to his feet, "if you'll say the word, we'll fix Tim yet. Henry and I can go to him and declare that if he won't take you on, we're off. And he'll have to give in now, with the crowd all here and everything ready to begin."

"Yes, Ward, that's what we'll do," chimed in Henry. "It can be done now."

"No, fellows," said Ward shaking his head. "I told you I couldn't go on in that way; and then too, I'm not in practice, you know."

"Bother the practice! You'll do better without it than most of us can with it. Here they come, Ward! Say the word and the deed's done."

But Ward still shook his head. He could not bring himself to do what Jack asked. And yet how he did long to be in the game!

The appearance of the nines upon the field was greeted by a shout and the school cheers were almost deafening on every side. The banners and flags were waving, the girls were standing erect in the autos, and the entire scene was

stirring and exhilarating in the highest degree. "Good luck to you, fellows," said Ward as Jack and Henry started to go and join their comrades.

Neither of them replied save by the look which they gave him and soon were with the nine.

The ground was cleared now, and the allotted time of preliminary practice for each team was given. As Ward watched the boys it almost seemed to him that he could not endure the sight. Only a year before and he had been one of the team. Even now he could feel again the thrill which he had when at the close of that famous game his mates had borne him from the field on their shoulders. But now no one seemed to care whether he played or not. And all the time there was the consciousness in his own heart that there was not a better player than he in all the Weston school.

Summoning all his resolution he left his place and took a position near the end of the long line of Weston boys who were standing well back on one side of the ground. He had seen Big Smith and Pond there, and even their company was comforting to him now.

"Hello, Ward," was Big Smith's hail as Ward approached; "I should think you would wish you were on the nine now. Do you know, I almost feel as if I could play well enough myself to take a position."

Ward made no response, though Big Smith little realized how his words had stung the troubled boy. The Weston nine had taken their positions in the field and the game was about to begin.

Ward glanced out toward left field, his old position, and his heart was bitter toward Ripley, who now was playing there. Ward knew he could fill the place much better than Ripley ever could. Indeed, his heart was so bitter that he was almost divided in his feelings between his desire for the Weston boys to win, and that Ripley and Tim should not put up a good game.

But everything was in readiness now and the hush which came over the assembly betrayed the suppressed excitement. Shackford grasped his bat and advanced to the plate, the umpire tossed the ball to Tim and gave the word, and the game with the Burrs was begun.

Tim settled himself into his position, drew back his arm and sent the ball in with all the speed he could put forth. Shackford for two years had been captain of the Burr nine and his prowess was well known. There was no one the Weston boys feared as they did him.

Shackford was ready, and the very first ball Tim sent in he caught fairly on the end of the bat and sent far down the field close to the foul flag.

A shout of delight arose from all the friends of the Burrs as the runner started swiftly toward the first base.

"Foul, foul ball!" called the umpire and Shackford stopped suddenly on his

way to the second base.

A murmur of disapproval arose from the crowd, and Ward, who was standing not very far from the place where the ball had struck, shook his head. To him the ball had seemed fair, but he said nothing and admired the spirit of Shackford as he raised his hand toward his supporters, betokening his desire for no manifestations of the kind which had just been heard, and went slowly back to the home-plate and once more picking up his bat stood facing the pitcher.

"One strike!" called the umpire as Tim sent the ball swiftly in.

"Two strikes!" he called again as the second ball went whistling past.

A low murmur could be heard as the excitement of the watching crowd increased. Shackford was ready and stood grimly waiting for Tim's next move. "One ball" and "two balls" followed and the strain on all was becoming more intense.

The next ball, however, was apparently the very one for which the captain of the Burrs had been waiting, for he struck it hard and squarely, and it went far up into the air directly into the territory which Ripley was guarding.

Again a shout of delight was heard from the supporters of the Burrs, but it was hushed in a moment as Ripley took his stand and waited with outstretched hands for the descending ball.

Shackford was speeding on toward the third base, but Ward was unmindful of him. He was watching his supplanter in left field. The ball settled lower and lower; but whether it was because Ripley was highly excited or had misjudged the ball was not known; it struck his hands and bounded out again. The fielder had squarely muffed it.

A groan arose from the Weston boys, and "Hi! yi! yi!" came from many of the friends of the Burrs.

Ward could not lament Ripley's failure, that would have been too much to expect of human nature; but still he turned angrily, as he heard the shouts, and then said to Little Pond: "That's a mean trick! no one ought to applaud his opponents' errors."

"I don't see why not," said Big Smith.

"Because it's no way to do," said Ward. "If you can't win squarely you don't want to win at all. But keep still. Let's see what'll be done now."

Shackford was on third base now, and as he kept dancing about, Tim, who had the ball, threw it to the baseman, but in his eagerness he sent it over his head among the crowd. Shackford ran home, much to the delight of his friends and the chagrin of the Weston boys. The first run had been scored with no one out.

Three more of the Burrs nine crossed the plate before the inning closed, the success of Shackford evidently encouraging his followers even more than the glaring errors of their opponents. When the Weston boys came in to take their

turn at the bat their faces were glum and the prospect was far from bright. Tim was the first batter, and got his base on balls.

As Jack Hobart stepped to the plate to follow him, Ward turned to the boys near him and called: "Let's give him a cheer, fellows!"

The cheers rang out, Ward's voice being the loudest of them all. Evidently Jack felt the stimulus, for he sent the ball between left and center fields, and Tim was soon on third, while Jack rested on second. But neither could go any farther. The next two batters struck out, and the third sent up a little fly which Shackford himself easily caught.

"Four to nothing," said Ward as the sides changed. "Not a very bright outlook." But the inning closed without another run being scored.

On the Weston side Henry succeeded in making the circuit of the bases and thus scored the first run for the team. The two succeeding innings failed to add to the score of either side. Both nines were playing desperately, and the interest and excitement of the spectators momentarily increased.

"Four to one," said Ward as the fifth inning was begun.

He had led the cheering in the portion of the crowd where he stood, and in his eagerness for the Weston boys to win, for the time he had almost forgotten his own disappointment. Ripley had struck out each time he had been at the bat, and certainly his success in the field had not been very marked thus far.

Again it was Shackford's turn to bat, and as he advanced to the plate the expression of determination on his face was to be clearly seen. Four to one was certainly no small advantage, and the captain of the Burrs was determined to hold it if such a thing were possible.

Again he waited until two strikes and two balls had been called. The crowd evidently was anxious, but Shackford appeared to be as cool and calm as if nothing were expected from him.

Ward had glanced aside a moment. The suspense of the spectators was interesting if nothing more. He was suddenly recalled by a yell which seemed to have arisen from a thousand throats. Shackford had lifted the ball high into the air, and once more it was coming directly into Ripley's territory.

The eager fielder started after the ball. He was compelled to run back and to Ward it seemed as if the ball were going far over his head. But having gone back as far as was necessary, Ripley turned sharply and ran in. The ball was settling lower and lower now, and just as the fielder stretched forth his hands for it his feet slipped from under him and he fell headlong on the ground, while the ball went rolling far beyond him.

When he had regained his footing and sent the ball in Shackford was once more on third base. A low but pronounced murmur rose from the Weston crowd which could be heard even above the shouts of the Burrs, but in a moment silence

was restored, as the next batter took his place and faced Tim. The crack which resounded when he struck the ball could be heard all over the field. As if with design the ball went skipping along the ground after it struck just back of Jack's position as short stop, and went rolling swiftly toward Ripley. The excited lad tried desperately to stop it, but failed, and the ball slipped between his legs and went on far behind him.

The murmurings of the crowd were unmistakable now. "Put him off! Put him out! Hill! Hill! Ward Hill! Put him off! Put him out! Ward Hill!" could be heard on every side.

Ward's heart was beating rapidly, and he tried to draw back out of sight; but for two minutes the cries continued, for boys are merciless in their judgments. At last quiet was in a measure restored and the game went on, but the inning closed with the score six to one against the Weston boys.

Ward could see that a crowd of angry students, chief among whom were Jack and Henry, quickly surrounded Tim and an animated conversation took place, though he could not hear any of the words which were spoken. He was hardly prepared for what followed, however, for after a momentary hesitation Tim started down the lines of the waiting spectators, and as he caught sight of Ward he quickly turned and approached him.

CHAPTER XVII
THE END OF THE GREAT GAME

"The fellows want you to take Ripley's place," said Tim gruffly.

Ward's heart responded in an instant. The Weston boys were to bat now and the excitement in the crowd was increasing. He longed to have a share in the work which must be done within the four innings yet to be played. It was a marvelous thing too, that Tim should himself come and invite him to return to his place. It was true he was surly, and his countenance betrayed his feelings. The pressure of the nine and the crowd had been too strong for him to resist; and then, doubtless the advantage which the Burr nine had thus far won also had its influence, for no one more earnestly desired to win the game than did Tim Pickard.

Eager as Ward was, he still hesitated a moment. He well knew that Tim's anger would not cease if he should do well; while if he should fail in a time when

so much was expected, his position in the school would be all the more trying.

Tim stood waiting before him and did not repeat his request.

In a moment Jack came running toward him, and as he came up, said: "Hurry up, Ward! Never mind the uniform. We won't stop for that. Just throw off your coat and come on. You can afford to spoil a dozen suits rather than let the Burrs win this game!"

Noticing the hesitation of his friend, Jack continued: "Oh, don't pull off now, Ward! all the school wants you. We've just got to have you, and that's all there is to it. Did you ever in your life see such work as Ripley made of it? I don't believe he could stop the moon if it was rolled at him by a baby. Come on, Ward, come on! Tim and I have got to go and bat, and we can't stay any longer. All the fellows want him, don't they, Tim?" he added, turning to the captain of the nine.

"That's what they say," growled Tim, and yet Ward could readily see that he was almost as eager for him to play as Jack was, only he could not bring himself to urge the boy whom he had abused in so many ways and hated with such a genuine hatred.

Just at this juncture Mr. Crane approached and touching Ward lightly upon the shoulder said in a low voice: "I should go in, Hill. You've nothing to lose and much to gain. Remember, you've had your Lexington and the Declaration of Independence and Trenton and Princeton, and now you're at Monmouth. Don't let the British or General Lee baffle you now. Besides, you must think of the school too."

Ward looked at the teacher in as great surprise as did Jack and Tim, and his hesitation was gone. He had no desire to appear unwilling or indifferent, for he certainly was not controlled by either feeling. He longed to enter the game and did not wish to be "coaxed" into it. All his hesitation had arisen from the fear that if he should not do well his position in the school would not be improved, and the enmity of Tim's special friends would only be intensified.

"I'll come in," he said gently, "and do the best I can."

"Good for you, Ward! good for you!" shouted Jack tossing his hat into the air and turning a somersault. "He'll take Ripley's place at the bat then, won't he, Tim?"

"I suppose so," replied Tim.

"Come on then, Ward. Maybe you'll get a chance this inning. Tim, you're next up," he added as he noticed who the batsman was, "and I follow you. We'll have to go now, Ward. Come up and take a seat on the players' bench."

"I'll be around in time," replied Ward quietly.

For several reasons he preferred to retain his place in the crowd for the present, unless his turn to bat should come.

Somehow fortune's wheel turned slightly in favor of the Weston boys, and

although Ward's turn to bat did not come, the inning closed with two more runs scored by the nine.

"Six to three," shouted the boys as the players started for their places in the field.

Ward's heart was beating high as he slowly drew off his coat and handed it to Little Pond, who proudly received it, and then he started toward his old place in left field.

His appearance was at once noted by the crowd and received with a cheer. It was true it seemed to be wanting in the volume and heartiness of the old-time applause, but still it did Ward's heart good.

Striving to appear unmindful he looked away from the crowd as the game was now resumed. What had become of Ripley he did not know.

The inning was quickly ended, without a run being scored. Not a ball had come near him, and Ward was not grieved over the fact, for his nerves were in such a highly strung condition that he was fearful he would not have been able to do much had the opportunity presented itself.

He was the second at bat, however, and as he heard his name called he carefully selected his bat and then tried to collect his thoughts and appear calm, though he was far from feeling as he strove to appear.

Shackford, the pitcher of the Burr nine apparently was becoming somewhat nervous, for he gave the first batter his base on balls.

Ward grasped his bat and started resolutely toward the plate. The crowd was silent, but Ward realized how eager his friends were for him to do well. Even a goodly portion of Tim's sneer had disappeared, and Ward could not determine whether his stronger desire was now for the nine to win or for him to fail. The task before the lad, however, quickly banished all other thoughts from his mind. How eager he was and determined to do his best.

"One strike," called the umpire. "Two strikes," he repeated a moment later.

Shackford was doing his utmost to puzzle him and Ward began to fear that he would strike out. The next ball, however, came close in to him and before he could dodge it or step out of its way it struck the handle of his bat and dropped a little ways from the plate. In an instant Ward flung aside his bat and rushed at his swiftest pace for first base, the runner in advance of him of course having started for second.

The excitement and necessity for quick action apparently rattled the Burrs, for both Shackford and the catcher started together for the ball, and as no one called out who was to make the play, the consequence was that they came together in a sharp collision, and were both thrown to the ground.

Before they could recover Ward was safe at first, and the other runner had gained the second base.

Shackford now began to play more deliberately. Every move was carefully timed, and he guarded his nine well. In spite of all the efforts of the Weston boys, and the encouraging shouts of their friends among the spectators, they could succeed in getting but one man around the bases, Ward having been left on third.

"Six to four, and only two more innings to play," said Jack to Ward as they walked together out upon the field to resume their positions. "Not a very brilliant prospect for us."

"We'll not give up before the last man is out," said Ward. "There's nothing more uncertain in all the world than a game of ball, and it's never finished till the end has come."

He had done nothing to warrant any special praise thus far, but he was in high spirits nevertheless. The increasing excitement as the game drew toward its close was manifest among players and spectators alike, and Ward Hill, as we know, was ever one of the quickest to respond to his immediate surroundings.

Again the inning closed without the Burrs being able to score. The utmost they could do was to get a man as far as second base, but there he was left.

"We've got two turns at the bat and they've got one," said Jack, as they came in from the field. "We've got to make three runs to win the game."

The inning opened very promisingly for the Weston boys. Both Tim and Jack made hits, and were on third and second bases respectively. The next two batters were out however, and as they all realized that everything depended upon the efforts of the next man, the crowd followed his movements with almost breathless interest.

"One strike!" called the umpire, and the various feelings of the spectators were at once apparent in their responses. "One ball!" "Two balls!" quickly followed.

Suddenly the crowd rose from their seats and stood leaning forward in intense suspense as they followed the movements of the catcher, who had let the ball which Shackford had pitched somewhat wildly get by him. Tim started quickly from third, and was running as he had never run before. Shackford stood waiting on the plate with outstretched hands for the ball to be thrown by the catcher, who was doing his utmost to get it and return it before Tim could gain the plate. Every player was eagerly watching the movements, and not a sound could be heard from the spectators. Nearer and nearer came Tim, and now the catcher had grasped the rolling ball. With a quick movement he turned and threw it swiftly to Shackford, who caught it just as Tim gained the plate, and running into the player threw both heavily to the ground.

The crowd rushed in from their places eager to learn the decision of the umpire, who had been standing close to the boys as they came together. "He's out!" shouted the umpire as he waved his hand for the spectators to go back to

their places. For a moment there was a scene of confusion. In their excitement many of the boys forgot what was expected of them, and the shouts and cheers of the schools were mingled with the groans and cries of those who took different views of the decision which had just been made.

Tim was thoroughly angry, and stood talking loudly with the umpire, claiming that he had cheated him out of a run and the nine from a score which it had justly won.

In a moment, however, several of the boys had surrounded the excited captain, and at last, after much persuasion, induced him to return to his place in the field.

"It was close," said Jack to Ward, "and I think we ought to have had it; but we can't help ourselves, and there's no use in kicking."

The excitement was now intense as the Burrs came to the bat for the last time. The score still stood two in their favor, and even if they did not succeed in adding to it, the advantage was still decidedly on their side. Every movement of the players was cheered now, and the nervous actions of the rival nines betrayed their own desires to win.

Tim Pickard was sending the balls in with a speed he had never had before. If his own exertions could win the game, then surely the Weston boys ought not to lose that day.

The first batsman struck out, and a fierce cheer arose from the Weston contingent as the player flung his bat on the ground and strode back to his place on the bench.

The next was struck by the first ball Tim threw in, and was evidently hurt, but in a moment he pluckily started toward first base, and the cheers of the spectators followed him.

His successor also struck out, and the din which arose was almost deafening. All depended now upon the efforts of the next batter, and the Weston boys' hearts sank when they saw that this was to be Shackford, the heaviest hitter on the opposing nine.

Shackford grasped his bat and stood calmly facing Tim, each realizing that it was now a battle royal. Tim was a trifle wild now, and the fears of his friends increased when the batter hit one or two long fouls that went far down the field, but luckily outside the lines. Again Shackford hit the ball, and sent it with tremendous force down the field directly toward the short stop. Jack made a desperate effort to stop it, but it was going so swiftly that it almost threw him backward, and he dropped the ball. In an instant, however, he recovered himself, and quickly picking up the ball threw it swiftly to the second baseman, who was waiting for it. He caught it just an instant before the runner gained the base, and the umpire shouted, "Out!"

The din on the field now increased. Most of the spectators were standing, and the boys were crowding close in to the lines. Each of the Weston players was cheered by name as he approached the plate and stood facing the calm and collected pitcher of the Burrs.

The first man was out, and a yell of delight arose from the supporters of the Burrs.

The second made a hit, and a louder shout arose from the friends of the Weston nine.

The third batter sent up a high foul, which was easily caught by the third baseman, and the uproar broke out again. Another gained his base, and now two men were out, two were on the bases, and two runs were required to tie the game, and three to win, and it was Ward Hill's turn to bat. Already some of the outer spectators were leaving the grounds, for the game seemed to be practically ended.

"Now do your duty, Ward Hill!" called Jack as Ward grasped his bat and started toward the plate. "Remember everything depends upon you."

Ward made no reply. Was it likely he could fail to realize how much depended upon him? He was dimly conscious of the applause which greeted him. Eager faces seemed to surround him, and the tension was intense.

Shackford brushed back the hair from his wet forehead, glanced coolly about him at the runners on the bases and to see that his own men were all ready, then quickly drew back his arm and sent the ball in swiftly and directly over the plate.

"One strike!" called the umpire, and shrieks and calls resounded from the crowd.

Before Ward could prepare himself Shackford swiftly drew back his arm and sent in another ball.

"Two strikes!" shouted the umpire, and cheers and jeers alike could now be heard. Indeed, many more of the spectators arose to depart, for it seemed to be evident that the end had come. Only one more ball might be necessary.

Shackford sent in the ball again, but this time Ward was ready. He hit it squarely, and with all his force. Only realizing that the ball was going, he started swiftly toward first base. It seemed to him that pandemonium had broken loose behind him. Shrieks, calls, shouts, and cheers were all mingled.

As he touched the first base and started toward second he looked at the ball. He had sent it far out over the center-fielder's head, and not yet had he caught up with it. It was a terrific hit, and all of Ward's long pent up feelings seemed to have found vent in the force with which he had struck. On and on sped the ball, and on and on ran Ward.

Before he had gained the third base both of the runners in advance of him

had scored. He touched the third base, and putting forth all his speed started toward home. The applause was deafening now. He was dimly conscious of a mass of waving banners and flags off on his right, and that "Hi! yi! yi!" could be heard on every side.

"Go it, Ward! Go it!" shouted Jack intensely as he ran outside the line to encourage his friend; and Ward was "going it" at his very best.

He bent low and rushed forward. He could hardly breathe now, but his speed did not slacken. On and on he ran, until it seemed to him he never could gain the coveted base.

Putting forth all the last remnant of his strength he obeyed Jack's warning, and throwing himself on the ground touched the base just as a last, loud, prolonged yell came from the crowd.

With his hand on the plate he for the first time glanced behind him. The ball had just been thrown in and Shackford had caught it. The game with the Burrs was won, and Ward Hill's long hit had won it.

CHAPTER XVIII
A PUZZLING QUESTION

Ward at first was only conscious that there was a scene of great excitement being enacted all over the grounds. He had exerted himself to the utmost and breathless and hardly able to stand he dimly realized that a crowd of boys had surrounded him, and that the game was won. Soon, however, he recovered, and with a beaming face looked out upon the actions of his friends. Hats were thrown into the air, shouts and cheers could be heard on every side.

Silence only was to be found among the supporters of the Burrs, and they were already departing from the field. The treble shouts of the girls had ceased, the banners and streamers which had been flung out were nowhere to be seen now, but the very absence of all the signs of cheer among the friends of the opposing nine only served to make more emphatic the frantic joy of the Weston boys.

It was the first game they had won in more than two years from their sturdy opponents, and naturally the long pent up feelings now broke forth with the reserve of the time past.

For a long time the confusion continued. The cries would die away in a

measure, and then some enthusiast would lead in a cheer, and the entire school and all its friends would take up the response, and it would seem that all the previous enthusiasm would be redoubled.

Boys who had not spoken to Ward since his return to Weston now rushed forward, eager to do him honor. He was the center of a constantly increasing group, for those who had been foremost to praise him did not depart when others came with their offering.

"Hill, I wish to congratulate you."

Ward turned as he heard the words, and saw Shackford, the captain of the Burrs, standing before him with outstretched hand.

"I want to congratulate you," said Shackford again cordially. "That was a magnificent hit. I never saw a heavier one. Of course I'm sorry we lost the game, and I know that such a hit as that doesn't reflect very much credit upon the pitcher of the Burrs, but all the same, I don't want to be the last to honor the fellow that did it."

"Thank you," said Ward, highly pleased over the cordial expression. "You needn't say a word about the pitcher of the Burrs. I thought when you caught me napping with that second strike of yours that it was good-bye with me. I wanted to hit you," he added laughingly, "but I was afraid I couldn't, so I feel all the better that it has turned out as it has."

"After your work last year, I was surprised when I heard that you were not to play to-day. At first I felt afraid that if you were off the nine, it must be that the Weston boys had found some still better material, and I knew if that were true we had a great contract on our hands. It wasn't long though before I was chuckling because you were not in the game, and I can tell you I didn't rejoice very much when I saw you throw off your coat and start for left field. Still, I hope I'm not so small as not to be able to appreciate a good play even when it's made by the other side, and I must say, Hill, that hit of yours was great. It just won the game, and the Weston school ought to erect a monument in your honor; they ought to, honestly."

Shackford's words served to increase the eagerness of the boys who had crowded about Ward, and much as he enjoyed the novel experience he soon began to feel somewhat abashed. He caught sight of Little Pond looking at him with longing eyes from the border of the assembly, and pushing his way toward him, Ward was soon grasping his youthful admirer by the hand.

"O Ward, I'm so glad," said Little Pond eagerly. "Everybody's praising you."

"Are they?" replied Ward, laughing as he spoke. "Well, I'm glad we won the game."

He started to depart from the grounds now, but a crowd of boys still followed him, all eager to honor the senior who had won the day and saved the

honor of the school.

And Ward Hill was happy. His heart was exulting over his success, and the praise of his fellows was doubly sweet to him after his long period of trouble. He knew he had done well, and the consciousness that Tim Pickard at last had been compelled to come to him for aid, was perhaps not the least of the sources of his enjoyment.

As the boys came up to the campus and turned the corner by the chapel, Tim and Ripley stood there talking with some of the Burr boys. They could not fail to perceive Ward in the midst of the crowd, but neither Tim nor Ripley gave any signs of recognition.

Ward turned to Jack and laughed aloud, so loudly that both Tim and Ripley heard him, and a flush of anger spread over their faces.

"Tim would rather have lost the game than have had it won in the way it was," said Ward, as he started to leave Jack and go to his own room.

"Oh, well," replied Jack gleefully, "you can't blame Tim for making a wry face over swallowing his dose; but it may do him good, after all."

"Perhaps so," said Ward dubiously.

In his heart just at that moment he cared but little about Tim Pickard's feelings toward him. In the flush of success and the apparent return of his popularity he could afford to be magnanimous, and Tim and all his petty torments seemed now to be too slight to be heeded.

For two or three days Ward's long hit was the one theme of the school. Not all of the boys, however, joined in singing his praises, for Tim was not without his followers, and his influence was sufficiently strong to hold them back; but the enthusiasm of the others more than atoned for the failures, and Ward Hill was far happier than he had ever been since he became a student in the Weston school.

The consciousness of having done good work in his classes was the main foundation of it all. The appeals of Little Pond, and the manner in which he himself, with Jack's aid, had met and stopped the stacking of his room, also helped him now, and he rejoiced that he had not stooped to retaliate in Tim's room, as he had been sorely tempted to do.

It may be that his success, and the sudden change which had come in his standing in the school, may have led Ward unknowingly to assume a new air. If he did, it was done wholly unconsciously, but in some way he had come to glance sneeringly at Tim whenever he met him. He felt so strong now that he could afford to condescend even to Tim Pickard himself.

One morning, three days after the game, and when the excitement which had followed it had somewhat abated, as Ward, after passing Tim on their way out from Mr. Crane's room, and returning the glance of hatred which the captain of the nine had given him, was recalled by Mr. Crane, he stopped a moment in

front of his desk.

"I haven't seen you to speak to you since the game," said Mr. Crane kindly. "I wanted to tell you that I rejoiced in your success, but perhaps you may have heard all the words of that kind that you care to hear."

"Not from you," replied Ward, his face flushing with pleasure.

"What are you reading in your Greek now?" inquired Mr. Crane.

"Homer," said Ward, wondering what that had to do with the game with the Burrs.

"Do you recall the term which Homer applies to Achilles?"

"Yes, 'swift-footed' is one of them."

"And what is the term which is so frequently given the Greek heroes?"

"Why they're called 'well-greaved,' and 'great-souled,' 'great-hearted,' and, and—-"

"That's the word I wanted. The great-hearted, great-souled men. There's a Latin word which is almost the equivalent of the term, and the word was such a good one that it has been retained in many languages, and has come down to us in a form but slightly modified. Do you know what the word is?"

Ward hesitated a moment, and then, as his mind always worked rapidly, his face lightened up as he said, "Why, it's the word 'magnanimous,' isn't it?"

"That's the very word. And what does that word literally mean, then?"

"Large-minded."

"That's right. I mustn't detain you any longer or you'll be late for your Greek. Come and see me some time soon, Hill."

Ward went out of the room, but he was somewhat puzzled over his interview with the teacher. What did Mr. Crane mean by asking him those questions? Was he only trying to test his knowledge? Ward knew better than that. Mr. Crane was not one to put idle questions to him, especially at such a time as he had chosen for the brief interview. But what could he mean?

Ward entered the Greek room, but he only partially heard what Dr. Gray was saying to the class. Boy after boy was called upon to recite, but Ward was giving slight heed to what was occurring about him. His thoughts were upon Mr. Crane's strange questions. What could he mean by them? He never assumed that manner, his eyes slightly twinkling as if there was some concealed joke in his mind and his grave, quiet ways being all the more impressive, without having something more than the mere questions in his mind.

The recitation was about half done, when suddenly Ward started up in his seat. His face flushed as he almost spoke aloud.

Jack looked at him in astonishment, but Ward made no reply as he hastily turned again to his book, and apparently was only following the recitation. And yet in a flash it had come to him what Mr. Crane had meant by his questions. At

first he felt somewhat resentful, but as his mind ran rapidly over the events of the past few days, he could not conceal from himself the fact that he had given too much justification for the implied rebuke of his teacher.

All through the day his mind kept going back to that brief interview with Mr. Crane, and the recollection was not always a source of pleasure.

That evening a group of boys was assembled in his room, Little Pond, Jack, and Big Smith all being there, as well as Ward and his room-mate. The conversation had been almost entirely on the game with the Burrs, which to them at least, and most of all to Ward, was still a topic of great interest.

"Well," Jack was saying, "we've got this game, thanks to Ward, and even if we lose the return game in the spring we're not so badly off as we might be. The valedic will help us out then too, won't you, Ward?"

"There's no knowing who the valedic will be, I'm thinking. Your friend Luscious is making a pretty strong bid for it, and Little Pond here says his big brother is coming back next week."

"Is that so?" said Jack eagerly, turning to the lad as he spoke. "Is that so? Why I thought he wasn't coming back till after the Christmas vacation."

"He didn't expect to," replied Little Pond; "but it's turned out so that he can come next week, and I'm expecting him next Wednesday."

"That's fine," said Jack enthusiastically. "I tell you, Pond's got the right stuff in him. Now Luscious has had a good influence on me, and I've braced up wonderfully under his valuable example, and if Pond comes back I think I shall make a try of it myself for the valedic. 'Us four, no more,' will be in it then."

The boys laughed at Jack's declaration that he was about to try for the honors of the class, for they all knew that the impulsive boy was not over fond of study, and that the improvement in his class work had been almost entirely due to the efforts which Berry had made in his behalf.

"I don't see why it is," said Big Smith solemnly, "that I don't receive more recognition in the school. I've tried to do my best, and yet I'm left out of everything. It sometimes seems to me that if a fellow is wild, or gets into scrapes and then reforms, there's a good deal more of a time made over him than there is over a fellow who just plods on and never does anything bad at all. I can't understand it."

Ward's face flushed, for it seemed as if Big Smith meant to be personal. Perhaps the recent return of his own popularity was the more marked because of its very contrast with his previous record and position.

An angry reply rose to his lips, but in a moment the interview with Mr. Crane flashed into his mind, and he bit his lips and remained silent. "'Great-hearted,' 'large-minded,'" he thought. "I suppose Mr. Crane was trying to get me to stretch my soul a bit, and I'll try not to be petty and small to-day, anyway."

"Big Smith," said Jack solemnly, rising and moving his right arm up and down after the manner of a pump-handle as he spoke, "there's a great truth in what you say. I've suffered from the effects of it, lo, these seventeen years. I've often thought if I'd fallen into evil ways or joined in a few scrapes, that when the school saw, as the fellows all must see now, the mighty change in me, they'd give me a good deal more credit than they do. But they just take it all for granted, you see, and expect me to do well every time."

"You can laugh all you please," said Big Smith, "but it's true. Now look at Ward. He's been in more scrapes than I, for I never was in one since I came to Weston; but just see how all the fellows, or almost all of them, are talking him up on every side. They never talk in that way about me, and yet I've tried to do right all the time."

The angry word this time almost escaped Ward's lips, but before he could speak Jack quickly replied, and as Ward looked at Big Smith again he was glad he had not spoken. It was evident the big fellow was in "dead earnest," as the boys phrased it, and Ward thought he even saw traces of moisture in his eyes. Surprise overcame his feeling of resentment, and he stopped to listen to Jack, who had resumed his pump-handle gesture.

"The trouble with you, Big Smith, is that you are a prig. It isn't that you don't do wrong that makes the fellows feel toward you as they do. In their hearts there isn't a fellow who doesn't respect the chap who tries to do right, and they wish they were like him too. But you're a regular grandmother, Big Smith. You've been a big fellow in your own town, and when you went away to school you thought you were doing a big thing. Then you come up here and the first thing you do you go to reaching out and patting all the rest of us bad little boys on our heads. You rebuke us; you think we're all on the downward road because we don't do just what you want us to; and then you expect everybody to do for you instead of trying to be of some use to the fellows. Why, from the time last Mountain Day, when you left others to carry the luggage and then when night came took all of Pond's bedquilt to yourself, every fellow in the school thought you were for Big Smith first, last, and all the time."

"But I was cold that night," said Big Smith solemnly.

"And what did you think of Pond? And whose bedquilt did you think that was? Now Pond never was in any scrape, and yet the fellows all take to him. You're never in any scrape, either, but you've got to do more than that, let me tell you. You heard about the man who never said a foolish thing and never did a wise one, didn't you? Well, let me tell you that a fellow has got to have something more than negative goodness to make him count in the Weston school."

The boys looked with wonder at Jack as they heard him speak. It was all so different from his usual manner that not one of them could understand him,

and almost in consternation they turned to see how Big Smith was receiving the lesson.

CHAPTER XIX
JACK'S SERMON

"I don't just know that I understand what you mean," said Big Smith slowly. "Isn't doing right the same as not doing wrong? That's what I've been taught, that a good fellow was one who didn't drink and swear and steal."

"You've got the cart before the horse, my distinguished friend," replied Jack. "A fellow isn't good because he doesn't do those things, but he doesn't do them because he is good. Now I know a place where there are more than a thousand men living all together. They neither drink, swear, nor steal; they don't even fight. Not one of them."

"That must be a fine community, Jack," said Big Smith quickly.

"Well, it isn't. It's one of the toughest places 'in all this broad land of ours,' to quote from Ward's last speech. Not much. I don't think you, even you, Big Smith, would like it there, even with all the virtues I have mentioned, and they're not half of them, let me tell you, either. I could give you a catalogue more than a yard long, just like them."

"I don't see, Jack. I think you must be joking. What's the place?"

"Never was more serious in all my life," replied Jack lightly. "Now listen, and I'll give you the name of the place. It's the State prison."

Big Smith looked blankly at Jack for a moment, while all the other boys present burst into a loud laugh. It was not so much what Jack had said as the expression of amazement which spread over Big Smith's face as he heard the words.

The laughter of the boys continued for several minutes, and at last Big Smith said slowly: "I never in all my life before thought of it in that way, Jack. Up where I live, when they speak of a good boy they always mean one who doesn't do anything bad."

"And right they are," said Jack, with a laugh; "that is, right as far as they go. The only trouble is they don't go far enough. Any old pumpkin out in the field doesn't do any of these things either, but they don't call the pumpkin 'good' on that account, at least as far as I've ever observed. Did you ever go to a circus, Big

Smith?"

"I never did."

"Well, that's all right; I'm not telling you you ought to. All I mean is that if you should happen to go some time, just to take the children, you know, of course, you'd probably see a lot of cages there. And the cages would be full of awful beasts. Wild animals, you know. There'd be the hyena, he's a very cheerful bird; and there'd be the rhinoceros, and the elephant, and the tiger, and the mosquito, and the lion, and all sorts of gr-o-w-ling, savage beasts of the field," and Jack's voice became low as if he were trying to imitate the sounds of the animals he named. "Now, Big Smith, if you ever were so naughty as to take the children to see such sights, you'd feel perfectly safe, because not one of those monsters was ever known to devour a man, woman, or even one of the children, for whose sake you probably had gone. You see they're held back by the bars, and they can't do any damage, no matter how tempting your tender flesh might appear to be. But, Big Smith, honestly, you wouldn't feel any warmer toward the gentle hyena, or the mild and smiling tiger, would you? or think it any safer to leave those tender little infants you had gotten together, and for whose sake alone you had gone to the circus–I mean just to see the animals, of course–there in the tent, if the bars were all taken away, although not one of those animals had ever done any damage to any man?"

"I–I–don't just see the point," said Big Smith, somewhat bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Alas! alas!" said Jack in mock despair. "Well, what I mean is just this. You don't trust a lion or a tiger in the menagerie because he hasn't done any harm. So you don't always take to a fellow just because he's never done anything very bad, either. He may be held back, he may be afraid, he may not know anything about the bad, and so not do it because he doesn't know enough to do it. Now, Ned Butler, who graduated last year, you know, or Little Puddle's big brother, why either or both of those fellows just gripped the whole school, you see. They never were in any of the mean things, but there was something besides that. They tried not only not to do wrong, but they also tried to do right. Every fellow in the school knew that both of those boys were just doing their level best to do the square thing every time, as well as keep out of the mean things. It wasn't half so much what they did not do as what they did do that counted, let me tell you. They had good, red blood in their veins every time, and the boys knew and felt it too, but it seemed just as if they used every ounce of muscle they had to do something. They weren't thinking of the things they didn't do."

"I–I–think I'm beginning to see what you mean," said Big Smith quietly.

"I'm mighty glad you are able to see the point once in your life," said Jack good-naturedly.

"You'd better be glad," interrupted Ward, who sympathized somewhat with Big Smith in his manifest trouble, "you'd better be glad that you were able to make the point plain enough to be seen for once in your life, Jack, as I've told you so many times lately."

The lad laughed heartily, for he was one of the few boys who was willing to receive as well as give the bantering of the school.

Turning again to Big Smith, and noting the unusual seriousness of his manner he said, in a far more gentle tone than he had before used, "Honestly, Big Smith, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. You started the thing you know, and asked me what I thought was the reason you didn't stand better with the fellows, and I told you just what I thought. It was none of my business, and I ought not to have done it. Who am I to preach to you? I'm one of those who do just exactly the opposite of the very thing I've been urging on you, for I leave undone those things which I ought to have done, and do the things which I ought not to do. Forgive me if I've said what I ought not to have said," and Jack, in his impulsive way, stretched forth his hand.

Big Smith took it, but made no reply, and in a few moments slipped quietly out of the room.

As soon as he was gone Jack began to upbraid himself for the words he had spoken, and in a brief time he too departed. None of the boys ever knew of the visit he immediately made in Big Smith's room, nor did they ever hear of the long conversation between the two boys which followed.

It was soon evident, however, that a change of some kind was coming over Big Smith. Many of his ways were greatly modified, and his devotion to Jack Hobart became as marked as it was strange.

None of the boys, however, thought very much of the matter, for Jack was universally popular, and no one could long retain a grudge against him, and to that fact was probably attributed the new departure in the case of Big Smith.

Pond returned to the school on the following week, and great was the rejoicing among his friends. The boy had but little money, and while in his calm, quiet way he never concealed the fact nor hesitated to give it as a reason for not entering into many of the projects of his companions, he never obtruded it nor referred to his poverty as if he gloried in it. He was one of the most popular boys in the Weston school, thoroughly respected and warmly loved for his genuine manliness.

He had continued his studies during his absence, and had been able to keep well up with his class, and as soon as he returned Ward at once perceived that Pond was determined to retain the laurels he had won in the preceding year if hard work would accomplish it.

It soon became manifest that the struggle for the first place in the class lay

between Ward, Pond, and Berry, but the three boys lost none of their regard for one another in the contest.

Ward learned more easily than either of the other two, but he lacked the steady, dogged, even ways of Pond. There were occasions when he was strongly tempted to neglect his work, and indeed did even neglect it, but not for a long time. He had been taught a severe lesson, and with the higher impulses now in his heart, and the longing to carry home to his father a report which he was well aware would give him higher pleasure than anything else he could do for him, he held himself well to his work in the main, and was recognized as one of the leaders in his class.

In the even lines of the school work there came many pleasant breaks. On Mountain Day the summit of the great hill was climbed as it had been in the preceding year by the most of the boys of the Weston school, and many of the experiences which have already been recorded were repeated.

The party of friends, with Little Pond and Big Smith occasionally added, tramped over the hills in quest of chestnuts, and never failed to return with a goodly store. On the brief half-holidays, until the snow came, they would take their luncheons and start forth to explore some of the beauties of the region in which Weston lay, and the hills would echo and re-echo with the sounds of healthful boyish shouts and laughter, the best sounds in all this world.

Ward Hill was happy. The past seldom rose before him now, or if it did come for a moment and awaken a sharp pang, it was soon put aside as the consciousness of the efforts he was then making came to take its place. And Ward was working faithfully. He was doing so much more and so much better than ever he had done before, that it seemed to him as if he was working intensely. He had yet to learn some of the necessities and possibilities in that line.

The enmity of Tim Pickard and the "Tangs" still continued, but for the most part it was expressed in sneers and attempted slights rather than by any open manifestations; but Ward felt that he could endure all that easily now in the knowledge he had of the regard with which most of the boys looked up to him since the day of the great game with the Burrs. And then too, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he was not neglecting his work, and that results were already becoming more and more plain.

Once, it is true, his room was "stacked" again, when he had carelessly left the door unlocked, but he did not care so much for that as he did that Pond's room was also upset on the same day. Coming up the stairs together they discovered two of the younger boys at work in very midst of the mischief. They administered a sound "seniorly" spanking, and made the little fellows confess that Tim Pickard had told them to do what they were doing.

As soon as the chastening and some good advice had been given, Pond

insisted upon going at once to Tim's room and "having it out with him" as he expressed it. Nothing loth, Ward assented, and the two boys at once went down to Mrs. Perrins' and found Tim by chance in his room.

The presence of his visitors evidently confused the lad at first, but soon assuming a bold manner he listened to what Pond had to say.

"We've come down here to tell you, Tim, that you're not to set any more of the little fellows up to stacking our rooms again."

"I haven't stacked your rooms," said Tim boldly.

"I'm not talking about that," said Pond, speaking in a quiet manner, frequently deceiving to those who were not well acquainted with him. He was seldom angry, but his very quietness gave the impression that it would not be wise to push him unduly. "I'm not talking about that," repeated Pond. "All I said was that you were not to set any more of the little fellows up to such tricks as stacking our rooms."

"Have the little imps gone and squealed? I'll fix—-"

"Now look here, Tim," said Pond, still speaking quietly, and his manner betrayed no excitement, "you know me and I know you. There isn't any use in dodging this thing. Ward and I caught the little fellows right in the act, and we spanked them till we made them own up. It wasn't their fault but ours if they told, and it wasn't their fault that they were in such petty business, either. I don't think they will be in it again."

"What'll you do to stop it?" sneered Tim. "Go and tell the doctor, won't you?"

"I'm not making any threats," replied Pond; "all I'm saying is that this has got to stop. You can't afford to do it, Tim, and as for me, it costs me too much to come up here to have anybody rob me of what I came for. I haven't any time to spend in setting up my room. I need all the time I can get to hold my place in the class," and he turned and smiled slightly at Ward as he spoke. "Now you know, Tim, what I've come for, and that's all there is to it. I'm after the work, and I haven't a spark of the nonsense some of the fellows talk about, putting up with all sorts of tricks, to call them by no worse names, that any one may feel disposed to play on them. That's what I came for, and now I've said all I have to say. Good-night, Tim."

Tim did not reply to the salutation as Ward and Pond turned and went out of the room.

At the door they met Jack, who had just come down for his supper, and to him Ward related all that Pond had said and done.

Jack whistled when he had heard all and said, "That's what you may call bearding the lion in his den. Maybe it will work all right and maybe it won't. They won't bother you again till after Christmas, but my opinion is that you'll

have to look out then."

"What'll he do? Why will he wait until after Christmas?" said Ward.

"Nobody knows what he'll do; it won't be stacking your room, though, I'm thinking. I think he won't dare to stir things up before that time, for he knows he's on his good behavior himself; but it'll come somehow, I'm sure, for Tim's fighting mad."

Jack's prophecy, so far as nothing being done before Christmas, proved to be correct. Nothing occurred to disturb the quiet and harmony of the school.

The little flurries of snow were soon followed by heavier falls, and the wintry winds began to be heard throughout the valley. The crests of the hills were the first to be covered by the snow, but soon it crept down the sides and over the meadows, and when at last the end of the term had come, the snow lay deep over all the landscape, one of the heaviest falls ever known in Weston, even the oldest inhabitants declared.

Of Ward's welcome home, of the good time he had, and the happiness which this time was his, we cannot write here.

When his report came, Ward found that he was third in his class. He knew then that both Pond and Berry must be in advance of him, and he felt somewhat disappointed. The pride and rejoicing of his father over the improvement, however, were so great, and as Ward himself was aware that he had done good work, he did not refer to his own feelings, but he resolved none the less that he would try to show both Pond and Berry that in the coming term if they held their laurels it would be only by the strongest kind of effort.

The "coming term," however, was to be an unusual one even in the annals of the Weston school, but Ward's heart was light, and not a shadow of the future at this time darkened it.

The vacation at last was ended, and Ward and Henry departed from Rockford in the midst of a severe snowstorm. The storm changed to rain before they arrived at the end of their journey, and that night there was a sharp freeze.

In the morning, when they left their room to go to their breakfast, they found that the crust of the snow was strong enough to bear their weight, and in every direction they could see the boys running, sliding, slipping, falling over the smooth surface, while all the time shouts and laughter could be heard on every side.

CHAPTER XX

"Come on, Henry, let's go over to Jack's room," said Ward as they came out of the dining hall together.

The zest of the meeting with the boys was not yet gone and as they came into the hall or went together down the steps, the boisterous laughter still continued.

But Ward was not entirely jubilant, and as he looked about him at his noisy companions, perhaps he was somewhat suspicious that all were not so happy as the sounds of their laughter might lead an inexperienced observer to believe.

The winter term was the long, hard term of the year. In the fall, while each boy was aware that a long stretch of weeks intervened between him and the joyous Christmas time when he would again be at home, there were yet the re-unions after the long vacation, and the formation of new friendships as well as the renewal of the old ones; there was the excitement of the outdoor athletic sports, and the long tramps over the hills and through the valleys, to say nothing of the Mountain Day, which was one of the features of school life at Weston.

In the spring, in addition to the fact that the term itself was a brief one, there was also all the joy which the returning summer brought, and the thought of a speedy return home.

But the winter term was long and sometimes dreary. Storms swept over the valley, the fierce winds piled the heavy fall of snow into mountain-like drifts, and there was not very much to vary the monotony of the school life. It was the time when the hardest work was demanded and done, and the natural consequence was that as the Weston boys came thronging back to the school after the Christmas vacation time more than one of them returned with hearts that were somewhat heavy within them.

But all the boys had a dread of even the appearance of homesickness, and by every available method each sought to create the impression that he at least was not suffering from that dreaded disease.

Just why this was so, no one could explain. Surely no boy had any cause to feel ashamed of his love for his home and his desire to look again upon the faces of those whom he loved and those who loved him. But whatever the explanation, or lack of explanation, it was still true that many of the boys looked forward with anything but pleasure to the days of the winter term, and yet few were willing to acknowledge their feelings.

Ward Hill was no exception to the general rule at Weston. As he came out of the dining hall that evening and the cold, wintry air struck him full in the face, he lifted his eyes and looked at the snow-clad hills which shut in the

valley. The towering monarchs seemed to be absolutely pitiless and forlorn in the starlight. Snow and leafless trees, and cold and lifeless landscapes seemed to be all about him and even the laughter of the boys sounded noisy and unnatural, as if his boisterous companions either were striving to drown their thoughts by their protests, or were endeavoring to force themselves into some kind of a belief that they really were glad to be back together in school again.

He was sharing in the general depression, and in addition to his desire to see Jack was the longing to be cheered, and perhaps compelled to forget the immediate pressure by the contagious and irresistible good nature of his friend.

Henry gladly yielded assent and in a few moments they entered Jack's room and had received his somewhat noisy welcome. Berry also was there, and Pond and his brother came a little later, and in the presence of such friends Ward's gloomy thoughts soon vanished.

"And how are all the good people at Rockford?" said Jack eagerly. "That's the best town I ever was in in my life. I don't see why they need any churches or preachers there for my part; a fellow has to make a desperate effort if he wants to do anything bad there."

Ward smiled at Jack's words as he replied to his question. He thought he might be able to explain to his friend that even Rockford was not free from all temptations, but Jack soon broke in again.

"If I didn't want Pond here to come to New York and take charge of the church I attend just as soon as he's ready to begin to preach, I'd say to him go up to Rockford. They are awfully good up there."

"Yes, some of us 'too good to be true,' I'm afraid," said Ward quietly.

"You don't suppose I'm going to a place where I'd have nothing to do but loaf, do you?" protested Pond. "No sir! I'm going to a place where there's work, and plenty of it too."

Ward glanced quickly at Henry and noticed the pained expression upon his face at Pond's innocent reference to the position of a preacher in Rockford. He was well aware of the almost passionate devotion with which Henry regarded his father, and indeed the feeling was somewhat shared by Ward himself as he pictured to himself even then the saintly beautiful face of Dr. Boyd.

"I don't know about that, Pond," he said quickly. "My impression is that Henry's father doesn't think he's lying in a bed of roses with such a scapegrace as I am to look after. I rather think it depends upon the man almost as much as it does upon the place he's in whether he works or not."

"That isn't what I mean," said Pond, perceiving at once that he had said something which might better have been left unsaid. "I know there's work even in Rockford, and there's a worker for the work too. I was only speaking for myself, and what I meant was that the place where there's the most to be done

is the one which appeals most to me."

"Good for you, Pond," said Jack hastily. "My church is the place for you. The men there think if they give lots of money, and pay a good big salary to the preacher they've done all that's required of them. But honestly I'm most afraid the missionary part was left out of me. I like a good time. And fellows," he hastily added, "I've brought something back with me just for that very purpose. I got one and Tim Pickard's got one too. He brought his up on the same train with me."

"What's that you've got?" said Ward, voicing the immediate interest of all in the room.

"I've the daintiest bob you ever saw. Come out in the hall and see it."

The boys followed the eager lad, and there in the hall stood the long sled which Jack had brought. It was shod with slender steel runners, and in its narrowness appeared to be even longer than it really was. It was beautifully upholstered and equipped with the most approved steering apparatus.

"Isn't she a beauty?" said Jack enthusiastically. "I wouldn't dare tell you what my father paid for her. I just hinted that I wanted the best affair in all the city, and behold! just before I started for the train, this bob put in an appearance."

The enthusiasm of the boys was almost equal to that of the sled's owner, as they noted its good points and examined it critically.

"We'll have some fun on her," said Jack. "She's like an arrow almost. What is it we sing in chapel, 'Swift as an arrow cleaves the air'? Well, that's what this bob can do. She's a good ten feet in length, and I think she won't tarry very long on her way down West Hill, do you?"

"How many will she carry, Jack?" inquired Ward.

"All I can put on her. I can pack away ten or twelve, and maybe more. We'll soon see. Come up on West Hill to-morrow afternoon after study hour, will you, fellows?"

All the boys eagerly accepted the invitation, and on the following afternoon joined Jack and together dragged the long, slender bob up West Hill.

West Hill was a long hill with several bends in the road and a number of very sharp descents, between which were long stretches where the road ran downward, but in a gradual incline. From the place where the boys at last stopped, to the street on which the school buildings stood it was at least a mile, and they were all eager to see in what time the new bob could carry them that distance.

The pathway was almost like ice, for the cold weather still continued and the recent sharp freeze had left a hard coating over all the snow. When at last the party of seven boys halted, for both Big and Little Smith had joined them, they were far above the valley. The trees had a coating of frost and glistened in the

afternoon sunlight. The pathway was hard and firm and did not yield beneath their weight. The air was crisp, but the boys were clothed to meet that and no one thought of the cold.

"Get ready there!" shouted Jack, as he took his seat in front on the sled and grasped the little ropes by which he was to steer. He braced his feet against the ice to hold the sled in its position and waited for the boys to take their positions behind him.

One after another took his place on the sled, carefully bracing his feet and grasping the body of the boy in front of him tightly with both arms. Ward was to have the position in the rear and was to give the push which should start them on their long journey.

"All ready?" shouted Ward taking his place.

"All ready! Let her go!" shouted Jack in reply.

Ward began to push, and as the sled began to move slowly gave it one more hard shove and it had started. Then running swiftly behind it he leaped quickly upon it, braced his feet and tightly grasped Henry, who was seated next before him.

The sled began to move slowly at first, but in a moment its speed increased and soon it seemed to the excited boys as if they were almost flying over the smooth and slippery surface. Faster and faster sped the long sled and the sharp air seemed almost to cut their faces like a knife.

Down the long descent the sled swept on and soon came to the first of the sharp falls. It seemed then almost to leap from the ground and shoot through the air, as indeed it did for a number of feet, then struck the ground and swept onward with an ever-increasing speed.

Ward thought of Jack's reference to the arrow cleaving the air, and it seemed as if that was just what the swift-flying sled was doing.

On and on, swifter and swifter sped the party. Around one of the bends in the road they passed, and the boys clung more tightly to one another, for it seemed at first as if they would be flung from their places; but Jack was doing nobly as steersman and held his beloved sled well to its place in the road. Down another of the sharp descents they passed and the speed was again increased. It seemed as if nothing could move more swiftly than they were sweeping down the long hillside. The vision of the fences by the roadside and of the few scattered farmhouses and barns was all confused and indistinct so rapidly did they pass. Down, down, and ever downward sped the sled, and the excitement of the breathless boys increased each moment.

Another of the bends in the road lay before them, and almost before they were aware of it they were sweeping around the curve, and before them lay the last of the sharp falls in the road.

As they turned the bend a loud warning cry burst from Jack's lips, and as the frightened boys glanced quickly before them, they had an indistinct vision of another party of boys coming up the hill dragging a long bob behind them. The warning cry was heard just in time, and the startled boys only succeeded in swiftly leaping to one side before Jack's sled was upon them. It just grazed the edge of the other sled, and then before any one could utter a word was yards away down the hillside. Not one of the boys spoke, but their faces were white and drawn, and the peril they had barely escaped caused their hearts to beat wildly.

Again the sled seemed to leap and shoot through the air as it came to the last fall, and swift as its motion had been before, it became even swifter now. The fences and trees seemed to fly past them. It was even difficult to breathe in the cold and rushing air. On and on swept the sled with its load, until at last the long road had been traversed and they approached the little hill which was near the village.

Up the ascent the sled plunged on its way, then down the hillside on the farther side, then up again on its way to the last of the rises in the ground before they approached the school buildings.

But the upward movement now began to tell even on the swiftly flying bob and its speed visibly slackened. Slowly and still more slowly it moved, and when at last it had gained the high ground on which West Hall stood it came to a standstill.

With a heavy sigh the boys leaped off and stood together facing Jack, who was holding the ropes by which he had steered, in his hand.

"Whew!" said Jack enthusiastically. "That's what I call coasting, fellows!"

"Coasting!" said Ward. "That isn't any name for it. That's flying, that's what it is–just flying. I feel as if we'd been shot through the air and didn't, even touch the ground. I say, Jack, I've got a name for your bob."

"What is it?"

"'The Arrow.' ,'Swift as an arrow cleaves the air,' you know. You can't improve on that name if you try ten years. Call her 'The Arrow,' Jack."

"All right," said Jack laughingly in reply. "'The Arrow' it is then. I'll have her all painted up in colors in a day or two. Come on, fellows, and we'll try it again."

The boys turned to follow Jack up West Hill again; but no one spoke for a time, as the excitement following the swift ride had not yet disappeared.

Ward was walking by Jack's side assisting in dragging the sled, and when they were half-way up the hillside they quickly called to their companions to "look out," and then swiftly darted to one side of the road drawing the long sled with them. Just before them they could see the other bob coming swiftly on its way, and as it swept past them they discovered that Tim Pickard was steering it.

Doubtless it was his bob, and the party consisted of his boon companions.

"I say, Jack," said Ward soberly, "this is lots of fun, but it's dangerous too. You don't suppose Tim would leave his bob so that we might happen to strike it on our way down, do you? It would be all day with us if he should do such a thing."

"No, I don't believe Tim would do that," replied Jack lightly, although Ward thought he could see that his friend was troubled by the suggestion. "No, I don't believe Tim would do that," repeated Jack. "He's got the disposition to upset us, but I don't believe he'd do it. He thinks too much of his bob to run the risk of a collision."

Nothing more was said by either of the boys, and in a brief time they arrived at the summit of West Hill and prepared once more for the long ride.

The party was arranged just as it had been in the preceding ride, and as soon as Ward saw that all the boys were ready, he began again to push the heavy load and as the sled started, he ran lightly behind it and then leaped upon it in his former position.

CHAPTER XXI
THE ARROW AND THE SWALLOW

Again the swift descent of the long hill was made, and then once more the boys climbed back to the starting point.

Tim Pickard and his friends were passed each time, but no trouble came, the owner of the other bob either not caring to disturb them then, or else, as Jack suggested, he feared the damage which might come to his own sled from a collision.

When at last the boys returned to their rooms, they were all enthusiastic over the sport of the afternoon and were eagerly looking forward to the following day when the experience might be repeated.

Indeed it was not long before the entire school seemed to feel the contagion of the sport, and sleds and improved bobs were to be seen every afternoon upon the long course of West Hill. Even the towns-people came to share in the coasting, and many strange looking sleds soon made their appearance.

One in particular attracted much attention. It was made of two rude low sleds such as the farmers used to draw their heavy loads of wood in the winter.

It was an immense affair, and frequently fifteen or twenty young men would be packed together upon it, and when the rough-looking contrivance made its appearance it was sure to have every right of way, as no one cared to stand in its path.

Even the ladies soon joined in the sport and West Hill presented a gay appearance, covered as it frequently was by the merry crowds. Some of the townspeople had horses to drag the heavy sleds back up the hill and to enable the ladies to avoid the trouble of climbing, but the Weston boys did not consider it much of a task to retrace their steps; and indeed the pleasure was perhaps increased by the difficult ascent.

Jack soon had the name which Ward had suggested painted in bright colors on his bob, and the fame and the speed of "The Arrow" seemed to increase daily.

Among the coasting contrivances none seemed to be equal to it except the bob which Tim Packard owned and which he had named "The Swallow," perhaps from some fancied resemblance between its swiftness and the flight of that bird.

The school had "gone mad," as Jack phrased it, over the coasting on West Hill. The time between supper and the evening study hour also was given up to the sport, and instead of soon tiring of it, the interest and excitement seemed to increase with every passing day.

But among all the sleds and bobs none appeared to belong to the class of "The Arrow" and "The Swallow," and they were soon the acknowledged leaders of them all. The events which followed were perhaps only a natural outcome of that fact and a trial between the two soon came to be talked of among the boys.

"Ward," said Jack, one evening about two weeks after the beginning of the winter term, "Tim wants to have a race between his bob and mine. What do you think of it?"

"I didn't think he'd condescend to race with us," replied Ward, almost unconsciously assuming a partial ownership in "The Arrow." Jack apparently did not notice that there was anything of assumption either in Ward's words or manner, for while the generous-hearted boy had fully shared the pleasures of his bob among the boys of the school, his love for Ward had led to his being a member of every party formed. He declared that Ward alone knew just how to start "The Arrow" aright, and that much of its success was due to that very fact. And Ward in his joy had not stopped long to consider the matter, and soon came almost to regard the swift-flying bob as a joint possession.

"Condescend?" said Jack. "It's no condescension on his part, let me tell you, to have a race with 'The Arrow.' His old tub isn't to be mentioned with it."

"That's all right; I wasn't referring to the bobs, but to Tim's present feelings."

"Well, I fancy Tim did have to swallow hard once or twice before he could

bring himself up to the point of challenging 'The Arrow.' But, you see, so many of the fellows are interested and have talked so much about the two bobs that Tim probably couldn't stand it any longer. So the upshot of it all is that he wants a race."

"I think we can accommodate him," said Ward. "When does he want it to come off?"

"Next Saturday afternoon's the time he mentioned. I suppose we can suit ourselves about that, though. When do you think is the best time?"

"Oh, that'll do as well as any. That is, if the weather holds good. How many are to be in each party?"

"We shall have you and me, of course, and then there'll be Luscious, and Henry, and Big and Little Smith, and Puddle and his big brother. That'll be eight all together."

"Why do you take the little fellows?"

"Oh, it'll be fun for them," replied Jack. "Tim'll carry the same number, eight."

"Yes, but his load will be heavier. Little Pond and Little Smith are both so light that they won't count for very much, I'm afraid."

"Oh well, never mind that. They'll get some fun out of it anyhow, and that'll be almost as good as winning the race. But I'm not afraid, even if Tim does have a heavier load. I guess 'The Arrow' will cleave the air all right."

The race was soon arranged and at once became the exciting topic in the school life. Three days only intervened and the boys of the rival parties were not idle. Daily they went up on West Hill, and Jack tried several new methods of steering, while Ward practised the "send-off," upon which they all relied.

Saturday dawned clear and bright, and the afternoon promised to be almost ideal for the race. Long before the time when it was to occur, the boys of the school took various positions along the roadside to watch the race, although many of them preferred the place in front of West Hall, which was to be the terminus, and there they could witness the finish and at once determine which had won.

Ward had suggested that the race should be "on time," that is, that each bob should go over the course alone and that the time occupied by each should be carefully kept, and the merits of the bobs be determined in that manner. There would be less danger by adopting that method, and he could not disguise the fact, in spite of his excitement, that the race was fraught with more or less of peril. The unanimous protest of all his companions, however, had served to do away with his suggestion, and he had said no more.

It was arranged that the course should be gone over three times and that the bob which won two of the three races should be declared the victor.

Much time had been spent in polishing the long, slender steel runners of "The Arrow," and everything which was likely to add to its speed and safety was carefully looked to.

At last the appointed time arrived and the eight boys who were to comprise "The Arrow's" load started up West Hill, each grasping the long rope and assisting in drawing the bob after them.

A cheer from their friends followed them as they started forth from West Hall, and at intervals along the road they were greeted by the plaudits of the boys. It was evident that most of the school desired them to win, though Tim was not entirely lacking in supporters.

As they drew near the hilltop, it was seen that the rival party was already there, and a crowd of boys stood about "The Swallow" admiring her strength and speed, and talking over her various good points.

Many of the boys who were there to see the start, planned to go down the hill after the first race and be with those who were assembled near West Hall to witness the finish in the succeeding races. Mr. Blake was to be the starter, while Mr. Crane was to be the judge at the end of the course, and they had left him with the crowd in the village.

The excitement was now at the highest pitch. Lots were soon drawn for choice of sides in the road, and as Jack won he selected the right, although there was no advantage in that, and the allotment had been made only to insure perfect fairness for all. The bobs were soon in position and Ward took his stand behind "The Arrow" ready to make the start, while Ripley was waiting to do a similar work for "The Swallow."

The pathway was all cleared and the boys along the roadside were to see that the way was kept clear throughout the course. Ward could see the eager faces of those who were assembled at the starting-place as he glanced about him. They stood back from the road, but were leaning forward intent upon every movement of the rivals.

Jack and Tim had taken their positions in front, for each was to steer his own sled. Tim's face betrayed no feeling, but as he glanced at Ripley, Ward could see that in spite of his apparent indifference he felt confident of winning. Indeed, as he returned Ward's glance a sneer spread over his face, which served to rouse his rival still more. How Ward did wish to win that race! They must have it! And the eager lad determined to give "The Arrow" such a start as she never before had.

"Are you ready?" called Mr. Blake, his tall, angular form bending in the excitement which he shared with the boys. "When I count three you're to start."

He took his watch from his pocket and then glanced once more about him to see that all were ready for the signal to be given.

"One! Two! THREE!"

Instantly Ward bent to his task and "The Arrow" began to move before him. Harder and harder he pushed, and as the speed instantly increased he leaped lightly into his seat and tightly grasped the body of Big Smith who was seated directly in front of him. Unmindful of the frantic cheers of the boys in the assembly behind him he turned to look at "The Swallow." Neither side apparently had gained any advantage in the start, and now the two bobs were speeding onward side by side.

The speed increased, but the two sleds still kept the same relative positions. On down the hillside swept the rivals, and soon they were almost flying through the air. The cold wind made their eyes water, but as yet neither Jack nor Tim had for a moment withdrawn his attention from the task before him. Both fully realized the necessity of constant watchfulness and were resolved that not an advantage should be lost.

Cheers arose from the boys waiting by the roadside, but almost before they could be heard they sounded far away behind them. Both sleds were well handled and were doing nobly.

Around the first bend in the road they swept almost together, and soon the first of the steep descents was gained. Almost as if they were not touching the ground the sleds shot through the air, but the increasing swiftness apparently was equally shared by them both. Side by side the two sleds swept onward. The speed increased each moment, and as yet it was impossible to determine which was gaining the advantage. On and on they sped, "swifter than the wings of the wind."

Around the next curve, then on down the next fall in the road, then around the next bend. More than half of the course had now been covered and still the sleds sped forward side by side.

Before them lay the last of the steep places, and as in an instant they seemed to be upon it, Ward gave a shout as he saw "The Arrow" push slightly forward in advance of its rival. The advantage was very slight but still it was an advantage, for he was nearly abreast of Tim Pickard, who was seated in front on "The Swallow" and steering his own sled, as we know.

Before them now there lay the two little hills. The issue of the race would be decided by the ability to withstand the slackening of speed which was sure to come there.

Up the first little hill both sleds went, and Ward's shouts redoubled as he saw that "The Arrow" was forging slightly ahead. They were just about a sled length beyond their opponents now, and it seemed to him that he could almost hear the labored breathing of Tim Pickard who was just behind him. The lighter load was a very decided advantage now, Ward thought, in climbing the hill, and he blamed himself for having made any protest against the younger boys being

made members of the party.

As they passed down the little hill "The Swallow" gained slightly, but as they began the ascent of the last remaining hill again the lighter weight of "The Arrow's" load began to tell, and when at last they gained the summit it was once more a full length in advance.

They could see West Hall in the distance now, and as the descent was begun they all knew that the last stretch of the course was at hand. The waiting boys had already obtained a glimpse of the racers and their shouts in the distance could be distinctly heard. Plainer and plainer grew the sounds, but Ward's heart sank as he glanced behind him and saw that "The Swallow" was slowly creeping up on them. Her heavier load began to tell now as the descent was fairly entered upon. Ward felt as if he must get off and push the bob before him. What was the trouble? Why was it that "The Arrow" seemed to drag on her way? Slowly and yet steadily he could see that "The Swallow" was gaining. First Tim Pickard came alongside, and then one after another was directly by his side. On and on moved the sleds and soon "The Swallow" was a little in advance.

The cheers of the waiting assembly redoubled now that the bobs were in plain view and the end of the course had been almost gained.

Still "The Swallow" pushed ahead, and when at last the end had been gained she crossed the line more than a length in advance of her rival.

Shouts and cheers greeted the outcome of the first race, even the boys who had not favored "The Swallow" shouting till they were almost beside themselves in their excitement.

Ward and his companions rose from their seats, but they were downcast and disheartened.

"Never mind, Ward," said Jack lightly as they started again up the hill, "'one swallow doesn't make a summer,' you know. They haven't won the race yet. It's the best two out of three and we've a good fighting chance left."

"'The Arrow's' the swifter bob," said Ward disconsolately. "There's no doubt at all about that. They beat us by their heavier load. We were ahead up to the top of the hill, but when we started down then their weight put in its fine work. We'd have beaten them easily if we'd carried as many pounds of weight as they did."

"Never mind that," said Jack quickly, glancing behind him as he spoke to see whether either of the younger boys had overheard the words. "It's an experience they'll always remember, and it's as great fun to see them have a good time as it is to win. Maybe we'll win this time."

Ward made no reply, nor did he speak again before they had gained the summit of the hill. Many of the boys had left it now to go down to West Hall to witness the finish of the race.

The sleds were soon in readiness for the second race, and this time Jack's prophecy proved to be correct, for "The Arrow" won by three full lengths.

Each had now won once and the third trial would be the deciding one. The excitement of the spectators as well as the boys engaged in the race became more intense now. Nearly all had gone from the summit when for the third time the sleds were drawn up there.

They were quickly reversed and placed in position, and then at the word of Mr. Blake started swiftly down the long course for the third and decisive trial in the race.

CHAPTER XXII
THE MISHAP OF THE ARROW

In spite of his excitement, Ward Hill was not unmindful of the danger which attended the race. While the long road was kept clear of vehicles and passing teams by the boys who were stationed at intervals along the course, yet the speed with which the bobs swept over the smooth surface was terrific, and any little mistake on the part of either Jack or Tim was likely to prove very serious in its consequences.

He knew that both the boys were skillful, and their control of the sleds had been superb up to this time, and that there apparently was no cause for the fear which somehow came upon him when they started on the third and last descent of West Hill.

In a moment, however, all his attention was absorbed by the excitement of the race. While not so many of the boys had been on the summit when they started this time as had been there when the other two starts had been made, their feelings were more intense, and what they lacked in numbers they more than made up by their shouts. Each bob had now won a race, and the third trial would determine which should be the acknowledged champion of the school.

It almost seemed as if the sleds themselves shared in the feelings of the boys. The road was in prime condition, and apparently there was nothing to prevent a full test of the speed of each sled.

At any rate, it seemed to Ward, as he clung tightly to the body of the boy in front of him, as if the speed had very materially increased. And yet almost side by side the two bobs sped on down the hillside.

Far away rose the shouts of the waiting boys as soon as they obtained a glimpse of the oncoming sleds; but almost before the sounds could be heard the bobs swept on and passed the scattered groups, and then again the shouts and cheers from below would be heard. No one on either sled spoke, however, for their feelings were too strong for utterance.

Two of the bends of the road had been passed, and twice had both sleds shot through the air as they came to the sharp descents in the road, and while the speed of each had instantly been increased, as yet neither had gained any perceptible advantage over the other.

As they approached the third bend, however, Ward could see that "The Arrow" was slightly in advance.

Tim Pickard, who was steering "The Swallow," was now just abreast of Little Smith, who was seated in the center of the load which Jack's bob was carrying. The advantage, however, was too slight to be a source of much comfort to the anxious boys, and the slightest mistake on Jack's part might forfeit it all in a moment.

Ward looked ahead of him and could see three boys standing directly in the pathway. They were all waving their arms and shouting together, but Ward thought nothing of their appearance, and was satisfied that they would do as all the others had done when the racers came nearer, and step aside to give them a free course down the hill.

A shout arose from "The Arrow's" load as the boys still retained their places in the road, and as the bobs swept swiftly forward, the three still kept their places till the racers were almost upon them. They were shouting and waving their arms all the time, but no one thought of that, and as they darted quickly to the side of the road, the sleds came almost upon them.

"Look out, look out!" suddenly Ward shouted as he glanced at the other sled for it seemed to him that Tim had changed his course and was steering directly into "The Arrow."

"Look out, look out!" he screamed again frantically as he saw that Tim evidently was trying to drive them off from the course. If one or the other did not instantly change there was sure to be a collision.

All the boys on "The Arrow" looked up at Ward's shout of warning, and Jack glanced backward as he heard the call.

"Look out! look out, Tim!" he screamed in his excitement, but the course of "The Arrow" instantly was changed.

Just how it all occurred Ward never knew; whether Jack had for a moment lost control of the sled as he looked backward, or the forward runners of "The Swallow" actually struck the bob he never could tell.

There was for a moment a dull grating sound, as if "The Arrow" had grated

on bare ground, and all the boys on it were thrown slightly forward by the sudden checking of the speed.

However, it instantly became apparent that Jack had lost control of the bob. The swift-flying sled left the road, started directly down the bank, and before them, only a few rods away, was a low, rambling stone wall which still appeared above the crust of the snow. There was a shout of alarm from the watching boys by the roadside, a feeling of utter despair in Ward's heart as he perceived there was to be a crash of some kind. But before he or any of the boys could voice their alarm, or roll from the sled which was plunging ahead with no apparent slackening in its speed, there was a sudden shock, and the sled struck the wall, and in a moment Ward felt himself shooting through the air over the heads of his companions.

He was only partially aware of the force with which he struck the hard, smooth crust at last and slid far ahead over its surface. He tried desperately to check his speed, but all of his efforts were without avail, till at last he came sharply against the stone wall which bordered the narrow field on its farther side.

Even then he felt dull and stunned, and for a moment could not move. Just where he was or how he came to be there was not at first apparent to him.

In a brief time, however, he was aware of the shouts and cries behind him and then staggered to his feet. His face and hands were bleeding and his clothing was torn in many places. But all that was instantly forgotten as he perceived from the actions of the boys, who had quickly gathered at the place where the accident had occurred, that something was wrong there. Stumbling, staggering forward, he made his way back, though it seemed to him that every bone in his body was aching and every step gave him pain.

At last he reached the crowd, and as he approached, one of the boys noticing his appearance, turned to him and said quickly, "Are you hurt, Ward?"

"No, I think not," though even while he was speaking he was conscious of the wounds on his face and hands. "No, I think not much," he repeated; "but some of the boys here are, I fear," he hastily added.

Before him stretched upon the snow lay the bodies of Henry, Big Smith, and Jack. The others of the party were standing about as if they were almost as dazed as he, and certainly their appearance was as bad as his own. Some had bleeding noses, some showed great bruises on their faces, and all had their clothing more or less torn by the accident.

"What is it? What is it?" he said hastily, as he pushed his way into the group and approached the three boys who lay stretched upon the snow. Beneath them some of the boys had placed their overcoats, while others had rolled theirs into rude pillows and placed them underneath the heads of the injured boys.

"Are they killed?" he added in a low voice as be gazed at them.

"No, they're not dead," said one in the group; "but Jack's got it the worst of all. He must have fallen under the bob, for his little finger had been almost cut off. The runners must have gone over it. We've tied his hand up with handkerchiefs as best we could. I don't think the other fellows are anything more than stunned. Here comes Mr. Blake," he added, as the tall teacher came running toward them.

But Mr. Blake was not able to do anything more than the boys had done, and the confusion increased.

"Send for a doctor!" "Take them down on the sleds!" "Take the pillows out from under their heads!" "Rub them with snow!" were among the expressions now heard on every side, but no one seemed to be able to take the lead and the confusion increased.

"Here comes Mr. Crane!" shouted one of the boys, and in a moment the teacher approached the group. Tim's sled had gone on down the hill, and when it arrived at the end of the course, great was the astonishment of the assembled boys that it should be alone.

In response to the many questions Tim disclaimed all knowledge of what had become of "The Arrow," simply declaring that he thought there had been an accident of some kind, but that he did not know just what it was.

Mr. Crane had not waited to hear more, and had instantly pressed into service one of the horses and sleighs which had been halted near the place so that the racers might have a free course, and had started up West Hill.

As he obtained a glimpse of the crowd which soon had assembled near the place of the accident, he had needed nothing more to inform him that something of a serious nature had occurred, and leaping lightly out, he left the horse in charge of one of the boys and ran swiftly to the crowd.

The boys at once made way for him, and just as he bent over the boys Big Smith opened his eyes and stared wildly about him. Soon Henry too regained consciousness, and Mr. Crane at once proceeded to make an examination. Big Smith was declared to be all right, but with Henry it was impossible to determine whether his left arm had been broken or not. The slightly movement of it caused him intense pain, and Mr. Crane said:

"We'll have to leave that for a surgeon to determine. We'll now look at this poor boy," and turning to Jack he began to make a further investigation.

Jack was still unconscious, and soon it was decided to carry him back in the sleigh in which Mr. Crane had come. Ward pleaded that he might assist, but one look at him led the teacher to say, "You look as if you needed help yourself, Hill. No, I'll let one of the other boys assist me. Here's another sleigh," he added, as he saw that others had driven to the place. "Doubtless Boyd and Smith can be taken back in that."

The arrangements were soon completed and the three boys were carried

back to the school. To the offer to carry him and the other remaining boys on the sleds, Ward said: "No, sir, I don't want any more of that at present. I can't speak for the others; but for myself I'd rather crawl back on my hands and knees. Look at 'The Arrow' too, will you?" he added. "I guess her racing days are done."

"The Arrow" was indeed in apparently a worse plight than that of any of the boys. The collision with the stone wall had torn it apart. One runner was broken loose and the seat lay several feet away from the body of the sled.

It was only about a half-mile back to the school buildings, and in the midst of the constantly increasing crowd of boys who looked upon their injured companions much as if they were heroes, the racers returned. It was a procession in striking contrast with that which had started out.

Just how they made the journey Ward never knew. He felt sore throughout the whole extent of his body, and every step caused him suffering, but somehow it was at last accomplished, and when he went up to his room, Henry was already in bed and one of the other boys, who roomed in West Hall, was there.

"How are you, Henry? Are you hurt much?" inquired Ward hastily.

"No, I think not. It's my arm that's the worst. It may be broken. The doctor is coming soon. But how are you, Ward? You look all torn into pieces."

"Oh, I'm all right," replied Ward hastily. "I got a few scratches and bumps, but some hot water and arnica will soon fix me all right."

And he proceeded immediately to carry out his own directions. But his heart was heavy when he thought of Jack and he could not entirely check the tears that rose in his eyes. Sore and bruised as he was he decided to go at once over to East Hall and learn how his friend was.

What a good fellow Jack was, thought Ward. He would share anything he had with any or all who called upon him. And Tim Pickard! His heart grew bitter and hard when he thought of Tim's dastardly trick. He had been the one to blame for the accident, for doubtless his threatened collision had been the cause of "The Arrow's" leaving the road, and the dire events which had followed.

Ward was a long time washing his wounds and bruises, and by the time he was ready to go over to East Hall, Doctor Leslie, the Weston physician, entered the room with the principal of the school.

He at once began to make an examination of Henry and in a few minutes declared, "There are no broken bones. The left arm has had a bad sprain, and he'll have to carry it in a sling for a while, but I'm confident that otherwise he's not seriously injured and will be around again in a few days."

"Do you think he had better go home?" inquired Doctor Gray anxiously.

"That remains to be seen," replied the physician; "but I hardly think it will be necessary."

"You'd better look at Ward," said Henry, his face beaming in spite of the

pain he was suffering, at the doctor's verdict. "He's been hurt too."

"Only a few bruises and scratches," said Ward hastily. "But, doctor, have you seen Jack?"

Doctor Leslie's face clouded as he said: "Yes, I have just come from his room."

"How is he? How is he?" said Ward eagerly. "Is he badly hurt? I want to go over there right away."

"You can't see him, if you do go," said the physician quietly. "I've left orders with Mr. Crane for no one to be admitted into his room. He's to keep the boys in the hall quiet too, and I've telegraphed for his mother."

"Telegraphed for his mother?" said Ward aghast. "Is it as bad as that? Oh, doctor, is he going to die?"

"I trust not, but he is seriously injured. I've been compelled to amputate one of his fingers."

Ward was almost overcome by the kind-hearted physician's words and for a moment he could not speak.

"I think, Hill," said Doctor Gray sympathetically, "that you had better be in bed yourself. Doctor Leslie, isn't there something you can do for him?"

Doctor Leslie left a few directions and then departed with the principal to visit the other boys who had been on the unfortunate "Arrow." Much against Ward's will he was ordered to remain in his room that night and have his supper brought to him.

The following morning, although he felt stiff and sore, he resolutely went down to the dining hall for his breakfast. Henry was in fairly good spirits also, but he was not to leave his room that day. The reports of Jack were not very encouraging and a gloom rested over all the school when the boys assembled in the chapel. The accident of the preceding day was the one topic of conversation and the subdued manners of all the boys showed how deeply they had been touched.

At the close of the service Doctor Gray said: "It is not necessary for me to refer to the distressing accident which occurred yesterday. We all may rejoice that its effects were no worse, bad as they were. In view of the results, which might easily have been fatal, you will all readily understand why it is that from this time forward the use of so-called 'bobs' is strictly prohibited, and no coasting will be allowed except by special permission of the house teachers. I bespeak your sympathy for those who are confined to their rooms and trust you will do all in your power to aid those who are caring for them. You may now pass to your class-rooms."

As the boys filed out of the chapel, many were the words of sympathy heard for Jack Hobart. The popular light-hearted boy would have rejoiced could he have heard the many expressions of interest and good-will, but at that time he cared

for none of those things. Rolling and tossing upon his bed in his room in East Hall, he uttered no sounds except an occasional moan, and even the presence of his mother, who had arrived that morning, passed unrecognized by the suffering boy.

Ward was passing to the Latin room and glanced up at the windows in Jack's room. How he did long to go there and do something to aid his friend! Never before he thought had Jack seemed so dear to him. What would life in the Weston school be without him? He almost groaned aloud at the suggestion.

He was in a measure recalled from his sadness by Little Pond who rushed up to him and said: "Ward, I just heard something."

"What is it?" said Ward, only slightly heeding the boy's eager words.

"I heard that some ashes had been sprinkled on the road where the accident occurred."

"What?" said Ward, interested in a moment.

He stopped and for several minutes conversed with his little friend and when he turned to enter the class-room, there was an expression upon his face which had never been seen there before.

CHAPTER XXIII
THE INVESTIGATION

As soon as the recitations were finished that morning, Ward sought out Little Pond and as they walked together to the dining hall, he said:

"What did you mean by what you said about ashes having been sprinkled on the hill yesterday?"

"Brown told me," replied Little Pond. "Brown said he overheard Tim and Ripley talking together this morning before chapel. He wasn't trying to listen you know, but they take their meals at the same place, and as they came out of the house he heard Ripley say something about ashes and then Tim say 'Yes,' and that 'somebody must go up there right away.' Then they suddenly stopped short as they looked behind them and saw Brown so near them. Brown said they looked guilty too, and as they knew he was a good friend to Jack, they probably were afraid he had overheard them."

"What did Brown do then?"

"Oh, he said that it flashed into his mind in an instant just what they'd

been up to. He thinks that Tim had arranged with these fellows who stuck to the road yesterday, you remember, there by the last of those steep places till we were almost on them. Brown believes that they had sprinkled ashes over the path, or rather over one of the paths, and that they held their places as they did to drive 'The Arrow' right on to it. Then he thinks too that Tim steered in toward us a bit so as to drive us farther and make sure that we'd be held back."

"The rascal," muttered Ward angrily.

"You don't really think Tim Pickard intended to force us out of the road, do you, Ward?" inquired Little Pond. "I think all he wanted–that is, if Brown's right–was to send us on to the ashes, so that we'd be held back and he'd get a chance to gain enough to let him keep the lead on the way down the hill. I can't believe he'd do anything so bad as to drive us into the wall."

"Oh, Tim Pickard's all gentleness! He wouldn't harm any one! He'd never take a fellow out in a baby carriage and jostle him around over the rough ground, not he! He wouldn't stack a room. He wouldn't do anything that isn't just the proper thing to do! Oh no, Tim Pickard's too good for this world, I mean, of course, the Weston world, you know. For my part, I wish he was taken out of it too. Weston would be a very decent sort of a place without him."

Ward spoke bitterly for his heart was hot against Tim Pickard and the "Tangs." Not that he believed that even Tim would deliberately plan to run the boys into such danger as the load "The Arrow" carried had incurred, but he was well aware of his bitter feeling against him, and to an extent against Jack as well, and also of his desire for "The Swallow" to win the race, and that he would stop at nothing to carry his point.

However, he said nothing more to Little Pond, but as soon as he had finished his dinner, he hastened over to East Hall and had a long conversation with Brown, the result of which was that Brown and Baxter, another of the East Hall boys, soon after dinner started up West Hill to make some investigations near the place where the accident had occurred.

Doctor Leslie came out into the hall as Ward departed and the troubled lad delayed for a moment to learn of Jack's condition.

"He's better, decidedly better," said the kind-hearted physician. "I think he's going to pull through all right if we have no setbacks. It was a great shaking up you boys had."

"It certainly was for Jack and Henry," replied Ward. "The rest of us got a few bruises and scratches, but we don't mind such little things."

"Well, I understand that a physician's services are not likely to be required in any similar cases very soon. I hear the principal has forbidden the use of bobs any more."

"Yes, but our sled's all broken up, so we couldn't use it if we wanted to."

"And that makes Doctor Gray's prohibition more easily borne, does it?" said Doctor Leslie with a smile.

Ward made no response as he started toward West Hall. On his way Mr. Blake overtook him and as they walked on together, the teacher said: "Well, Hill, I hear that Hobart is likely to be about again soon. That was a very careless piece of work."

"Careless? I don't understand what you mean," replied Ward angrily.

"Why, Timothy Pickard tells me that you were trying to cut across his path and get ahead of him in the race. That was hardly fair I think, and it ended just as all tricks are sure to end. I'm sure honesty is the best policy, even in a race between bobs."

"Did Pickard tell you that?"

"Yes; I had quite an extended conversation with him this morning. Timothy has improved greatly since he returned to school this year, as you know, Hill. I confess I was somewhat dubious as to the advisability of receiving him back into the school, but Doctor Gray plainly understood him better than any of us did. There is a certain frankness about Timothy Pickard that I now greatly admire. He has had many conversations with me this year, and I am beginning to feel proud of him. There must be something about the Weston air which is highly conducive to manliness. And, Hill, while I am speaking, let me say that I should rejoice greatly if you too were disposed to manifest a little more friendly disposition toward your teachers. You must bear in mind that we are here for the sole purpose of aiding you, and yet you apparently are not eager to receive it."

If Ward had not been so angry, he would have felt inclined to laugh. It was a new departure for Mr. Blake to assume the role of a helper among the boys. Indeed, at times Ward had felt so keenly the impositions of the boys upon him that he had been many times tempted to take his part. The tall, awkward, ungainly teacher had never been a favorite with any of them. Of his scholarship no one had any doubt, but apparently he was lacking in the appreciation of boy nature, and even then Ward recalled the many pranks which the various classes had played upon him. Even Doctor Gray's words in the preceding year, when he had almost begged of Ward and Henry to exert their influence to see that Mr. Blake's pathway was not made so rough, came back to him now.

And here was Mr. Blake posing as a friend. Ward knew that in his heart the teacher desired to be popular in the school, but his desire had been so apparent as to cheapen his very efforts in that direction.

As for himself, Ward had never felt drawn to him and in his heart he did not respect him. He had done his work in his classes, but never had he felt the slightest inclination to go to him as he had done so many times to Mr. Crane.

And yet now he recalled the fact that he had heard and even noticed that

Tim was disposed to be very friendly with the awkward teacher of mathematics. Just what he had in mind by such a course of action, Ward could not determine, but he was satisfied that Tim, to whom at the present time he was not disposed to impute any worthy act or motive, must have some deep-laid plans in mind.

Ward's silence was not understood by Mr. Blake, and as they entered West Hall, the teacher said: "I am glad to see that you have been impressed by what I have said, Hill. You have shown an inclination to do better in your studies this term than you did last, but I trust you will also conform to the spirit as well as to the letter of the Weston rules and life."

Ward said "Thank you" somewhat gruffly, and then hastened up the stairway to his room. Henry was there when he entered, and he at once related to him the outcome of his conversation with Brown, and also told him of the expedition of Brown and Baxter to West Hill.

As he went on to relate the conversation with Mr. Blake, even the staid and sober Henry could not repress the smile which came at the thought of the new air which the teacher had assumed, and with Ward he agreed that Tim must have some deeper motive in his mind than was now apparent in cultivating the friendship of Mr. Blake.

It had been decided that Henry was not to go home. While his arm pained him intensely, and he would be compelled to carry it for some time in a sling, the expense of a journey home and the loss of lessons combined to render his stay in the school desirable, and all that afternoon Ward studied steadily with him in getting out their work for the following day.

After supper that night Brown and Baxter came over to Ward's room to report the result of their investigations at West Hill. It became evident at once by the expression upon their faces that they had something of interest to relate, and after closing and locking the door to prevent interruptions, Ward turned to them and said: "Well, let's have it, fellows. What did you find on the hill?"

"We had a funny kind of an experience," said Brown. "We got permission from Mr. Crane to be excused for a part of the study hour, so we started out right after dinner. We didn't want any of the fellows to see us, so we didn't go together till we got down by the bridge. We met there as we agreed upon and then started up the hill. Well, sir, whom do you suppose we saw when we got most up to the place where the accident occurred?"

"I don't know," said Ward. "Maybe it was Tim Packard."

"No, Tim wouldn't be there, you can rest your soul on that. He never gets his fingers scorched as long as there's some one else to be had to pull his chestnuts out of the fire for him. It was Ripley."

"Was he alone?" inquired Ward eagerly.

"We couldn't see any one else, though we both suspected some one might

not be very far away, didn't we, Baxter?"

"Go on, go on," said Ward. "What was Ripley doing there?"

"Well, when we first saw him he was right in the road. Before I knew it, Baxter had called out to him and you never in your life saw a fellow so scared as Ripley seemed to be. He looked up, for he was on his knees there in the road right where 'The Arrow' left it, you see, and when he saw us coming he just jumped over the fence and made a bee line across lots for home. Oh, it was great fun, let me tell you. We called and called to him, but every time we shouted he just let out another length and the way he slipped over the crust then was a caution. I don't believe 'The Arrow' could have stood a ghost of a show with him. He never once stopped or looked behind him, and it wasn't but a few minutes before he was away down the hill, and pretty soon we could see him in the valley. But even then he never stopped to look back. My opinion is that he hasn't stopped yet. From the way he was going he made me think of the wandering Jew and that he never would stop anywhere, only I don't believe the wandering Jew ever could make such time as Ripley did. He was in dead earnest too, let me tell you."

"Well, what then?" said Henry. "You didn't follow him?"

"No; after we recovered from our astonishment, for we'd never seen Ripley in a hurry before, you see, we put straight on up the hill. Pretty quickly we came to the place where the accident happened and then we began to make our investigations. We didn't have any trouble in finding the place, for the crust was all broken in and the holes that Big Smith made where he placed his tiny 'footies' remain even unto this day. My impression is that they'll find some hollows in the ground up there too in the spring when the snow is gone. 'Every time his foot comes down, the heel of his shoe makes a hole in the ground,' you know."

"Oh, bother Big Smith's heels!" said Ward quickly. "He isn't here to defend himself, and it isn't fair to go for a fellow behind his back. What we want is your story."

"That's what I'm giving you. Well, we went right at the road next, to see if we could find any of those ashes we'd heard so much about."

"You didn't have any difficulty in finding what you were after, did you?" said Ward.

"Difficulty? Well, I should say we did. We searched up the road and then searched down the road, but not an ash could we find, sir, not even a little piece of one."

"Well, what was Ripley doing up there then? What made him run when you came?"

"That's the very question we put to ourselves, my patient little lad, but the question was a good deal more easily asked than answered, let me tell you. If it hadn't been for my friend Baxter here we'd never have had it solved for us at all.

But, you see, Baxter's a descendant of the great Baxter, and he knows a thing or two."

"Who was the great Baxter?" said Henry solemnly. "I never heard of him."

"Oh, he wrote a book, or took a rest, or did something, I don't know just what. But this Baxter took no rest. He made a great discovery. Just when I was about to declare the expedition a failure and was going to organize a retreat *à la* Xenophon, my sweet-spirited friend dropped upon his knees. I was somewhat astonished, you may believe, to behold my comrade in that attitude, and was about to make a few simple inquiries as to the purpose in view, for I heartily approved of his conduct, I have no need of assuring you. But let Baxter tell his own story. He'll do it justice, a good deal better than I can with my poor stammering tongue, you see."

"Baxter, will you tell us what you did?" said Ward. "The trip must have turned Brown's head."

"Why, all there was of it, I saw that some of the snow had been dug out from the bank and it seemed to me it had been thrown on the road," said Baxter. "It was trodden down, but it showed that some one had stamped on it. Of course that made me suspicious and I just got down on my knees and began to dig with my hands. I didn't have to go very far before I found what we were after. Ashes had been scattered in the path, and then some one had gone up and covered it all over with snow, and had tried to pack it down so that it wouldn't show."

"And that was what Ripley was doing?"

"Precisely. Precisely," said Brown. "Your massive brain has solved the riddle."

"The rascals," said Henry angrily. "Where do you suppose they got the ashes?"

"Probably Timothy Pickard, Esquire, looked well to that," said Brown; "and he had planned to fix you fellows on your third trip down."

"But if we'd struck the ashes fairly, it might have sent us flying in every direction, at the speed we were going," said Henry. "It was a dangerous as well as a cowardly trick."

"Precisely so," responded Brown; "but you were saved from flying all abroad by the sled taking only one direction, and somehow you boys seemed to be inclined to follow it too."

"I think it ought to be reported to Doctor Gray," said Henry indignantly. "I'm no tell-tale, but such a thing as that might almost have been murder."

"And how will you prove that Tim did it? Or that any one did it, for the matter of that? As for Tim, he didn't do it, you don't need to be told that, I'm thinking," said Brown.

"And then there's Jack," said Ward. "He's suffered the most, but I don't think

he'd want the thing reported. I don't believe we'd better do anything before he is well enough to hear all about it. Doctor Leslie thinks he'll get along all right now."

"All except his little finger," said Brown. "But I think Ward's right. We don't want to report it before Jack knows all about it. We can keep our eyes open though, and may be we'll find out who did it. Somebody's rapping, Ward."

"I know it," replied Ward. "Let him keep on, we don't want him in here, whoever he is."

Nevertheless he went to the door, but he almost stumbled backward when he opened it, and beheld Tim Pickard and Ripley standing before him.

He was too astonished to speak, but the new-comers did not wait for an invitation to enter the room, for they at once came in, and Ward not knowing what to make of the visit and the visitors, quietly closed the door and again locked it.

CHAPTER XXIV
UNEXPECTED VISITORS

For a few moments no one in the room spoke, and as the boys glanced at one another the embarrassment under which they were laboring seemed to increase. What could have induced Tim and Ripley to visit him, Ward could not conceive. The intensity with which he disliked both increased even as he looked steadily at them and waited for them to speak; for Ward had quickly decided that they must declare their errand without any questioning on his part.

What an evil face Tim had, Ward thought. And yet his own face flushed slightly at the recollection that only a few months before this time he and Tim had stood much in the same position, had engaged in the same pranks, and had reaped the same result at the end of the year. But Tim apparently had sunk even lower, and while Ward was fully conscious of his own failures and falls, yet there was a little feeling of rejoicing that he certainly was now trying to do better. And his own heart rebelled against Tim and all his ways. Surely there was a wide difference between them now, for while they might have started from almost the same plane both had been moving steadily onward, but drifting apart, with the consequence that there was now a distance between them greater than either could conceive.

And too, in that moment of awkward silence, Ward thought of how their positions had changed since the beginning of the present school year. Then Tim had seemed to be a leading force in the school. The boys, even those whose hearts were repelled by him, still outwardly acknowledged his position, and his word had been law with them in many ways. His wealth, his fine physique, his ability as a baseball player and a general athlete, had all their weight, as Ward himself was fully aware. And indeed, had he not himself felt the influence of all these things in the previous year, and been among those whom Tim had easily induced to follow him in his evil ways?

Now, however, it was clearly evident to Ward that to a large extent Tim had lost in influence in the school, while he himself had risen in the estimation of his fellows. What had wrought the change? Was it the winning of the game from the Burrs? Doubtless that had not been without its influence, but it was something more than that, and although Ward Hill could not find a name for the cause of the change, and perhaps was not fully aware of the change itself, it was still due far more to something within him than to anything he had done which could be seen by his fellows.

The struggle had been a difficult one, and what the sensitive, highly-strung lad had suffered no one but himself could know. And perhaps the battle was not entirely won even now, nor would it ever be until life itself should be ended, for no matter how high a person may rise there still lies the unattained before him. The successful merchant is not willing to rest on the laurels won; the statesman finds difficulties confronting him even when he has gained the coveted position, and even the schoolboy is not satisfied with the victories he has achieved, but is looking out upon fields all untrodden by him. And all this is because life is at work. When a man ceases to struggle he ceases to live. Dead men are never hungry. They rest from their labors, but the living rest for their labors.

The main difference between Ward Hill and Tim Pickard lay not in the positions they then occupied, widely apart as these at the time seemed to be, but rather in the direction in which each boy was moving. Tim was slipping and drifting, and his direction was downward. Ward was struggling and striving, falling too many times in spite of all his endeavors, but the direction in which he was moving was after all steadily upward. If their relative positions were so far apart now, what would they be at the end of the journey?

Not all of these thoughts had come to Ward in the awkward silence which had followed the unexpected entrance of Tim and Ripley, but a dim suggestion of some of them had made itself felt in the heart of the puzzled lad.

In a moment, however, all his better impulses were swept away as he thought of the troubles Tim had brought upon them. The ”stacking” of his room, and all the petty annoyances he had suffered at his hands in the earlier part of

the year were as nothing now in contrast with the condition of Jack and Henry, and even his own body was not without its witnesses in the shape of bruises and sores.

When he thought of Jack, Ward's anger quickly returned, and a harsh and bitter taunt arose almost upon his lips, but by a great effort he restrained himself. After all, who was he to taunt Tim with his shortcomings? Possibly Tim might not be entirely without flings to give him in return. No, silence was the better part now, and he need not stoop because Tim had fallen so low.

Tim was the first to speak. Assuming an air of indifference and bravado, and looking boldly about the room he said "Well, we might as well have it out at the beginning as at any time, I suppose. We've come over to see what you intend to do about it."

"Do about what, Tim?" said Ward. "Of what are you talking?"

Tim laughed noisily, as he replied. "That'll do to tell the doctor, but it won't go here. You know as well as I do what we've come over here for."

"You'll have to explain yourself," said Ward coldly.

"All right then, if you must have it; it's the accident. We came over to see about it. You might as well speak it right out now as any time, and it may save a heap of trouble."

"I suppose by 'the accident' you mean the ashes you had sprinkled on the road on West Hill, and your trying to crowd 'The Arrow' upon them," said Ward.

"Now look here, fellows," said Tim with an air of assumed indifference, "it's all very well for you to talk about my steering into you. No one can ever say that I did that purposely. You can't hold two bobs going as swiftly as ours were right to a chalk line. It's simply impossible. You happened to have the lower side, that's all there was about it, anyway, and when 'The Swallow' veered a little from her course, why you thought we were coming straight for you. But even then you didn't have to leave the track, and you wouldn't have done it, only Speck lost his head. He looked behind him and, like Lot's wife, he had to suffer the consequences of his own mistake, and that's all there was to it."

As none of the boys made any reply, Tim hastily continued. "And it's all true what I was saying about it's not being necessary for you to leave the track, even if we had gone out of our course a bit. We know it's so, because some of us have been up and examined the place again."

"Is that what Ripley was running down the hill so for?" inquired Brown quietly.

Ripley's face flushed as he said quickly: "I wasn't running away. If any of you fellows think you can go down West Hill across lots at a walk when the crust is as hard and slippery as it is now, why just try it, that's all I've got to say, and you'll sing a different tune. I couldn't stop and I couldn't turn around. I wasn't

running away. What was there to run from, I'd like to know?"

"I'll tell you what you were running from, Ripley, if you want to know," said Brown.

"What was it?"

"Ashes."

Ripley's face could not entirely conceal his alarm as he heard Brown's words, but he only laughed lightly by way of reply.

"Yes, sir," said Brown. "We found out all about it. We dug over the snow you had thrown on the road and then tried to tramp down so that it wouldn't show. We know all about that, my fleet-footed friend."

"No one can say that either of us put any ashes on the road," said Tim boldly. "We didn't do it, we didn't have anything to do with it–if any ashes were scattered there, which, for my part, I very much doubt."

"No one would ever accuse you of doing it," said Ward hotly. "You never yet had the manliness to stand up and have a decent share in the mean tricks you set the other boys up to. Oh, no, you probably didn't carry the ashes up the hill. No one would ever think of you as doing that. You'd rather have some one else do all your dirty work, and then you'll crawl out when the pinch comes."

"Well, there's one thing I never did, anyway," replied Tim slowly, although his eyes betrayed the anger which Ward's words had aroused. "I never went back on my friends by the 'I am holier than thou' dodge. I never stooped to pose as a pious fraud after I'd been guilty of some things I could mention. Not much! If ever I went over to Dorrfield and had a supper at another fellow's expense and got drunk, I never whined and lied out of it, nor told of the other fellows, anyway. If I ever stole any examination questions, I never denied it. If I flunked when it came to the end of the year, I never bootlicked the teachers and tried the 'good little boy' dodge. Now suppose I did know that ashes were to be scattered on the path? What could I do about it, I'd like to know? If some of the fellows couldn't bear the thought of Jack Hobart, with such a crowd of bootlicks as he had on his bob, coming in ahead of 'The Swallow,' why whose fault was it, I'd like to know? I couldn't help it, could I? I've got enough to answer for myself, without taking on my shoulders every fellow that is despised by the school."

The anger which Ward felt when Tim first began to speak soon gave way to shame and mortification as the brutal lad went on. All his thrusts went home, and Ward could hardly speak when Tim stopped. All his former disgrace came back upon him, and he felt as if every boy in the room must be regarding him as Tim pretended to himself.

But Henry, who felt deeply for his room-mate, with flashing eyes quickly came to his assistance. Rising from the chair in which he had been seated and standing directly in front of Tim, he said: "Look here, Tim Pickard, you'll not

gain anything by raking up old scores, or trying to get us off on the track of last year's work, whether it's true or false what you say. You know as well as I do that some of these things are not true; but I don't care anything about them, one way or the other. And you can't scare us in any such way, either. Now look here, Tim Pickard! do you see that arm of mine? I've got to carry it in a sling for weeks, and why? Just because of your sneaking trick. Jack Hobart's lost a finger and no one knows how long he'll be in bed, or whether he'll ever leave it alive or not, for that matter. Now what was the cause of it? Answer me, will you? Where did all these fellows get their bumps and bruises, and how does it happen that 'The Arrow' is smashed into pieces? Can you tell me that? You want to know what we're going to do about it, do you? Well, I could tell you mighty quick what I'd do if it was left to me. I'd go straight to Doctor Gray and lay the whole thing before him. We'd arranged for a square race with you, you know that. And I don't care whether you carried the ashes up there yourself or had some of your sneaking 'Tangs' do the work for you; it's all one to me. I don't think the fellow who would be guilty of such a mean, contemptible trick as that is fit to be in such a school as this. I haven't a bit of fear of being called a tell-tale. I'd think I was doing the very best that could be done. Yes, sir, if I could have my way I'd even get up a petition to the doctor to have you put out of the school. When you set the little fellows up to stacking rooms, I thought that was pretty small business for a senior to be engaged in, though I didn't think it was worth noticing; but when you come to do things that endanger our lives, it's another matter entirely, and I don't believe in mincing matters, either. If you'd settle down and behave yourself, there isn't a fellow in the Weston school that would do a thing against you; but it's time you put a stop to some of the things you're doing, and if you won't do it, then I claim the fellows themselves ought to do it for you."

Henry ceased, and for a moment all the boys looked at him in astonishment. He was usually such a quiet fellow that the outburst seemed to them all the more remarkable. Even Tim apparently had been affected by Henry's righteous indignation; but in a moment he recovered himself and said:

"That's just what we came over for. Then we are to understand, are we, that you intend to report the matter to the teachers?"

"No, Tim," said Ward, who now had somewhat recovered from his mortification. "No, Tim, we don't say we shall do that. We talked it all over and made up our minds that it wouldn't be quite fair to Jack to do that. He's suffered the most and he ought to have the most to say about what shall be done. We sha'n't do anything till he is better and can say what he wants."

"Jack Hobart never will squeal, if you leave it to him; but it won't be left to him, I'm thinking. Some of these pious frauds will not be able to keep still and wait for him. Well, Ripley," he continued, rising as he spoke and turning to his

companion, "we'll have to face the music, I suppose." And face the music they did for Dr. Gray in some mysterious way heard of their part in the almost fatal accident and immediately expelled Tim from school. He gave Ripley a severe reprimand but did not deal as severely with him, for the just master realized Tim's mastery over the weaker boy.

Ward felt greatly relieved when he heard of Tim's expulsion. An evil genius had passed out of his life.

CHAPTER XXV
JACK HOBART'S PROPOSITION

Jack Hobart's recovery was rapid. The fear which Doctor Leslie had first felt that there might be some internal injuries was soon dispelled, and though the shock to Jack's system had been severe, his sturdy frame soon asserted itself, and very soon he was pronounced out of all danger.

The spring and early summer days almost seemed to rush past Ward Hill, so swiftly did they go. Each day was filled with its routine work, and as he was working hard to pass Berry in his class, he had little inclination or time to devote to outside matters.

The boy, however, was no book-worn, or "dig," as the Weston boys designated one who was devoted to books alone, and the class meetings, frequent now that the end of the year was so near, the school life, and the companionship of the boys all appealed to him strongly.

But even stronger than his desire to win a high standing in his scholarship was his determination to carry off the prize in declamation. In lieu of the ordinary "graduating exercises," there was each year a contest for two prizes, in which all of the seniors and a few of the boys in the class below them whose standing was sufficiently high were permitted to compete. Preliminary contests were held and the number of contestants was somewhat decreased before the final trial occurred.

Ward and Henry already had succeeded in passing the first of these trials and were sure of a place on the program for the final and deciding contest. This was to occur in the evening of the last day of the term, and many of the parents and friends of the boys, as well as a large number of former students who came back to revisit the scenes of their school-days and perhaps strive to catch some-

thing of the contagion of the spirit of life and enthusiasm, were expected to be present. Jack Hobart was not to compete for the prize, as he had but little ability in that line; but he was almost as much interested in Ward's success as he would have been in his own. Together they went almost every afternoon to one of the secluded spots on the hillsides, and while Ward awakened the echoes by his eloquence, Jack sat by and listened in solemn admiration or passed such criticisms as occurred to him, and Ward found his friend's suggestions frequently of great value.

Only a week remained now before the prize speaking was to take place. Ward and Jack were returning from their daily visit to the woods, and as they walked on their thoughts naturally reflected their feelings.

"I don't know how it is," Jack was saying, "but somehow I have a mighty queer feeling at the close of this year. This makes four years I have been in the Weston school, and any one would naturally think I'd be glad to be out of it. Of course in a way I am, but somehow I'm broken up by it too. The first thing I do every morning is to take a good look at the Hump. The old hill is always there just the same, but I'm half afraid every morning to look out for fear he's hidden himself somewhere."

"It's become a part of your life, I fancy," said Ward soberly. "Last year when the end came, it almost seemed to me as if the mountains here were frowning upon me, but this year they seem like steps or ladders up to something better."

"And they are," said Jack enthusiastically. "I suppose we're somewhat broken up to think the end has come and that we've got to scatter now. Some of the fellows I sha'n't feel very bad about leaving, but when I think of some of the others, it almost seems to me as if I just couldn't go on without them, and that is all there is to it. It just seems to me, Ward, as if I couldn't go on without you. I don't believe, old fellow, you ever realized how much you are to me. I never had a brother; but it seems to me, Ward, that if we had both had the same father and same mother we couldn't be more to each other."

Jack was evidently affected, and Ward's heart responded to that of his impulsive friend in an instant.

"I never had a brother either, Speck, but I feel as if I had one now." Almost instinctively the boys stopped and clasping hands looked earnestly into each other's face. There was something almost sacred in the hand-clasp, as if it were a pledge of a lifelong love.

The love between brother and sister, father and son, mother and daughter, husband and wife, are all sacred and beautiful, but the love between two boys or young men has in it also something that is very nearly sublime. God pity the man who has never known what it was to have a deep-abiding love for another of his own sex. Something is wanting in his make-up to cause such a lack, and his

life too will never know the fullness of its best meaning without that experience. Friends and friendship! "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly," wrote a keen observer of men many centuries ago. But with a friendship once formed no true man ever ought to let anything break in upon it.

And these lifelong friendships are almost never formed in after years. They come, if they come at all, in the days of boyhood or young manhood. That is the seed-sowing time for friendship, as it is for a good many of the other good things of life.

"I've been thinking it over a good deal, Ward," said Jack, "and I talked with my mother about it too when she was here. Now you're going on to college and so am I. I don't want to break up what's been begun between us here if it can be avoided. Now you know I did think of going away from home to college, and of course I may do that yet, but whatever comes I want to go with you. You can't tell how you have helped me by the fight you've made this year. I ought to have such a fellow with me all the time. There's no telling what I might do if I had."

Ward smiled but made no other reply. Jack's words had stirred him deeply, but he had learned too much in the year that was now almost gone to put a very high estimate upon the value of the "fight" to which his friend referred.

"What I want to say," said Jack, "if I can only get at it, is, that rather than not be with you I'd be glad to go to the college in my own town and have you come right there and live in our house all through the course. There! I've managed to get it out at last, but that's just exactly what I mean."

"You are good to me, Jack," said Ward slowly.

"That's not it, for you'd be the one to confer the favor, let me tell you. My mother would be only too glad to have you come, for she says that then she'd be sure to have me home for a time. She says my absence, lo, these many years, has been the only 'speck' on her horizon. Now if you'll say the word, it's all settled, college, room, chum, and all."

"I hope you won't think me ungrateful, Jack, but I can't answer you now, though honestly I don't believe my father would be willing to accept such a gift. He'll feel proud as a peacock that you thought enough of me to make me such an offer, and he'll appreciate your kindness too; but I don't believe you can understand just how he feels about some things. He wouldn't be quite willing to receive such a favor, I think, unless he saw some way of returning it."

"But he would return it and more," said Jack eagerly.

"I don't just see how."

"By letting you come. Your company, and the influence of such a fellow on your humble servant would be something which would be more than just a mere matter of a gift. We'd be so glad to have you, we'd think it a great bargain, and if there's anything in all the world, next to me, my mother loves, it's a bargain."

Ward laughed, but Jack was too much in earnest to be turned from his purpose.

"Let's go over to Mr. Crane's room and talk with him. Will you do it, Ward?"

"Yes, I'll go over to his room, but I hope you won't think I don't appreciate what you've said, Jack, if I say I can't settle the matter now, and that I am more than half afraid my father won't agree to it, though I know he'll thank you."

"I don't expect you to give in at once," said Jack. "It's asking too much. But come on! We'll go right over to Mr. Crane's room now."

Whatever the impulsive lad wished to do must be done at once, and as Ward consented, in a few minutes both of them were seated in the teacher's room.

"We want to know, Mr. Crane," said Jack, not broaching his project at once, "what you think about colleges. We want to get your opinion, if you're willing to give it to us."

"What I think about college?" replied Mr. Crane. "I thought you understood pretty well what my opinion about that was, long before this time. You know I am a strong believer in every boy going who can do so without too great a strain upon his parents."

"That isn't exactly what I mean," said Jack. "We both of us know how you feel about that. But what college do you prefer?"

"That depends. I prefer some colleges for certain boys and should advise others to go to different ones. It is impossible to formulate a fixed rule for every case."

"But which is better, a large college or small?"

"Again, that depends," replied Mr. Crane with a smile. "If a boy has means, and his character is fairly well developed when he goes so that he will not be likely to be lost in the crowd, undoubtedly he can gain certain advantages in some of the larger colleges he never could find in the smaller. Their larger endowments and better equipments are certainly no small matter to be considered. On the other hand, if a boy is somewhat diffident and immature and needs bringing out more than he needs to be filled, doubtless he would do better in a small college. There is more of the personal contact there between the student and his teachers, and his own individual needs are looked to much better. In general, I may say if what a boy needs is the development of himself, the smaller college will do more for him. If what he needs is not so much the bringing out of himself as the filling up, the larger college is the place for him."

"That places Jack and me in two different classes, then," said Ward.

"I am not so sure of that," replied Mr. Crane. "You have both of you been away to school now, and have been thrown back upon yourselves. You have learned to depend upon your own efforts, and I do not regard it as in the least

probable that either of you would be swallowed up and lost in the crowd in a large college. It is no slight advantage to have had two years at Weston before you go."

"I wish we could keep right on at Weston, and not have to go anywhere else," said Jack.

"No, I hardly think you really wish that, Hobart. Of course, now that you are about to leave us you forget all the unpleasant things and remember only the pleasant ones. I would not have it otherwise, and trust that some of us will still be a part of your lives, even when you are apart from us. But when one becomes a man he is compelled to leave childish things. All that you have been doing has been leading up to this time, and now you must face it."

"Of course I know that must be so," said Jack quietly, "and I suppose if we really thought we should have to come back we wouldn't like it a little bit. But what I really wanted to know, Mr. Crane, was what you thought about Ward coming down and living with me in my home and going to college there with me."

Ward's face flushed slightly, and he added: "Jack hasn't told it all. What he wants is for me to live with him and not to pay anything for the privilege."

"That isn't—-" began Jack.

Mr. Crane interrupted him and said: "I think I understand; but it's a question in which I fancy others besides you boys may be interested."

"That's just it," said Jack quickly, "My mother wants him even more than I do."

"But there's my father to be thought of too," said Ward. "He may not want me to do it."

"Precisely," said Mr. Crane. "That's a question I cannot answer. You see I am the one being examined now, and you are the examiners; and I have failed."

"There's some hope for me then if the teachers themselves fail," said Jack laughingly.

"Personally I never had that feeling others describe as being unwilling to accept a favor," said Mr. Crane. "Few of these so-called 'favors' are all on one side. They are almost always a species of 'give and take.' However, I am no judge for others, and sometimes think I have more than I can do to look after myself. I shall be interested to learn your decision."

The boys departed, and soon after went to their own rooms with the problem still unsolved.

Ward was deeply touched by Jack's offer and his eagerness for him to accept it. If he should do so, he well knew what a load would be lifted from his father's shoulders, but still he thought he understood what his father's decision would be.

The few remaining days of the term now rapidly came. Ward was working busily and the visits to the glen with Jack increased. He was more anxious than he cared to show about the prize for declamation, but his anxiety only served to increase his labors. Henry was to compete also, but somehow the boys did not often refer to the contest in the other's presence. The best of feeling prevailed, but both were eager to win, although if either lost he sincerely desired the other to win.

On Monday, the visitors in the village began rapidly to increase. "Old boys," as the students called the former students, many of them now gray-haired men and coming up to Weston with their own sons or grandsons, arrived by every bus. The parents and sisters, and brothers of the graduating class also came, and the beauty of the little village was greatly enhanced by the bright apparel of the girls and the interested groups of the visitors who wandered about among the school buildings or along the wide streets.

When Ward's father and mother came, the welcome they received from him was far different from that he had given them in the preceding year. He was all eagerness, and his happiness was so apparent that it speedily became contagious, and as he brought the boys up to meet his father and mother his heart was overflowing as he heard the warm words for him on almost every side.

On Tuesday night the contest for the prize in declamation was to be held. As the hour approached Ward's excitement became greater, although his outward calm was not disturbed. A great audience assembled to listen to the boys, and at last Doctor Gray, who presided, advanced to the front of the platform to announce the first speaker of the evening.

CHAPTER XXVI
CONCLUSION

Ward, with the other speakers, was waiting in the rear of the platform, but the printed program informed each when his time was to come, and so each was striving to possess his soul in patience.

Berry was the first to be called, and as Ward peered out at him as he advanced to the front of the platform, bowed gracefully to Dr. Gray, and then turned to face the audience, he almost envied him his self-possession and ease.

Soon, however, the boy was speaking, and as he went on even Ward felt

deeply interested in what he was saying. When his declamation was ended and a storm of applause broke forth, Ward felt as if there was little use in trying to compete with Berry, and as he rejoined his companions in the rear of the platform Ward was the first to congratulate him upon his success.

And his expressions were genuine and hearty too, for while Ward with all his heart desired to win the prize, he had now no feeling of bitterness toward his competitors.

Ripley was the next speaker, but Ward at once perceived that he was far below Berry in his hold upon the audience, and indeed among those who followed only Pond seemed in any way likely to be a close competitor for the prize.

Ward's name was the last on the list, and when he heard his name announced and walked slowly forward, he was somehow conscious that the audience was becoming somewhat wearied and restless.

His appearance, however, served to arouse the younger portion at least, and a faint murmur of applause was heard as he bowed low to his hearers. This was quickly hushed and Ward for the first time looked directly at his audience.

He was conscious only of an indiscriminate mass of faces at first all turned toward him. It seemed to him as if he must have more air. His breath would not come and he felt as if he were choking. For a moment every sentence of his declamation departed and he could not recall even the first and opening words.

His momentary hesitation was not noticed or perhaps perceived by his audience, however, or it may have been that they considered his hesitancy as only a deliberate movement on his part. It seemed to the frightened boy as if something were clutching him by the throat. Everything turned black before him, and he almost felt that he must cry aloud in his misery. Abject failure seemed to stare him in the face.

Suddenly he caught sight of Mr. Crane seated about half-way back in the audience, and then right near him were his father and mother and Jack. The last was leaning forward and regarding him with breathless interest, and the sight instantly restored Ward's self-possession. The words of his declamation instantly flashed into his mind and in a low, clear voice he began to speak.

All his previous confusion which to him had seemed to cover hours, had in reality lasted but a moment, and as has been said, was not noted by his audience. But as soon as he heard the sound of his own voice all his "stage fright" was forgotten and his whole soul was in his immediate task. Yet out of all the audience Ward seemed to be aware only of the presence of Mr. Crane. To him he was speaking, and almost as if he was to be the deciding judge he addressed himself to the teacher. Whenever he changed his position or faced other portions of the assembly he saw no one distinctly and soon returned to his favorite teacher. To him he spoke, for him he exerted himself, his praise was to be his exceeding great

reward.

And Ward Hill threw himself without reserve into his speaking. It seemed to him as if every word was his own, and he must make his hearers see what he saw and believe as he believed. The audience became more and more silent, and almost no one removed his eyes from the eager, animated, manly-appearing boy.

As he went on his eagerness increased and the interest of his hearers increased also. Ward almost forgot every one except Mr. Crane, and as he felt rather than saw the intense interest of his teacher, he responded to it instantly. There was no hesitation, no faltering, no lack of words now. His face was glowing, his movements animated, and his every gesture counted.

When at last he had finished and paused a moment before he made his final bow, there was a silence in the room that was most intense. But the instant he turned to depart from the platform the pent-up feelings of the audience broke forth and a storm of applause followed him which continued long after he had rejoined his competitors behind the scenes.

"You did nobly, Ward," said Pond eagerly, as he grasped the hand of the flushed and excited boy. "Not much show for us, is there, Berry?" he added, as Berry pressed forward to add his congratulations.

"I'm afraid not," replied Berry. "I never heard any one do better, Ward."

They all instantly became silent as Dr. Gray arose to speak. He spoke some warm words of praise for the work which had been done that year, and then announced the honors of the graduating class.

Pond stood at the head, and although the audience applauded heartily, the announcement created little interest, as the popular boy's position had been a forgone conclusion. Berry was second and Ward was third. The applause which followed had hardly begun before Ward rushed forward to congratulate the boys who had outstripped him.

"Lucky for us, Ward, that you didn't work last year as you have this. I'm afraid we wouldn't have stood a very good chance if you had," said Pond.

Ward laughed as he said: "To tell the truth, boys, I should be glad to have stood first, of course, but there was not much chance for me with the load I had to carry. Perhaps I learned more, though, by my failures than I would have if I had worked as hard last year as I have this. The wound is healed but the scar is left, you see. But honestly, fellows, I'm glad you are the ones to go ahead if I couldn't."

"Hush, boys! Here comes the committee to report their decision," said Berry.

The suspense and interest were manifest in the hush which fell over all as the chairman of the committee who was to award the prize for the best declamation now returned to the platform and signified his readiness to make the report.

As in duty bound the man first referred to his own school days in Weston, now far back in the years, and noted the many changes which had taken place. Then he went on to speak in glowing terms of the exercises of the evening, and when he came to the remark which almost every chairman had made for years, that "seldom from any college platform had he heard better speaking," a smile crept over the faces of many who heard him.

"And now," resumed the speaker, "we are to report on the exercises of this evening. If it had been in our power we should have been glad to award the first place to every boy on the program, much as Artemus Ward made each man in his company a brigadier general. But as that is impossible, we are compelled to do the next best thing and use our judgment in selecting the speaker who seems best entitled to the award and to the reward."

"Bother his long speeches," said Berry in a low voice. "Why can't he say what he has to say and be done with it?"

The three boys were standing together just out of the sight of the audience, and with breathless interest were peering forward and listening to the speaker.

"As to the award of the first prize, there has not been much difference of opinion."

The man was speaking again and the boys at once became silent and intent upon his words.

"We have decided that the first prize, in view of the points we have marked, namely: forcefulness, clearness of enunciation, gracefulness, and self-possession, and the interpretation of the piece, belongs to–Ward Hill."

The words had hardly been uttered before a loud burst of applause broke forth from the audience. Jack in his enthusiasm stood up on his seat and threw his hat into the air, but a quiet touch by Mr. Crane recalled him to the proprieties of the occasion. The applause, however, was long continued and hearty, and showed that plainly the assembly concurred in the decision.

Ward felt the blood surge up in his face and as Berry patted him upon the shoulder, and Pond's glance betrayed his feeling, Ward felt that never before had he been so happy.

"The second prize," resumed the chairman as the audience at last became quiet, "has been a little more difficult to award. The nearly equal excellence of two of the speakers has led us at last to divide the prize. The second prize is therefore awarded to Lucius Berry and Frederick Pond."

Again the applause broke forth, genuine and long continued, and was redoubled when the three boys advanced to receive their prizes.

Ward glanced down at his father and mother and as he plainly saw them stealthily wiping their eyes, he felt a suspicious moisture creeping into his own. How different it all was from the close of the preceding year! It had been a long,

hard struggle, but he had been well repaid in the happiness which had come to his parents, and in which he fully shared.

He was only partially aware of what followed. He knew that the audience had been dismissed and that many of the boys crowded about him with their words of congratulation and praise. He heard Mr. Crane's quiet words of praise too, and the warm grasp of the hand which was the sole expression of his father at the time was inexpressibly dear to him. His heart seemed to be overflowing and the long-continued effort of the year had brought him its reward; far more than the prize he had received was the satisfaction of having faced his difficulties and conquered in the struggle.

At last all the audience was gone, and Jack and Ward started slowly up the street together.

"It's been a great night," said Jack: "and, Ward, you have done nobly. Everybody is proud of you. But do you know, I'm not thinking of the prize you took."

"What are you thinking of?" said Ward quietly. His own mind had not been dwelling upon the prize either.

"I was thinking of the way in which you have faced the school, the work, and yourself, this year. I think I know something of what it has cost you. It's been a big price, but it was worth it."

Ward made no reply, although his heart responded warmly to his friend's words. He thought he too knew what he had lost and what he had gained; but he could not speak of either.

"Now, Ward," resumed Jack, "you've had a chance to talk with your father. What does he say about my proposition for next year?"

"Jack, old fellow, he was deeply touched, but he doesn't think it will do."

"Is he afraid to have you with me?"

"No, no; not a bit. That isn't it, but he wants me to go to another college." Ward did not refer to the other fact of which he was well aware, that his father was not willing for him to accept so great a favor at the hands of another, when he had no means of returning it.

"That's all right, then," said Jack; "but you haven't got rid of me yet. I'm going where you go, and I'm going with you too. Wouldn't it be a fine thing if Luscious and Henry and you and I could get some rooms together? Then, if Pond and one or two of the other fellows could go up to the same college we'd be all fixed out, wouldn't we? Say, Ward, let's fix that up, will you?" And all of the eagerness and impulsiveness of Jack's nature seemed to find expression in his words.

"It would be fine," replied Ward. "We'll have to talk that up."

The few remaining days of the closing week passed rapidly, and to Ward it

seemed as if he were almost in a dream. The attentions he received, the words of love and praise spoken by nearly every one, his pride in his success, and above all the satisfaction in his own soul, arising from the consciousness that he had done his best, were with him all the time.

The last interview with Mr. Crane affected him deeply. He and Jack went up together for the parting, and it seemed to them as if the quiet dignity and warm heart of the loved teacher were never more apparent.

"It's a sad break in some ways to us who are to remain," said Mr. Crane. "You can't understand it, but it seems to me as if you were my younger brothers, and the home life was being broken. There will be something lacking next year. Not that we shall not have other boys whom we shall love and in whom we shall be interested, but they will not fully take the place of those who have left. Weston is all the home I know and perhaps shall ever know, and while I never may have any boys of my own, I trust you will always let me feel at least like an older brother to each of you."

"Mr. Crane, we owe everything to you," said Ward with shining eyes.

"If I have aided you, then pay the debt by aiding others," replied Mr. Crane softly. "Weston is only a stopping-place, not the end of the journey, and there is work for you to do. Some one else needs the helping hand, and yours I know will not be held back. I shall want to hear from you often and shall follow you with interest as long as I live. Whatever else you may become, I know you will be men!"

"I trust so," said Ward, and when for the last time he grasped Mr. Crane's hand and returned the pressure, his eyes were moist and his heart went out to the noble teacher with a great love, which never ended.

Even Mr. Blake was visited by the boys that night, and much of their dislike for him was forgotten in the fullness of their hearts. All the world looked bright and there was no room for anything but peace and good-will to all men.

On the following day, the last good-byes were spoken and they knew as they started for their homes, that the end of their lives and work at Weston had come. The peaceful valley, bathed in the sunlight of the early summer morning, smiled upon them. Around it were the hills, the everlasting hills, which would beam upon the coming generations of boys, who might never know of the struggles and triumphs, the failures and success of Ward Hill; but as for the last time he looked back upon the familiar scenes he felt that in a peculiar sense they were his own personal possessions. He might not return to them, but they would not depart from him.

"We'll meet again," said Jack when the school cheer had been given for the last time on the platform of the little station at Dorrfield.

Were his words true? Certainly in the college days there was ample op-

portunity to test the truthfulness of his prophecy, and as a record of those days has been kept as well as of the visits to the old familiar scenes at Weston, perhaps some of our readers may be sufficiently interested to desire to follow their fortunes in—-

WARD HILL AT COLLEGE.

* * * * * * * *

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