Dave Porter in the Far North

Edward Stratemeyer

Title: Dave Porter in the Far North

Date of first publication: 1908

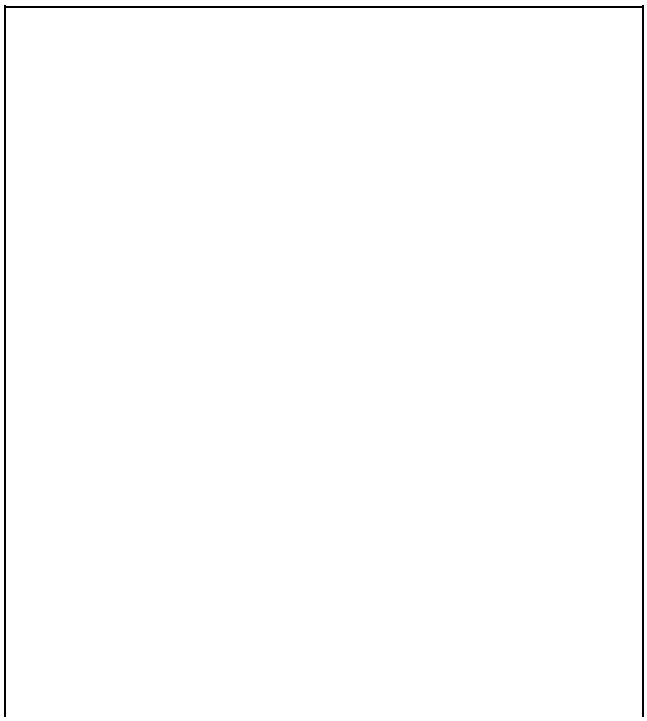
Author: Edward Stratemeyer

Date first posted: Aug. 9, 2013

Date last updated: Aug. 9, 2013

Faded Page eBook #20130819

This eBook was produced by: Woodie4, Curtis Weyant & the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net from digital material generously made available by Internet Archive/ American Libraries (http://www.archive.org/details/americana)



In a twinkling the turnout was upset.
Page 206.

Dave Porter Series

DAVE PORTER IN THE FAR NORTH

OR

THE PLUCK OF AN AMERICAN SCHOOLBOY

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

**Author of "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," "Dave Porter in the South Seas,"
"Dave Porter's Return to School," "Old Glory Series,"
"Pan American Series," "Defending His Flag," etc.**

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES NUTTALL

**BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.**

Published, March, 1908

DAVE PORTER IN THE FAR NORTH

Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
Norwood, Mass.
U. S. A.

PREFACE

"Dave Porter in the Far North" is a complete story in itself, but forms the fourth volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

In the first volume, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," I introduced a typical American lad, full of life and vigor, and related the particulars of his doings at an American boarding school of to-day—a place which is a little world in itself. At this school Dave made both friends and enemies, proved that he was a natural leader, and was admired accordingly.

The great cloud over Dave's life was the question of his parentage. His enemies called him "that poorhouse nobody," which hurt him deeply. He made a discovery, and in the second volume of the series, entitled "Dave Porter in the South Seas," we followed him on a most unusual voyage, at the end of which he found an uncle, and learned something of his father and sister, who were at that time traveling in Europe.

Dave was anxious to meet his own family, but could not find out just where they were. While waiting for word from them, he went back to Oak Hall, and in the third volume of the series, called "Dave Porter's Return to School," we learned how he became innocently involved in a mysterious series of robberies, helped to win two great games of football, and brought the bully of the academy to a realization of his better self.

As time went by Dave longed more than ever to meet his father and his sister, and how he went in search of them I leave the pages which follow to relate. As before, Dave is bright, manly, and honest to the core, and in those qualities I trust my young readers will take him as their model throughout life.

Once more I thank the thousands who have taken an interest in what I have written for them. May the present story help them to despise those things which are mean and hold fast to those things which are good.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

January 10, 1908.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

DAVE PORTER IN THE FAR NORTH

CHAPTER I

ON THE TRAIN

"Here we are at the station, Dave!"

"Yes, and there is Phil waiting for us," answered Dave Porter. He threw up the car window hastily. "Hi, there, Phil, this way!" he called out, lustily.

A youth who stood on the railroad platform, dress-suit case in hand, turned hastily, smiled broadly, and then ran for the steps of the railroad car. The two boys already on board arose in their seats to greet him.

"How are you, Dave? How are you, Ben?" he exclaimed cordially, and shook hands. "I see you've saved a seat for me. Thank you. My, but it's a cold morning, isn't it?"

"I was afraid you wouldn't come on account of the weather," answered Dave Porter. "How are you feeling?"

"As fine as ever," answered Phil Lawrence. "Oh, it will take more than one football game to kill me," he went on, with a light laugh.

"I trust you never get knocked out like that again, Phil," said Dave Porter, seriously.

"So do I," added Ben Basswood. "The game isn't worth it."

"Mother thought I ought to stay home until the weather moderated a bit, but I told her you would all be on this train and I wanted to be with the crowd. Had a fine Thanksgiving, I suppose."

"I did," returned Ben Basswood.

"Yes, we had a splendid time," added Dave Porter, "only I should have been better satisfied if I had received some word from my father and sister."

"No word yet, Dave?"

"Not a line, Phil," and Dave Porter's usually bright face took on a serious look. "I don't know what to make of it and neither does my Uncle Dunston."

"It certainly is queer. If they went to Europe your letters and cablegrams ought to catch them somewhere. I trust you get word soon."

"If I don't, I know what I am going to do."

"What?"

"Go on a hunt, just as I did when I found my uncle," was Dave Porter's reply.

While the three boys were talking the train had rolled out of the station. The car was but half filled, so the lads had plenty of room in which to make themselves comfortable. Phil Lawrence stowed away his suit case in a rack overhead and settled down facing the others. He gave a yawn of satisfaction.

"I can tell you, it will feel good to get back to Oak Hall again," he observed. "You can't imagine how much I've missed the boys and the good times, even if I was laid up in bed with a broken head."

"You'll get a royal reception, Phil," said Dave. "Don't forget that when you went down you won the football game for us."

"Maybe I did, Dave, but you had your hand in winning, too, and so did Ben."

"Well, if the fellows—— Say, here comes Nat Poole." Dave lowered his voice. "I don't think he'll want to see me."

As Dave spoke, a tall, fastidiously dressed youth came down the car aisle. He was not bad-looking, but there was an air

of dissipation about him that was not pleasant to contemplate. He wore a fur-trimmed overcoat and a cap to match, and heavy fur-lined gloves.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, on catching sight of Phil Lawrence. "Going back to the Hall, eh?"

"I am, and you are going back too, Nat, I suppose."

"Yes," drawled Nat Poole. He turned and caught sight of Dave and Ben. "Humph!" he muttered, and without saying more continued on his way down the aisle and through to the next car of the train.

"He's real sociable, he is," observed Ben Basswood, with a grin.

"I knew he wouldn't want to see me," said Dave.

"What's up—more trouble, Dave?" questioned Phil. "Remember, I've been away from Oak Hall so long I've rather lost track of things."

"This trouble didn't occur at the school," answered Dave. His face grew a trifle red as he spoke.

"It happened back at Crumville," broke in Ben, and winked one eye. "You see, Nat wanted to come to a Thanksgiving party the Wadsworths gave. But Dave told Jessie just what sort Nat was, and she left him out at the last moment. It made Nat furious, and I've heard that he is going to do his best to square up with Dave this winter."

"You're mistaken, Ben; I didn't have to tell Jessie anything," corrected Dave. "A fellow named Bangs wanted Nat invited, but Jessie didn't want him and neither did her folks. Bangs got mad over it, and said he wouldn't come either, and he and Nat went to a show instead."

"Well, I heard that Nat blamed it on you."

"He is apt to blame everything on me—if he can," said Dave, with a short, hard laugh. "It's his style. I suppose he'll even blame me for getting Gus Plum to reform."

"Well, you did get Gus to do that," declared Ben, heartily. "It's the best thing I ever heard of, too."

"If Plum cuts Poole, what's the dude to do?" asked Phil. "The two used to be great cronies."

To these words Dave did not reply. He was wiping the steam from the car window. Now he peered out as the train came to a stop.

"Hurrah! Here we are!" he cried, and leaped from his seat.

"Where are you going?" demanded Ben.

"After Roger. I know he'll be at the station, for I sent him a special message," and away went Dave after Roger Morr, one of his best and dearest schoolmates. The two met on the car platform, and as the train moved off again, both came in to join Ben and Phil.

To those who have read the former volumes in this "Dave Porter Series" the boys already mentioned need no special introduction. They were all pupils of Oak Hall, a first-class boarding school located in the heart of one of our New England States. At the academy Dave Porter seemed to be a natural leader, although that place had been at times disputed by Nat Poole, Gus Plum, and others. It was wonderful what a hold Dave had on his friends, considering his natural modesty. Physically he was well built and his muscles were those of a youth used to hard work and a life in the open air. Yet, though he loved to run, row, swim, and play games, Dave did not neglect his studies, and only a short time before this story opens had won the Oak Hall medal of honor, of which he was justly proud.

In times gone by Dave's enemies had called him "a poorhouse nobody"—something which had caused him a great deal of pain. When a child, he had been picked up alongside of the railroad tracks by strangers and taken to the Crumville poorhouse. At this institution he remained until he was nine years old, when a broken-down college professor named Caspar Potts, who had turned farmer, took him out and gave him a home. At that time Caspar Potts was in the grasp of a hard-hearted money lender, Aaron Poole, the father of Nat Poole, already mentioned, and the outlook soon became very dark for both man and boy.

Then came an unexpected turn of affairs, and from that moment Dave's future seemed assured. As related in my first volume, "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," the boy called upon Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, a rich manufacturer of that neighborhood. The gentleman had a daughter Jessie, a bright-eyed miss some years younger than Dave. She was waiting to take an automobile ride when the gasoline tank of the machine caught fire. It was plucky Dave who rushed in and, at the peril of his own life, saved the girl from being fatally burned.

The Wadsworths were more than grateful, and when Mr. Wadsworth discovered that Caspar Potts was one of his former college teachers, he insisted that both the old man and Dave come to live at his mansion. He took a great interest in Dave, more especially as he had had a son about Dave's age who had died.

"The lad must go to some boarding school," said Oliver Wadsworth, and at his own expense he sent Dave to Oak Hall. With Dave went Ben Basswood, a friend of several years' standing.

Dave made friends with great rapidity. First came Roger Morr, the son of a United States senator, then Phil Lawrence, whose father was a wealthy ship-owner, Sam Day, who was usually called "Lazy," because he was so big and fat, "Buster" Beggs, "Shadow" Hamilton, and a number of others, whom we shall meet as our story proceeds.

For a while all went well with Dave, but then came trouble with Nat Poole, who had come to the Hall, and with Gus Plum, the school bully, and Chip Macklin, his toady. The cry of "poorhouse nobody" was again raised, and Dave felt almost like leaving Oak Hall in disgust.

"I must find out who I really am," he told himself, and fortune presently favored him. By a curious turn of circumstances he fell in with an old sailor named Billy Dill. This tar declared he knew Dave or somebody who looked exactly like him. This unknown individual was on an island in the South Seas.

"My father's ships sail to the South Seas," Phil Lawrence told Dave, and the upshot of the matter was that Dave took passage on one of the vessels, in company with the ship-owner's son, Roger Morr, and Billy Dill.

As already related in the second volume of this series, "Dave Porter in the South Seas," the voyage of the *Stormy Petrel* proved to be anything but an uneventful one. Fearful storms arose, and Dave and some others were cast away on an uninhabited island. But in the end all went well, and, much to the lad's joy, he found an uncle named Dunston Porter.

"Your father is my twin brother," said Dunston Porter. "He is now traveling in Europe, and with him is your sister Laura, about one year younger than yourself. We must return to the United States at once and let them know of this. They mourn you as dead."

There was a good deal of money in the Porter family, a fair share of which would come to Dave when he became of age. The whole party returned to California and then to the East, and word was at once sent to Europe, to David Breslow Porter, as Dave's father was named. To the surprise of all, no answer came back, and then it was learned that Mr. Porter and his daughter Laura had started on some trip, leaving no address behind them.

"This is too bad," said Dave. "I wanted so much to see them."

"We'll get word soon, never fear," replied his uncle, and then advised Dave to finish out his term at Oak Hall, Mr. Porter in the meantime remaining a guest of the Wadsworth family.

How Dave went back to Oak Hall, and what happened to him there has already been related in detail in "Dave Porter's Return to School." His enemies could no longer twit him with being a "poorhouse nobody," yet they did all they could to dim his popularity and get him into trouble.

"He shan't cut a dash over me, even if he has money," said Nat Poole, and to this Gus Plum, the bully, eagerly agreed. There was likewise another pupil, Nick Jasniff, who also hated Dave, and one day this fellow, who was exceedingly hot-tempered, attempted to strike Dave down with a heavy Indian club. It was a most foul attack and justly condemned by nearly all who saw it, and thoroughly scared over what he had attempted to do, Nick Jasniff ran away from school and could not be found.

There had been a number of robberies around Oakdale, where the academy was located, and one day when Dave and his chums were out ice-boating they had come on the track of two of the robbers. Then to his surprise Dave learned that Nick Jasniff was also implicated in the thefts. He knew that Jasniff and Gus Plum were very intimate, and wondered if

the bully of the school could be one of the criminals also. At length, one snowy day, he saw Plum leave the Hall and followed the fellow. Plum made for the railroad, where there was a deep cut, and into this cut he fell, just as a train was approaching. At the peril of his life Dave scrambled to the bottom of the opening and drew the bully from the tracks just as the train rolled by.

If ever a boy was conquered, it was Gus Plum at that time. At first he could not realize that Dave had saved him. "To think you would do this for me—you!" he sobbed. "And I thought you hated me!" And then he broke down completely. He confessed how he had tried to injure Dave and his chums, but said he had had nothing to do with the robberies. Nick Jasniff had wanted him to go in with the robbers, but he had declined.

"I am going to cut Jasniff after this," said Gus Plum, "and I am going to cut Nat Poole, too. I want to make a man of myself—if I can."

But it was hard work. A short time after the railroad incident the two robbers were caught and sent to prison, to await trial, and Plum had to appear as a witness for the state and tell how he had been implicated. In the meantime Nick Jasniff ran away to Europe, taking several hundred dollars of the stolen funds with him. Dave thought he had seen the last of the young rascal, but in this he was mistaken, as the events which followed proved.

CHAPTER II

A ROW IN A RESTAURANT

The majority of the boys had been home only for the Thanksgiving holidays. The exception was poor Phil Lawrence, who had been laid up for a number of weeks as the result of a blow on the head while playing a game of football. Phil said he felt as well as ever, but he was somewhat pale and in no humor for anything in the way of roughness.

As the train stopped at one station and another along the line, it began to fill up with passengers, including a goodly number of Oak Hall students. At one place Sam Day and Shadow Hamilton came on board, followed by half a dozen snowballs, sent after them by boys who had come to see them off.

"Hi! stop that!" cried Sam Day, as he tried to dodge, and just then a snowball meant for his head took a somewhat stout man in the ear. The man uttered a cry of surprise, slipped on the platform of the car, and fell flat, crushing his valise under him. At this a shout of laughter rang out from the depot platform, and the lads standing there lost no time in disappearing.

"You—you villains!" roared the stout man when he could catch his breath. "I'll—I'll have you locked up!"

"It wasn't my fault," answered Sam Day, trying hard to suppress the grin on his face. "Shall I help you up?"

"No," grunted the man, and arose slowly. "Do you know I have a dozen fresh eggs in that valise?"

"Sorry, I'm sure."

"A dozen eggs!" cried Shadow Hamilton. "Well, I never! Say, that puts me in mind of a story. Once a man bought some eggs that weren't strictly fresh, and——"

"Pah! who wants to listen to your stories?" interrupted the stout man. "You had better pay for the eggs that are smashed," and he entered the car in anything but a pleasant humor.

Dave had come to the car door to greet Sam and Shadow and conduct them to a seat near his own. The stout man was so upset mentally that he bumped roughly into the youth.

"Get out of my way, will you?" grunted the irate passenger.

"Excuse me, I didn't know you owned the whole aisle," said Dave, coldly. He did not like the manner in which he had been addressed.

"See here, are you another one of them good-for-nothing schoolboys?" bellowed the stout individual. "If you are, I want you to understand you can't run this train—not as far as I am concerned, anyhow."

Dave looked at the man for a moment in silence. "You are very polite, I must say," he observed. "I haven't done anything to you, have I?"

"No, but you young bloods are all in together. I know you! Last spring I was on the train with a lot of college boys, and they tried to run things to suit themselves. But we fixed 'em, we did. And we'll fix you, too, if you try to run matters here," and with a savage shake of his head the stout man passed down the aisle and dropped heavily into the first vacant seat he reached.

"Isn't he a peach?" murmured Sam Day to Dave. "Meekest man I ever saw, and ought to have a monument for politeness."

"I hope all his eggs are smashed," said Shadow Hamilton. "He certainly deserves it."

"Shouldn't wonder if they are—he came down hard enough," answered Dave.

By good luck all the students had seats close to each other, and as the train rolled along they told of their various holiday experiences and discussed school matters.

"Just four weeks and then we'll close down for Christmas," said Roger.

"We ought to have lots of fun," said Ben. "We can go skating and ice-boating, and we can build a fort——"

"And snowball Pop Swingly and Horsehair," interrupted Sam, mentioning the janitor of Oak Hall and the driver for the institution. "Don't forget them or they'll feel slighted."

"What's the matter with snowballing Job Haskers?" asked Phil, mentioning a teacher who was anything but popular with the students.

"Oh, we'll attend to him, never fear," answered Roger Morr.

"Has anybody heard from Plum?" questioned Sam, during a lull in the conversation.

"I got a letter from him," answered Dave, seeing that nobody else replied. "He is afraid he is going to have a hard time of it to reform. I hope you fellows will treat him as well as you can."

"I shall," said the senator's son, and several nodded.

"I think I have always treated him better than he deserved," said Shadow Hamilton. He could not forget what serious trouble the former bully of Oak Hall had once caused him, when Doctor Clay's valuable collection of postage stamps had disappeared.

It had been snowing slightly since morning, and now the flakes began to come down thicker than ever. As a consequence the engineer of the train could not see the signals ahead and had to run slowly, so that when the Junction was gained, where the boys had to change for Oakdale, they were half an hour late.

"We've missed the connection and must remain here for just an hour and a quarter," declared Dave, after questioning the station master. "We can't get to Oak Hall until after dark."

"I move we have something to eat," said Roger. "A sandwich, a piece of mince-pie, and a cup of hot chocolate wouldn't go bad."

"Second the commotion!" cried Ben. "All in favor raise their left ear."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," said Shadow. "Two men went to a restaurant and ordered——"

"Fried snakes' livers on mushrooms," interrupted Dave. "You've told that story before."

"No, I didn't, and it wasn't fried——"

"I know what he means," said Phil. "It was robins' wings salted in sauerkraut."

"It wasn't. This was an order of——"

"Blue pumpkin rinds with mackerel sauce," interrupted Sam Day. "Very fine dish. I ate it once, when I was dining at the White House with the President."

"It wasn't pumpkin rinds, or anything like it. It was a plain order of——"

"Cherry roast, with minced sunflowers?" suggested Roger. "The girls at Vassar dine on 'em regularly, after playing football."

"This was a plain everyday order of pork and beans," shouted Shadow, desperately. "And after the men got 'em, what do you think they did? Oh, this is a good one;" and Shadow's eyes began to sparkle.

"Found fault, I suppose, because the beans weren't from Boston," said Dave.

"No."

"Don't keep us waiting, Shadow. Tell the story to a finish," said Phil.

"Well, they got the pork and beans——"

"Yes."

"And they sat down, facing each other——"

"All right—fire away," said Sam, as the story-teller paused.

"And they began to eat——"

"Glad to know they didn't begin to weep," was Roger's soft comment.

"And they ate the pork and beans all up," continued Shadow, soberly. And then he stopped short and looked around blankly.

"Eh?"

"Well, I never!"

"Is that all there is to the story?" demanded Sam.

"Certainly. You didn't expect they'd buy the beans and throw them away, did you?" asked Shadow, innocently.

"Sold that time!" cried Dave, good-naturedly. "Never mind; we'll let Shadow pay for the lunch we're going to have. Come on."

"Not on your tintype," murmured the story-teller. "Not unless you pass around the hat and make me treasurer."

They found a convenient restaurant and, pushing together two of the tables, sat down in a merry group. The proprietor knew some of them, and nodded pleasantly as he took their orders. Soon they were eating as only happy and healthy schoolboys can eat.

"My, but this mince-pie is good!" declared Roger. "I could eat about a yard of it!"

"A yard of pie is good," said Dave, with a smile.

"Talking about a yard of pie puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow, who was stowing away the last of a hot roast-beef sandwich.

"Hold on, we've had enough!" cried Sam.

"If you pile on another like that last one, we'll roll you out in the snow," was Phil's comment.

"This is a real story, really it is, and it's a good one, too."

"Vintage of 1864, or before Columbus landed?" inquired Ben.

"I've never told this before. Some Yale students went into a butcher shop and one of 'em, to be funny, asked the butcher if he'd sell him a yard of mutton. 'Certainly,' says the butcher. 'Fifty cents a yard.' 'All right,' says Mr. Student. 'I'll take two yards.' 'A dollar, please,' says the butcher. 'Here you are,' says the student, and holds up the money. Then the butcher takes the bill, puts it in his cash drawer, and hands out—six sheep feet."

"Very old and musty," was Dave's comment. "Washington told that to Cæsar when the two were planning to throw Socrates into Niagara." And then a laugh went up all around.

The boys were just finishing their lunch when the door opened and a stout man walked in. He was covered with snow, and looked anything but happy.

"Our friend of the smashed eggs," whispered Sam to Dave. "Wonder if he has cleaned out his valise yet."

The man sat down at a side table and ordered several things. Then he happened to glance around, noticed the students for the first time, and scowled.

"Humph! what you fellows doing here?" he growled.

"Haven't we a right to come here?" demanded Dave, for the man was looking straight at him.

"Shouldn't think the proprietor would want such gay larks as you here."

"I shouldn't think he'd want such a grunt as you here," retorted Sam Day.

"Hi! now, don't you talk to me that way!" roared the stout man. "I want you to understand I am a gentleman, I am."

"See here, we can't have any quarreling in here," said the restaurant proprietor, coming forward.

"Some of them fellows knocked me down on the train and smashed a valise full of eggs on me, Mr. Denman."

"We did nothing of the sort," answered Sam. "He fell on the icy platform of the car and right on top of his valise."

"And then he got up and bumped into me," added Dave. "He was very impolite, to say the least."

"Look here!" roared the stout man, "I want you to understand——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Amos Denman, the restaurant keeper. "Isn't your name Isaac Pludding?"

"Yes."

"Then you are the man who caused the trouble at Mr. Brown's restaurant last week. I know you. Some time ago you were in here, and nothing suited you. I don't want to serve you, and you can go elsewhere for your meal."

"Don't want to sell me anything?" snarled Isaac Pludding.

"Not a mouthful. And, let me add, I consider these young men gentlemen, and I won't have them annoyed while they are in my place."

"Oh, all right, have your own way," snarled the stout man. "I'll take my money elsewhere, I will!" He glared at the students. "But I'll get square some day for this—don't forget that!" And shaking his head very savagely, he stormed out of the restaurant, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER III

OFF THE TRACK

"Well, if he isn't the worst yet," was the comment of the senator's son.

"I hope he isn't waiting for that train," said Shadow. "I don't want to see any more of him."

"Pooh! who's afraid?" asked Phil. "I guess we can make him keep his distance."

"I thought I knew him when he came in, but I wasn't sure," said the restaurant keeper. "The man who runs the hotel, Mr. Brown, had a lot of trouble with him because he wouldn't pay his bill—said it was too high. Then he came here once and said the meat wasn't fresh and the bread was stale and sour. I came close to pitching him out. Don't let him walk over you—if he does take your train."

"No danger," answered Dave. He had not yet forgotten the rude manner in which Isaac Pludding had shoved him.

It was soon time for the Oakdale train to arrive, and the students walked back to the depot. The snow was over a foot deep and still coming down steadily. The depot was crowded with folks, and among them they discovered Isaac Pludding, with his valise and a big bundle done up in brown paper.

"He certainly must be waiting for the train," said Dave; and he was right. When the cars came to a stop the stout man was the first person aboard. The students entered another car and secured seats in a bunch as before.

"By the way, where is Nat Poole?" asked Roger, suddenly. "I didn't see him get off the other train."

"He got off and walked towards the hotel," answered Phil. "I suppose he feels rather lonesome."

"That can't be helped," said Sam. "He makes himself so disagreeable that nobody wants him around."

Just as the train was about to start a boy leaped on the platform of the car our friends occupied, opened the door, and came in. It was Nat Poole, and he was all out of breath. He looked for a seat, but could find none.

"They ought to run more cars on this train," he muttered, to Roger. "It's a beastly shame to make a fellow stand up."

"Better write to the president of the railroad company about it, Nat," answered the senator's son, dryly.

"Maybe there is a seat in the next car," suggested Phil.

Nat Poole shuffled off, looking anything but pleased. Hardly had he gone when several came in from the car ahead, also looking for seats. Among them was Isaac Pludding. He had had a seat near a door, but had given it up to look for something better, and now he had nothing. He glanced bitterly at the students as he passed, then came back and leaned heavily against the seat Dave and Roger were occupying. In doing this he almost knocked Dave's hat from his head.

"I'll thank you to be a little more careful," said Dave, as he put his hat into place. He felt certain that Isaac Pludding had shoved against him on purpose.

"Talking to me?" growled the stout man.

"I am. I want you to stop shoving me."

"I've got to stand somewhere."

"Well, you quit shoving me, or you'll get the worst of it," answered Dave, decidedly.

At that moment the car lurched around a curve and Isaac Pludding bumped against Dave harder than ever. Thoroughly angry, the youth arose and faced the stout man.

"If you do that again, I'll have you put off the train," he said.

"That's right, Dave, don't let him walk over you," added Roger.

"If he doesn't know his place, teach it to him," was Phil's comment.

"Have me put off the train?" cried Isaac Pludding. "I'd like to see you do it! I want you to know I am a stockholder of this line."

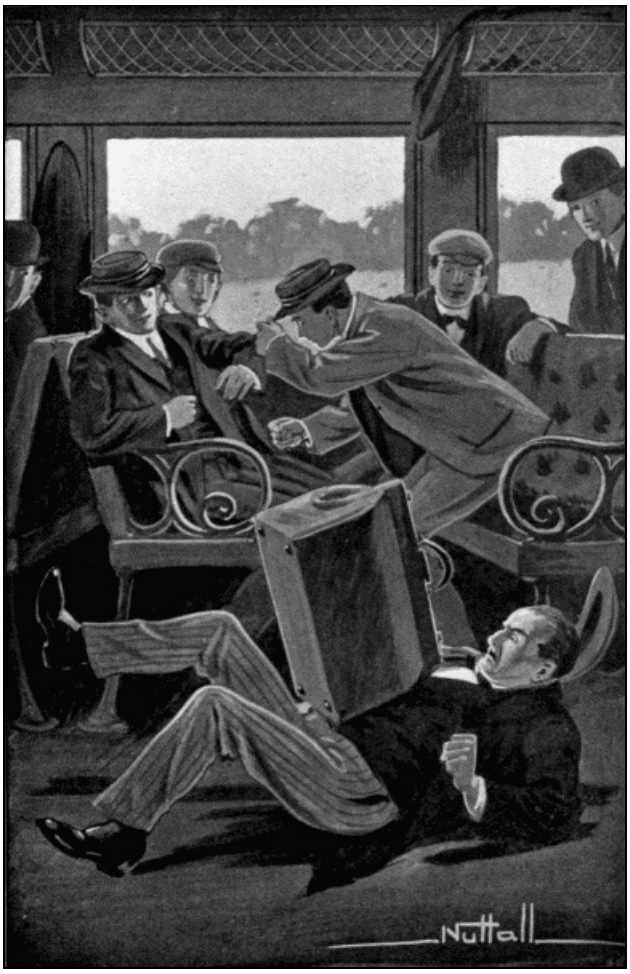
"Then it's a shame you don't provide seats for all your passengers."

"That's true, too," remarked a gentleman who was standing close by.

"I don't believe he owns more than one share of stock," observed Sam. "And that he most likely inherited from his great-granduncle."

"I own five shares!" howled Isaac Pludding. "And I want you to know——"

What he wanted the boys to know they never found out, for at that moment the train gave another lurch. It came so suddenly that the stout man was taken completely from his feet and sent sprawling in the aisle on his back. A valise from a rack over a seat came tumbling down, and, not to get it on his head, Roger shoved it aside and it struck Isaac Pludding full on the stomach, causing him to gasp.



Roger shoved it aside and it struck Isaac Pludding full on the stomach.—*Page 25.*

The boys uttered a shout of laughter, and many other passengers joined in. The floor of the car was wet from snow, and when Isaac Pludding scrambled up he was covered with dirt. Dave caught up the valise and turned it over to Sam, to whom it belonged.

"Who threw that valise on me?" demanded the stout man, eyeing the boys in rage.

To this there was no answer.

"I guess you threw it," went on Isaac Pludding, and caught Dave by the arm.

"Let go of me," said Dave, eyeing the man steadily. "I did not throw it. Let go."

Isaac Pludding wanted to argue the matter, but there was something in Dave's manner that he did not like. He dropped his hold and drew back a little.

"Don't you dare to shove me again—not once," continued the youth. "If you do you'll regret it. I have stood all from you that I am going to stand."

"Oh, you're no good," muttered the stout man, lamely, and passed on to the end of the car.

The train was coming to a halt at a place called Raytown. They were now but eight miles from Oakdale, and the students began to wonder if anybody would be at that station to meet them.

"If Horsehair comes down with the carryall, he'll have all he can do to get through the snow," said Dave.

"Perhaps he'll come down with four horses," suggested Roger.

"One thing is certain, Doctor Clay will see to it that we get to Oak Hall somehow," said Ben.

"What a rickety old railroad this side line is!" declared Phil, as the car gave several lurches. "It's a wonder they don't fix the track."

"Not enough traffic to make it pay, I fancy," answered Dave. "They carry more milk and cattle than they do passengers."

It was growing dark and still snowing briskly. The car was cold, and more than one passenger had to stamp his feet to keep them warm. On they plunged, through the snow, until of a sudden there came a lurch and a jerk and then a series of bumps that caused everybody to jump up in alarm. Then the train came to a stop.

"What's the matter now?"

"I think we must be off the track."

"It's a wonder the train didn't go over."

"It couldn't go over, for we are down in a cut."

As one end of the car was up and the other down, the boys knew something serious was the matter. Taking up their hand baggage, they followed some of the passengers outside and jumped down in the snow.

It did not take long to learn the truth of the situation. A turnout on the track had become clogged with ice, and the locomotive and two cars had jumped the track and bumped along the ties for a distance of two hundred feet. Nobody had been hurt, and even the train was not seriously damaged, although one pair of car-trucks would have to be repaired.

"I don't believe they can get the cars and the locomotive back on the track right away," said Dave. "They'll have to have the wrecking train and crew down here."

When appealed to, the conductor said he did not know how soon they would be able to move again. Probably not in three or four hours, and maybe not until the next morning.

"I'll have to walk back to Raytown and telegraph to headquarters," he explained.

"We are in a pickle, and no mistake," was Roger's comment. "I must say I don't feel like staying on the train all night—it's too cold and uncomfortable."

In the group of passengers was Isaac Pludding, storming angrily at everything and everybody.

"It's an outrage!" he declared, to a bystander. "I must get to Oakdale by seven o'clock. I've got a business deal for some cattle I must close. If I don't get there, somebody else may buy the cattle."

"I hope he gets left," said Phil, softly.

"So do I," returned Dave.

"If we could only hire a big sleigh and some horses, we might drive to Oakdale," suggested Ben.

"Hurrah, that's the talk!" cried Dave. "There must be some farmhouse near here."

"Say, if you can get a sleigh, I'll pay my share, if you'll take me along," put in Nat Poole, eagerly. He hated to think of being left behind.

"All right, Nat, I'm willing," said Dave, generously.

"We've got to find the sleigh first," added the senator's son.

"And see if we can get horses enough to pull it," said Ben. "Some farmers won't let their horses out in such a storm as this—and you can't blame 'em much, either."

"If we can't get a sleigh, perhaps we can stay at some farmhouse all night," suggested Sam.

All of the party climbed through the snow to the top of the railroad cut and then looked around for some buildings.

"I see a light!" cried Phil, and pointed it out, between some bare trees.

"It's a house; come on," replied Dave, and set off without delay, the others following. "Who knows but that somebody else may want to ride, and if so, we want to be first to get a sleigh."

It was rather a toilsome journey to the farmhouse. Between them and the place were a barn and a cow-shed, and just as they passed the former there arose a fierce barking, and three big black dogs came bounding toward the students.

"Look out! The dogs will chew us up!" yelled Nat Poole, in terror, and started to retreat.

"Down!" called out Dave, who was still in advance. "Down, I say! Charge!" But instead of obeying, the big dogs continued to approach until they were within a dozen feet of the students. Then they lined up, growled fiercely, and showed their teeth.

"Let us get into the barn," suggested Roger, and flung open a door that was handy. Into the building they went pell-mell, Dave being the last to enter. One dog made a dart at the youth's leg, but Dave gave him a kick that sent him back. Then the door was slammed shut and latched, and the students found themselves in utter darkness.

"Wonder if they can get in any other way?" asked Phil, after a second of silence, during which they heard the dogs barking outside.

"I doubt if any of the doors are open in this storm," answered Shadow.

"Let us get up in—in the loft!" suggested Nat Poole. He was as white as the snow outside and his teeth were chattering from something else besides the cold.

"That's a good idea," said Dave. "But we must have a light to learn where the loft is. Anybody got a match?"

Nobody had such an article, and a groan went up. Nat Poole was appealed to, for the others knew he had been smoking on the train.

"My matchbox is empty," said he. "I am going to hunt for the loft ladder in the dark."

"Be careful, or you may run into some troublesome horse," cautioned Dave.

The boys moved slowly around in the dark. They could hear the sounds of several horses feeding and the barking of the dogs. Then, quite unexpectedly, came the cracking of a board, a yell of alarm from Nat Poole, and a loud splash.

"Help! I am drowning! Save me!"

CHAPTER IV

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BARN

"Nat has fallen into the water!"

"Where is he? I can't see a thing."

"He must have gone down in some cistern."

These and other cries rang out, and all of the boys of Oak Hall were filled with consternation. Dave had located the splash fairly well, and as quickly as he could he felt his way in that direction.

"Nat, where are you?" he called out.

"Here, down in a cistern! Help me out, or I'll be frozen to death."

Dave now reached the edge of the cistern. Two of the boards which had covered it had broken, letting Nat down quite unexpectedly. Fortunately there was only three feet of water in the cistern, so there was no fear of drowning. But the water was icy and far from agreeable.

As Dave leaned down to give Poole his hand, the door of the barn was flung open and a farmer strode in, a lantern in one hand and a stout stick in the other. The man held the light over his head and looked around suspiciously.

"Wot yeou fellers doin' here?" he demanded.

"Come here with the light—one of our party has fallen into the cistern!" cried Dave.

"Into the cistern, eh? Mebbe it serves him right. Ain't got no business in my barn," answered the farmer, as he came closer.

"We ran in because your dogs came after us," explained Roger.

"An' where did yeou come from? Ye don't belong around here, I know."

"We came from the train—it's off the track," said Dave. "But help us get this boy out first and then we'll explain."

"Train off the track? Well, I snum!" cried the farmer. Then he set down the lantern and aided in bringing Nat Poole to the flooring of the barn. "Putty cold, I'll bet a quart o' shellbarks," he added, grinning at the lad's wet and shivering figure.

"Can't we get him into the house by the fire?" asked Ben. "We'll pay you for your trouble."

Now if there was one thing Shadrach Mellick loved, it was money, and at the mention of pay he was all attention. He asked a few questions, and then led the way out of the barn and towards his house. The dogs wanted to follow, but he drove them back.

"Their bark is worse nor their bite," he explained. "They wouldn't hurt yeou very much." Then he asked about the train, and the students gave him the particulars of the mishap. In the meantime Mrs. Mellick bustled around and got Nat Poole some dry clothing and allowed him to change his garments in a side room that chanced to be warm.

The boys soon learned that Shadrach Mellick owned a sleigh large enough to accommodate the entire party, and also four good, strong horses. For ten dollars he agreed to take them to Oak Hall, stopping at Oakdale on the way, to see if the school sleigh was waiting for them.

"The sooner we start the better," said Dave. And then he added in a whisper to Roger and Phil: "If we don't, some other passengers from the train may come up here and offer him more money for his turnout."

"Let us pay him part and bind the bargain," suggested the senator's son.

"I'll do it," answered Dave, and gave Shadrach Mellick two dollars.

"Good enough—thet binds the bargain," said the close-fisted farmer.

Nat Poole was a sight to behold in a well-worn suit several sizes too big for him, and the boys could not help but laugh when he made his appearance.

"That's a real swagger suit, Nat!" cried Sam Day. "Won't you give me the address of your tailor?"

"Nat can't do that," added Ben. "He wants the artist all to himself."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," broke in Shadow Hamilton. "A countryman went into a clothing store to buy a suit and——"

"Wow!" came from several of the students in a chorus.

"That story is a hundred and fifty years old."

"It's full of moth-holes, Shadow."

"It isn't—I've only told it about——"

"Two hundred and eleven times," finished Dave. "Shadow, you really must get a new joke-book to read."

"Never mind my clothing," grumbled Nat Poole. "I couldn't help it that I fell in the cistern. The farmer had no right to cover it with rotten boards."

"Yeou had no right to be in the barn," answered Shadrach Mellick, with a grin. "Howsomever, we'll let it pass. I'm satisfied ef yeou air."

The sleigh was soon ready, and the students bundled in, making themselves as comfortable as possible. Nat Poole's wet clothing was placed in a sack and tied on behind. Then the farmer mounted to the front seat.

"All ready?" he queried.

"All ready—let her go!" sang out several of the lads.

At that moment the dogs began to set up another bark, and then came a call from the darkness.

"Hi, there, wait a minute!"

"Who is that?" questioned Dave. "Hullo, if it isn't the stout man!"

It was Isaac Pludding, true enough. He had been walking rapidly and was nearly out of wind.

"Whe—where are you going?" he panted, to the farmer.

"Goin' to take these chaps to Oakdale."

"That is where I want to go." Isaac Pludding glared at the students. "I don't like to ride with those boys, but I suppose I can stand it. Got room for another passenger? I suppose they told you how the train broke down."

"They did," answered Shadrach Mellick. "Reckon I can carry one more," he added. "But yeou'll have to pay me. These boys are paying me ten dollars for the trip."

"How much do you want?" demanded Isaac Pludding.

"About a dollar, I guess."

"It's enough, but I'll go you," answered the stout man, and prepared to climb into the big sleigh.

As soon as Isaac Pludding appeared, Dave held a whispered conversation with Roger and some of the others. Now he turned to Shadrach Mellick.

"Excuse me, Mr. Mellick, but we don't propose to take another passenger," he said, decidedly. "At least, not this man."

"No?"

"No, sir. We hired this sleigh for ourselves alone."

"And paid part of the money to bind the bargain," added Phil.

"What! do you mean to say I can't ride if I want to?" cried the stout man, as unreasonable as he had been on the train.

"You can't ride with us," said Roger.

"What do you say?" asked Isaac Pludding of the farmer.

Shadrach Mellick scratched his head.

"A bargain is a bargain, Mr. Mellick," said Dave, hastily. "We hired this sleigh, and that is all there is to it."

"That is true, but—er——"

"Wouldn't you rather earn ten dollars than one or two?" asked Ben. "If that man is to ride we won't."

"So say we all of us!" came from a number of the others.

"Then I can't take yeou," said the farmer to Isaac Pludding. "These young fellers come fust."

"It's an outrage!" cried the stout man. "I'll—I'll have the law on you for it."

"Guess yeou air a fool," muttered Shadrach Mellick, in disgust. "Git alang there, ye lazy critters!" And with a crack of his whip he sent the double team on their way, leaving Isaac Pludding standing by the gateway, shaking his fist at the vanishing students.

"He is mad now, if he never was before," observed Phil.

"I wonder if we'll see any more of him," said Ben.

"I don't want to see him again," answered Dave.

The wagon-road to Oakdale did not run near the railroad, so they saw nothing of the train passengers as they moved along. Luckily the snowstorm was letting up, so the ride was not as disagreeable as they had anticipated. In spite of the delay the boys were in excellent spirits, the single exception being Nat Poole, who sat huddled in a seat corner, saying nothing. The boys sang songs, told funny stories, and "cut up" generally, and thus, almost before they knew it, they drew up alongside of the railroad station at Oakdale.

There was no turnout there to meet them, and from the station master they learned that Jackson Lamond, the Hall driver, had been down with the carryall, but had gone back when he had learned that the train had broken down and would not arrive until morning.

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Dave. "We've hired our driver to take us to the Hall, anyway."

"All hands off for a hot soda!" cried Phil, as they rounded the drug-store corner, and the sleigh was stopped and they rushed in to get the refreshment. They treated Shadrach Mellick to two glasses, which put the old farmer in fairly good humor.

"I don't blame ye for not wanting thet man," said he, after he had heard their story about Isaac Pludding. "Guess he's about as mean as they make 'em."

"He said he had some cattle deal on in Oakdale," said Dave. "Perhaps you know something about that?"

"Oh, mebbe I do. There's a city consarn buying cattle up here, now—started last fall. They're tryin' to do old Joe Parker out o' his bus'ness. Mebbe this fat feller is the city company's agent. If he is, old Joe Parker won't want him up here."

"Where does Joe Parker live?" asked Dave, with interest.

"We'll pass his house in a minit. There it is—over yonder, by the willer trees."

"Let me off a minute at that place," went on Dave.

"That's the talk!" cried Roger, catching Dave's idea. "We'll put a spoke in Pludding's wheel—if he is the rival cattle dealer."

Arriving at the Parker cottage, Dave and Roger leaped down in the snow and knocked on the door. A heavy-set and rather pleasant-looking man answered their summons.

"Is this Mr. Joseph Parker?" asked Dave.

"That's my handle, lad. What can I do for you? Will you come in?"

"No, Mr. Parker—I haven't time. I wanted to ask you, do you know a Mr. Isaac Pludding?"

At this question the brow of Joe Parker darkened.

"I certainly do."

"He is working for some opposition in the cattle line, isn't he?"

"Yes, and trying his best to do me out of my little income," was the grumbled-out answer.

"Well, I thought I might do you a favor," went on Dave, and then told of his meeting with the cattle agent, and of how Pludding was trying to reach Oakdale without delay.

"Is that possible!" cried Joseph Parker. "If it is, I'll have to get a hustle on me, I'm thinking. I told Farrington I'd let him know about those cattle to-day or to-morrow. I'll go right over and close the deal now—before Pludding gets here. It's Farrington's cattle he is after. I am very much obliged to you."

"You are welcome," said Dave.

"I only hope you get the better of the fat man," added the senator's son; and then he and Dave went back to the sleigh, and the journey to Oak Hall was resumed.

CHAPTER V

BACK TO OAK HALL

As my old readers know, Oak Hall was an up-to-date structure built of brick and stone. Its shape was that of a broad cross, with its front facing the south. On that side, and to the east and west, were the classrooms, while the dining-hall and kitchen and laundry were on the north. Around the school was a broad campus, running down to the Leming River in the rear. Great clumps of oaks were scattered around, giving to the institution its name.

"Hurrah! I see the school!" cried Sam Day, who sat in front with the sleigh driver.

"So do I!" cried Roger.

"Boys, let's give them a song when we drive up!" suggested Dave. "It will prove that we are not quite frozen to death."

"Right you are," responded Shadow Hamilton. "Now then, all together!" And he started up the school song, sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne":

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

This was sung with great gusto and immediately following came the well-known Hall rally:

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

"That's the way to do it!" sang out Dave, and then, as the sleigh drew up to the front door of the academy, he started some doggerel also sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" and just then becoming popular:

"We're here because we're here because
We're here because we're here!
We're here because we're here because
We're here because we're here!
We're here because we're here because
We're here because we're here!
We're here because we're here because—
We're nowhere else just now!"

The boys sang as loudly as they could, and kept it up until the front door of the Hall opened and Job Haskers appeared, attired in a dressing-gown and wearing slippers.

"Here! here! stop that racket!" cried the teacher who could never see any fun in anything. "Do you want to awaken the entire Hall?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Haskers; we only thought we'd let you know that we had arrived," answered Dave, sweetly.

"Well, there's no need to act like a lot of hoodlums," growled Job Haskers. "I thought you were all storm-bound at Raytown," he went on. "Lamond brought in word that the train had broken down."

"It did break down, but we hired this sleigh to bring us over," answered Roger. "We said the man could put up here over-night and go back in the morning."

"Ahem! I don't know about that. We are not in the habit——" began the teacher, when somebody caught him by the arm and came to the front. It was Doctor Clay, also in a dressing-gown, and smiling broadly.

"How do you do, boys?" he said, cheerily. "Glad to see you! So you thought you couldn't stay away, even if the train did break down? I rather suspected some of you would try to get a sleigh over. Come right in. You must be rather cold—or did the singing keep you warm?"

"How do you do, Doctor Clay?" was the answering cry, and all of the boys bounced out of the turnout, ran up the steps, and shook hands. Job Haskers was "left in the cold," so to speak, and stood in the background in disgust. He thought it was "bad discipline" to treat the scholars too good-naturedly. "Hold them down with a rod of iron," was his motto, and the boys knew it only too well.

Matters were speedily explained to the master of the school, and he directed Job Haskers to call Lamond and have the horses and the sleigh taken care of, and then told Shadrach Mellick to come in and he would be given a room for the night and his breakfast in the morning. The farmer was paid off and was well pleased over the treatment received.

"You appear to be the only one who has suffered," said Doctor Clay to Nat Poole. "But a good night's sleep will probably fix you up, and the housekeeper can look after your clothing."

"I have plenty of other clothing in my trunk," answered Poole, and then went off to the dormitory he occupied with Gus Plum and a number of others.

Dave and his chums occupied Dormitories Nos. 11 and 12, and there they found several of the other students awaiting them, including Luke Watson, who was noted as a singer and banjo-player, Bertram Vane, always called "Polly," because his manner was so girlish, and little Chip Macklin, who had been the school sneak but who had now turned over a new leaf.

"It does my heart good to set eyes on you fellows again!" cried Luke Watson. "If it wasn't so late I'd get out my banjo and sing a song in your honor."

"Yes, and have old Haskers up here, giving us extra work for to-morrow," answered Ben. "No, thank you, Luke, not so early in the season, please."

"Delighted to see you all," lisped Polly Vane. "I trust you all had a real nice time."

"I certainly did," answered Dave. "How about you, Polly? Did they invite you to any molasses-pulls or pink teas?"

"Oh, I had a glorious time, Dave. My two cousins visited us—splendid girls—and they had some other girls come in, and we——"

"All played blindman's-buff and hunt-the-slipper," finished Sam. "Wasn't that too delicious for anything!" and he said this in such a feminine tone that everybody but Polly laughed. The girlish student looked a bit doubtful, but was not offended.

The cold ride had made the boys sleepy, and all were glad to undress and go to bed. Dave was tired out, having put in an extra-long day, and the moment his head touched the pillow he sailed off into the land of dreams and did not awaken until the morning bell was clanging in his ears.

The storm had passed away, and outside it was as clear as crystal. The sun shone brightly, and this helped to put all the boys in good humor, for a gray day at Oak Hall was not to their liking. All were soon dressed, and Dave, Roger, and Phil started to go below together.

In the upper corridor they came face to face with Gus Plum, the former bully. Plum looked rather pale and thin and his eyes were somewhat sunken. That the exposure of his wrongdoings had caused him much worry there could be no doubt.

"How do you do, Gus?" said Dave kindly, and stepping closer he shook a hand that was almost as cold as ice. Phil and Roger merely nodded.

"Oh, I'm pretty well," answered Gus Plum. "How are you?"

"First-rate—that is, I would be if I could only get some word from my father and sister."

"It's too bad that you don't get some kind of message." Plum lowered his voice. "I'd like to see you alone this noon or to-night. I—er—want to talk something over with you," he whispered.

"All right, Gus—I'll try to see you this noon," replied Dave, in a low tone; and then all the students passed down to the dining-hall.

"Plum has certainly got something on his mind," was Roger's comment.

"Well, that exposure was a terrible thing for him," returned Phil. "Of course what he did wasn't as bad as what was done by Nick Jasniff and those two robbers, but it was bad enough. I'd hate to have such a black mark against my name."

The Thanksgiving holidays had been rather short, and those pupils who lived a long distance from Oak Hall had remained at that institution; consequently the routine of studies was taken up that day without much trouble. Fortunately Dave was now placed under Andrew Dale, the first assistant, a teacher loved by all the scholars.

"I know I shall learn faster than ever," said Dave to Roger. "Mr. Dale knows just how to bring out all there is in a fellow."

"I wish the doctor would get rid of old Haskers," returned the senator's son. "I simply can't bear him."

"Haskers is under contract, so I've been told, Roger. Maybe he'll be dropped when the contract runs out."

Just before the bell rang for the morning session Shadrach Mellick drove off in his big sleigh. The schoolboys gave him a parting salute of snowballs which the farmer tried in vain to duck.

"Hi, yeou!" he roared. "Want to knock the top of my head off? Stop it!" And then, to escape his tormentors, he whipped up his horses and dashed out of the Hall grounds at top speed. It was the last the boys saw of him for a long time.

It was not until after the day's sessions were over that Dave got a chance to see Gus Plum alone. The two met in the upper hallway and walked to the dormitory the former bully occupied, and Plum locked the door.

"Sit down, Dave, I want to talk to you," said Plum, and motioned Dave to the easiest chair the dormitory contained. Then he sank on the edge of a bed close by.

"All right, Gus, fire away," answered Dave, and he wondered what was coming next.

"I—er—I don't know how to say it—how to begin," stammered the former bully, and his face showed a trace of red in it. "But I've made up my mind to speak to you, and ask your advice. You saved me from a terrible disgrace, Dave, and I know you'll tell me the best thing to do."

"What about?"

"Well—about everything. First of all, about staying here. At first I thought I could do it—that I could face the crowd and live it down. But now—the way some of the boys treat me—and look at me—and the remarks made behind my back! Oh, Dave, it's terrible,—you can't imagine how hard it is!" And there was a quiver in Gus Plum's voice that meant a great deal.

"I am sorry to hear of this, Gus. But you must live it down, there is nothing else to do."

"I can go away—my folks are ready to send me to another school."

"Don't do it—stay here and fight it out. I know how you feel—I felt that way when they called me 'a poorhouse nobody.'"

"Oh, Dave, I did that! I am so sorry now!"

"You are bound to win in the end—if you do what is fair and honest. So long as Doctor Clay is willing to keep you, you'd better stay by all means."

"Yes, yes, I know, but—but—there is something else." Plum dropped his hands in his face. "I don't know how I am going to tell you, but I want to tell somebody. It's been on my mind ever since it happened." And then, to Dave's amazement, Gus Plum threw himself across the bed and began to sob violently.

CHAPTER VI

GUS PLUM'S CONFESSION

That the former bully of Oak Hall was thoroughly broken-down there could be no doubt, and Dave pitied him from the bottom of his heart. He wondered what Gus Plum would have to say next, and resolved to aid the lad as much as lay in his power.

"Come, Gus, you had better tell me your whole story," he said, kindly, and sitting on the bed he took one of the lad's hands in his own.

"Well, you know how I promised Doctor Clay I'd turn over a new leaf, and all that," began Plum. "I haven't done it."

"Oh, Gus!"

"I wanted to—but the force of circumstances, and my own weakness, wouldn't let me. Do you remember how I told you about my financial affairs—losing money on that football game and all that? Well, I learned that I was deeper in debt than I thought I was. I paid what debts I could and then found out that I still owed two men in Oakdale forty dollars. I didn't dare to write home for money, for after that exposure my father said he would only allow me five dollars a month spending money and not a cent more, for the next year. I met one of the men in Oakdale the day before Thanksgiving—after you were away—and he—oh, how can I tell it!—he got me to go to that tavern with him and gamble again, in the hope of winning the money I needed."

"And you gambled, Gus? That was too bad."

"At first I played cards for small amounts, but then the men treated—they insisted upon my drinking—and then we made the stakes larger, and when I came away, instead of winning back the forty dollars, I found myself owing them eighty-five dollars. And now they say if I do not pay up at once they'll expose me to the doctor and my folks." Gus Plum heaved a deep sigh. "Oh, I wish I was dead!" he sobbed.

"Gus, I thought you were going to give up gambling and drinking?"

"I was, but those men persuaded me before I was aware. If I ever get out of this you'll never catch me doing it again—never, as long as I live!"

"You say you owe them eighty-five dollars?"

"Yes."

"Do you owe any more than that?"

"They say I owe the tavern keeper two dollars. But I don't think so. I didn't order anything."

"Have you any money at all?"

"Three dollars and a half."

"Come to my room."

"What for?"

"Never mind, come along—before any of the others come up."

Wondering what Dave had in mind to do, the former bully of Oak Hall followed Dave to Dormitory No. 12. Here Dave went straight to his trunk, brought out a long flat pocketbook, and began to open it.

"Why, Dave, you don't mean to——" began Gus Plum, his eyes opening widely.

"Gus, I am going to lend you the money, but only under one condition," said Dave.

"Do you mean to say you have that much on hand?" demanded Plum.

"Yes, I have exactly a hundred dollars in this pocketbook. It is a special sum that my uncle advised me to keep for emergencies. He says he may go away some time and I may need money before he can send it to me. It has nothing to do with my regular allowance. I will loan you the eighty-five dollars on one condition—no, on two conditions."

"What are they?"

"The first is, that you give me your word to cut out all drinking and all gambling from now on."

"I'll do that readily, Dave."

"And the second is, that you remain at Oak Hall and fight your way through in spite of what some of the fellows say. Show one and all that you want to make a man of yourself, and sooner or later they will respect you."

"It will be a terribly hard thing to do."

"Never mind, Gus, I will help you all I can, and I am sure some of the others will help you, too."

For a full minute Gus Plum was silent, looking out of the long window at the gathering darkness of the short winter day. Then he turned again to Dave.

"All right, I'll take you up and stay, and I'll do my level best to deserve your kindness, Dave," he said, in a husky voice.

"Good! Now here is the money, in five-dollar bills. If you don't mind, I'll go along when you pay those fellows. I want to see that you get a receipt in full from them. As you say you owe them the money, we'll let it go at that, although it's more than likely they cheated you."

"Maybe they did, but I can't prove it."

With added thanks, Gus Plum took the eighty-five dollars and placed it carefully away in an inner pocket.

"I'll write the men a note to meet me Saturday afternoon," said he. "Will that suit you?"

"Yes, but don't meet them at the tavern. The depot will be better."

"Very well, I'll make it the depot," answered the former bully. He was very humble, and once more Dave had great hopes of his keeping his promises.

Some of the other students were now coming up, and Dave brought out some books he had brought along from home, including a fine illustrated work on polar exploration which Jessie Wadsworth had presented to him. She had written his name and her own on the flyleaf, and of this inscription Dave thought a great deal.

"I've read a part of it already," he said to Gus Plum. "It's very interesting. Some day I'll let you read it, if you wish."

"Thanks, perhaps I will, Dave," said the former bully, and then with a meaning look at Dave he retired. He knew Dave had brought out the book merely in order that the other lads would not ask embarrassing questions.

"That is a great book," said Roger, looking it over. "Say, it must be fine to travel in the land of perpetual snow."

"Providing you can keep warm," added Phil.

"Talking about keeping warm, puts me in mind of a story," began Shadow Hamilton. "Now, if you'll listen I'll tell it, otherwise I won't."

"How much to listen?" asked Luke Watson, meekly.

"Nothing—this is free, gratis, for nothing."

"I mean, what are you going to pay us for listening, Shadow?"

"Oh, you go to Jericho!" growled the story-teller of the school. "Well, this is about two men who hired a room in a hotel. It was in the summer-time and the room was very hot. They opened the window on the court, but it didn't let in enough air. In the middle of the night one of the men got up in the dark. 'What you doing?' asked the other man. 'Looking for

another window to open,' says the man who was up. Pretty soon he touched a glass and found what he thought was a window opening sideways. 'There, that's fine!' he said. 'It's pretty breezy—guess I'll pull up the cover a little,' said the other man, and then both slept well until morning. When they got up they found that the one fellow had opened the door to an old bookcase in a corner."

"Very breezy story," was Roger's comment.

"Quite a refined air about it," remarked Ben.

"How did opening the bookcase make the room cooler?" demanded Dave, innocently.

"Why, it didn't. The man thought——"

"But you said he was cooler. He even pulled up the cover on the bed!"

"Certainly. He got the impression——"

"Who?"

"The man. He thought——"

"How could he think if he was asleep, Shadow?"

"I didn't say he thought in his sleep. I said——"

"Well, he went to bed anyhow, didn't he?"

"Of course. But when he opened the bookcase door——"

"Oh, I see, it was a refrigerator in disguise. Why didn't you tell us that before,—how the block of ice fell out on the man's left front toe and injured his spine so he couldn't sing any more?" finished Dave, and then a laugh arose, in the midst of which Shadow made a playful pass as if to box Dave's ear.

"The next time I have a good story like that to tell I'll keep it to myself," he grumbled.

To change the subject, some of the boys asked Luke Watson to give them a song. Luke was willing, and getting out his banjo, tuned up, and soon started a ditty about "A Coon Who Lived in the Moon," or something of that sort. Then he began a breakdown, and, unable to resist, Sam Day got up and began to dance a step he had learned from his father's coachman at home.

"Good for you, Sam!" cried Dave. "That's fine!"

"Sam, you ought to join the minstrels," added Roger, and began to keep time with his hands, "patting juba" as it is termed down South.

Not to be outdone by Sam, Ben joined in the dance, and several lads began to "pat juba" as loudly as possible. Growing very enthusiastic, Ben leaped over a bed and back. Then Shadow Hamilton caught up a chair and began to gallop around, horseback fashion. The chair caught in a stand, and over it went, carrying a lot of books and poor Polly Vane with it.

"Gracious, this won't do," murmured Dave, as he set to work to pick up the books. "Hi, stop that racket, Shadow!" he called out. "Do you want to get us all into trouble?"

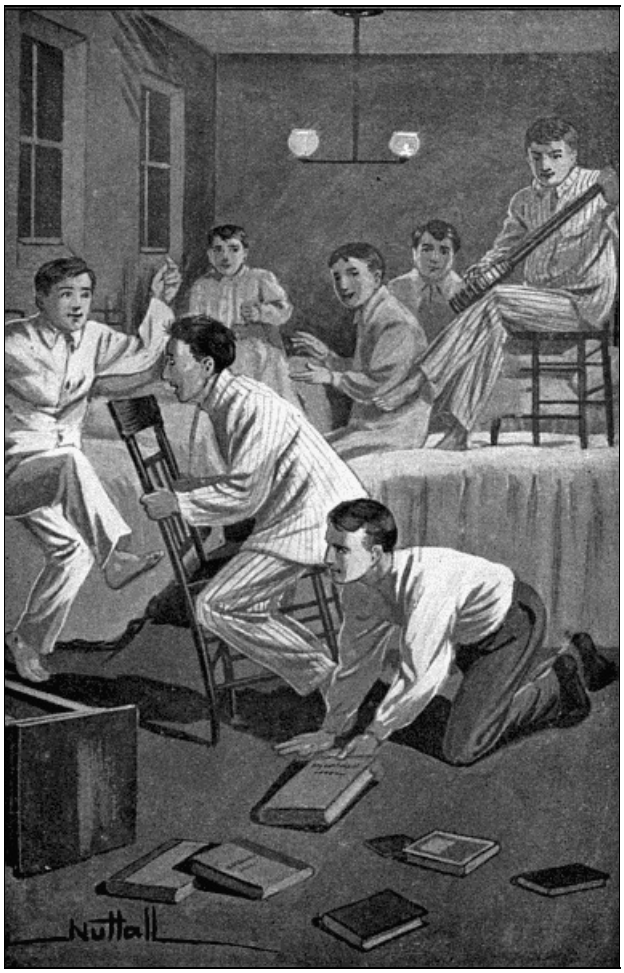
"Can't stop, I'm on the race-track!" yelled Shadow. "This is the last quarter. Bet I win!" and around the dormitory he spun again. This time he knocked over little Chip Macklin, sending him sprawling.

"Say, let up!" called out Roger, and catching up one of the books he took aim at Shadow. "If you don't stop I'll throw this at your head."

"Can't stop—let her go—if you dare!" called back Shadow.

Hardly had he spoken when the senator's son let the volume drive. As he did so the dormitory door opened and Job Haskers appeared. The book missed Shadow, who dodged, and struck the door, sending that barrier up against the

teacher's nose so sharply that Job Haskers uttered a shrill cry of mingled pain and alarm.



"Can't stop, I'm on the race-track!" yelled Shadow.
Page 58.

CHAPTER VII

HOW JOB HASKERS WENT SLEIGH-RIDING

On the instant the noise in Dormitory No. 12 came to an end. Shadow Hamilton dropped the chair and sat upon it and Luke Watson swung his banjo out of sight under a bedspread. Dave remained on one knee, picking up the books that had been scattered.

"You—you young rascals!" spluttered Job Haskers, when he could speak. "How dare you throw books at me?"

He glared around at the students, then strode into the dormitory and caught Dave by the shoulder.

"I say how dare you throw books at me?" he went on.

"I haven't thrown any books, Mr. Haskers," answered Dave, calmly.

"What!"

"I threw that book, Mr. Haskers," said Roger, promptly. "But I didn't throw it at you."

"Ahem! So it was you, Master Morr! Nice proceedings, I must say. Instead of going to bed you all cut up like wild Indians. This must be stopped. Every student in this room will report to me to-morrow after school. I will take down your names." The teacher drew out a notebook and began to write rapidly. "Who knocked over that stand?"

"I did," answered Shadow. "It was an—er—an accident."

"Who was making that awful noise dancing?"

"I was dancing," answered Sam. "But I don't think I made much noise."

"It is outrageous, this noise up here, and it must be stopped once and for all. Now go to bed, all of you, and not another sound, remember!" And with this warning, Job Haskers withdrew from the room, closing the door sharply after him.

"Now we are in a mess!" muttered Roger.

"Isn't it—er—dreadful!" lisped Polly Vane, who had taken no part in the proceedings, but had been looking over Dave's book on polar explorations.

"He'll give us extra lessons for this," grumbled Roger. "Just wait and see."

The next day the weather remained fine, and a number of the students went out coasting on a hill running down to the river. Dave and his friends wished they could go along, as both Sam and Ben had big bobs capable of carrying six boys each. But after the school session they had to report to Job Haskers, and he kept them in until supper-time, doing examples in arithmetic.

"Say, Dave, we ought to square up for this," said Phil. "See what a lot of fun coasting we've missed."

"Just what I say," added the senator's son. "We must get even with old Haskers somehow."

"Remember the time we put the ram in his room?" said Sam, with a grin.

"Yes, and the time we put the bats in," added Phil. "My, but didn't that cause a racket!"

"Let us put something else in his room this time," said Ben.

"Oh, that's old," answered Dave. "We ought to hit on something new."

"If we could only play some joke on him outside of the academy," said the senator's son.

"He is going to Oakdale to-night; I heard him mention it to Mr. Dale."

"Did he say when he would be back?"

"Yes—not later than eleven o'clock."

"Maybe we can have some fun with him on his return," said Dave. "I'll try to think up something."

They watched and saw Job Haskers leave the Hall dressed in his best. He drove off in a cutter belonging to Doctor Clay. But he had hardly reached the gateway of the grounds when he turned around and came back again.

"Forgotten something, I suppose," said Dave, who had been watching.

Job Haskers ran up the steps of the Hall and disappeared.

"Come, Roger, quick!" cried Dave. "We'll unhook the horse!"

The senator's son understood, and in a trice he followed Dave outside. It was rather dark, so they were unobserved. With great rapidity they unhooked the traces and unbuckled the straps around the shafts. Fortunately the horse did not move.

"Wait, we'll fix up the seat for him," said Dave, and lifting the cushion he placed some snow and ice beneath. "That will make things warm for him."

"I'll put a cake of ice in the bottom, too, for his feet," said the senator's son, with a grin, and did so, covering it partly with the lap-robe. Then the lads hurried into the school.

Soon Job Haskers came from the Hall with a small packet in his hand. The boys watched from some side windows and saw him leap into the cutter. He took up the reins.

"Get ap!" he chirped to the horse, and gave a quick jerk on the lines.

The steed did as bidden and began to move out of the shafts of the cutter. At first Job Haskers could not believe the evidence of his eyesight.

"Hi! hold up!" he yelled. "What the mischief! Who did——" And then his remarks came to a sudden end. He tried to hold the horse back, but could not, and in a twinkling he was dragged over the dashboard and landed head first in the snow of the road. Then the horse, no doubt startled at the unusual proceedings, started off on a trot, dragging the teacher after him.

"Whoa, I say! Whoa there!" spluttered Job Haskers. "Whoa!" and he tried to regain his feet, only to plunge down once more, this time on his face. Then he let go the reins and the horse trotted off, coming to a halt near the campus gateway.

If ever there was an angry man that individual was Job Haskers. He had intended to make an evening call on some ladies, and had spent considerable time over his toilet. Now his beautiful expanse of white shirt front was wet and mussed up and he had a goodly quantity of snow down his back.

"Who did this? Who did this?" he cried, dancing around in his rage. "Oh, if I only catch the boy who did this, I will punish him well for it."

He looked around sharply, and at that moment a student chanced to come around the corner of the Hall, on the way to the gymnasium building. Job Haskers leaped towards him and caught him roughly by the shoulder.

"Ha! I have you, you young imp!" he cried. "How dare you do such a thing to me! How dare you!" And he shook the boy as a dog shakes a rat.

"St—top!" spluttered the pupil, in consternation and alarm. "Stop, I say! I—I—— Oh, Mr. Haskers, let up, please! Don't shake me to pieces!"

"Well, I never!" whispered Dave to Phil and Roger.

"Who is it?"

"Nat Poole."

"Oh my! but he's catching it right enough," chuckled the senator's son.

"Will unharness my horse!" went on Job Haskers. "Will throw me on my head in the snow! Oh, you imp!" And he continued to shake poor Nat until the latter's teeth rattled.

"I—I won't stand this!" cried Nat at last, and struck out blindly, landing a blow on the teacher's ear.

"Ha! so you dare to strike me!" spluttered Job Haskers. "I—I——"

"Let go! I haven't done anything!" roared Nat. "Let go, or I'll kick!"

Now, the assistant teacher did not fancy being kicked, so he dropped his hold and Nat Poole speedily retreated to a safe distance.

"You unharnessed my horse——" began Job Haskers.

"I never touched your horse—I don't know anything about your horse," exploded Nat.

"Didn't I catch you?"

"I just came from the library. I left a pair of skates in the gym., and I was going to get them. I've been in the library for half an hour," went on the dude of the school. "It's an outrage the way you've treated me. I am going to report it to Doctor Clay." And he started for the front door of the school.

"Wait! Stop!" called Job Haskers, in sudden alarm. "Do you mean to say you know absolutely nothing about this?"

"No, I don't."

"Somebody came out here while I was in the Hall and unharnessed the horse."

"Well, it wasn't me, and you had no right to pounce on me as you did," grumbled Nat Poole. "I am going to report it to Doctor Clay."

"Stop! I—er—if I made a mistake, Poole, I am sorry for it," said the teacher, in a more subdued tone. "Have you any idea who could have played this trick on me?"

"No, and I don't care," snorted the dudish pupil. "I am going to report to the doctor and see if he will allow an innocent pupil to be handled like a tramp." And off marched Nat Poole, just as angry as Job Haskers.

"Good for Nat," whispered Phil. "I hope he does report old Haskers."

"We must look out that we are not caught," answered Dave. "How funny it did look when Haskers went over the dashboard!" And he laughed merrily.

The boys took themselves to a safe place in the lower hallway. They saw Nat Poole come in and march straight for Doctor Clay's office. The master of the Hall was in, and an animated discussion lasting several minutes took place. Then the doctor came out to interview Job Haskers, who in the meantime had caught the horse and was hooking him up once more.

"Mr. Haskers, what does this mean?" asked the doctor, in rather a cold tone. "Master Poole says you attacked him and shook him without provocation."

"Somebody has been playing a trick on me—I thought it was Poole," was the reply, and the teacher told what had happened. "Just look at that shirt, and my back is full of snow!"

The doctor looked and was inclined to smile. But he kept a straight face.

"Certainly nobody had a right to play such a trick," said he. "But you shouldn't punish Poole for what he didn't do. You are altogether too hasty at times, Mr. Haskers."

"Am I? Well, perhaps; but some of the boys here need a club, and need it badly, too!"

"I do not agree with you. They like a little fun, but that is only natural. Occasionally they go a little too far, but I do not look to a clubbing as a remedy."

"I wish I could find out who played this trick on me."

"Don't you think you owe Poole an apology?"

"An apology?" gasped Job Haskers. Such a thing had never occurred to him.

"Yes. You are certainly in the wrong."

"I'll apologize to nobody," snapped the teacher.

"Well, after this you be more careful as to how you attack my students," said Doctor Clay, severely. "Otherwise, I shall have to ask you to resign your position."

Some sharp words followed, and in the end Job Haskers drove off feeling decidedly humble. He could not afford to throw up his contract with the doctor, and he was afraid that the latter might demand his resignation. But he was very angry, and the discovery of the ice and snow in the cutter, later on, did not tend to make his temper any sweeter.

"I'll find out who did this!" he muttered to himself. "And when I do, I'll fix him, as sure as my name is Job Haskers." But he never did find out; and there the incident came to an end. The boys thought they had had fun enough for one night, and so did not watch for the teacher's return to Oak Hall.

CHAPTER VIII

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER

In the morning mail Gus Plum received a letter postmarked London which he read with much interest. Then he called on Dave.

"I've just received a letter I want you to read," he said. "It is from Nick Jasniff, and he mentions you." And he handed over the communication.

It was a long rambling epistle, upbraiding Plum roundly for "having gone back on him," as Jasniff put it. The writer said he was now "doing Europe" and having a good time generally. One portion of the letter read as follows:

> "The authorities needn't look for me, for they will never find me. I struck a soft thing over here and am about seventy pounds to the good. Tell Dave Porter I could tell him something he would like to hear—about his folks—but I am not going to do it. I don't think he'll meet that father of his just yet, or that pretty sister of his either. She'd be all right if she didn't have such a lunkhead of a brother. Tell him that some day I'll square up with him and put him in a bigger hole than he got me into. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't have to stay away as I'm doing—not but what I'm having a good time—better than grinding away at Oak Hall."

As may be imagined, Dave read this letter with even greater interest than had Gus Plum. What was said about his father and sister mystified him.

"Can it be possible that Nick Jasniff has met them?" he said.

"To me the letter reads that way, Dave," answered Plum. "He mentions your sister as being pretty and all right, and how could he do that if he hadn't seen her? Yes, I think they must have met."

"Then perhaps my folks have been in London all this time—and I didn't know it. Gus, I'd like to copy part of that letter and send it to my uncle."

"Very well—and I am going to show the letter to Doctor Clay," answered the former bully of Oak Hall.

Dave copied that portion of the letter which interested him and forwarded it to Dunston Porter, along with a communication in which he asked his uncle about taking a trip to London. He said he was tired of waiting and would like to start on a hunt for his father and sister without further delay. After sending the letter he talked the matter over with Roger.

"You can't imagine how impatient I am to meet my father and sister," he said. "Why, some days I get so I can hardly fasten my mind on my studies, and I go in for fun just to help me forget what is on my mind."

"I can appreciate your feelings, Dave," answered his chum, kindly. "I'd feel the same way if my folks were missing. If you go to London, do you know I'd like first-rate to go with you."

"I'd like very much to have you, Roger. But how could you get away?"

"Oh, I think I could manage that. My mother thinks I am pushing ahead almost too fast in my studies—the doctor said I was growing too fast and studying too much at the same time. I think she'd be willing for me to take the trip,—and what she says, father always agrees to."

"Where are your folks—in Washington?"

"Yes, they stay at a hotel there during the time Congress is in session."

"Well, I will have to see what my uncle says before I make any move," said Dave; and there the talk came to an end.

Gus Plum had written to the men to whom he owed his gambling debt, and they agreed to meet him at the Oakdale depot on Saturday afternoon at four o'clock. They wrote that if he did not pay up at that time in full they would expose him.

"I believe they are bluffing," said Dave, after he heard of this. "They will not expose you so long as they think there is any chance of getting more money from you. I wish you could prove that you had been swindled,—then you wouldn't have to pay them a cent."

"Well, I can't prove that—although I think it," answered the former bully, with a long sigh.

Saturday noon it began to snow, so that the majority of the students remained indoors or spent the time over at the gymnasium. Dave excused himself to his chums and met Gus Plum at a spot agreed upon, and both set off for Oakdale on foot.

"I suppose I might have asked the doctor for a cutter," said Plum. "But I was afraid he might ask embarrassing questions."

"We can walk it easily enough," answered Dave. "The road is well-broken."

"Dave, you are putting yourself out a good deal for me," answered Plum, gratefully. "Somehow, I'd hate to meet those men alone."

"They must be scamps, or they wouldn't try to lead a student like you astray."

On and on the two boys went, past several places which were familiar to them. The snow did not bother them much, and before long they reached the outskirts of the village.

"There are the two men now!" cried Gus Plum, and pointed across the way.

"They are not going to the depot," answered Dave. "They are turning down Main Street. Supposing we follow them, Gus?"

"I'm willing, but I don't see what good it will do."

"Well, it won't do any harm."

The two men were burly individuals who had evidently seen better days. Each was shabbily dressed and each had a nose that was suspiciously red. Plum said that one was named Blodgett and the other Volney.

"I believe they came here from Hartford," the big youth added. "I wish I had their record from that city."

The men turned into a resort that was half tavern and half restaurant. At the doorway they met another burly fellow who had evidently been drinking pretty freely.

"Hello, Blodgett!" cried this man. "Glad to see you again. Hello, Volney!"

"How are you, Crandall," answered Blodgett, while Volney nodded pleasantly. "What brought you to town?"

"Was looking for you two chaps."

"Why?" questioned Volney, quickly.

"Oh, I've got news that will interest you."

"About Sadler?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it," demanded Blodgett, hoarsely. "What has he found out?"

"A whole lot."

"Does he suspect us?"

"I don't know as to that. He suspects somebody."

"You didn't tell him anything, did you?" asked Volney, catching Crandall by the arm.

"No, but he is satisfied that he was swindled. He was going to the Hartford police about it."

"Hang the luck!" muttered Blodgett. "Tell us the particulars."

"Come inside and I will—it's too cold out here," was the answer; and then the three men entered the tavern.

Dave and Gus Plum had not heard all of the talk, but they had heard enough, and each looked at the other inquiringly.

"I believe they are thorough rascals," said Dave. "I wish we could hear the rest of what that Crandall has to say."

"Come with me—I've been in this building before," answered the former bully of Oak Hall.

He led the way to an alley halfway down the block. This ran to the rear of the tavern, where there was a door communicating with a hallway and a back stairs. Under the stairs was a closet filled with discarded cooking utensils. The closet had two doors, one opening into a drinking-room behind the main bar-room of the tavern.

Looking through a crack of the door, they saw that the three men had seated themselves, the proprietor of the resort spending his time with some men in front.

"Now give us the straight of the story," Blodgett was saying.

Thereupon Crandall launched into a tale that took him the best part of ten minutes to relate. From his talk it was clear that a man named Dodsworth Sadler, of Hartford, had met the three men at Albany and gambled with them on three different occasions. Sadler had lost several hundred dollars one night and nearly a thousand the next, and then Blodgett and Volney had come away. Now Sadler had discovered that marked cards were in use at the place he had visited, and he was satisfied that he had been swindled, if not in all the games at least in some of them.

"Well, we did him up, that's certain," said Blodgett, with a coarse laugh. "But I don't want him to learn the truth if it can be helped."

"No, we want to keep him in the dark—hold him down like that boarding-school chap here," chuckled Volney.

"Never mind about that," said Blodgett, sharply.

"Got somebody else on the string here, eh?" observed Crandall. "You always were the boys to keep things moving."

"Oh, this is only a small affair—mere pocket money," answered Blodgett.

At this point the conversation changed, and it came out that Crandall was out of money and wanted a loan of fifty dollars.

"We can't give it to you now," said Volney. "But wait till to-night and I'll let you have ten dollars."

"And I'll let you have the same," said Blodgett. "We've got to collect a trifle first."

"All right. Twenty is little enough, but it will tide me over until I hit my streak again," answered Crandall. And after a little more talk the men arose and prepared to separate.

"We've heard enough," whispered Dave to Gus Plum. "Come on," and he led the way out of the building and down the alley.

"What do you think?" demanded the former bully, when they were on the street again.

"Just as I suspected, Blodgett and Volney are nothing but sharpers. They undoubtedly swindled you. I shouldn't pay them a cent."

"But they may expose me to the doctor, Dave."

"I don't think they will—not after you talk to them."

"I hardly know what to say."

"Then suppose you let me do the talking, Gus?"

"You?"

"Yes, I fancy I know how to handle them," answered Dave, confidently.

"Well, I don't want to get into any hole," said the big boy, doubtfully.

"You won't get into any hole. When I get through with them, I'm sure they will be only too glad to leave you alone."

The two boys talked the matter over, and at last Gus Plum agreed to let Dave conduct the affair as he thought best. Then both walked to the Oakdale depot, there to await the arrival of the two swindlers.

CHAPTER IX

DAVE TALKS TO THE POINT

It was not long before Blodgett and Volney put in an appearance. They had had several glasses of liquor at the tavern, and walked along as if very well satisfied with themselves.

"So you are here," said Blodgett, striding up to Gus Plum and holding out his hand. "Shake, my boy!"

"I don't care to shake hands with you," replied the former bully of Oak Hall.

"Oh, so that's your lay, is it?" sneered the man. "Very well—but I thought you were a better loser."

"Let us have this meeting over as soon as possible," put in Volney. "Have you got the money?"

Instead of replying, Plum looked at Dave, and then for the first time the two sharpers noticed that the lad they had come to meet was not alone.

"Who's your friend? Thought you'd come alone," said Blodgett, somewhat roughly.

"I believe your name is Blodgett," remarked Dave, drawing himself up and looking as businesslike as possible.

"That's my name, yes. What of it?"

"And your name, I believe, is Volney," went on Dave, turning to the second rascal.

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Never mind that just now. Both of you come from Hartford; isn't that so?"

"What if we do?" asked Blodgett.

"Some time ago you got this young man to gamble with you, and he lost considerable money. Now you want him to pay up."

"Hadn't he ought to pay up?" asked Volney. He was growing uneasy.

"He isn't going to pay you a cent."

"What's that?" came quickly from Blodgett.

"I say he isn't going to pay you a cent, Mr. Blodgett. Is that plain enough for you to understand?" answered Dave, sharply.

"Who are you, I'd like to know, to interfere with our dealings!" cried Jack Blodgett.

"Perhaps I'll tell you who I am later on. I found out about this just in time, it seems. You came from Hartford, but you have been in Albany lately. While you were in Albany you swindled a man named Dodsworth Sadler out of a large sum of money—at least twelve or fifteen hundred dollars."

"Say, look here——" began Blodgett, and his tone became nervous.

"You used marked cards, just as you did when you played with this young man. I think when you find yourselves in the hands of the police—— Hi! stop, don't be going in such a hurry!"

For, turning swiftly, Blodgett had rushed from the depot. Volney followed him.

"They are running away!" cried Gus Plum. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

"Let us give them a good scare while we are at it," answered Dave, and he ran outside and after the swindlers, who cut across the tracks and made for the freight-house. Here a freight-train was just starting out, and the men hopped aboard and were soon out of sight.

"There, I guess you have seen the last of them, Gus," said Dave, when he and the big youth had given up the chase.

"Do you really think so?"

"I feel sure of it."

"Maybe they took you for some officer of the law."

"I don't know as to that, but they were thoroughly scared. I don't believe they will ever show their faces near Oakdale again."

"But they may write to Doctor Clay."

"I shouldn't worry about that, Gus. They will make themselves as scarce as possible, for they will now know that Dodsworth Sadler is on the lookout for them."

"Don't you think we ought to let Dodsworth Sadler know about this? I might write him an anonymous letter."

"You won't have to, Gus. I'll write him a letter, telling of what I heard. That won't bring you into it at all, and as I had nothing to do with Blodgett and Volney, those fellows can't hurt me."

"Oh, Dave, what a head you've got for things!" cried the former bully, admiringly. "I suppose you'll say you simply overheard the talk while you were in Oakdale."

"Yes, and I'll add that when the swindlers found out I knew the truth, they jumped on a freight-train and ran away."

When the two boys returned to Oak Hall, Gus Plum felt in better spirits than he had for a long time. He returned the money to Dave and thanked him over and over for all he had done. Dave penned the letter to Dodsworth Sadler without delay, and it was posted early Monday morning.

"I hope I get a letter from my uncle to-day," said Dave to Roger. But no communication came, for Dunston Porter had gone to Boston on business, and did not return to Crumville for several days.

The weather was now clear and bright and the wind had swept a good portion of the river clear of snow. As a consequence many of the boys went out skating, while a few brought out the ice-boats they had constructed.

Among the latter affairs was the *Snowbird*, built by two students named Messmer and Henshaw. It was not a handsome craft, but it could make good speed, and that was what the boys wanted.

"Come on for a sail, Dave!" called Henshaw, after school-hours on Tuesday. "It's just grand on the river."

"I was going skating with Roger and Phil," was the reply. "Otherwise I'd like to go first-rate."

"Tell them to come too," said Messmer, a lad who always liked to have company on his rides.

The matter was quickly arranged, and Shadow Hamilton was also included in the party. The ice-boat was rather crowded, but that only added to the sport.

"Hold tight, everybody!" cried Henshaw, as he raised the sail. There was a good, stiff breeze, and in a minute the *Snowbird* was bowling along in grand style, the students shrieking their delight as they passed their numerous friends on skates.

"Come along and race!" cried Roger, to Sam Day.

"Give me a tow and I will," was the merry reply.

"Be sure to return when you get back!" called out Ben Basswood, and this remark caused a general laugh.

"Do you remember the ice-boat race we had with the Rockville cadets?" said Messmer.

"Yes, and the accident," replied Dave. "We don't want to run into anything again."

"I say, fellows, let us visit that cabin on the island!" cried Roger. "Maybe we'll find out something more about Pud

Frodel and that other fellow."

The senator's son referred to a cabin located on a lonely island some distance from Oak Hall. Here it was that the lads had discovered the two robbers with whom Nick Jasniff had been associated, and had given to the authorities the information which had led to the rascals' capture.

"I'm willing to go," said Henshaw. "Only we can't stay on the island too long, for we'll have to get back before it gets too dark."

As the ice-boat swept along they passed quite a number of boys on skates. Presently they came to a crowd of six, all attired in neat semi-military uniforms.

"Hello, Oak Hall!" was the cry.

"Hello, Rockville!"

"Where are you going with that tub?"

"Looking for another Rockville boat to beat!" sang out Henshaw. How he had once won an ice-boat race against the military academy lads is already known to my old readers.

"Go along, we're going to build a boat that will leave you away behind," retorted one of the Rockville cadets.

"Brag is a good hoss, but Get-there takes the oats!" cried Dave, and then the *Snowbird* swept out of hearing of the military academy lads.

"They didn't like it at all, that we beat them," was Roger's comment. "Wonder if they will try to build a swifter boat?"

"Let them come on," answered Dave. "We can build another boat, too, if it's necessary."

"Say, their blowing puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow Hamilton. "Two little boys——"

"Oh, Shadow, another?" groaned Messmer, reproachfully.

"Let him tell it, it will help to pass the time," remarked Henshaw. "I know it's all about two poor lads who were caught in a snowstorm and had to shovel their way out with nothing but toothpicks."

"No, it's about two boys who sold suspension bridges for a living," cried Dave, merrily. "They sold as high as eighteen a day, and——"

"Say, if you want to hear this story, say so," demanded Shadow. "These little boys got to bragging what each could do. Says one, 'I kin climb our apple tree clear to the top.' Says the other, 'Huh! I can climb to the roof of our house.' 'Hum,' says the first boy, 'I can climb to the roof of our house, an' it's higher'n yours.' 'No, 'taint.' 'It is so—it's got a cupola on top.' 'I don't care,' cried the other boy. 'Our's is higher. It's got a mortgage on it—I heard dad say so!'" And a smile went the rounds.

Not having any other name, the boys had christened the place for which they were bound, Robber Island. It was a lonely spot, rocky in some places and covered with woods and underbrush in others. The shore was fringed with bushes, through which the driven snow had sifted to a depth of two feet and more.

"Here we are!" cried Dave, as they came in sight of one end of the island. "Lower the sail, or we'll be sliding into the trees and rocks."

They made a safe landing, and then prepared to walk to the cabin, which was some distance away. Henshaw looked doubtfully at the ice-boat.

"Think she'll be all right?" he asked, of Messmer.

"I think so."

"Oh, sure she'll be all right, with the sail down," added Roger.

"Wonder if there are any wild animals on this island?" questioned Shadow.

"Might be an elephant or two," answered Dave, "or half a dozen royal Bengal tigers."

"Quit your fooling, Dave. I reckon you wouldn't want to meet a bear or a wildcat any more than myself."

"No bears around here," said the senator's son. "Might be a wildcat though, or a fox. I'm going to get a good stick."

Each student provided himself with a stout stick, and then the whole crowd moved forward in the direction of the cabin in the center of the island, never dreaming of the astonishing adventure in store for them.

CHAPTER X

AN ADVENTURE ON ROBBER ISLAND

The way to the lonely cabin was not an easy one. There was no path, and they had to scramble over rough rocks and across fallen trees and through thick masses of brushwood. They forgot about the gully, and only remembered it when they found themselves floundering in snow up to their waists.

"For gracious' sake!" cried the senator's son, as he crawled out the best way he could. "I fancied the bottom had dropped out of everything!"

"I remember this hollow now," answered Dave. "We haven't got much further to go."

It was a clear December day and quite light under the leafless trees. There were a few evergreens scattered about, but not many, and these hung low with their weight of snow. All was intensely silent.

"This ought to be lonely enough to suit anybody," observed Henshaw. He turned to Roger. "How would you like to come out here some dark night all alone?"

"None of that for me," was the quick answer.

"Might meet a ghost," said Dave, with a smile.

"Talking of ghosts puts me in mind of a story," said Shadow. "A boy once had to go through a dark woods all alone——"

"Shadow wants to get us scared," interrupted Dave. "Oh, Shadow, I didn't think it of you! It's bad enough as it is," he went on, in seeming reproach. "Don't you know this island is haunted by the man who committed suicide here?"

"A suicide, Dave?" cried the school story-teller, forgetting all about the tale he had been on the point of relating.

"Sure. That man tried to kill his wife and seven children, and then hung himself from a tree not far from here. They say that twice a month his ghost appears."

"It's about time for the ghost now," added Roger, scenting fun. "Listen! Didn't I hear a groan!"

"Must have been that," went on Dave. "There it is again!"

"I—I didn't hear anything," faltered Shadow. He was not an excessively brave lad at the best.

"It's getting pretty dark," continued Dave. "That is when the ghost shows itself, so I've been informed. If we—— Look! look!" he yelled, pointing over Shadow's left shoulder.

The story-teller gave a leap forward and glanced around hastily. Dave was pointing to a clump of bushes.

"Wha—what did you see?" asked Shadow, in a shaking voice.

"I don't know. It was tall and white——"

"The ghost! The ghost!" yelled Roger. "It's coming for us!" And he began to run back.

Shadow gave a scream of terror and started to run also. As if by accident, Dave allowed his foot to trip the boy up, and down went the story-teller of the Hall on his face in the snow.

"Hi! hi! Don't leave me behind!" he bawled, as the others all ran. "Don't leave me!" and he scrambled up and tore along through the brushwood as if possessed. The others speedily halted and set up a shout of laughter, at which Shadow looked very sheepish.

"I—I only ran for the fun of the thing," he explained, lamely. "I knew all along there wasn't a ghost."

"Shadow shall lead the way," said Dave. "Go ahead, old fellow."

"I—er—I don't know the path," was the quick excuse. "You go on." And Shadow dropped behind once more and stuck

there during the remainder of the trip.

The cabin was built of rough logs. It had been put up by some hunters years before, but the sportsmen, owing to the scarcity of game, did not come to the place any more. It was in a dilapidated condition, and the snow had driven in through the broken-out window and open doorway.

"Not a very cheerful place," observed Dave, as he led the way inside. "Let us light a torch, so we can see things."

They procured several pine sticks and soon had them lit, and holding these aloft surveyed the scene. All was very much as it had been during their former visit.

"Nothing new, so far as I can see," was Roger's comment.

"Here are some footprints in the snow," came from Messmer. "We didn't make those."

"Those are the footprints of some animal!" cried Dave. "Maybe there's a bear here after all." He smiled as he made the remark.

"Looks to me more like the tracks of a horse," answered Henshaw. "Maybe somebody came over here from the shore on horseback."

"You want to be careful—it may be a wild beast after all," observed Shadow, nervously.

At that moment came a queer sound from outside of the cabin, which caused all of the lads to start. Messmer, who had the best of the torches, dropped it, leaving them almost in darkness.

"Why, I declare——" began Dave, when a form darkened the doorway and the next instant a big, bony mule entered the old cabin and stood among them. Some of the boys were frightened and started to retreat.

"It's only a mule!" cried Dave. "I don't think he'll hurt anybody. But how in the world did he get here?"

"His halter is broken," declared Roger. "He must have run away from somewhere."

"I know that mule," declared Shadow. "He belongs to Mike Marcy."

The man he mentioned was a farmer, living in the Oakdale district. Marcy was a close-fisted fellow who never wanted the schoolboys to have any of his fruit, and Dave, through no fault of his own, had once had considerable trouble with the fellow.

"I think Shadow is right," said Dave. "I saw that mule around Marcy's place. If he ran away we ought to take him back to where he belongs."

"Perhaps you'd have some fun trying to ride him," suggested Henshaw.

"Oh, pshaw! anybody could ride that mule," declared Roger. "Why, riding a mule is as easy as riding a horse. All mules don't love to kick."

"Roger shall have the honor of riding him home," said Messmer. "Think of what a reward Mike Marcy will give you," he added, with a grin.

"Catch Marcy giving a reward," said Dave, laughing. "Why, he wouldn't fork over so much as a sour apple."

"He'd want to charge Roger for the ride."

"We can take the mule to the Hall and let Marcy come and get him," suggested Messmer.

In a spirit of mischief Shadow had taken his stick and rubbed it over the mule's hind legs. There was a sudden snort and up came the beast's feet. Bang! crack! bang! they sounded on the wall of the dilapidated cabin, and Shadow leaped for his life.

"Look out, he's in action!"

"Clear the deck for his muleship!"

"He'll have the cabin down next!" called out Dave. "Take care!"

The mule continued to kick, and, standing at his head, Dave and Roger tried in vain to quiet him. Then of a sudden came a crack of another kind and the wall of the rotted cabin fell outward and the roof began to sag.

"Out of this, all hands!" yelled Dave, and let go the mule. Roger did the same, and both ran out through the open doorway. Shadow was already outside, and Messmer and Henshaw started to follow. Then the mule turned, knocking Messmer down, and made a dash for liberty.

The cabin swayed and groaned and began to settle rapidly. Henshaw leaped out in the nick of time, one heavy log scraping his shoulder. Messmer was half dazed by the sudden turn of affairs, and before he could arise some of the roof beams began to settle across his back.

"Help! help!" he wailed. "The roof is coming down on me!"

His cry of assistance struck terror to the hearts of some of his friends, and for the moment they did not know what to do. Dave was the only one of the party who remained cool, and he rushed in and caught hold of one of the falling timbers.

"Prop them up!" he called. "Put your sticks under them—anything! If we don't, Messmer may be crushed to death!"

Roger came forward first and the others quickly followed, the mule being, for the time, forgotten. They took their heavy sticks and set them up under the falling timbers, and Henshaw rolled in a stone that chanced to be handy. These things kept the roof from coming down further, but poor Messmer was held as if in a vise and could not be extricated.

"We've got to pry the logs up a little," said Dave. "Here is a log to work with," and he pointed to one which had fallen out of the side wall.

Only one torch remained lighted, and this had to be swung into a livelier blaze, so that they could see. Then they had to start operations with care, for fear they might do more harm than good.

"If th—the logs co—come down on me they will ki—kill me!" gasped the unfortunate lad under the ruins.

"We'll not let them come down," answered Dave. "Keep perfectly still till I tell you to move."

Messmer did as directed, and Dave and the others inserted the loose log under one end of the ruins. A flat stone was used for the fulcrum, and they bore down slowly but steadily until the larger portion of the ruins was raised several inches.

"It's coming!" cried Dave. "Don't go too fast. Can you loosen yourself now, Messmer?"

"A little. Go a bit higher," was the reply.

They went up two inches more, but now the log began to crack, for the strain upon it was tremendous. Messmer heard the ominous sound, and, with a twist, loosened himself and began to crawl forth. Dave caught him by the arms.

"Out you come," he said, and gave a strong pull. And out Messmer did come, and a moment later the lever snapped in two and the ruins settled back into their former position.

"I—I think I've had a narrow escape," faltered the lucky youth, when he could speak. "Much obliged to you, Dave, for hauling me out."

"Talk about a mule kicking!" declared Henshaw. "He brought this cabin down quick enough."

"The old place was about ready to fall down," answered the senator's son. "I think I could have shoved it down myself, had I tried. But I wonder what made the mule start kicking so suddenly. He acted as if a hornet had stung him."

"I guess I was to blame," replied Shadow, sheepishly. "I rubbed him in the rear with my stick. He didn't appreciate the handling."

"By the way, where is his muleship?" cried Dave, looking around in the semi-darkness.

"Guess he's taken time by the forelock and run away," answered the senator's son.

They looked around, but could see nothing of the animal. Some marks were in the snow, losing themselves on the rocks, and that was all.

"It's time to get back to the Hall," observed Henshaw. "I am not going to lose time looking for a mule. Come on."

"We can send Mike Marcy word that his mule is on the island," suggested Dave. "That wouldn't be any more than fair. If left here alone the animal may starve to death."

"Mules don't starve so easily," answered Shadow. "I am not going to look for him any more," he added.

They were soon on their way back to the shore where they had left the *Snowbird*. The short winter day was drawing to a close, and it was getting colder. They walked briskly, for they feared the wind would be against them on the return to Oak Hall, and they did not wish to be late for supper, for that, at the very least, would mean a lecture from Job Haskers.

Henshaw was in the lead, and presently he came out on the shore, looked around in dazed fashion, and uttered a cry of dismay. And not without good reason.

The ice-boat had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI

A HUNT FOR AN ICE-BOAT

"It's gone!"

"Where in the world could it have gone to?"

"It was too far on the shore to be blown away."

"Can anybody have stolen the craft?"

Such were some of the words uttered as the students stood on the shore of the lonely island, gazing first in one direction and then in another. Darkness had now settled down, and they could see but little at a distance.

"I really believe somebody took the ice-boat," remarked Dave. "As the sail was down I don't see how she could budge of herself."

"Exactly my way of thinking," answered Roger. "And I've got an idea who took the craft, too."

"Those Rockville cadets?" queried Henshaw.

"Yes."

"They wouldn't be above such a piece of mischief," said Messmer. "They feel mighty sore over the way we outsailed them that time we raced."

"They'll be likely to sail the boat to our dock and leave her there," said Shadow. "Puts me in mind of a story I once heard about——"

"I don't want to listen to any stories just now," grumbled Henshaw. "I want to find that ice-boat. If we can't find her we'll have to walk home."

"What a pity we didn't bring our skates!" cried Dave. "The wind is very light, and if we had them we might catch up with whoever took the craft. I am by no means certain the Rockville cadets are guilty. When we met them they were going home, and they didn't know we were coming here."

"Nobody knew that," said Messmer.

"Who was the last person we met on the river before landing?" questioned the senator's son.

All of the boys thought for a minute.

"I saw Link Merwell," said Shadow.

"Yes, and Nat Poole was with him," answered Henshaw. "Merwell has become quite a crony of Nat Poole's since Gus Plum dropped out."

Link Merwell was a new student, who had come to Oak Hall from another boarding school some miles away. He was a tall, slim fellow with a tremendously good opinion of himself, and showed a disposition to "lord it over everybody," as Sam Day had expressed it. He was something of a dude, and it was their mutual regard for dress that caused him and Nat Poole to become intimate.

"Then I believe Poole and Merwell are the guilty parties," declared Dave. "They must have seen us land, and Poole, I know, is itching to pay us back for the way we have cut him."

"All of which doesn't bring back the ice-boat," observed Messmer. "The question is, What are we to do?"

"Hoof it back to Oak Hall—there is nothing else," answered the senator's son, sadly.

Hardly had Roger spoken when Dave heard a peculiar sound on the rocks behind the crowd. He looked back and saw

Mike Marcy's mule, nibbling at some bushes.

"The mule—I'm going to catch him!" he ejaculated, and made a leap for the animal. Just as the mule turned he caught hold of the halter.

"Whoa there! Whoa, you rascal!" he cried, and then, watching his chance, he flung himself across the mule's back. The animal pranced around in a lively fashion.

"Look out, Dave, he'll throw you!"

"He'll kick you to death if he gets a chance!"

"Remember, he's a vicious beast!"

The mule continued to dance about and kicked high in the air, throwing Dave well forward. But the boy who had been brought up on a farm clung on, grasping the mule's ears to steady himself. Then of a sudden the mule turned and dashed away through the bushes.

"He's running away with Dave!"

"Look out for the tree branches!"

Dave paid no attention to the cries. He had all he could do to keep from falling under the animal. Away went boy and mule, over the rough rocks in a fashion which nearly jounced the breath from the rider's body. Then, just as they came close to some low-hanging trees where Dave felt certain he would be hurt, the mule turned again, leaped for the shore, and sped out on the ice of the river.

"So that's your game!" cried Dave, between his set teeth. "All right; if you want to run you can carry me all the way to Oak Hall!"

Away went the mule, as if accustomed to run over the ice all his life. He was a sure-footed creature and took only one or two slides, which amounted to nothing. The boys on the shore saw Dave and mule disappear in the darkness and set up a cry of wonder.

"Hi! come back here, Dave!" sang out Roger.

"If you are going to ride to the Hall take us with you!" yelled Shadow.

"He won't stop till he's tired out," said Henshaw. "And goodness only knows where he'll carry Dave."

"Trust Dave to take care of himself," answered the senator's son. "I never saw him get into a hole but that he managed to get out again."

"I hope the mule doesn't land him in some crack in the ice," said Messmer.

On and on through the gathering darkness sped the mule, with Dave clinging to his back with a deathlike grip. The animal was young and full of go and seemed thoroughly to enjoy the run.

"Talk about mules being slow," panted the boy. "The chap who thinks that ought to be on this steed. Why, he'd win on a race-track sure!"

A half-mile was quickly covered, and then the mule neared the bank of the river, where the latter made a long curve. Here there was a fair-sized creek, and up this the animal dashed, in spite of Dave's efforts to stop him or get him to keep to the river proper.

"Whoa, you rascal!" sang out the youth for at least the fiftieth time, and then he caught sight of a white sail just ahead of him. The next moment the mule bumped into the edge of the sail, shied to one side, and sent Dave sprawling on the ice. Then the animal steadied himself and made tracks for the road which led to Mike Marcy's farm. Evidently he was tired of roaming around and of being ridden, and was now going home.

The mule shied to one side and sent Dave sprawling on the ice.—*Page 101.*

Somewhat dazed, Dave picked himself up and gazed at the ice-boat. It was the *Snowbird*, and on it were Nat Poole and Link Merwell.

"Hullo, if it isn't Dave Porter!" muttered Poole, in amazement.

"Where did he get that mule?" questioned Merwell.

"I'm sure I don't know. But this makes a mess of things. I didn't want that crowd to know we had taken the ice-boat," went on the dudish youth.

Dave picked up the cap which had fallen on the ice and ran up to the ice-boat. Those on board had run into the creek by mistake and were trying to turn the *Snowbird* around.

"What are you doing with that craft?" asked Dave.

"That's our business," retorted Nat Poole.

"I think it is my business. That boat belongs to Messmer and Henshaw."

"We found it, and we are going to have a sail back to Oak Hall," said Link Merwell.

"I don't think so," answered Dave, decidedly.

"What's that?" cried Merwell, sharply. He was a fellow used to having his own way.

"I want that boat. I was with Messmer and Henshaw, and we left the craft on the shore of an island. It's my opinion you two chaps ran off with her."

"See here, do you take me for a thief?" cried Link Merwell. And in his aggressive fashion he swaggered up to Dave.

"Not that, Merwell, but I think you took the ice-boat. I am going to take her back, so I can get our crowd aboard."

"And what do you expect me to do?" asked Nat Poole.

"You can skate back to the Hall."

"I lost one of my skates."

"Then let Merwell tow you on one foot."

"Oh, you needn't boss us around, Porter," growled Link Merwell. "I'm not used to it, and I won't stand for it. Poole and I are going to the Hall on the ice-boat, and that is all there is about it."

He drew himself up to his full height—he was four inches taller than Dave—and glared down defiantly. This gave Nat Poole a little courage, and he ranged beside Merwell, and both doubled up their fists.

They fancied they could make Dave back down, but they were mistaken. The lad who had been brought up on a farm faced them fearlessly.

"There is no use of fighting about it," he said, as calmly as he could. "You have no right to this ice-boat, and you know it. If you don't give it up perhaps I'll report you."

"Oh, you're a squealer, are you?" sneered Link Merwell. "It's about what I would expect from a boy brought up in a poorhouse."

At this uncalled-for and cutting remark Dave's face flamed. He took one step forward and caught the tall youth by the arm, in a grip that seemed to be of steel and made Merwell wince.

"Are you going to bring that up?" he asked, in a low voice. "I should have thought your friend Poole would have cautioned you that it wasn't healthy to do so."

"Let go of my arm, Porter," and Merwell tried to pull himself free, but in vain. Dave's eyes were blazing like two stars and seemed to look the tall youth through and through.

"I am not letting go just yet, Merwell. I want you to answer my question."

"If you don't let go I'll knock you down!" cried Link Merwell, in a rage.

"If you do, you'll get well punished for it. I allow nobody to talk to me as you have done."

"Want to fight?"

"No; but I can defend myself—I guess Nat Poole knows that."

"Don't soil your hands on him, Link," said Poole. Even though they were two to one, he knew Dave's power and was afraid of him.

"He can't come it over me," answered Merwell. "Let go!" and then he hauled off and tried to hit Dave in the face.

The boy from the country was on guard, and ducked with a quickness that surprised his antagonist. Then he gave Merwell's arm a twist that sent the tall youth sprawling on the ice.

The new pupil was amazed, and it took him several seconds to recover himself. He had not dreamed that Dave was so powerful, yet he threw prudence to the winds and rushed in, trying again to reach Dave's face with his fist. But Dave skipped to one side, put out his foot, and again Merwell went down, on his hands and knees.

"I'll fix you!" he roared, scrambling up, his face red with rage. "I'll show you what I can do! How do you like that, you poorhouse rat!"

This time he hit Dave in the breast. The blow was a heavy one, but it did not hurt nearly as much as did the words which accompanied it. They made Dave shiver as if with ague, and, all in a blaze he could not curb, he sprang towards Link Merwell. Out shot first one fist and then the other, the blows landing on the eye and chin of the tall youth. They made him

stagger back against the ice-boat. Then came a third blow, and Merwell gave a gasp, swayed from side to side, and would have fallen had not Nat Poole caught him as he was going down.

"Stop, Porter; don't hit him again!"

"Merwell, do you take back what you just said?" demanded Dave, paying no attention to Nat Poole's remark.

There was an instant of silence. Link Merwell wanted to answer, but was too dazed to do so. Slowly and painfully he stood erect. His head was in a whirl and one eye was rather rapidly closing.

"Merwell, are you going to take back what you said?" demanded Dave, again. And he held his fist ready to strike another blow.

"Ye—yes," stuttered Link Merwell. "Do—don't hit me again!" And then he collapsed in a heap at Dave's feet.

CHAPTER XII

THE MEETING OF THE GEE EYES

When Link Merwell went down again Dave looked at Nat Poole, thinking that lad might possibly attack him. But the dudish fellow was too scared to do anything but back away to a safe distance.

"Don—don't you dare to hit me, Porter!" he cried, in a trembling voice. "Don't you dare! If you do I'll tell Doctor Clay!"

"If you behave yourself I'll not lay my fingers on you, Nat Poole," was the reply. "Merwell brought this on himself—you know that as well as I do."

"He's pretty badly hurt, I fear."

"Oh, he'll come around all right," answered Dave. "You had better see to it that he gets to the Hall safely."

"Are you going to leave me?"

"Yes, I want to find Henshaw and the others."

Nat Poole wanted to argue, but he did not dare. Dave waited until Link Merwell sat up and opened his eyes. Then he leaped on the ice-boat and flung off the three skates he found there.

"Going away?" mumbled Merwell, when he could speak.

"Yes, and after this, Link Merwell, see that you keep a civil tongue in your head," answered Dave, and then he trimmed the sail of the ice-boat, shoved the craft around, and started for the river.

Dave was a good deal "worked up," but he had not deemed it wise to let his enemies see it. To be called a "poorhouse rat" had stung him to the quick, and once again when touched on that subject he had found his temper as ungovernable as ever.

"It's no use, I can't stand it," he told himself. "If they want me to let them alone they have got to cut that out."

It was now so dark that but little could be seen on the broad river. Dave turned the craft towards Robber Island and made a long tack. He was just coming around on the other tack when there came a shout out of the darkness.

"Don't run us down! Why, it's Dave!"

"Right you are," was the reply. Then he saw Roger and the others, who had started to walk to Oak Hall. They were soon beside the *Snowbird*, and the craft was headed for the school.

"So Poole and Merwell had her," observed Messmer, on the way. "Did you have any trouble making them give her up?"

"Just a little," answered Dave, modestly.

"Tell us about it, Dave!" cried the senator's son. "Somebody told me Merwell was of the scrappy kind."

"I really don't like to talk about it," said Dave, his face clouding. "I had some words with Merwell and I knocked him down. Then he and Poole were willing enough to let me take the ice-boat."

"You knocked Merwell down!" exclaimed Henshaw. "He's a big fellow."

"Dave isn't afraid of anybody," said Roger, in a tone of pride.

In the end Dave was compelled to tell his story, to which the others listened with deep interest. They understood the boy from the country perfectly, and said the treatment received had served Link Merwell right.

When they reached Oak Hall they were nearly an hour late. They expected Job Haskers would lecture them and give them extra lessons to do, but fortunately they found Andrew Dale, the head teacher, in charge. He listened to their explanations with a smile.

"After this you mustn't go so far, or else start earlier," said the instructor, and let them go in to supper.

"Gracious! what a difference between Mr. Dale and old Haskers," was Dave's comment.

"I wish all the teachers were like Mr. Dale—and Doctor Clay," returned Roger.

The party were just finishing their evening meal when Nat Poole and Link Merwell slunk in. The tall youth had one eye nearly closed by the blow Dave had delivered. He glared savagely at Dave, but said nothing.

"He'll chew you up—if he gets the chance," whispered Roger to Dave.

"Then I won't give him the chance," answered the other, with a quiet smile.

The story soon circulated among the students that Merwell and Dave had had a fight and the tall boy had gotten the worse of it. To this Dave said nothing, but Merwell explained to his friends that Porter had hit him foul, taking him completely off his guard.

"The next time we meet you'll see him go down and out," added the tall boy. "He won't be in it a minute after I once get at him."

Word was sent to Mike Marcy about his mule, and the farmer sent an answer back that the mule was now at home again, safe and sound. The mean fellow did not add one word of thanks for the information given to him.

"That's like Marcy," said Dave. "If he thanked me for anything I think I'd drop dead."

"Some men hardly know how to be civil," answered Phil.

During the next few days word also came from Dodsworth Sadler that he was on the trail of Blodgett and Volney and hoped to catch them before many days. He added that he had evidence to convict the swindlers if he could only lay his hands on them.

"That lets you and me out," said Dave to Gus Plum. "I don't think you'll ever hear another word from the two rascals."

"If it hadn't been for you I should have paid them that money," said the former bully, gratefully. "And they would have kept me in their power if they could."

Dave was anxiously awaiting a letter from his uncle, and when it came he could scarcely take time to tear open the communication, so eager was he to know its contents. The letter was very brief and simply asked the boy to come home on the following Saturday, and added that if he really wanted to go to London he could do so. Dave was to show the letter to Doctor Clay, in order to get the necessary permission to leave the Hall.

"I shall be sorry to have you go, Master Porter," said the principal of the academy. "But I can understand how you feel about your father and sister, and it will perhaps be better for you to go in search of them than to sit down here and be on pins and needles over it;" and Doctor Clay smiled kindly.

"Then you are really going to London!" cried Phil, when he heard the news. "Wish I was going, too!"

"So do I, Phil," answered Dave. "We'd have as good a time as we did on your father's ship in the South Seas."

"I am going to write to my folks about this at once," said Roger. His heart was set on going to England with his chum.

As soon as Dave's friends heard that he was going away once more, several began to plan a celebration for him.

"Let us hold a special meeting of the Gee Eyes, for Dave's benefit," said Sam Day; and so it was voted.

The Gee Eyes, as my old readers know, was a secret organization that had existed at Oak Hall for a long time. The words stood for the two letters G and I, which in turn stood for the name of the club, Guess It. The club was organized largely for fun, and this fun consisted mainly in the initiation of new members.

At one time Gus Plum had been at the head of a rival organization called the Dare Do Anything Club, but this had been broken up by Doctor Clay because of the unduly severe initiation of a small boy, named Frank Bond, who had almost lost his reason thereby. Now Gus had applied for membership in the Gee Eyes and had said that he would stand for any

initiation they offered.

"I have half a mind to take Plum up," said Phil Lawrence, who was the Honorable Muck-a-Muck, otherwise president, of the club. "He deserves to be put through a strong course of sprouts for what he did to Frank Bond."

"All right, I am willing for one," said Buster Beggs, who was the secretary, under the high-sounding title of Lord of the Penwiper. "But we will have to ask the others first."

A canvass was made and it was decided to initiate Gus Plum on Friday night, after which the club was to celebrate the departure of Dave in as fitting a style as the exchequer of the organization permitted. Plum was duly notified, and said he would be on hand as required. "And you can do anything short of killing me," he added, with a grin.

"It will make Plum feel better if he suffers," said Dave. "He hasn't got Frank Bond off his mind yet." Which statement was true. Plum and Bond had made up, and the former bully now did all in his power to aid the small, timid fellow in his studies and otherwise.

The club met in an old boathouse down the river. It was a bright moonlight night and about twenty members were present, all attired in their red robes and black hoods with yellow tassels. As before, some of the members had wooden swords and others stuffed clubs. Around the boathouse were hung a number of pumpkin lanterns, cut out in imitation of skulls.

For the initiation of Gus Plum one of the club members had composed a new chant, which was sung slowly and impressively as the former bully of Oak Hall was led in by Buster Beggs and Sam Day.

"Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly dall!
Here's the victim, see him fall!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly dees!
Down upon his bended knees!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly deet!
Bind his hands and bind his feet!
Hoopra! hoopra! Dilly dive!
Let us cut him up alive!

"Punch him, crunch him, smash him up!
Let him drink the poison cup!
Let him groan and let him rave
As we put him in his grave!"

As this strange doggerel was sung the masked students danced fantastically around Gus Plum, slapping him with their swords and clubs. Then of a sudden he was tripped up, bound hands and feet, and marched out of the boathouse. Here a bag was tied over his head, so that he could not see a thing, although the bag had holes in the rear, so that he would not be suffocated.

"To the river with him!" came the loud command. "An icy bath will do him a world of good."

Now if there was one thing Gus Plum hated, it was ice-cold water for bathing purposes, and the suggestion of such a bath, in the open air, with the thermometer below the freezing point, caused him to shiver.

"Now, see here——" he began, and then shut his lips tightly. Come what might he resolved to utter no complaint.

"What sayest thou?" demanded a voice by his side.

"Wouldst thou beg off?" demanded another.

"No, I'll take my medicine, no matter what it is," answered the former bully, doggedly.

CHAPTER XIII

AN INTERRUPTED INITIATION

"He's full of grit this time," whispered Phil to Dave.

"Oh, Plum isn't the boy he used to be, I am certain of that," was the low answer.

Before long the students reached a point on the river front where there was a heavy clump of bushes. In a hollow between the bushes a fire had been built, and on the bushes had been hung some horse blankets, to keep off the wind.

As the members of the Gee Eyes reached the hollow they saw two boys wrapped up in overcoats stealing away into the woods close by.

"Hello, who are those chaps?" cried Roger.

"One of them looked like Nat Poole to me," answered Dave.

"Wonder what they are doing here?"

"Came to see what was going on, I suppose."

"I don't like fellows like Nat Poole to be hanging around," remarked Buster Beggs.

The fire had been burning low, but now it was stirred up and more dry branches were piled on top, creating a roaring blaze. By the flickering glare the masked figures looked decidedly fantastic.

Up to that moment the club members had been undecided what to do with Gus Plum. Some were in favor of taking off his shoes and socks and letting him down into the river through a hole in the ice, wetting him up to his knees. Others wanted him to crawl on his hands and knees to another spot on the river, quarter of a mile away. Still others wanted to make a snow house and shut him inside for awhile, letting him breathe through a piece of gaspipe which had been brought along. Others wanted him to make a ten minutes' speech on "What Mackerels Have Done for Astronomy," or some subject equally "deep."

"Let us have the speech, at least first," suggested Dave.

"All right, give us the subject," answered Phil, after a consultation with the other officers.

"All right, I will," answered Dave, after a moment's thought. "Better take the bag off his head first."

This was quickly removed, and Gus Plum was made to stand up on a rock close to the fire.

"Wretch, listen!" came from one of the masked figures. "It is decreed that thou must speak for ten minutes by the second-splitting watch on a subject that shall be given to thee. Shouldst thou fail, it will be a whacking with staves for thine. Dost thou agree?"

"Speak on what?"

"Here is the subject," said Dave, in a disguised voice that was thin and piping: 'If a Pail Lets Out Water When it Leaks, Why Doesn't a Boat Do the Same Thing?'" And a snicker went round at this question.

"Thou hast heard the subject. Art prepared to discourse?" asked one of the Gee Eyes.

"Sure thing," answered Gus Plum, after a moment of thought. He struck an attitude. "My subject is a most profound one, first broached by Cicero to Henry Clay, during the first trip of the beloved pair to Coney Island."

"Hurrah! Hooroo!" came from one of the club members.

"Cicero had been speaking to just such a crowd of convicts as I am now addressing—thieves, murderers, and those who had failed to shovel the snow from their sidewalks during the months of July and August," continued Gus Plum.

"Convicts is good," murmured Roger.

"The boat running to Coney Island had slowed up to a walk, which caused Cicero to grow impatient, as he wanted a ride on the shoot-the-chutes. Henry Clay, along with Napoleon and a Roman sausage-maker named Hannibal, were in the bow of the craft trying to solve the fifteen puzzle by the aid of a compass and a book on etiquette. Suddenly a great commotion arose to a height of a mile or more. The boat sank to the bottom of the sea, turned over three times, and came to the surface again. A shriek arose from one of the ladies, Cleopatra's waiting-maid: 'I have lost my knitting overboard.' 'Man the pumps!' cried Cicero, and then tied his sandals around his neck for a life-preserver. Henry Clay drew a Henry Clay from his pocket and began to smoke vigorously. Hannibal said he would turn cannibal if the boat went down again. Cleopatra said she would die happy if only they would start up the phonograph, and Homer did so, with that beautiful ode entitled, 'Why Eat Turkey When Corned Beef Is So Cheap?'"

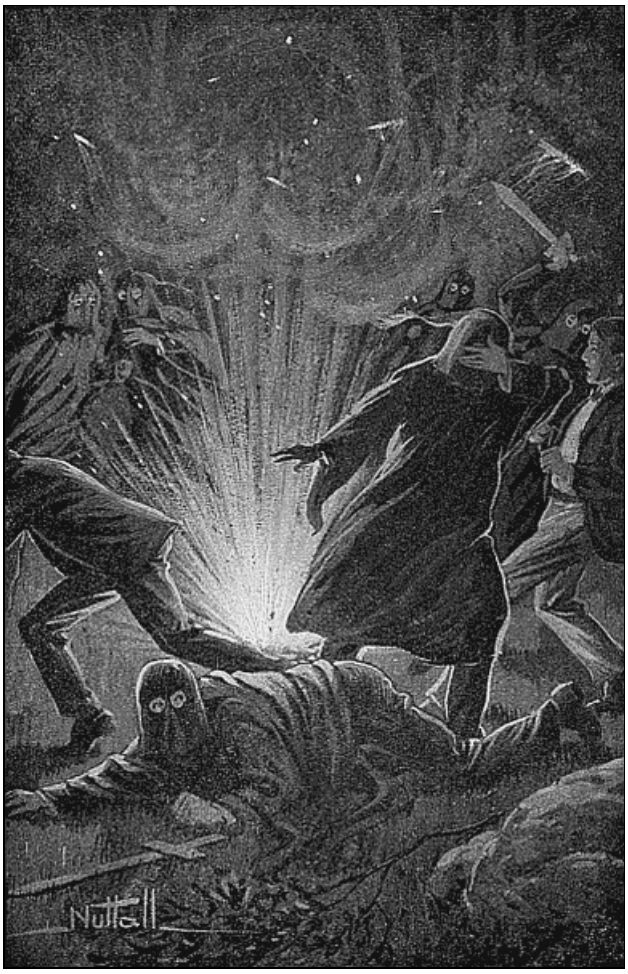
"Where's the pail that leaked?" came from the crowd.

"Stick to the subject."

"Is the boat leaking yet?"

"Be not afraid," answered Gus Plum, solemnly. "By the chronometer I have still seven minutes before the boat and pail sink out of sight forever. However, the pail was there, sitting, like a hen, on the larboard mast, filled with gooseberries, which Pocahontas had picked at dawn, in company with General Grant and King Henry the Sixty-second. Looking at this pail, John Paul Jones slapped his sailor thigh and asked, 'Why is a gooseberry?' a question which has come resounding down the ages—— Oh, thunder! Do you want to blow me to pieces!"

Crack! bang! crack! boom! came four loud reports, and the fire was scattered in all directions. *Bang!* came another report, and Dave received some burning fagots in the face. Gus Plum was hurled from the rock upon which he had been standing. *Boom!* came a report louder than any of the rest, and what was left of the camp-fire flew up in the air as if a volcano were under it.



What was left of the camp-fire flew up in the air.

Page 120.

All of the club members were dumbfounded, for nobody had expected anything of this sort. Half a dozen of the boys had gone down and in a twinkling the robes Roger and Ben wore were in flames. The fire lay in all directions, and now came two smaller reports and Dave saw a fair-sized fire-cracker fly apart.

"Somebody put fire-crackers under the fire," he cried. "Big ones and little ones." And then, seeing Ben in flames, he rushed to the assistance of his chum.

It was no easy matter to put out the fire, and before Ben was out of danger Dave got a blister on one hand. In the meantime Gus Plum had leaped towards Roger.

"Roll over!" he cried, and tripped the senator's son up. Then he began to beat the flames out with his hands and with the bag that had been over his head. Roger had gotten some hot ashes in his face, and he was confused and half blinded thereby.

The excitement lasted nearly five minutes, and when it was over the boys stood there with their hoods and robes off, gazing at each other nervously.

"Who did this?" demanded Phil.

"That was too much of a good thing," said Shadow. "Why, some of us might have been burned to death."

"Kind of rough initiation," remarked Gus Plum, dryly. "But I didn't catch it as much as Roger and Ben."

"That wasn't down on the programme," returned Dave. "At least, it wasn't so far as I am concerned."

"I didn't know of it!" cried Buster Beggs.

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" came from one after another of the other members of the Gee Eyes.

"Who started the fire?" asked Phil.

"I did," answered Sam Day. "I just got some wood together and lit it, that's all."

"Was there anything on the ground?"

"Not a thing, so far as I noticed."

"Here is part of a big cannon cracker," said Dave, holding up the still burning paper. "That was big enough to blow off a fellow's hand or foot."

"Say, don't you remember those fellows we saw running away!" exclaimed Roger.

"To be sure!" was the quick answer. "Nat Poole was one."

"Who was the other?"

"He looked like Link Merwell to me," said Buster Beggs.

"Then we've got an account to settle with Poole and Merwell," said Roger. "Just look at how my hands and my neck are blistered!"

"And my hand," said Ben. "Oh, how it smarts! I'll have to put some oil and flour on it."

"Let us declare Plum's initiation finished," said Phil. "Then we can hunt up those fellows who played this dirty trick on us."

Phil's suggestion was at once adopted, and the club members scattered through the woods, to look for those who had hidden themselves. In a very few minutes Sam Day set up a shout:

"Here is one of them!"

"And here is the other!" called out Gus Plum and Ben, simultaneously.

"You let go of me, Sam Day!" came in the voice of Nat Poole. "I didn't do anything! Let me go!"

"You come along with me, Nat Poole," answered Sam, sternly. "Just look how that hand is burnt!" And in his anger Sam gave the other boy a smart box on the ear.

"Oh! Don't, please don't."

"You'll yell worse than that when we are through with you," answered Sam.

"You bet he will," said Buster Beggs. "I got a hot cinder in my right eye."

"Don't, please don't!" shrieked Nat Poole. He was a coward at heart, and the attitude of those around filled him with sudden terror. "I didn't do it, I tell you."

"Then who did?" demanded Dave.

"Oh, I—I can't tell you. I—I——"

"Yes, you can tell," said Shadow, and gave Poole's ear a twist. The story-teller of the school had gotten some hot ashes in his mouth, which had put him in anything but a gentle humor.

"It was Link Merwell. He put the crackers under the fire and let the fuses stick up," said Poole.

"You're a fine sort to blab!" sneered Merwell. "Since you're willing to tell so much, I'll tell something too. He bought the fire-crackers."

"Is that true, Poole?" questioned Roger.

"Ye—yes, but I—I didn't know——"

"He knew what I was going to do with them," broke in Link Merwell. "It was only a joke."

"So is that a joke, Merwell," answered Roger, and hauling off he boxed the tall youth's right ear. "If you want to make anything out of it, do so. Look at my hands and neck. You went too far."

Merwell's face blazed and he looked as if he wished to annihilate the senator's son.

"Humph! I suppose you think you can do as you please, with your own crowd around you," he muttered. "You don't know how to take a joke."

"I can take a joke as well as anybody, but not such a perilous trick as that."

"It's on a par with the joke of the fellow who put gunpowder in a poor Irishman's pipe," broke in Shadow. "It put the Irishman's eyes out. I don't see any fun in that."

"I think we ought to give them both a good licking!" cried a boy named Jason, and without more ado he took his wooden sword and gave Poole a whack across the back. Then he turned and whacked Merwell.

It was a signal for a general use of the wooden swords and stuffed clubs, and in a moment the two unlucky students were surrounded, and blows fell thick and fast. Poole yelled like a wild Indian, but Merwell set his teeth and said nothing, only striking back with his fists when he got the chance. Dave took no part in the onslaught, nor did Ben and Phil. As soon as he saw a chance Nat Poole ran for his life. Link Merwell stood his ground a little longer, then he too retreated, shaking his fist at the members of the Gee Eyes.

"Just wait!" he fairly hissed. "I'll get square for this, if it takes me a lifetime!"

CHAPTER XIV

GOOD-BYE TO OAK HALL

"I'll wager Merwell is the maddest boy Oak Hall ever saw!" said Shadow, when the excitement had subsided.

"Poole is a sneak, and no mistake," said Sam. "I wonder if he'll go and tell old Haskers or Doctor Clay?"

"He won't dare—for he is afraid we will tell about the fire-crackers," answered Dave. "Yes, he is a sneak."

"I don't see, now, how I could ever make a friend of him," declared Gus Plum. "Now, in one way, I like Merwell—he's a fighter and he doesn't care who knows it."

"Yes, but he's got a wicked temper," observed Roger. "He reminds me of Nick Jasniff. They would make a team."

"Where did he come from, anyway?" questioned Messmer.

"From some ranch out West. His father is a big cattle-owner. He is used to life in the open air, and one of the fellows says he can ride like the wind."

"We must watch him," declared Phil.

"I can't do that—since I am going away," answered Dave. "I'll have to leave you chaps to fight it out."

"Do you think they'll come back or send Haskers?" asked Buster Beggs.

"It might be wise to leave this spot," answered Phil. "There are plenty of places we can go to."

It was decided to move, and several baskets which had been stored away in the bushes were brought forth.

"I've got an idea!" cried Henshaw. "Let us go to that old barn on the Baggot place. Nobody will disturb us there."

"I want to fix up my burns first," said Roger.

"So do I," said Ben. "Come on to the Hall—we can join the crowd later."

So it was arranged, and while the senator's son and Ben went off in one direction the remaining members of the Gee Eyes took another, which led them over a small hill and through an old apple orchard.

The Baggot place had not been used for several years. The house was nailed up, but the big barn stood wide open and had often been the resort of tramps. But during the hunt for the robber, Pud Frodel, and his tool, all the tramps had been rounded up and driven away.

Several of the students had brought their pumpkin lanterns with them, and these were hung up on convenient nails.

"Say, a small stove wouldn't go bad," suggested Messmer. "It's mighty cold in here."

"Let us settle down in some hay," suggested Phil. "That will keep us warm, especially if we shut the doors and windows tight."

The baskets which had been brought along were filled with good things, and these were speedily passed around. The boys fell to eating with avidity, for the adventures of the evening had made them hungry. Then Dave was called upon for a speech.

"I hardly know what to say, fellow-students," he began, after a cheering and hand-clapping. "You have treated me royally to-night, and I do not intend to forget your kindness. I am sorry that I am going to leave you, but you all know what is taking me away——"

"We do, and we hope you'll find your folks," put in Phil.

"So say we all of us!" sang out Henshaw.

"If I am successful in my search perhaps I'll return to Oak Hall before a great while," continued Dave. "In the meantime I trust you all have good times, and that you may have no more trouble with our enemies. More than this, as I expect to be away during the holidays, I wish each one a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!"

As Dave concluded there was a round of applause, and the club members drank his health in lemon soda and sarsaparilla. Then some nuts and raisins were passed around, and all prepared to return to Oak Hall.

"We've got to go in quietly, or else there may be trouble," said Phil. "Remember, we don't know what Merwell and Poole will do."

There was no trouble, however, for which Dave was thankful, since he wished to leave the Hall with a clean record. As soon as he reached his dormitory he went to bed, and so did the other occupants of the apartment. And thus his schooldays, for the time being, came to an end.

He was up bright and early and by nine o'clock was ready to enter the sleigh that was to take him to Oakdale station. The boys gathered around to see him off.

"I wish I was going with you," said Phil. "You must write me regularly."

"I'll do that, Phil. And you must tell me all about what happens here."

"Remember, Dave, I'll join you if I possibly can," said Roger. "Let me know where I can telegraph or telephone you."

"Sure, Roger, and if you can join me I'll like it first-rate."

An hour later Dave was on the train and speeding towards Crumville. He had sent word ahead when he would arrive, and at the station he found the Wadsworth sleigh, with Caspar Potts and Jessie Wadsworth awaiting him. The old professor looked hale and hearty, although his form was slightly bent and his hair was gray and white. Jessie, round-cheeked and rosy, was the picture of health and beauty.

"There he is! There's Dave!" cried the miss, and leaped to the sidewalk to shake hands.

"Why, how tall you are getting, Jessie," said the boy, and then blushed, for the handshake she gave him was a very cordial one. "How do you do, Professor?" And he shook hands with the man who had done so much for him in his younger years.

"I am very well indeed, Dave," answered Professor Potts. "Will you sit up here by me, or with Miss Jessie?"

"Dave must come in with me," said Jessie, promptly.

"Did my Uncle Dunston come?" questioned the boy, looking around, for he had fully expected to see his relative.

"No, he has a touch of rheumatism in his left knee," answered Caspar Potts.

"That's too bad."

Dave assisted Jessie to a seat and then got in beside her, and tucked in the handsome fur robe. Off went the team at a spanking gait, past the stores of the town and then in the direction of the Wadsworth mansion. Many looked at Dave as he rode by and thought him a lucky boy—and he certainly was lucky, and thankful for it.

The mansion reached, Dave was warmly greeted by Mrs. Wadsworth, and, later on, by Mr. Wadsworth, who had been to his large jewelry works on business. The lad found his Uncle Dunston in his room, in an easy-chair, with his rheumatic leg resting on a low stool.

"It's not so very bad, Dave," said Dunston Porter, after their greeting was over. "I hope to be around again before long. But it is too bad it should come on at this time, when I had hoped to go to London with you."

Dave sat down, and a conversation lasting the best part of an hour ensued. The boy told all he knew about Nick Jasniff, and showed the letter which Gus Plum had received. Dunston Porter said he had sent several cablegrams to London, but so far had heard nothing of satisfaction.

"I even sent a money order to this Nick Jasniff, thinking he might try to get it cashed, but the order has not been called for. The money was cabled to London and then put in a letter for the General Delivery department. Evidently this Jasniff is keeping shady, or otherwise he has left the city or is living under an assumed name."

"I know pretty much the sort of a chap he is," said Dave. "He likes to go to the theater, and he was a great chap to bowl. If I go over there I am going to hunt up the bowling places, if there are any, and take a look in at the different theaters. If he is in London I ought to run across him some day. And I'll try finding him by letter and by a notice in the newspapers, too."

Dave was a very busy boy for the next few days, perfecting his plans to visit England. Yet he managed to spend several happy hours with the others and especially with Jessie, who now acted more like a young lady than a girl. Truth to tell, Dave thought a great deal of the rich manufacturer's daughter, and Jessie seemed always to want him around, that they might sing together, or play games, or go out for a sleigh-ride.

"You mustn't forget us when you are in London," said Jessie. "I want you to send me some postal cards—the picture kind."

"I'll send you one every day," replied Dave. "The very nicest I can find."

"With pictures of the places you visit?"

"Yes."

"Then you must tell me about the places in your letters."

"Do you want me to write?"

"Of course, and I'll write too," said Jessie, and gave him one of her sunniest smile. Dave thought of that smile long afterwards—when he was in London and in the far northland—and it always brightened him in spirits.

On the day before his departure Dave received a telegram from Roger. It was short and characteristic:

"Hurrah! Engage stateroom for two. What steamer?"

"Good for Roger!" cried Dave, as he showed the message to his uncle. "He has permission to go with me. Now I won't be lonely."

"I am glad to know he is going along," said Dunston Porter. "Not but that I know you can take care of yourself, Dave."

Dave at once sent word to New York, to the steamship office, and by night the matter of a stateroom for two was arranged. Then he sent word to Roger where his chum could meet him.

He spent a quiet evening at the Wadsworth mansion. Jessie and the others did what they could to cheer him, but they realized what was on his mind.

"Oh, Dave, I do so hope you will find your father and your sister!" said Jessie, on bidding him good-night. "I want to know Laura; I know I shall love her—for your sake!" And then she ran off. Dave watched her mount the stairs and disappear in her room, and then he retired to his own apartment, more thoughtful than ever, yet with a warm feeling in his heart that was peculiar to itself, for it only came when he saw Jessie or was thinking of her.

CHAPTER XV

DAVE AND ROGER IN LONDON

"Off at last!"

"Yes, Roger, and I am not sorry for it."

"And just to think, Dave, inside of a week we'll be in England! It doesn't seem possible."

The two boys were standing on the deck of the great steamer, watching the last sight of New York City as it faded from view. Mr. Wadsworth and Caspar Potts had come down to see them off, and all had had a fine meal together at the old Astor House.

It was a clear, cold day, and the boys were glad enough to button their overcoats as they remained on deck watching the last bit of land disappear from view. Then they swept by the Sandy Hook lightship and out into the broad Atlantic, rolling majestically in the bright sunlight.

By good luck Dave had managed to obtain a first-class stateroom, and the chums felt very comfortable when they settled down in the apartment. But they did not know a soul on board, and it was not until the second day out that they made a few acquaintances.

"I think we are going to have a fine trip over," said the senator's son, on the evening of the second day. "Don't you think so, Dave?"

"I'll tell you better when we reach the other side," answered the boy from the country, with a laugh. "I don't know much about the Atlantic. When we were traveling on the Pacific I know the weather changed very quickly sometimes."

That very night came a heavy blow and by morning the seas were running high. The air was piercing cold, and everybody was glad enough to remain in the cabins. Dave, returning from the ship's library with a volume on travels in England, found Roger had gone to their stateroom.

"Seasick, I'll wager a new hat," he said to himself, and hurried to the apartment. Sure enough, the senator's son was on his berth and as pale as death.

"Can I do anything?" asked Dave, kindly.

"Nothing," groaned Roger. "Only make the boat stop for a minute—just one minute, Dave!"

"I would if I could, Roger. But maybe you'll get over it soon," he added, sympathetically.

"Perhaps—after my insides have had their merry-go-round ride," was the mournful reply.

Fortunately the heavy blow did not last long, and by the morning of the fourth day the Atlantic was comparatively calm. Dave had not been seasick in the least, and he was glad to see his chum come around once more. Roger greeted him with a faint smile.

"I was going to fight against it," said the senator's son. "But when it caught me I had to give in first clip. O dear! I don't see what seasickness was invented for!" And he said this so seriously that Dave was forced to laugh outright.

As soon as it had been decided that he was to go to London, Dave had begun to study up about the place, so that he might not be "too green" when he arrived there. He had two guide-books, and on the steamship he met several people who were only too willing to give him all the information at their command.

"London isn't New York, my boy," said one old gentleman to whom he spoke. "It's larger and it's different. But if you're used to big cities you'll soon find yourself at home there."

Soon the two boys were watching for a sight of land, and when it came they learned that they were in the English Channel and nearing the Isle of Wight. Here there was plenty of shipping, from all parts of the world, and they passed several other big liners, bound for Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Southern ports.

"This is certainly the age of travel," was Dave's comment, as they watched the boats pass. "Everybody seems to be going somewhere."

By the time they reached Southampton there was great bustle on board. Custom House regulations had to be met, after which Dave and Roger took their first ride in an English railway coach and soon reached the greatest city of the world. They had brought with them only their largest dress-suit cases, and these they carried.

They had already decided to go to a small but comfortable hotel called the Todham. A cabman was handy, who had their dress-suit cases almost before they knew it.

"What's the fare to the hotel?" demanded Dave.

The Jehu said several shillings, but when Dave shook his head the fellow cut the price in half and they sprang in and were off. The brief ride was an interesting one, and they could not help but contrast the sights to be seen with those of New York and Chicago.

"It's certainly different," said Roger. "But I guess we can make ourselves at home."

The hotel was in the vicinity of Charing Cross, and the two boys obtained an elegant apartment looking down on the busy street. They were glad to rest over Sunday, only going out in the morning to attend services at one of the great churches.

"Well, Dave, now you are here, how are you going to start to look for Nick Jasniff?" questioned Roger. "It seems to me that it will be a good deal like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"I am going to advertise and then try all the leading hotels," was the answer. "I have a list of them here. If you want to help, you can visit one group of them while I visit another."

The senator's son was willing, and they started off without delay. During the day Dave rode around to exactly twenty-two places, but at each hostelry was met with the reply that no such person as Nicholas Jasniff had registered there.

"One day wasted," he sighed, but altered his opinion when he rejoined his chum.

"Jasniff was at the Hotel Silverin," said Roger. "But he left there a little over two weeks ago."

"Did he leave any directions for forwarding mail?"

"Yes, here is the address." The senator's son drew a notebook from his pocket. "43, Pulford Road, Noxham."

"Let us look up the place," went on Dave, eagerly, and got out his map of London and its suburbs. It was in the northern end of the metropolis, and they found a railway running in that direction.

"We can't go to-night very well, but we can try it the first thing in the morning," said Dave; and so it was decided.

On arriving in the vicinity of 43, Pulford Road, the two youths found the neighborhood anything but first-class. The houses were old and dirty-looking and had about them a general air of neglect.

"What do you want?" demanded the tall and angular woman who answered their summons at the door.

"Good-morning, madam," said Dave, politely. "I am looking for a young gentleman named Nicholas Jasniff. I believe he boards here."

"Oh, so that's it," said the woman. She eyed Dave and Roger in a suspicious manner. "Who told you he was boarding here?"

"We heard so down at our hotel."

"He isn't here—he went away last week—owing me one pound six," was the spiteful answer. "I wish I had my hands on him. It's Kate Clever would teach him a lesson, the scamp!"

"So he ran away owing you some board money?" said Roger.

"He did that."

"And you haven't any idea where he is?"

"I have and I haven't. Are you friends of his?"

"Not exactly, but we wish very much to find him."

"I am not the one to do him a favor—after him treating me so shabbily," said the woman, spitefully.

"You'll not be doing him a favor," returned Dave. "To tell you the truth, I want to catch him for some other wrong he's been doing."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" The woman became more interested. "You are from the States, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"He was from the States. He pretended that he wasn't, but I knew differently. He got letters from America—I saw one of them."

"And where did he go, if you please?" asked Dave.

The tall woman drew up her angular shoulders and pursed up her thin lips.

"If you'll pay that board money I'll help you to find him."

"Very well, if we find him I'll pay you the one pound and six shillings," answered Dave. He did not wish to waste time that might be valuable.

"Come in the parlor and I'll tell you what I know," said Kate Clever.

They entered the little musty and dusty parlor, with its old haircloth furniture and its cheap bric-a-brac. The woman dusted two of the chairs with her apron and told them to be seated.

"I am a poor widow," she explained. "I have to make my living by taking boarders. This Jasniff paid me only one week's board. He said he expected to get some money, but while I was waiting he took his bag and box and slipped away one day when I was to market."

"I thought he had plenty of money," said Roger. "He ran away with enough."

"Ran away with enough? Was he a thief?"

"Yes."

"O dear! Then I am glad he is out of my house. Really! we might all have been murdered in our beds!" And the woman held up her thin hands in horror.

After that she told what she could of Nick Jasniff. She said he had spent a good part of his time, both day and night, down in the heart of London, visiting the theaters and other places of amusement. Once he had complained of being robbed of his pocketbook on a tram-car, and again he had lost himself in Cheapside and fallen in with some thugs who had tried to carry him into an alleyway. In the fight that followed he had had an eye blackened and the sleeve torn from his coat. She had sewed on the sleeve again, but he had paid her nothing for the work.

"He spoke once of visiting an old friend named Chesterfield, who lived in Siddingate," said the woman. "He said he might meet his father there. Maybe if you can find this Chesterfield you'll find him."

"We can try, anyway," answered Dave. "Is that all you can tell about him?"

"I don't know of much else, Mr.—— I haven't learned your name yet."

"My name is David Porter. This is my friend Roger Morr."

"Porter? Why, I've heard that name somewhere." The woman mused for a moment. "Why, yes, Nicholas Jasniff had a friend by that name—a gentleman much older than you."

"A friend!" gasped Dave. "Oh, that can't be true, Mrs. Clever!"

"Well, I heard him say something about a man named Porter. They had met somewhere—I think in London. The man had a daughter named Laura, and I think this Jasniff had been calling upon her."

CHAPTER XVI

SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Dave felt like groaning when he heard Mrs. Clever's words. Then what Jasniff had written in the letter to Gus Plum was true—he had met Mr. Porter and Laura. Had he tried to set himself up as a friend? It was more than likely.

"And father and Laura don't know what a rascal he is," Dave murmured to his chum. "Oh, I feel as if I could wring his neck! For all I know, he has been making himself agreeable to my sister. Isn't it enough to make one's blood boil?"

"It certainly is, Dave. But I fancy your sister will soon be able to size up such a fellow as Jasniff."

"Perhaps, although he can be very oily when he wants to be. Oh, if only I knew where my folks were!" sighed the boy from the country.

Mrs. Clever could tell nothing more about Nick Jasniff or about the Porters. But she promised to send Dave word if she heard anything, and seeing that she was poor Dave paid her the money out of which Jasniff had swindled her, about six dollars and a half. Then the two youths took their departure, stating they might call again.

"Let me know beforehand," said Mrs. Clever, "and I'll treat you handsome-like." She offered them some cakes and ale, but they politely declined the refreshments.

From the woman they learned the easiest way to reach Siddingate, and arrived at that London suburb shortly after the dinner-hour. Here they procured a hearty meal at the leading hotel and from a directory learned that six Chesterfields lived in that vicinity—one an ironmonger, otherwise a hardware dealer; another a draper, that is, a dry-goods merchant; and a third a stoker, which meant that he was a locomotive fireman. The other three were not put down as in business.

"I don't think we'll try to hunt up the stoker," said Dave. "Most likely he's off on a run. We can try the storekeepers and then the others."

The ironmonger, a burly, red-faced man, had never heard of Jasniff, but the draper, while he did not know anybody of that name, said that one of the other Chesterfields, whose first name was Philip, had some relatives in the United States, including some folks who were now traveling either in England or Scotland.

"Thank you; we'll hunt him up," said Dave. "Where does he live?"

"Any cabman can tell you," was the answer. "Better ride out—it's a cold walk."

It was cold, with the snow covering the ground to the depth of two inches or more. The air was very raw, and a regular London fog was settling down over the land.

A cabman was readily found, and inside of a few minutes they were on their way to the Philip Chesterfield estate. From the driver they learned that this Chesterfield was an old man, rather peculiar in his ways, and that he entertained visitors but seldom.

"It would be queer for Nick Jasniff to visit such a man," remarked Dave. "But I don't want to let any chance of locating him slip by."

"Nick may be glad enough to get a roof over his head, if his money is gone," answered Roger.

The cab presently turned up a side road and approached the stone wall of a fair-sized estate, the mansion of which stood back in a patch of old trees. As they entered the gateway Dave saw a door open and a boy came out on a veranda.

"There he is!" he gasped. "There is Nick now!"

"You're right!" exclaimed the senator's son. "This is luck, and no mistake."

As the cab came closer Nick Jasniff gazed at it curiously, to see whom it might contain. Not to be recognized too quickly, Dave kept his face averted and cautioned his chum to do the same.

"Say! I say——" began the youth who had run away, when Dave leaped out and confronted him. "Whe—where did you come from?"

"From Oak Hall," answered Dave, coolly. "I fancy you didn't expect to see me so soon, Jasniff."

"Humph!" The runaway boy did not know what to say. "I—er—— Been following me up, I suppose?"

"I have."

"You didn't expect me, did you?" put in Roger, with a grin.

"I didn't," growled Nick Jasniff. "Any more?" and he gazed anxiously into the cab, half expecting an officer of the law to put in an appearance.

"No more just now," said Dave, with peculiar emphasis.

"What do you want?" Jasniff was gradually regaining his self-possession.

"I want a whole lot of things," answered Dave. "Do you want to do your talking here or in the house?" And he glanced at the cab driver, who was staring at the boys with his mouth open in curiosity.

"You can come in, if you wish," was the awkward answer; and Nick Jasniff led the way into the old mansion, which was semi-dark and not more than half warmed. "Do you know who lives here?" he continued.

"Your relative, Philip Chesterfield," answered Roger.

"Humph! He's a great-uncle of mine and very old. He is down with gout. Come into the library. We needn't disturb him."

They filed into the apartment mentioned, a long, low room, the walls of which were lined with shelves filled with musty volumes. Dave kept his eyes on Jasniff, and this the runaway noticed.

"Think I'm going to skip?" he queried, sourly.

"I'll not give you the chance," was the ready answer.

"You think you've got me foul, don't you?"

"Doesn't it look like it?"

"You can't make me go back to the United States."

"Perhaps I can."

"My folks have settled up that Pud Frodel affair for me—did it only a few days ago."

"But they didn't settle up with Mrs. Clever. She was swindled out of some board money."

"I—er—I was going to send her that money to-day."

"Then you had better pay me, for I settled the account," answered Dave. "But let us drop this talk for the present, Jasniff. I want you to tell me all you know about my father and my sister."

"Humph! I haven't got to tell you anything if I don't want to."

"Yes, you have got to!" cried Dave. A dangerous gleam came into his eyes. "Out with it at once. Where is my father?"

"See here, Porter, I don't propose to be bullied. I——"

"You answer my question, Nick Jasniff. If you don't I'll call in an officer at once and have you placed under arrest."

"You can't do it."

"I can and will. If I can't have you held on one charge I'll have you held on another. I want the truth from you, and I want it right away."

Dave had followed Nick Jasniff to a window, and faced the runaway with such sternness and determination that the latter cowed before him.

"I—er—that is, your father went north, last week."

"Where to?"

"He said he was going to Christiania, Norway."

"Christiania, Norway?" repeated Dave. He knew there was such a place, but that was all. "What for?"

"Oh, he was interested in an expedition that was going to the upper interior—some kind of a scientific expedition, I think. He was full of it—said they hoped to make all kinds of discoveries."

"Whose expedition was it?"

"It was gotten up by two men named Lapham and Hausermann."

"I read about that expedition!" cried Roger. "There was an account of it in this morning's *Times*."

"When was it to start?" asked Dave, anxiously.

"I don't know."

"Do you know, Jasniff?"

"Not exactly—some time this week, I think."

"Was my sister Laura going with my father?" went on Dave, anxiously.

"No."

"Where is she?"

"I give it up."

"Jasniff, tell me the truth!" And again Dave looked at the runaway sternly.

"I don't know where she is."

"You met her."

"Certainly—half a dozen times."

"How did you get acquainted with my folks?"

"Oh, I met them by accident, and as soon as I learned who they were I introduced myself and said I knew your uncle Dunston Porter."

"What did you say about me?" and now Dave was more anxious than ever.

"I—er—I——"

"Come, out with it, and tell the exact truth, Jasniff, or it will be the worse for you."

"I—er—I didn't mention you," stammered the runaway. He could scarcely bring himself to speak the words.

"You didn't!"

"What! do you mean to say you met Mr. Porter and his daughter and didn't let them know that Dave was alive and that he was looking for them?" demanded Roger.

"It wasn't my business to tell them," answered Jasniff, doggedly.

"Nick Jasniff, you are the meanest fellow I ever met in my whole life!" burst out the senator's son. "For two pins I'd give

you the worst thrashing you ever received. Didn't you know how happy it would make Mr. Porter and his daughter to know that Dave was alive?"

"I—er—that wasn't my business. Dave was no friend of mine—why should I put myself out to do him a good turn? If he wants to find his father and his sister let him do it."

"Did you become well acquainted with my sister?" asked Dave, after a pause.

"Fairly well, yes."

"Did you take her out anywhere?"

"No—er—she wouldn't go with me."

"I am glad to hear it. You say you have no idea where she is now?"

"Not exactly. There was an American family named Endicott over here. They came from somewhere out West. They had a daughter about Laura's age, and the two were chums. I think your sister sailed with the Endicotts for the States."

"Did they write to my uncle?"

"I don't know, but I think not, for they thought your uncle was still knocking around the South Sea Islands."

"And you wouldn't tell them a word!" cried Dave, bitterly. "Jasniff, I never supposed any fellow could be so cruel and hard-hearted."

"Humph! I haven't forgotten what I had to suffer," muttered the runaway.

"You brought all that on yourself. You had no business to go in with those two thieves. If you had remained honest there would have been no call for you to run away."

"Oh, don't preach, Dave Porter."

"What Dave says is true, Jasniff," said Roger. "If you have suffered, it is all through your own dishonesty."

"Who says a relative of mine is dishonest!" came a loud, harsh voice from the doorway of the library, and turning quickly Dave and Roger found themselves confronted by an old man, white with sudden rage, and brandishing a heavy cane in his hand.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE NORTH SEA

Both Dave and his chum were startled by the sudden interruption, and for the moment did not know what to say. They looked at the old man and then at Nick Jasniff. The latter turned pale and seemed thoroughly ill at ease.

"Who says a relative of mine is dishonest?" repeated the old man, and now he strode up to Dave and raised the cane over the youth's head.

"If you refer to this boy as your relative, I say he is dishonest," answered Dave, stoutly.

"And so do I," added the senator's son.

"Nicholas dishonest! It cannot be! There must be some mistake."

"I am sorry for you, sir, but there is no mistake," returned Dave.

"Who are you, sir?"

"My name is David Porter. I come from the United States. Nicholas and myself and my friend here all attended the same boarding school."

"The place called Oak Hall?"

"Yes, sir. I presume you are Mr. Philip Chesterfield."

"I am, and I am a great-uncle to Nicholas." The old man lowered his cane. "What do you know of Nicholas?" he questioned, curiously.

"I know a great deal, Mr. Chesterfield. If you care to hear the story I will tell it to you."

"Don't you listen to him, Uncle Phil," stormed Nick Jasniff, in increasing fear. "He'll tell you nothing but a bundle of lies."

"I can prove every statement I make," answered Dave.

"Dave will tell you nothing but the truth," added Roger.

"Who are you, young man?"

"My name is Roger Morr."

"He is the son of United States Senator Morr," added Dave.

"Ah, indeed!" The fact that Roger's father occupied a high political position seemed to have considerable effect on Philip Chesterfield.

"They are a couple of fakirs!" cried Nick Jasniff. He knew not what else to say.

"Nicholas, be silent. I will listen to their story, and then you can have your say."

"If you are going to listen to them, I'll get out," stormed the runaway, and edged for the door.

"No, you don't; you'll stay here!" exclaimed Dave, and blocked the way. "I came all the way from America to catch you, and you are not going until I get through with you."

A brief war of words followed, which came to an end when the old gentleman locked the door. Then he had Dave and Roger tell their tale in full, after which he asked a number of questions. Nick Jasniff wanted to break into the conversation a number of times, but was not permitted to do so.

"Nicholas, if this is true, you are a young scoundrel, and I do not want you in my house another day!" exclaimed Philip

Chesterfield. "I shall send a telegram to your father at once, asking him to come on."

"Where is Mr. Jasniff?" asked Dave.

"In Italy—he went there for his wife's health."

"Did Nicholas tell you anything about my folks?" went on Dave.

"Nothing excepting that he had met a Mr. Porter and his daughter, and that the father had sailed for Norway and the daughter for the States."

"Then that news must be true," said Roger. "Dave, the best thing you can do is to go to Christiania at once."

"Exactly my way of thinking, Roger."

"And about Nick——?"

"You shan't do anything to me!" roared the runaway. "I won't stand for it."

"I shall notify the authorities in America where you are," answered Dave. "Then they can do as they please in the affair."

A little later Dave and Roger left the mansion, Philip Chesterfield bidding them a formal good-bye. Nick Jasniff was sullen and looked as if he wanted to kill both boys.

"He'll get back at us some day, if he can," observed the senator's son, as they drove back to Siddingate.

Arriving at the town, the two youths took the first train back to London proper. Here they found that to get to Christiania they would have to take a train to Hull and from there try to obtain passage on some vessel bound for the Norwegian capital.

"It's only a four hours' ride to Hull," said Dave, consulting a time-table. "I can get there to-night, if I wish."

"All right, let us take the first train."

"Do you want to go to Hull to see me off, Roger?"

"I am not going to see you off, Dave."

"What do you mean?"

"I am going with you—if you'll have me."

"To Norway?"

"Sure—anywhere."

"But what will your folks say?"

"They won't mind—so long as I keep out of trouble. I told father we might go further than England."

"I'll be pleased to have you along."

They settled up at the hotel, and quarter of an hour later were at the station. At the "booking office," as it is called in England, they procured tickets for seats in a first-class coach, and soon the train came along.

"It seems funny to be locked up in such a coach as this," remarked Dave. "I must say, I like our style of open car best."

They were soon leaving the smoky and foggy city of London behind and rushing northward. Only two stops were made, one at Leicester and the other at Sheffield.

"Here is where the celebrated Sheffield cutlery comes from," observed Roger, as the last stop was made. "If we were going to stop over I'd buy a pocket-knife for a souvenir."

"Remember, we must get some picture postals at Hull," answered Dave, who had not forgotten the promise made to

Jessie. He had already sent her over a dozen cards.

Hull is one of the main seaports of England, and ship-building and sail-making are great industries there. In the harbor were a great many steamers and sailing vessels, bound for ports all over the world.

Dave was in a fever of anxiety. He had been unable to ascertain when the expedition in which his father was interested was to start northward from Christiania, and, as a consequence, he wanted to reach the Norwegian capital city with the least possible delay.

"It will be just my luck to arrive there after the expedition has left," he half groaned to his chum.

"Let us hope for the best, Dave."

As late as it was, the two youths skirmished around and finally learned that a steamer would leave Hull for Christiania two days later. On this they booked passage, and then Dave hurried to the nearest telegraph office and sent a cablegram to Christiania, addressed to his parent. The message ran as follows:

"Wait until I reach you. Your long-lost son,

"DAVID PORTER."

"That ought to hold him," said he to Roger.

"Of course it will—if he gets it, Dave."

The message sent, the two boys looked around for a hotel, and then obtained a decidedly late supper. When they retired, Roger slept "like a top," as he expressed it, but Dave lay awake for hours, wondering what the future held in store for him. Now that he seemed so close to his father he could scarcely wait for the time to come when they should meet face to face.

Roughly estimated, the distance from Hull to Christiania is about six hundred miles. As it was winter, the harbor of the Norwegian capital was frozen up, so the steamer could not go further than Dröbak, a seaport eighteen miles south of the capital. Owing to the wintry weather Dave learned that it would take three full days to make the voyage.

It was not particularly cold on leaving Hull, but as soon as the steamer struck the full sweep of the winds on the North Sea the thermometer went down rapidly.

"Phew! but this is cold!" ejaculated Roger, as he buttoned his coat tightly. "It's like being down on the coast of Maine."

"Just wait until we get to Norway—there is where you'll find it cold," was Dave's reply. "Maybe we'll have to invest in fur overcoats."

"Well, I am willing," answered the senator's son, with a laugh.

Fortunately, both boys had been supplied with considerable cash and ample letters of credit, so that monetary matters did not bother them. Before leaving Hull, Dave supplied himself with an English-Danish Self-Educator, and on the ship both he and Roger studied the volume with interest.

"I want to know a few words," said the senator's son. "It is awful to be in a country when you're not able to speak a word of the language."

On the second day of the voyage the two boys got something of a scare. They heard an explosion and then a great cloud of steam spread over the vessel.

"Something has burst, that's certain!" cried Dave. "Let us go on deck and see what is wrong."

They hurried out on the main deck and there found a great number of passengers, all in a state of excitement. A few were on the point of leaping overboard, thinking the ship was going to sink. But the officers were cool and collected, and did all in their power to restore confidence.

"Nothing serious has occurred," was the announcement one of the officers made, in the presence of Dave and his chum.

"A steam-pipe burst and one of the engineers was scalded, that is all. The pipe will be repaired as quickly as possible."

"Will this delay us much?" asked Dave.

"That I cannot say," was the answer.

The rest of the day passed quietly enough. The steamer moved along slowly, for the engines were badly crippled. Dave, thinking only of the time in which he might reach his destination, walked the deck impatiently.

"I'll wager this means another day," said he to his chum.

"More than likely," was the reply. "Well, since it can't be helped you'll have to make the best of it."

"Yes, I know, Roger, but I'd give almost anything to be in Christiania now."

"I can appreciate how you feel. I'd be the same way, if I were in your place, Dave," was the kindly answer of the senator's son.

That night a heavy snowstorm came on, and by morning all around the ship was completely shut out of sight. The steam-pipe had now been mended, but the engines had to be kept down at a low speed for fear of running into some other craft. The foghorn was blown constantly, and occasionally came an answering sound from another vessel. Once they ran close to a three-masted schooner, and then the bell on that ship was rung with a loud clamor.

"That was a narrow escape," said Dave, after the schooner had drifted from sight.

Towards night the snowstorm increased in violence. The wind piped merrily over the deck of the steamer and the boys were glad to remain inside. They turned in early, since there was nothing else to do.

Once they ran close to a three-masted schooner.—
Page 160.

Dave could not sleep at first, but presently dropped into a light doze. When he awoke he sat up with a start. He had heard a strange noise, but now all was silent. He called to Roger, but received no reply. Then he called again and got up and lighted the room.

"Roger, where are you?" he repeated, and then looked toward his chum's berth. To his amazement the berth was made up as if it had never been occupied, and Roger was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN NORWAY AT LAST

There is no denying the fact that Dave was startled. It was one thing to have Roger missing, it was quite another to have his chum gone and have the berth made up as if it had never been occupied.

"He went to bed—I saw him go," muttered the boy from the country to himself. "Am I dreaming, or what can the matter be?"

The more Dave thought over the affair the more was he puzzled. As quickly as he could, he put on some of his clothing and slipped on his shoes. Then he opened the stateroom door and stepped out into the passageway leading to the main saloon.

There was a dim light burning outside, and nobody appeared to be in sight. Dave looked up and down the passageway eagerly, and even stepped to one of the corners. Then he walked to the main saloon, with its big sofas and easy-chairs, and its grand piano. Not a soul was in sight anywhere.

"Well, if this isn't the queerest yet," he murmured, and pinched himself, to make certain that he was not dreaming. He walked to one end of the saloon and then to the other, and then started for the stairs leading out on deck.

At that moment there came an extra-heavy gust of wind and the steamer rocked violently. Dave was thrown on his side and fell headlong over the end of a sofa. As he went down he heard several cries, one in a voice that sounded familiar to him.

"That must have been Roger," he told himself. "Where can he be?" And then he called out loudly: "Roger! Roger Morr! Where are you?"

The boat continued to toss and pitch, and now Dave had all he could do to keep his feet. When he reached the entrance to the main deck he was stopped by one of the under officers.

"Too rough to go out there."

"I am looking for my friend," answered Dave, and told of the disappearance of the senator's son.

"Perhaps he's walking in his sleep," suggested the officer.

"That may be it!" cried Dave. "Queer I didn't think of it. He told me he got up once in a great while."

"If he was walking in his sleep the lurching of the boat must have awakened him—if he cried out. Maybe he went back to his stateroom," continued the ship's official.

"I'll go back and see."

Not without some difficulty Dave returned to his stateroom. The steamer was pitching and tossing dreadfully, and the wind made a wild whistling sound overhead. He heard the overturning of a table or a chair and the crash of glassware.

"We are going to have a tough night of it," he reasoned. "Guess further sleep will be out of the question."

Hoping he would find his chum in the stateroom, Dave returned to the apartment. Here another surprise was in store for him. The door was locked from the inside. He rapped loudly several times.

"Hello! Who's there?" came in a sleepy voice.

"Roger, is that you? Let me in."

"Dave, I declare! Why, I thought you were in your berth."

The senator's son came to the door and opened it. Dave entered the stateroom, which was dark.

"Roger, where have you been?" he demanded.

"So you knew I went out, did you?" asked the senator's son, in a voice that showed he was vexed. "I thought I went out and came back without your knowing it. I thought you were still in your berth."

"I got up, made a light, and found you gone—and the berth made up as if you hadn't used it." Dave paused and looked at his chum, who had just lit up.

"Well—er—I might as well tell you. I must have been walking in my sleep," stammered Roger, and got red. "I'm as bad as Shadow Hamilton."

"Well, I hope you didn't steal anything, as he did," added Dave hastily, referring to an unfortunate incident already well known to my old readers.

"I don't think I did—but I don't know where I went."

"You made up your bed, too."

"Did I? That's queer."

"And you don't know where you went at all, Roger?"

"No, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Were you dreaming?"

"I think I was—I'm not sure. It was something about Nick Jasniff—he was trying to take something from me and I got afraid of him. That is all I can remember."

"I thought I heard you scream—when the vessel gave that awful lurch a few minutes ago."

"That woke me up, and I found myself in one of the passageways not far from here. I was dazed by the tumble I received, but got back here all right."

"After this you had better tie yourself to the bed," was Dave's final remark, and then he turned in again and the light was again extinguished.

But anything more than fitful dozes could not be had. The North Sea is well known for its violent storms during the winter months, and this one proved to be a "corker," as Dave called it afterwards. The waves were lashed into a tremendous fury, and some broke over the steamer's deck with terrific force, one carrying away a twenty-foot section of the forward rail. The high wind was accompanied by a snow that was as fine and hard as salt, and this sifted through every crack the windows and doors afforded.

"No port to-day," said Dave; and he was right. To run close to the Norwegian coast in such a high wind, and with so much snow flying, was dangerous, and they had to remain for twenty-four hours longer at the entrance to Christiania Fjord—*fjord* being the local name for bay.

But at last the snow stopped coming down and the wind subsided a little, and the steamer headed up the bay to Dröbak, located on the east shore of the harbor. Here there was a good deal of floating ice, and plowing among it were vessels of all kinds and sizes, all covered with ice and snow.

"It's wintry enough up here, goodness knows," remarked Roger. "I wonder how far north Christiania is?"

"I was looking it up on the map," answered Dave. "It is located about sixty degrees north, which is just about the latitude of the lower coast of Greenland."

"What, as far north as that! No wonder it is cold."

"Don't forget, Roger, that Norway is the Land of the Midnight Sun. At the far north they have a night lasting about three months."

"Well, I don't want such a night as that, just yet."

"No—you might do too much sleep-walking," and Dave grinned.

"Oh, cut that out!" and the face of the senator's son grew red.

"I shan't mention it again."

Dröbak is but a small place, containing less than twenty-five hundred inhabitants, but during the winter all the shipping of the fjord congregates there, and as a consequence the scene was a lively one. The boys were quickly landed, and then from one of the dock officials learned where they could get a train running to the capital. Their baggage had been examined and passed upon by the usual custom officials.

"Well, this is certainly a second-rate railroad," was Dave's comment, as they seated themselves in the stuffy coach and had the door locked upon them. Then the train moved off at a slow rate of speed that was tantalizing to both. With half a dozen stops, it took them nearly an hour to reach Christiania, only eighteen miles away. Looking out of the window, the landscape was a dreary one, of marshland on one side and rocks on the other, all covered with ice and snow. The coach had no heat in it, and Roger declared that his feet were half frozen.

"Puts me in mind of the time I visited a lumber camp in upper Maine," he told his chum. "It was in the winter-time, and they only ran one train a day, of two cars, a freight and a combination of everything else. We were delayed on the road, almost snowed in, and I didn't thaw out for a week afterwards."

At the railroad station in Christiania they had some trouble passing the guard. Again their baggage was looked over, and they were taken to an office and asked a dozen or more questions by a man who looked as if he might be a police-inspector. What it was all about they could not make out, but at first the officer was not inclined to let them go.

"Perhaps you had better go back to where you came from," said the man to Dave.

"Why, what's the trouble?" demanded the youth. "I am sure I have done no wrong."

"What brought you to Norway?"

"I am looking for my father. His name is David Porter, like my own. He has joined the Lapham-Hausermann Expedition, bound for the interior of Norway."

"Exactly," and the officer looked wise. "Who is this young man?"

"This is my friend, Roger Morr. He is traveling with me for company."

"You are very young to be traveling alone."

"I can't help that. I want to find my father, and do it as soon as I can."

"Is he expecting you?"

"I don't know. I sent him a cablegram, but I do not know if he received it."

"That expedition—do you know anything about it?" asked the officer, shrewdly.

"No, sir—nothing more than what I saw in the English papers."

"Didn't your father tell you anything about it?"

"No, he couldn't." And Dave hesitated.

"Why?"

"Because—well, he doesn't know me—that is, he doesn't know I am alive."

"This is extraordinary, young man!" exclaimed the officer of the police, for such the man was. "I think you had better explain."

"I am in a great hurry, sir," pleaded Dave.

"He wants to catch his father before the expedition leaves Christiania," put in Roger.

"Before it leaves?"

"Yes."

The police official drew up his shoulders and made a wry face.

"Has it left already?" questioned Dave, eagerly.

"To be sure—four days ago," was the answer, which filled Dave's heart with fresh dismay.

CHAPTER XIX

OFF TO THE NORTHWARD

Dave and Roger were told to follow the police officer, and did so, to a large stone building, located on one of the principal streets of the Norwegian capital. As they walked along many gazed at the American boys with interest.

Conducted into a plainly furnished office, the boys were told to sit down. Then they were asked if they had any objection to their baggage being examined.

"Not the slightest," answered Dave, and Roger said the same.

"At the same time I wish you to understand one thing," went on Dave's chum. "I am the son of a United States senator, and if I have to suffer any indignity at your hands you'll hear from it later, through the proper authorities."

"A United States senator's son!" murmured the police official. "Ah!" He took a long breath. "I shall not detain you a second longer than is necessary, sir," he went on, more civilly.

After that Dave and Roger were asked a great number of additional questions, and Dave had virtually to tell his story from beginning to end. Several officials listened with interest, but whether they believed him or not the boy could not tell.

"I am afraid you will have hard work finding your parent," said the police officer, at the conclusion of the interview.

"He must have left some directions behind—for forwarding mail, and the like."

"Possibly, but I doubt it. The expedition was bound up into the mountains,—so it was said. The means of communication are very poor at this time of year."

The baggage was gone over with care, and the examination was evidently a disappointment to those who made it. A long talk in Norwegian followed between several police officials, and then Dave and Roger were told that they could go.

"Would you mind telling me what it is all about?" questioned Dave, when he was ready to leave.

"You will have to excuse me, but I am not permitted to answer that question," said the man who had brought them in, gravely. "If we have detained you without just cause, we are very sorry for it." And that was all he would say.

"It's mighty queer, to say the least," observed Roger, after they had taken their departure. "Dave, what do you make of it?"

"I think they took us to be some foreigners who had come to Norway for no good purpose. You must remember that throughout Europe they have great trouble with anarchists and with political criminals who plot all sorts of things against the various governments. Maybe they took us to be fellows who had come here to blow somebody up."

"They ought to know better than that. I don't think we look like anarchists."

"Since that uprising in Russia, and the attempt on the king in Italy, every nation over here looks with suspicion on all foreigners. But there is something else to it, I imagine," went on Dave, seriously. "Those fellows acted as if they didn't think much of this expedition which my father has joined. Maybe that is under suspicion, too."

"Yes, I noticed that—and if it is true, your father may have some trouble before he leaves Norway."

"I wish I could get to him at once. I could warn him."

From an Englishman on the steamer the boys had learned of a good hotel where English was spoken, and there they obtained a good room for the night. Before going to bed Dave mailed several postals to Jessie, and also a letter to his Uncle Dunston and another to Phil Lawrence, for the benefit of the boys at Oak Hall.

It was not difficult in Christiania to find out when the Lapham-Hausermann Expedition had left the capital, or what had been its first stopping-place. It had taken a railroad train to Pansfar and then gone northward to the mountain town of

Blanfos—so called because of the waterfall in that vicinity—a waterfall being a *fos* in the native tongue.

"I don't see anything to do but to journey to Blanfos," said Dave. "I presume it will be a mighty cold trip, and you needn't go if you don't wish to, Roger."

"Didn't I say I'd go anywhere you went—even if it's to the North Pole?" was the answer. "Come on,—I'm ready to start any time you are."

"I don't think we'll get to the North Pole, but we may get to the North Cape. But we can't start until we've got those fur overcoats we talked about."

At several of the shops in Christiania they procured all the additional clothing they thought they needed. Some of their lighter-weight stuff they left behind, not wishing to be encumbered with too much baggage. They booked for Pansfar at the railroad station, and by the middle of the afternoon of the second day in Norway were bound northward.

"There is that police official, watching us!" cried Roger, as the train was about to depart. He was right—the man was in sight, but he quickly lost himself in a crowd, and whether he got on the train or not they could not tell.

The train was but scantily filled, and only four people occupied the coach with the young Americans. One couple was evidently a newly married pair who had been on a wedding trip to Christiania, and they were very retired and shy. The other pair were a burgomaster and his wife, from some interior town. The burgomaster—who held a position similar to that of a mayor in an American city—wanted everybody to know who he was, and was thoroughly disagreeable. He crowded Dave into a corner until the youth could hardly get any air.

"I'll thank you not to crowd so much—there is plenty of room," said the boy.

The Norwegian did not understand, and continued to crowd the youth. Then Dave grew thoroughly angry and crowded back, digging his elbow well into the burgomaster's fat ribs. This caused the man to glare at the young American. Nothing daunted, Dave glared back.

"What do you do that for?" demanded the burgomaster, sourly.

"I don't speak Norwegian," answered Dave, brokenly, for that was one of the native phrases he had picked up. "But I want you to quit crowding me," he added, in English, and moved his elbows to show what he meant.

The burly Norwegian had supposed he would daunt Dave by his looks, and when he saw that the young American was unmoved he was nonplussed. He growled out something to his wife, who grumbled something in return. He did not budge, and Dave continued to hold his elbow well in the fellow's ribs. The situation had its comical side, and it was all Roger could do to keep from laughing.

"If you don't stop that, I'll have you put off the train!" roared the burgomaster.

As Dave did not understand, he said nothing.

A few minutes passed, and the train came to a halt and the door was unlocked. Nobody got out, but a round and ruddy-faced man got in and nodded to all those present.

"Guard! guard! Come here!" roared the burgomaster, but even as he spoke the door was closed and locked again, and the train moved off. Then of a sudden the Norwegian grabbed Dave by the shoulder.

"Let go there!" cried the youth, and took hold of the man's fat wrist. He gave such a tight squeeze that the burgomaster was glad enough to release his hold.

"I say, what's the matter here?" demanded the man who had just come in, and spoke in a distinctly English tone of voice.

"He's been shoving me into a corner and I told him to quit," answered Dave, glad to be able to make himself understood to somebody besides Roger.

The Englishman looked at the Norwegian and gave a grunt of disgust. "Can't you let the lad alone?" he demanded, in Norwegian. "He's not hurting you any, is he? What's the use of acting as if you owned the whole coach?"

The burgomaster attempted to answer, but the Englishman would scarcely listen. He liked Dave's looks, while he could readily see that the Norwegian was nothing but a bully. He said he didn't care if the man was a burgomaster, if Dave wasn't doing anything wrong he must be let alone, and a good deal more to the same effect. He and the Norwegian got into a spirited argument, but finally the burgomaster cooled down a bit, got up and bounced down on another seat, and his wife followed him.

"Some of these blooming chaps are as overbearing as they can be," remarked the Englishman, after matters had quieted down. "Now this fellow is the burgomaster of some small town up here in Norway, and on that account he thinks he can treat folks as he pleases. I am glad to know you stood up for your rights. Never let them walk over you. Old England every time, say I!" And he smiled broadly.

"I am much obliged to you for what you did," answered Dave, smiling back. "A fellow is at a disadvantage when he can't speak the language."

"That's true, lad. What part of our country do you come from?"

"I come from the United States, and so does my friend here," and the young American introduced himself and Roger.

"Well now, isn't that strange!" exclaimed the newcomer. "And I took you to be English lads sure. Well, next to being English I'd prefer to be an American. My name is Granbury Lapham."

"Granbury Lapham!" cried Dave, quickly. "Not the Lapham of the Lapham-Hausermann Expedition?"

"No, not exactly that, lad, but close to it. That Lapham is my brother Oscar. He is younger than I and daffy on the subject of investigations. As soon as I heard he had started for the mountains of Norway I came over to find out just what he was doing. I don't want him to investigate some high mountain in a snowstorm, fall over some precipice, and kill himself."

"You are going to join the expedition?"

"Yes, if I can find it. But what do you know about it?"

"I am going to join it also, and so is my friend," and then Dave had to give his reasons. Granbury Lapham listened with many a nod to the recital.

"I declare, Master Porter, it sounds like a six-shilling novel, don't you know," he said. "So you haven't ever seen this father of yours? Small wonder you're in a hurry to run across him. Well, I'll assist you all I can. I presume we had better travel together."

"With pleasure!" cried Dave, and he and the Englishman shook hands. Then Granbury Lapham told something of himself, and thus the time passed until Pansfar was reached. Here they got out, the burgomaster scowling after them as they departed.

The Englishman had visited Norway a number of times and spoke Danish and Norwegian very well. He led the way to a tavern, where all enjoyed a smoking-hot meal, with some steaming coffee.

"In the parts of Norway where there are no railroads the stage and sleigh lines, so called, are under the control of the government. The drivers are allowed to charge just so much for driving a person from one place to another, and the road-houses along the way are also subject to official control, and you can always get your meals for a stated price."

"I suppose a fellow can get extras," suggested Roger.

"Certainly—whatever you pay for," answered Granbury Lapham, with a laugh.

He said that the Lapham-Hausermann Expedition consisted of six members, including Mr. Porter. What the object was he did not particularly know, excepting that his brother wanted to gather information concerning the hardy plants of Norway. He knew the party were going to keep to what was known as the Sklovarak Highway as far as Fesfjor and then to a new road leading directly northward.

"I think the best thing we can do is to hire a good sleigh and a double team of horses," said the Englishman. "We'll want a good driver too, one who knows all the roads."

It took them until the next day to obtain just what they wanted. The sleigh was a commodious one, and in it they placed such things as the driver advised them to take along. Then, wrapped in fur overcoats and wearing fur caps, they set off, on a tour that was destined to be filled with not a few perils and strange adventures.

CHAPTER XX

AN ENCOUNTER WITH WOLVES

"Well, this is certainly a strange Christmas day!"

It was Dave who spoke. He stood in the doorway of a small log hut, gazing anxiously out at the landscape before him.

He was in the very heart of Norway, and on every side loomed the mountains with their covering of ice and snow. Just behind the hut was a patch of firs, the only trees growing in that vicinity. In front was what in summer was a mountain torrent, now a mass of irregular ice, the hollows filled with snow.

The party had arrived at this place the night before, after four days of almost constant traveling. But here a blinding snowstorm had brought them to a halt, the driver of the sleigh refusing to trust himself and his turnout on the mountain trail beyond.

"It is a bad road," said he to Granbury Lapham, in Norwegian. "A slip and a slide and we should all be killed. We must wait until the storm is over." And so they put up at this hut by the roadside, and the horses were stabled in a cow-shed in the rear.

The four days of traveling in the heart of Norway had been full of interest to Dave and Roger. They had passed through half a dozen towns and as many more villages, and had met not a few people on the road, some dressed like ordinary Europeans and others in the bright-colored clothing of their forefathers. They had had "all kinds of meals, mostly bad," as Dave declared, and both boys longed for some "United States cooking," as Roger said. But one thing pleased them—wherever they slept the beds were good and the rooms as clean as wax.

Up to the day previous they had heard a number of times about the scientific expedition, which was said to be just ahead. But then somebody had sent them astray, and in trying to get on the right road they had been caught in the snowstorm and been forced to take to the shelter as described.

"Too bad, Dave; especially when you hoped to meet your father by Christmas," said Roger. "But shut the door—it is too cold for comfort out there."

"I opened it to get a whiff of fresh air,—it's vile inside, when the cooking is going on—they use so much fat for frying."

The hut was the property of a sturdy mountaineer, who possessed half a dozen cows and a large flock of sheep. He was a big fellow, all of six feet four inches high, with yellowish hair and bright blue eyes. He was generally good-natured, but the boys once saw him give his oldest son a box on the ear that sent the youngster rolling over and over on the floor.

"He's got a hand on him like a ham," remarked the senator's son. "I shouldn't want him to strike me."

"Most of these Norwegian mountain folks are big and strong," said Granbury Lapham. "I fancy the puny ones die off young."

"What do they do for a living? They can't farm much around here," said Dave.

"They raise sheep, goats, and cows, and a good many of them are wood-choppers. Norwegian lumber is a great thing in the market, and of late years the paper mills are after wood-pulp, which they get from the small growth. Along the coast nearly all the inhabitants are fishermen."

The family of the hut-owner consisted of his wife and seven children. For Christmas dinner there were a hare potpie, carrots and onions, and a pudding with honey sauce. The children had a Christmas tree, brought in by their father from the forest, and this was decorated with fancy-colored papers, and rings, stars and animals, all made of a kind of ginger and spice dough and baked by the housewife. There were a few presents, and the boys and Granbury Lapham added to these by giving the children each a small silver piece, which delighted them hugely.

"I'll wager they are having a fine dinner at the Wadsworth home," said Dave, with a sigh. In his mind's eye he could see Jessie, his Uncle Dunston, and all the others, making merry around the board.

"Don't mention it, Dave," answered his chum. "We generally have a bang-up time, too."

"What I miss most of all is my plum-pudding, don't you know," remarked Granbury Lapham. "I've had plum-pudding for Christmas ever since I was a baby."

"I'd like to know how my father is faring."

"And my brother," added the Englishman.

"Well, we are bound to catch up to them soon, so don't let us worry about it any more," said the senator's son, cheerfully.

The mountaineer was something of a huntsman, and showed the boys his shotgun, a weapon they considered rather antiquated, yet one capable of doing good service.

"He says he once brought down a bear with that gun," said Granbury Lapham. "It must have been at close quarters, for, as I understand it, a Norway bear is a pretty tough creature to kill."

"Do they have many wild animals up here?" questioned Roger, with interest.

"They have, besides bears, a good many wolves, some lynxes, and also red deer, reindeer, hares, and a variety of small animals."

"We must go out hunting before we leave Norway!" cried Roger, who liked the sport very much.

"All right, I'm willing," answered Dave. "But I should like to find my father first," he added, hastily.

"Oh, of course."

The evening of Christmas Day was spent in watching the children around the decorated tree, which was lit up with a dozen or more tiny candles, of home production. Then the boys turned in and Granbury Lapham followed.

About the middle of the night came a great disturbance, and in a minute the household was in an uproar. They heard the mountaineer call to his wife, and then, lantern in hand, he rushed outside and toward the sheepfold, back of the cow-shed.

"Some wolves have gotten among the sheep," explained Granbury Lapham, after a few words with the woman of the hut. "The man is going after them with his gun."

"Let us see if we can aid him!" exclaimed Roger, and slipped on such of his clothing as he had taken off. He had a loaded pistol in his pocket.

"If you go out, I'll go too," answered Dave, and followed his chum to the rear of the hut. He, too, had a pistol, purchased before going on the journey in the sleigh, and now he looked to see that the weapon was in condition for use.

Outside, they heard the mountaineer calling loudly, although they could not make out what was being said. There was a commotion in the sheepfold and also in the cow-shed. Then came a crashing sound, and from the cow-shed came one of the horses.

"Hullo! one of the horses is running away!" cried Dave. "This won't do at all! Whoa! Whoa, there!"

But the steed did not whoa—evidently not understanding such a command! On it went, around the corner of the hut and along the snowy trail. The sleigh driver was up and after it, and set off on a labored run, cracking a whip as he went.

"I see a wolf!" cried Roger. The beast had just left the sheepfold and was carrying something in its mouth. Evidently it was nearly famished, or it would never have stopped to carry off such a burden.

"It's a sheep!" said Dave.

As he spoke, the senator's son fired, and the bullet from his pistol hit the wolf in the side. The beast staggered for a second and then kept on, still carrying the sheep in its strong teeth.

"He's game, that's sure," said Dave, and now he, too, fired, running forward as he did so. Then came the roar of the

shotgun from the sheepfold and out came another wolf, followed presently by a third. The fourth and last of the pack was instantly killed by the mountaineer, who literally, at close range, blew the animal's head off.

Dave's shot caused the wolf with the sheep to falter, and presently it dropped its burden and limped away for the nearest patch of firs. As it did this the second and the third wolf ranged up by the side of the two young Americans. Roger fired three shots in succession and Dave fired twice, but the animals were so quick that but little damage was done. One beast was hit in the tail and the other in the shoulder, and this made them extremely ugly.

Granbury Lapham had come out, but was at the sheepfold with the mountaineer. As a consequence the two boys faced the two wolves alone. One was sniffing at the body of the dead sheep, and now it essayed to raise the carcass up.

"He's going to run off with that sheep!" cried Roger.

"Not if I know it!" answered Dave, and rushing closer, he took the best aim the night afforded and blazed away. The wolf dropped the carcass, gave a vicious snarl, and turned abruptly.

"Look out!" yelled the senator's son, and scarcely had he spoken when the wolf was at Dave's very feet, glaring ferociously into the youth's face. Dave wanted to fire at the animal, but only a click of the hammer followed the pulling of the pistol's trigger.

It was a moment of peril, but Roger came to the rescue. Not to hit his chum, he ran around to the wolf's side and blazed away twice in rapid succession. This was too much for the wolf, and with only a grunt it rolled over and stretched out dead.

"Good for you, Roger!" said Dave. "If you hadn't—— Look out, here comes the other wolf!"

Dave was right: undaunted by the death of its mate, the last wolf—the largest of the pack of four—had leaped up through the snow and darkness. It was so hungry that the smell of blood maddened it beyond all endurance. It leaped so close to Dave it brushed his legs, then grabbed the sheep and began to drag the carcass rapidly through the snow.

"He's game, I must say!" cried Roger, and reloaded his pistol, while Dave did the same. Then came a shout from the sheepfold and the mountaineer put in an appearance, followed by Granbury Lapham.

The man of the place was angry, for three of his best sheep had been killed. He blazed away as soon as he saw the wolf, but his aim was poor, and the snow, blown up by a sudden wind, almost hid the beast from sight. Then the Englishman fired, hitting the wolf in the right hind leg. The animal whirled savagely, dropped the sheep, gave a snarl of rage, and suddenly confronted Roger.

"Get back, you!" yelled the senator's son, and fired point-blank at the wolf. He hit only one ear, and in a twinkling the wolf was on his breast, trying his best to get at Roger's throat.

CHAPTER XXI

CAUGHT IN A WINDSTORM

It was an anxious moment for all, and the others expected to see poor Roger almost torn to pieces. The wolf was big and strong, and hunger and the wounds it had received made it a formidable antagonist. Its eyes gleamed like those of a tiger.

"Help! help!" cried Roger, and then his words were drowned in the crack of Dave's pistol. Taking the best aim he could, the youth fired three times, and the wolf was hit in the side and the rump. It fell to the ground, whirled over and over in the snow, and started for Dave. Then Granbury Lapham fired, and the wolf fell over on its side. A moment later the mountaineer rushed in, and with a club he had picked up at the sheepfold dashed out the brains of the creature; and thus the strange and unexpected encounter came to an end.

Roger had suffered little more than a few scratches, yet he was so weak that the others had to support him back to the hut.

"I—I felt it was my last minute on earth!" he gasped. "If that wolf had been left alone another ten seconds he would have bitten me in the throat!"

"He was certainly a savage beast," replied Dave. He, too, was trembling, in spite of all he could do to control himself.

Several lights were now lit; and leaving Roger at the hut, the others went around to view the damage done. The mountaineer mourned the loss of his sheep, but was rejoiced to know so many wolves were dead.

"I know that big wolf," he told the Englishman. "He had given me a great deal of trouble. He was the leader of the pack. Now he is gone, perhaps I shall have peace for the rest of the winter."

The sleigh driver had returned with the runaway horse. The animal was highly excited and the driver had all he could do to quiet the steed.

"I could tell a long story about this horse," said the sleigh driver. "Once we were caught near Stamo in a great snow. The wolves came after us and this horse was bitten in the flank. That is what made him so afraid. The other horses do not know what wolves really are, and they did not mind them any more than they would so many dogs."

"This is a Christmas night to remember," said Dave, when they finally turned in again. "Roger, if this sort of thing keeps up, we are in for a trip full of excitement."

"Thank you, I don't want to meet any more wolves," replied the senator's son.

All were worn out by what had happened and glad to sleep late the following day. When they arose they found the storm had cleared away and it was as bright as could be expected at this time of year. Once more the sleigh was brought forth and the double team harnessed up. From the mountaineer they obtained a few extra provisions, including a portion of the mutton that had been killed. For this the man would take no pay, but the boys made his wife a present of some silver that pleased the family very much.

"And now to catch the exploring party!" cried Dave. "I don't think they traveled any further than we did in that awful snowstorm."

"It all depends upon what road they were on, so Hendrik tells me," answered Granbury Lapham. Hendrik was the sleigh driver, a good-natured man, although rather silent.

"Does he mean that they could travel on some of the roads, even if it did storm?" asked Dave.

"Yes."

"Well, all we can do is to follow them the best we know how," said Roger.

The new fall of snow had made traveling very heavy, and by noon they had covered only nine miles. Not a hut was in sight, and they made a temporary camp at the edge of a pine forest, where the trees sheltered them from the wind. A fire was built and they broiled a piece of mutton and made a large pot of coffee.

"What a sparsely settled country this is!" remarked the senator's son. "I declare, it looks like some spots in the far West of the United States."

"Norway is the most thinly settled country of Europe," answered Granbury Lapham. "And instead of growing better it seems to grow worse. Many of the peasants emigrate to Canada and the United States, where they can get productive farms without much trouble."

It was necessary to let the horses rest for an hour, and during that time the two boys strolled around the vicinity. There was, however, not much to see, and once off the road they found walking uncertain and dangerous.

"I can now understand why the driver didn't want to go on in that storm," was Dave's comment, when he pulled himself out of a gully several feet deep. "A little more and I'd have gone heels over head, and what would happen to the turnout in such a place I don't know."

"If the sleigh breaks down, or we lose a horse, it will be very bad," answered the Englishman, gravely. "The further north we go the more careful we must be, or we may not get back in safety. I think that exploring expedition was rather a foolhardy undertaking—at this season of the year."

"I believe I know what prompted my father to undertake it," said Dave. "It was the spirit of adventure. My Uncle Dunston says my father loves an adventure of any kind."

"Do you take after him?" asked the Englishman, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"I think I must—otherwise I shouldn't be here," and Dave smiled broadly.

The sleigh driver said that if they made good time during the afternoon they would reach the village of Bojowak by five or six o'clock. Here he was certain they would hear further of the exploring party.

"Then let us hurry all we can," said Dave. "If it is too much of a pull for the horses, I, for one, am willing to walk part of the way."

"So am I," added the senator's son, and the Englishman also agreed to this, although he declared that trudging in the deep snow generally winded him greatly.

They were now approaching a dangerous part of the road, which ran around the western slope of two fair-sized mountains. They progressed with care, and frequently the driver would go in advance, to make sure that the footing was good.

"If only the fellows of Oak Hall could see us now!" declared Dave. "Wonder what they would say?"

"I must take another snapshot or two," answered Roger.

He had brought a folding pocket camera with him and had already taken several rolls of pictures. None of the films had been developed, so he could not as yet tell how the snapshots would turn out. Now he took a picture of Dave knee-deep in snow, with the turnout and the others in the background.

"I ought to have a picture of that fight with the wolves," said Roger, when he put his camera away. "When we tell about it at the Hall some of the fellows will be sure to say it's a fish-story."

"Nat Poole won't believe it for one, Roger; and I don't think Merwell will believe it either."

At the mention of Merwell's name Dave's face clouded for an instant.

"I wish Merwell would leave Oak Hall, Roger," he said. "Somehow, I like that chap less than I do Nat Poole or anybody else—even Jasniff."

"So do I. Poole is a fool, and Jasniff is a hot-headed scamp, but this Merwell——" The senator's son could not finish.

"I believe Merwell has the making of a thoroughly bad fellow in him," finished Dave. "I don't see how Doctor Clay allowed him to join the school."

On and on went the sleigh. The road was up hill, and all hands walked. Once they passed a man on horseback, wrapped up in furs. He stared at them curiously.

"Stop, please!" called out Granbury Lapham, in Norwegian, and the traveler came to a halt. When questioned he said he had heard about the strange party of six men who had come into that part of Norway, and he had also heard that the authorities were watching them.

"But where did they go to?" asked the Englishman.

That the man could not tell, but said they might possibly find out at Bojowak, from a man named Quicklabokjav.

"What a name!" cried Dave.

"It's bad enough—but I have heard worse," answered Granbury Lapham. "Some of the Norwegian names are such that a person speaking the English tongue cannot pronounce them correctly."

They were now more anxious than ever to reach Bojowak, which Hendrik said was a village of about sixty or seventy inhabitants. The people were mostly wood-choppers, working for a lumber company that had located in that territory two years before.

The wind was beginning to rise again. This blew the snow down from the mountain side, and occasionally the landscape was all but blotted out thereby. They struggled along as best they could, the driver cracking his whip with the loudness of a pistol. They passed around one edge of the mountain, only to view with consternation a still more dangerous stretch of road ahead.

"Dave, this is getting interesting," remarked Roger, as the horses stopped for a needed rest.

"I don't like the looks of that road, Roger. There is too much snow on the upper side and too deep a hollow on the lower."

"Right you are." The senator's son turned to the Englishman. "Mr. Lapham, will you ask Hendrik if he thinks it is safe to go on?"

When appealed to, the burly sleigh driver merely shrugged his shoulders. Then he looked up the mountain side speculatively.

"He says he thinks we can get through if the wind doesn't blow too strongly," said Granbury Lapham, presently.

"But the wind is blowing strong enough now," answered Roger.

"And it is gradually getting worse," added Dave.

Once again they went forward, but now with added caution. Ahead of them was a point where the firs stood in a large patch with the road cut through the center. As they entered the forest the wind whistled shrilly through the tree branches.

"I'd give a good bit to be safe in that village," remarked Roger, after listening to the wind.

"After we leave this patch of timber we are going to have our own troubles on the road."

They looked at the sleigh driver and saw that he, too, was disturbed. He stopped the team and gazed upward between the firs to the dull and heavy sky. Then he shook his head slowly.

"He says another storm is coming," said Granbury Lapham. "It is a great pity that it can't keep off until we reach Bojowak."

They were in the very center of the patch of firs when the wind increased as if by magic. It caught up the loose snow and sent it whirling this way and that, almost blinding the travelers. The horses, too, could not see, and they stopped short, refusing to go another step. The driver looked around again, and now his face showed that he was frightened.

"He says we must gain shelter of some kind," said the Englishman, after a few hurried words had passed. "He thinks it will be dangerous to remain here among the trees."

"The shelter of the trees is better than nothing," answered Roger. "If we were in the open and this wind—— Gracious! listen to that!"

A sudden rush of wind swept through the forest, causing the trees to sway and creak. The loose snow was blown in all directions, and they had to be careful that they did not get their eyes and mouths full of the stuff. "It's almost as bad as a—a blizzard!" panted Dave. "And I really think it is growing worse every minute!"

"The question is, where shall we go?" said Granbury Lapham.

"Perhaps the driver knows of some shelter," suggested Dave.

"If he does——"

The Englishman got no further, for at that moment came another rush of air. It bore down upon the forest with terrific force, and a second later they heard several trees go down with crashes that terrified them to the heart. It was a most alarming situation, and what to do to protect themselves nobody seemed to know.

CHAPTER XXII

SNOWBOUND IN THE MOUNTAINS

"If we stay here we'll be in danger of the falling trees!" cried Dave. He had to raise his voice to make himself heard above the fury of the elements.

"That's true, but where are we to go?" questioned Roger. The look in his eyes showed his keen anxiety.

"Isn't there some kind of a cliff around here, under which we can stand?" asked Granbury Lapham of the sleigh driver. Hendrik shrugged his shoulders for a moment, then suddenly tossed his head.

"Yes, I know such a spot," he said, in his native tongue. "Come, we will try to reach it before it is too late."

Amid the howling of the wind and the swirling of the snow, the horses and sleigh were turned partly around, and they struck off on a side trail, leading up the mountain. On and on they toiled, a distance of perhaps five hundred feet, although to the boys it seemed a mile or more. The wind was so strong it fairly took their breath away, and the snow all but blinded them. They had to walk, for it was all the double team could do to drag the turnout over the rough rocks and through the snow. Once Dave slipped, bumped against the Englishman, and both rolled downward a distance of several yards.

"Excuse me!" panted the young American. "My feet went up before I was aware."

"Don't mention it, my lad," was the gasped-out answer. "I fancy we're all doing the best we can."

Presently, through the driving snow, came the sight of a high, rocky wall. The sleigh driver halted and warned the others to do likewise.

"He says there is a pocket at the base of the cliff and we must be careful that we don't fall in it," said Granbury Lapham. "Let us wait until he makes certain it is perfectly safe."

In a few minutes Hendrik, having gone forward, came back and led the horses closer to the rocky wall, which towered over their heads a distance of a hundred feet or more. Toward the base the wall receded about a rod, so that the overhanging portion afforded a little shelter below. Outside of this shelter was a drift of snow as high as their heads, and the travelers had not a little trouble in getting through it.

"Well, this is certainly better than nothing," remarked Dave, as he shook the snow from his garments. "So long as the wind comes from down the mountain we'll be safe enough."

Hendrik proved a practical fellow in the emergency. He found a spot where some small rocks outside of the cliff set up something of a barrier in front. Then he unhitched the horses, took the outfit from the sleigh, and turned the sleigh upon its side. Not content with this, he found some fir saplings, cut them down with an axe he carried, and on them spread out the lap-robes. By the time he had finished they had quite a shelter from the wind and cold.

"Make a little fire now," he said, to the Englishman. "But be very careful that the forest does not catch." And then he explained that to allow the forest to burn in Norway was a prison offence.

"It's an outrage to burn down a forest, anyway," said Roger. "It takes so long for the trees to grow again."

"Yes, and they are never so nice afterwards either," added Dave.

With security from the storm, at least for the time being, everybody found himself hungry. A small fire of fir branches was started, and over this they made a pot of coffee and broiled a piece of the mutton brought along. They had some bread with them, and also some cheese-cake, and managed to make a square meal. They took their time eating, since there was nothing else to do.

"Wonder how long we'll have to stay here?" mused the senator's son.

"Until this awful wind lets up, I guess," answered Dave. "My! just listen to it roar and whistle! I shouldn't care to be out

on the mountain top."

"You couldn't stand up there."

Hendrik brought in a large bundle of sticks and kept the fire going, so that they were soon well warmed. In the meantime it was growing darker and darker.

"We'll have to stay here until morning," announced Granbury Lapham. "To attempt to move in this darkness would be foolhardy."

There was absolutely nothing to do after that but sit down and rest, and soon the dancing of the fire made Dave sleepy. He rolled up in a blanket and closed his eyes, and presently Roger followed his example.

When the two boys awoke it was morning, but only a faint light reached them in their sleeping place under the cliff. They found Granbury Lapham already up. The sleigh driver, worn out, was stretched beside the fire, snoring lustily.

"Why, what has happened?" asked Dave, trying to look beyond the shelter. "I declare, it looks as if we were snowed in!"

"That's about the size of it," returned the senator's son. "And it looks to me as if it was still snowing."

"We'll have a time getting out on the road."

It was snowing thickly, so that but little could be seen beyond the improvised shelter. Fortunately, however, the wind had gone down, so that it was not nearly so cold as it had been.

They made themselves breakfast, and then Granbury Lapham aroused the sleigh driver. Hendrik went beyond the shelter before eating and shook his head dubiously.

"It will be a hard road to travel," he announced, in Norwegian, to the Englishman. "A hard road indeed!"

"Don't you think we can reach Bojowak to-day?" asked Granbury Lapham.

"We can try," was the non-committal reply.

They did not start until nearly noon. First Hendrik broke the road with the horses alone and then came back for the sleigh. It took a full hour to get down to the spot where they had turned off the Bojowak highway the day previous. Even then they broke one of the traces and had to stand around while the leather was mended. The falling snow was so thick they could not see any distance ahead. It clung to their fur caps and overcoats until each looked "like a regular Santa Claus," as Dave declared.

Beyond the forest the road ran along a ridge, and here they found traveling much easier, so that all entered the sleigh once more and rode. But at the end of the ridge they found a hollow covered even with snow.

"What's the trouble now?" questioned the Englishman, as Hendrik pulled in his four horses.

"I must see how deep it is first," was the reply, and the Norwegian jumped out and walked ahead with a long and slender pole he had brought along. Of a sudden he sank up to his waist. Then he stuck his pole down ahead of him. The snow was all of seven feet deep. He shook his head vigorously.

"We can't drive through there," said Dave. "Now what's to be done?"

Roger and Granbury Lapham stared around helplessly. The driver came back and began an inspection of the ground to the left. Here was another ridge. He said they might try skirting that, since there seemed nothing else to do.

"All right, anything so long as we get to Bojowak!" cried Dave.

The sleigh was turned partly around and the horses tugged and labored bravely to get through the snow on the new route. They went up a small rise of ground and then along a ridge that did not appear to be more than two yards wide. At one point there was a sharp decline on the left.

"We'll have to be careful here!" cried the Englishman to the driver. "Otherwise we may all take a tumble."

He had hardly spoken when a sleigh ran up on a rock on one side and plunged into a hollow on the other. In a twinkling the turnout was upset. Dave felt himself pitched out and rolled over and over before he could stop himself. Then he went down and down, he knew not whither. His hand touched that of Roger, and instinctively the two chums clung to each other. The snow filled their eyes, ears, and noses, and almost smothered them. They saw a little light, and then suddenly all became pitch-dark around them.

For several seconds after they fell neither spoke, for each was busy collecting his scattered senses. They were side by side on their backs and the snow was still all around them. Dave put out an arm, felt something of an opening, and crawled into it.

"Roger, are you all right?"

"I—I guess so!" came in a spluttering voice. "But I must have rolled ov—er a hun—hundred times!"

"So did I. We came down on the lightning express, didn't we?"

"Where are we, and where is the sleigh?"

"Don't ask me. We're at the bottom of some place. Come here, there is more room to breathe."

The senator's son followed Dave into the opening the latter had found. All was so dark here they could not see a thing. They stood close together, fearing to take another step.

"Hello! hello!" yelled Dave, when he had his breath back, and Roger quickly joined in the cry. To their consternation there was no answer.

"Most likely the others went down, too," said Dave.

"Then they ought to be near here."

"Unless they slipped clear down to the bottom of the mountain. If they did that I guess it's good-bye to them."

"Oh, do you think they've been killed, Dave?"

"I don't know what to think. Let us call again."

They did so, a dozen times or more. But no answer came back. All around them it was as silent as a tomb.

While procuring their outfit Dave had invested in a pocket lantern, and this he now brought forth and lit. By the tiny rays he made out that they had tumbled into a hollow between several large rocks, over which the snow and ice hung thickly. A big bank of snow was in front of them and behind was a black-looking space of uncertain depth.

"Roger, I must confess, I don't like the look of things."

"Don't like the look of things? Well, I guess not, Dave! How are we ever to get out?"

"I don't know."

"But we've got to get out somehow," went on the senator's son, desperately. "We can't stay here forever."

"Not unless this place becomes our tomb."

"You are cheerful, to say the least," answered Roger, with a shiver.

"I don't intend the place shall be my tomb," went on Dave, sturdily. "I am going to get out somehow. Let us do a little exploring."

"What! go into that black hole behind us? Why, we may fall into a bottomless pit!"

"Not if we are careful."

"I don't want to take any more chances—I've taken enough."

Dave held the light low so that he could see where he was going and walked into the opening behind him for a couple of rods. Roger followed very gingerly, for he did not want to be left behind. The opening proved to be a cave in the mountain side and the roof and flooring were of almost solid rock. Walking was very rough, and they could not tell how far the cave extended or in what direction.

"I am going to call again," said Roger, and going back to the mouth of the cave they set up as strong a cry as before. At first they fancied somebody answered them, but then all became silent.

"Nothing doing," murmured the senator's son, and his face took on a look of deep anxiety. "Dave——" He stopped short.

"What?"

"Nothing, only—do you really think the others were killed?"

"Let us hope not," was Dave's grave reply.

CHAPTER XXIII

LEFT IN THE DARK

The thought that their two companions might possibly have been killed by the toppling over of the sleigh filled Dave and Roger with fresh horror, and for several minutes neither of the youths spoke. They listened for some sound, but none came. Then Roger heaved a deep sigh.

"Perhaps we had better try to climb out," he suggested, timidly.

"I've thought of that, Roger. But what if we slip when we get out? Why, the bottom of the valley is quarter of a mile further down. I don't want such a tumble, on top of the one we have already experienced."

"If we ever get out we'll have plenty of news to send home," was the senator's son's comment.

"True; but let us get out before we think of sending news."

They talked the matter over, and at length concluded to do a little more exploring of the cave. Dave turned up the pocket lantern as high as possible, and as he did this Roger took from his pocket a short, strong cord. "I thought this might come in useful, for tying up our supplies," explained the senator's son, "so I brought it from the last house we stopped at. Tie one end around your waist, Dave, and I will hold fast to the other end. Then I'll walk behind you, and if you go into a hole——"

"I may drag you behind me," finished Dave.

"No, I'll look out for that,—only be as careful as you can."

"I'll take no more risks than are necessary."

They moved forward slowly and cautiously, first to one side of the cavern and then to the other. At last they struck what appeared to be a passageway running parallel to the mountain side.

"Let us follow this," suggested Dave. "It may bring us out somewhere on the road."

Roger was willing to do anything his chum suggested. It was a hard journey, over rocks that were sharp and slippery. In some spots they found a coating of ice and above their heads long icicles hanging from the roofing. Roger slipped and fell and came down with such a jar that a great icicle weighing at least twenty pounds came down close to his head, smashing into many pieces and scattering over both him and Dave.

"Hi! look out!" cried Dave. "If we got one of those on our heads——"

His voice echoed loudly throughout the cave, and then down came two more icicles, one hitting his shoulder. He was thoroughly alarmed and leaped to a spot beyond, literally dragging Roger with him.

"That was a close shave!" murmured the senator's son. "Dave, this spot is full of perils!"

On they went once more, until Dave was almost certain he saw some sort of an opening ahead of them. He pointed it out; and just then the tiny light of the pocket lantern began to flicker.

"Dave, the light is going out!"

"I know it."

"Can't you turn it up a bit?"

"No; the oil is gone," was the answer, after Dave had shaken the lantern to make certain of that fact.

"What will we do if we are left in the dark?"

"Hurry; I think we can reach that opening—if it is an opening."

They ran, and as they did so the lantern flickered up for the last time and went out. Then Dave stopped short and Roger clung to him.

"Don't stop here, Dave!"

"I won't—but we must go slow, or we'll knock our heads on a rock or on the icicles."

They advanced with all the caution they could command. Each was filled with a nameless dread, for if there was no opening ahead what should they do? To go back the way they had come was next to impossible in the dark. A dozen steps, and both went down in a hollow, Roger rolling on top of his chum. The spot was like a huge washbowl, and all of the sides were covered with ice. They tried to scramble out, only to slip back over and over again.

"This is the limit!" cried Roger, desperately.

"If we—— Oh, wait!" He felt in his pocket.

"Hurrah!"

"What is it?"

"I've got five matches. I'm going to light one."

"Make it last as long as possible," was Dave's advice.

The match was ignited and the boys gazed around the hollow. Dave found some bits of projecting rocks and pulled himself up, and Roger came behind, the match burning itself out in the meanwhile. Then they pushed on, until they presently came to an opening through which the snow came down.

"Out at last!" murmured Dave. "I am thankful for that!"

"We have reached the open air, but we are not out of our difficulty," returned the senator's son. "I can't see anything of the road, can you?"

"Not yet, but it must be somewhere in the neighborhood, for we went upward in the cave."

They had come out at a point where there was a small table-land, which the wind of the night before had swept almost clear of snow. Below was the valley and above them a patch of firs.

"That's the forest," said Dave, pointing upward. "The road runs through there. I think the place where we took the tumble is over yonder."

"Let us call to the others again."

Once more they raised their voices, and from a distance came an answering call from Granbury Lapham.

"Where is he?" queried Roger. "I can't see anything through this snow."

"Neither can I."

They called again, and at last made out that the Englishman was above them. Then they said they were going to try to get to him and commenced the struggle. It was a hard task, and took not only their strength but also their breath. They could not see the man, and it was only by continual calling they finally located him.

"We all took a great tumble, don't you know!" cried Granbury Lapham. "Were you hurt?"

"Not enough to mention," answered Dave. "Where is the sleigh driver?"

"He tried to stop the horses, I think. They ran away after the sleigh turned over. I wanted to help and the first thing I knew I went down, too."

"Do you know where the road is?" asked Roger. "Not far above us. But I slipped back several times trying to get to it."

Now was no time to compare notes, and all three started to ascend the mountain side to where they thought the road must

be located. As they could not get up the icy slopes they pushed on to where there was a stunted growth of pines. Here, by clinging to one tree after another, they at last reached a point where trudging through the snow became comparatively easy.

"I got a pretty bad scare when I came down the mountain side," said Granbury Lapham, when they stopped to rest. "A bear came along not more than fifty feet in front of me."

"A bear!" cried the two boys, simultaneously.

"Yes, and a mighty big fellow, too, I can tell you."

"What did you do?"

"I felt for my pistol, but it was gone—I must have dropped it in the snow when I tumbled. At first I thought the beast would attack me, but he gave one look and then jumped away in the snow—and that's the last I saw or heard of him."

Both of the boys felt instinctively for their weapons and were glad to learn that they were safe.

"I don't want to see any bears," observed Dave. "All I want is to go on and join my father."

"And all I want to do is to find my brother," answered Granbury Lapham. "I sincerely trust they are safe."

"We all hope for that," answered the senator's son.

By the time they gained the mountain road it had stopped snowing, so that they could see a fair distance ahead and behind. Dave gave a long look in advance.

"There is something," he said. "I think it must be our turnout."

"It certainly is the sleigh," said Roger, a minute later. "But it is still turned over."

"Yes, and the two front horses are gone," added the Englishman.

As tired as they were, they pressed forward with all possible speed, and soon came up to the overturned sleigh, with its scattered outfit. Some of their goods had gone down the mountain side out of sight and the rest were covered with snow. The horses were nervous and on the point of dashing off, so that Dave had to go to their heads to quiet them.

"Do you know what I think?" said the boy. "The front team broke loose somehow, and Hendrik has gone after them."

"Well, I hope he catches 'em and brings 'em back," answered Roger.

They unhooked the team attached to the sleigh and tied them to the nearest tree, some distance off. Then all hands got at the heavy turnout and righted it and cleaned it out. This done, they put in the robes and all they could find of their belongings. Thus an hour went by.

"Hendrik doesn't seem to be coming back," said Dave. "Perhaps those horses went a long distance and it might be as well to follow them—if the single team can do it."

"Let us try the horses that are left, anyway," returned Roger. "We can let Mr. Lapham drive while we walk ahead and make sure of the road."

They hooked up with care and the Englishman took the reins. It was all the two animals could do to start the sleigh, for the road was slightly upward for quarter of a mile. But then it ran downhill and going became almost too easy.

"They'll be running away, if we don't look out," said Granbury Lapham, after Dave and Roger had jumped in on the rear seat. "There doesn't seem to be any whoa in them."

"Shall I drive?" asked Dave.

"Do you know anything about horses? My knowledge is rather limited."

"Yes, I used to live on a farm when I was younger. I'll take the reins."

Dave started to step from the rear to the front seat of the sleigh. As he did this the turnout reached a point in the road where the downgrade was greater than ever. Away went the horses, taking the bits in their teeth. The shock threw Dave backward into Roger's lap.

"Hi! hi!" yelled Granbury Lapham, in quick alarm. "They are running away! Stop them! Whoa! whoa!" And he tugged helplessly at the lines.

The steeds paid no attention to the command to stop and the pulling on the reins did not appear to bother them in the least. On and on the downgrade of the mountain road they bounded, causing the sleigh to bounce from one side to the other. They were certainly running away, and to the occupants of the sleigh it looked as if each moment might bring a smash that would terminate fatally.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BURGOMASTER OF MASOLGA

Granbury Lapham had had practically no experience with horses and in the present trying emergency he was as helpless as an infant. He sawed this way and that on the reins, and yelled at the top of his lungs. This merely served to frighten the steeds still more, and away they sprang at a greater speed than ever.

"We'll be killed!" gasped Roger. He stood up, pale with fright.

"Don't jump out!" cried Dave. "Maybe I can stop them."

As quickly as he could, he gained the front seat of the turnout and took the reins from the Englishman's hands. He saw at once that the horses had the bits in their teeth and that pulling on the lines would do little if any good.

By this time they had gained a level stretch of road, but ahead was a decline greater than that just passed. If they reached that spot an accident would be inevitable.

On one side of the road was the upward slope of the hill, on the other the treacherous downward slope that had already caused them so much trouble. Dave hesitated for a moment, then pulled on one side of the reins with might and main, allowing the other side to drop entirely.

At first the horses did not heed, but presently one began to lose temper and courage and turned in toward the upward slope. Then the other had to come around, and in a twinkling the team was literally climbing the mountain side, dragging sleigh and occupants behind them!

"Look out! We'll all go over!" cried the senator's son.

"Hold tight; they're bound to stop soon, they can't keep this up!" yelled back Dave, and even as he spoke the horses, blowing heavily, slackened up, came to a walk, and then stopped short.

"Really, don't you know——" began Granbury Lapham, and knew not what to say.

"Now you can get out, if you wish," said Dave, and gathered up both reins once more. "I guess they have had their fill of running away."

"You turned them up the hill nicely."

"It was a hard pull," said Roger. "Dave, are you going to get out?" he added, as he hopped to the ground.

"No, I am going to turn them around and drive them down to the road."

"They'll run away with you!" ejaculated the Englishman, in alarm.

"I won't give them a chance," was the quiet but firm reply.

"If you are going to ride, I'll do the same," said Roger, and clambered back to his seat again. Granbury Lapham said he would walk for a while.

"I want to see how they act," he remarked, frankly. "I am not going to risk my neck again until I know what I am doing."

With a firm hand Dave started the horses and turned them partly around. They were inclined to be fretful, but he gave them no chance to gain the mastery. He spoke to them in a voice they could not help but notice, and was ready to turn them up the mountain side again at the first indication of another "break."

"Dave, you certainly know how to manage horses," spoke up Roger, when the road was reached. "It must be born in you."

"I suppose it is, Roger. My Uncle Dunston tells me that my father is a very good horseman and that he and my mother used often to go out horseback riding together."

Seeing how well Dave managed, Granbury Lapham entered the sleigh once more, and away they went along the road and down the decline previously mentioned. To retard the movement of the turnout and thus ease the team, Dave kept partly in the deep snow, and consequently there was no excuse for the horses running away.

Nearly a mile was covered when they saw Hendrik returning with the other team. The Norwegian sleigh driver hailed their approach with joy, which was considerably increased when he learned that the sleigh and the other horses had suffered no damage and that the greater part of the outfit had been saved.

"I was afraid somebody had fallen down the mountain side and been killed," said he to Granbury Lapham. "It is a most dangerous portion of this road. Last winter two men and a woman lost their lives close to this very spot."

"We had all the trouble we wanted," said Dave, when the driver's remarks had been translated by the Englishman.

Hendrik looked over the sleigh and the harness with care, and quarter of an hour later they were moving toward Bojowak as rapidly as the state of the road permitted. They had to pass through two hollows, and here the men and boys walked, for it was all the double team could do to get through.

"I see smoke!" cried Dave, presently. "It seems to come from a chimney."

"Bojowak," said the sleigh driver, nodding his head.

"Hurrah! We'll soon be there!" cried Roger. He looked at his chum. "You won't be sorry, Dave?"

"No, indeed," was the ready answer.

They had to pass around a spur of the mountain, which took another half-hour, and then came in full view of Bojowak, a village, the houses, or rather cabins, of which seemed to fairly cling to the side of the mountain. There was but one street, and most of the residences were located on the upper side of this, with barns and sheds below or attached to the dwellings.

Their arrival was noted with considerable curiosity, and the sleigh driver was plied with innumerable questions as to what had brought him thus far in such weather. He quickly explained, and then asked concerning the exploring expedition, and Granbury Lapham asked a number of similar questions.

"The expedition left Bojowak two days ago," said the Englishman, after he had learned the news. "It moved on to a sheep-station called Plivohav, six miles from here. From Plivohav the party was going to try to reach the top of the mountain called Thundercap."

"Is there any kind of a good road to Plivohav?" asked Dave, eagerly.

"No, it is a very poor road."

"Then we can't use the sleigh?"

"No, we'll have to go there either on foot or on horseback. The explorers used horses."

"Oh, let us go on horseback!" urged Roger. "I don't want to walk."

"I certainly prefer riding," added Dave.

"I'm not much in a saddle, but I fancy I can stand it," said Granbury Lapham. "We can take Hendrik with us, and as we have four steeds that will give each of us a mount."

Dave was desirous of going ahead at once, but it was too late, and the horses were so worn out, it was decided to remain at Bojowak over night. There was something of a road-house, used principally during the summer, and at this they asked for accommodations for the whole party and also for the horses.

"I think I can accommodate you," said the landlord, a burly and rather rough-looking Norwegian. "Wait till I call my wife and see what rooms are vacant. We have quite a number of guests. The burgomaster of Masolga is here with his brother and his wife. They, too, came in all this storm."

The landlord went out, leaving the two American boys and the Englishman in the public room of the road-house. Scarcely had he departed when a side door opened and a man came in, evidently not in the best of humor.

"You dog of a landlord!" he cried, in Norwegian. "Where are you? My room is as cold as a barn. I want some extra wood put on the fire at once. This is a scurvy way to treat the burgomaster of Masolga."

"Hello!" cried Dave, in a low voice, and plucked his chum by the sleeve. "Here is the brute of the railway coach."

"Sure enough," murmured the senator's son. "I never thought we'd meet him up here. Wonder if he'll say anything if he sees us?"

"Humph! so he's the burgomaster of Masolga, eh?" muttered Granbury Lapham. "I pity the townfolks under him."

"I say, do you hear, landlord?" stormed the burgomaster, striding around. "Are you deaf, that I must wear my lungs out calling you? If I had—— Ha!"

He stopped short, for his striding around had brought him face to face with our friends. He was astonished, then glared at the three as if they were deadly enemies.

"You!" he cried. "You! What brought you to this place? Are you following me?"

"We are not following you," answered the Englishman.

"I thought I was done with you! That I would never behold any of you again!" went on the burgomaster. "You are English cattle."

"And you are a Norwegian pig," answered Granbury Lapham. His English blood could not stand the insult.

"Ha! this to me? Me! the burgomaster of Masolga!" The speaker stamped violently on the floor with his heavy boot. "You shall pay for that insult! A pig! I will show you!"

"You started the quarrel, I did not," said the Englishman. He was a trifle alarmed over the turn affairs had taken.

"Are you stopping here?" demanded the burgomaster, after an ugly pause.

"We expect to stop here."

"It shall not be—I will not have you in the house with me! Such English cattle! Hi, you, Mina!"—this to a servant who had come in. "Call your master at once, I must see him."

The servant departed, her wooden shoes clattering loudly on the bare floor. The burgomaster of Masolga paced up and down, slapping his hands together.

"I will show you your place!" he muttered, with a malicious look on his face. "Wait! Yes, wait!"

In a moment more the landlord came in, almost out of breath.

"A thousand pardons!" he said, bowing low. "It was stupid of Jan to let the fire burn low. I have ordered more wood, and——"

"Let that pass, for the present," answered the burgomaster. "It is about these fellows I want to question you. Have they engaged rooms here?"

"They want rooms, sir, and we have two that——"

"You must not take them in!" roared the burgomaster of Masolga. "I forbid it."

"Forbid?" gasped the astonished landlord.

"Yes, forbid. They are nothing but English cattle. I met them on the train. They insulted me grossly. They must go elsewhere for accommodations."

"Have you two vacant rooms?" demanded Granbury Lapham, coming to the front.

"Yes, but—but——"

"We'll take them," answered the Englishman, quickly. He felt certain no other accommodations could be had in the village.

"Thank you, sir, but——"

"He cannot have the rooms—I will take them myself!" howled the burgomaster.

"I have already taken them," answered the Englishman, quietly. "I will pay in advance for them, if necessary," and he pulled out his purse.

"It shall not be!" stormed the burgomaster of Masolga. "I forbid it! I will pay for the rooms, if needs be. Those English cattle shall not sleep under the same roof with me and my family."

CHAPTER XXV

TO THE NORTHWARD ONCE MORE

"What's the trouble about?" asked Dave, coming forward.

"That brute doesn't want us to stay here," explained Granbury Lapham. "He forbids the landlord renting us rooms."

"Are there any rooms vacant?" questioned Roger.

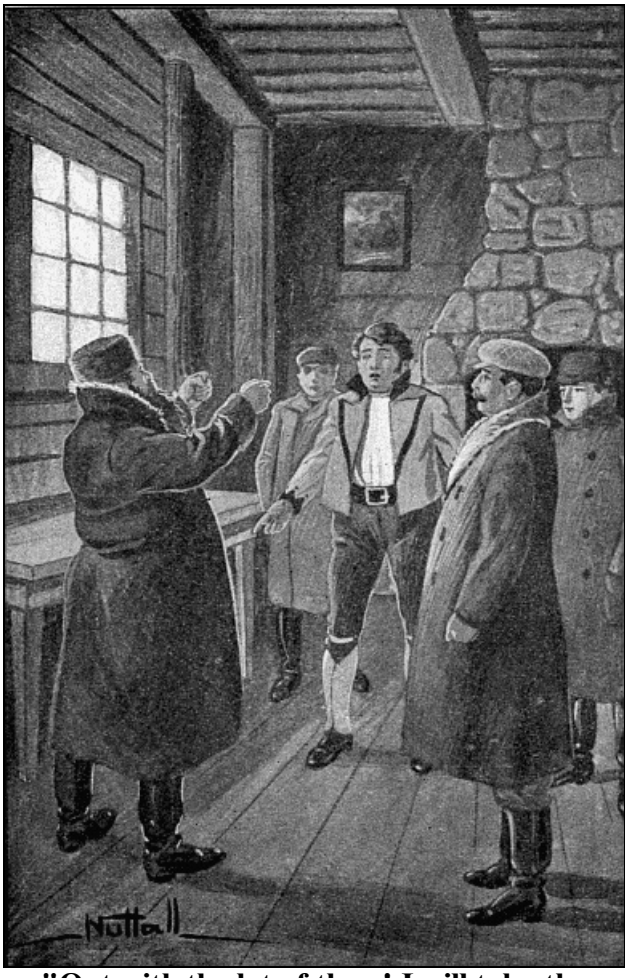
"Two."

"We'll take them!" cried Dave. "He can't stop us."

"I've already said I'd take them. But the burgomaster won't listen to it."

"The landlord has got to let us have the rooms," said Dave. "If his place is a public road-house we are entitled to accommodations, and at the legal rate——"

"By Jove, you're right! How stupid of me to forget!" cried the Englishman. He turned to the landlord. "I demand those rooms," he said, in Norwegian. "That man shall not keep us out of your place. It is a public house. I demand my rights."



"Out with the lot of them! I will take the rooms."
Page 229.

"Yes! yes!" replied the landlord. "But, sir——"

"Ha! Do not listen to him, Voshof," said the burgomaster. "Who is more important here, he or I? Out with the lot of them!

I will take the rooms, and if every apartment is occupied, why you cannot accommodate them, can you?"

"Here is my money," said Granbury Lapham. He placed several silver thalers on the table. "I believe you know the law. If you do not, my friends and I do."

The landlord was in a quandary. Ordinarily he would have sided with the burgomaster of Masolga, but there were several considerations which made him pause. In the first place, he did not like the burgomaster, for he was very dictatorial and few things at the inn suited him and his party; in the second place, the foreigners usually paid liberally for what they got, generous "tips" were not withheld; and lastly, and this was equally important, the landlord had once refused a man a room when he was by law entitled to accommodations and he had been fined for the offense. He did not want to be dragged into court again, for his license might possibly be taken from him.

"He pays for the rooms, I am helpless," said the landlord, taking up the thalers. "I will see to it that you are not molested by any one," he added, gravely.

At this the burgomaster stormed and raved, calling Granbury Lapham a number of hard names. The Englishman would not stand such insults, and rushing up he caught the Norwegian official by the arm.

"Stop!" he cried. "Any more such words, and I will knock you down. My friends and I did not come here to be insulted. We are gentlemen, and we expect to be treated as such. Landlord, I look to you for protection while under your roof."

"There must be no quarreling here," said the landlord. "The law does not allow it." He paused for an instant. "I will show you gentlemen to your rooms." He turned to the burgomaster of Masolga. "Your fire shall be attended to immediately."

"I shall remember this!" cried the burgomaster, quivering with rage. "I shall remember it! I shall never come here again!" And he stormed from the room.

"He is a very passionate man," said the landlord, when he was alone with our friends. "I do not care if he stays away. He is poor pay and he wants too much for his money."

"We shall pay you well if you treat us fairly," answered Granbury Lapham, and slipped an extra thaler into the inn-keeper's ready hand.

"Depend upon me to do my best, sir," was the quick answer, and then the travelers were shown to two connecting rooms, plainly but comfortably furnished. One had a broad fireplace, and in this a roaring fire was soon blazing. That there might be no further trouble they were served with supper in a private dining-room; so they saw practically nothing more of the hot-headed and unreasonable burgomaster of Masolga.

"We have to thank you for getting through in this instance," said Dave, warmly, to Granbury Lapham. "I realize now we should have been at a tremendous disadvantage had Roger and I undertaken this trip alone—neither of us being able to speak more than a few words of the language."

"I am glad I fell in with you," was the Englishman's reply. "'Twould have been mighty lonely without you, don't you know."

Despite the adventures through which they had passed, the young Americans slept soundly that night and did not awaken until eight in the morning. It was cold and cheerless, no sun showing in the sky, and there was a promise of more snow in the air.

A good breakfast was procured, and they settled with the landlord and "tipped" him in a fashion that made him bow almost to the ground.

"Come again, and welcome, sirs," he said. "And do not mind what the burgomaster said. More than likely he will soon lose his position, for many people are dissatisfied with him, and he is exceedingly slow in settling his debts."

They were soon on horseback, the sleigh having been put away under one of the sheds. Hendrik led the way, past the village and then to what was little better than a mountain trail, winding in and out through several patches of firs and then across some rough rocks. At the latter spot there was a good deal of ice, and once Roger's horse went down, carrying his rider with him.

"Are you hurt, Roger?" asked Dave, leaping down to his chum's assistance.

"I don't think so," was the reply of the senator's son. But when he arose he drew in a sharp breath. "He caught my left ankle and I reckon he twisted it a little."

The horse was gotten up and Dave assisted Roger to mount. It was painful to stand on the injured ankle, but Roger said it was all right when he was in the saddle.

"Be careful after this," said Dave, and they were cautious at every spot where the ice showed itself.

The scenery around them was magnificent, but it was such a gray day this was practically lost upon them. They were going steadily upward and to the north of Norway, and they could feel the air growing colder. Only the firs stood out against the sky; all else was snow and ice.

"This is winter weather, and no mistake," remarked Roger. "I don't know that I want to go much further north."

"How desolate it is!" said Dave. "Not a sign of a house or hut anywhere! It's as bad as being in the far West of our country in mid-winter."

"Hark! I hear bells!" cried Granbury Lapham. "Can another sleigh be coming?"

They looked in the direction from whence the sound came, and presently made out something moving below them, on a road in the valley.

"I really believe it is a sled with a reindeer attached!" cried Dave. And such proved to be the case. But before they could get a good look at the novel turnout, sled and reindeer flashed out of sight.

"I shouldn't mind having a ride behind a reindeer myself," said Dave, as they resumed their journey.

"Nor I," added his chum.

At the end of three hours of hard traveling they came in sight of the sheep-station for which they were bound. It was composed of a log cabin and half a dozen large sheds, surrounded by a high fence. Nobody was in sight, and they had to call several times before the care-taker of the place put in an appearance.

"Have you a party of strangers here?" questioned Granbury Lapham.

"Yes," was the answer, "but they are not here just now."

"A scientific exploring party?"

"Yes."

"Where have they gone?"

"They started this morning for the top of old Thundercap," said the sheep raiser. "They will be back by to-morrow night."

"Found at last," said the Englishman, joyfully, and translated what had been said to Dave and Roger.

"Back to-morrow night," murmured Dave. His heart began to beat rapidly. "I wish they'd come to-night. I can hardly wait."

The sheep raiser was questioned further, and told them the party was made up of Mr. Porter, Mr. Lapham, and five others, including a Norwegian guide named Bjornhof. He said they had a number of scientific instruments with them, and talked of gold and silver and other precious metals.

"Maybe they are trying to locate a mine," suggested Roger.

"If they are, I fancy they will be disappointed," answered Granbury Lapham. "Norway has been pretty well explored for minerals and the best of the mines have been located."

"This region doesn't look as if it had been explored very much," returned Dave. "It's about as wild and primitive as could be."

The sheep-station afforded but meager accommodations, and they were glad that they had brought along some supplies. There was, to be sure, plenty of mutton, but who wanted to eat that all the time?

"I don't mind lamb," said the senator's son. "But mutton, especially when it is strong, is another matter."

"Which puts me in mind of a story, as Shadow Hamilton would say," said Dave, with a smile. "A young housewife was going to have a number of her husband's friends to dinner, and her husband told her to get a big leg of lamb for roasting. So she went to the butcher. 'Give me a leg of lamb,' she said. 'I want a very large one. I think you had better give it to me from a lamb four or five years old.'"

"And that puts me in mind of another," answered the senator's son. "A country boy went to town and there saw a circus parade including two camels. When he got back home he told his folks that the parade was all right, but he thought it was a shame to drive around such long-necked, hump-backed cows!"

The sheep raiser told them that all the members of the exploring party were in excellent health. He said one of the men resembled Dave very much, and smiled broadly when told the man was the lad's father. When Granbury Lapham added that the two had not met since Dave was a little fellow, the sheep raiser opened his eyes wide in astonishment.

"'Tis like a fairy tale," said he, and then told them several fairy tales he had heard when a boy. He was an uneducated man and his life was exceedingly simple, and the fairy tales were, consequently, very wonderful to him.

"Imagine such a man set down in the heart of New York or Chicago," observed Roger. "How his eyes would open and how he would stare!"

"If you told him of all the wonders of the big cities he wouldn't believe you," answered Dave. "I once started to tell one of those natives of the South Sea Islands about the Brooklyn Bridge and when I pointed out how long it was, and said it hung in mid-air, he shook his head and walked away, and I know he thought I was either telling a lie or was crazy."

The day passed slowly, especially to Dave, who could scarcely wait for the hour to arrive when his father should come back. What a meeting that would be! It made the tears stand in his eyes to think about it.

"Dear, dear father!" he murmured to himself. "I know we are going to love each other very, very much!"

CHAPTER XXVI

DAYS OF WAITING

With the coming of night a strong wind sprang up, and by ten o'clock it was blowing a gale. The wind caused the house to rock and groan, and for the travelers sound sleep was out of the question. The man in charge, however, had experienced such a condition of affairs before and did not appear to mind it.

"Some great winds here at times," he said to Granbury Lapham. "Once the top of the house was blown off and sailed away down into the valley."

"Excuse me, but I don't want to be here at such a time, don't you know," answered the Englishman.

The wind increased steadily, and at midnight it was blowing so furiously that Dave thought the shelter might go over. He went towards the door, to find a quantity of snow sifting in above the sill.

"Hello, it must be snowing again!" he remarked. "That's too bad, for it will make traveling worse than ever."

It was snowing, and the downfall continued all night and half of the next day. The wind piled it up against the house until it reached the roof, burying two of the windows completely from sight.

"This is a regular North Pole experience," remarked Roger, as he bustled around in the morning, trying to get warm. "I don't know that I want to go much further north."

"Don't want to become an arctic explorer, then?" queried Granbury Lapham.

"Not much! Say, stir up the fire, or I'll be frozen stiff."

Wood was piled on the fire, and soon a pot of steaming coffee made all feel better. When the man in charge went out to look at the sheep in the various folds Dave went with him. The air was filled with snow, and it was very dark.

"This is terrible," said Dave, on returning. He was thinking of his father and the others of the exploring party.

"Land of the Midnight Sun," returned the senator's son, laconically.

"The man says they'll not return to-day," said Granbury Lapham. "It would not be safe on the mountain trail."

"I thought as much," answered Dave. "Well, all we can do, I suppose, is to wait." And he heaved a deep sigh.

The day passed slowly, for the place afforded nothing in the way of amusement, and even if it had, Dave was too much worried about his father to be interested. All went out among the sheep and saw them fed. The folds were long, low, and narrow, and the occupants huddled together "just like a flock of sheep," as Roger remarked with a grin.

"What timid creatures they are," said he, a little later. "I suppose you can do almost anything with them."

"Not with the rams," answered Dave. And then he went on: "Do you remember Farmer Cadmore's ram and how we put him in Job Haskers' room?"

"I don't believe these animals are quite so ugly," said the senator's son, and went up to one of the rams in question. The animal backed away a few feet, then of a sudden it leaped forward, lowered its head, and sent Roger sprawling on his back.

"Wow!" grunted the youth. "Ho! chase him off!" And he lost no time in rolling over and getting out of harm's way. "Gracious, but that was a crack in the stomach, all right!" he groaned.

"He's what you can call a battering-ram," observed Dave.

"Yes, and a ram-bunctious one at that."

"Don't ram-ble in your talk, Roger."

"If he goes on another ram-page I won't ram-ble, I'll run."

"Say, this joke has too many ram-ifications for me, let us drop it," said Dave, and with a merry laugh both lads changed the subject.

The hours dragged by slowly. At noon they took their time eating a meal that all hands prepared. Fortunately they had with them a few canned goods, which gave them something of a change in their diet.

When night came again the wind arose once more. But now the house was so completely buried in the snow that it was scarcely touched. Dave was worn out and slept soundly, and the others did not awaken him until nearly nine o'clock.

"Any news?" was his first question on arising.

"Nothing," answered Granbury Lapham. "Porter, I am growing worried," he added, seriously.

"I think we have good cause to worry, Mr. Lapham. It is no joke to be out on a mountain top in such weather as this."

"The man here tells me there are several shelters up there, one built between the rocks where the wind cannot touch it. But for all that I am worried."

"Do you suppose they have enough food with them?"

"They should know enough to go well supplied."

All of that day and the next went by, and still nobody appeared at the sheep-station. Another snowstorm was brewing, and when it came the air was so filled with it that nobody could venture outside. The young Americans and the Englishman paced the floor of the shelter impatiently, but could do nothing. Their food was limited, and the tobacco for Granbury Lapham's pipe ran low, which caused the man additional trouble.

"I can get along with a poor meal, but I must have my smoke," he said.

A day later they were seated around the fire discussing the situation when Roger gave a cry.

"Well, I never!"

"What's up now?" asked Dave.

"Why, we've gotten into a new year and nobody ever noticed it!"

"By Jove, that's so!" answered Granbury Lapham. "Well, here's a Happy New Year to all of you."

"A poor beginning makes a good ending, they say," said Dave. "Let us hope that proves true in this instance." He was sorry he had not been in a position to send New Year greetings to those at home, and especially to Jessie.

Sunday passed drearily, and also Monday. On Tuesday it began to clear and the wind dropped entirely. Then the house was opened and they went forth, and the man in charge busied himself with his sheep. Two of the animals had died from the cold, and one had been trampled to death in the huddling together to keep warm.

"Thank fortune, the horses are all right," said Roger, after an inspection.

With the coming of comparatively good weather they watched eagerly for the return of the exploring party. The sheep-station keeper pointed out to them where the mountain trails ran and told them the party must come by way of one of them, for to descend in any other manner would be impossible.

"I really can't see how they are going to get down in such a snow," was Dave's comment. "Why, in some places it must be ten feet deep or more."

"The wind has swept some places clear," was Granbury Lapham's answer. "As far as possible they'll stick to those cleared spots."

"It must be fearfully slippery," said Roger. "And if any of them takes a tumble——" He did not finish.

The day was coming to a close when Dave, who was still on the watch, uttered a shout.

"I see somebody, up on yonder trail!" he cried. "One, two, three of them!"

"Only three?" queried Granbury Lapham.

"That is all, so far."

All ran out and looked to where Dave pointed. Three men were coming along the trail slowly. Sometimes they would be in snow up to their waists, and then again they could be seen crawling cautiously over the icy rocks which had been swept clear of snow.

"If we only had a field-glass!" murmured Dave. He wondered if one of the men could be his father.

The men were only in sight a few minutes, then some projecting rocks hid them from view. The man in charge of the sheep-station was questioned, and he told them it would take the men on the mountain a good two hours to get down to the house, as the trail wound around considerably to avoid several dangerous cliffs.

"Let us go out to meet them," said Dave. "I can't stand this hanging around doing nothing."

"All right, I'll go with you," answered his chum.

Granbury Lapham was also anxious; and in a few minutes the three started out, along a road the sheep-station keeper pointed out. It was now dark, but they kept to the road with ease, as it ran between several patches of stunted pines.

No words can describe the feeling that filled Dave's heart. Was he to meet his father at last? At times he trembled like a leaf just to think of it.

His eyes were on the alert, and after trudging along for half an hour he made out several forms approaching down the mountain trail. He set up a shout and so did his companions, and presently came an answering call.

In a few minutes the two parties were within speaking distance. Dave gave each of the three newcomers a searching look, and his heart sank. Not one of them was his father.

The three men were the Norwegian guide and two individuals named Hausermann and Davis. They were almost exhausted by their journey, and begged to be conducted to the sheep-station and given something to eat before telling their story.

"But my brother—what of him?" demanded Granbury Lapham.

"Who is your brother?" asked Samuel Hausermann.

"Philip Lapham, the head of this expedition."

"Oh, so you are Philip's brother. Well, he is safe—at least he was when we left him. He hurt his knee a little, slipping over some rocks, but it didn't amount to much."

"And what of my father, David Porter?" put in Dave, anxiously. "He was with you, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was with us," answered Samuel Hausermann. "But he——" The man stopped speaking and looked at his companions.

"But what? Oh, don't say something has happened to him!" cried Dave, and a sudden chill took possession of his heart.

"We're hoping he is safe," said Charles Davis. "You see, he went out yesterday, to look for some food. It was very slippery on the rocks and the wind knocked him down and rolled him over a cliff."

"And then——" Dave could hardly speak.

"We tried to get to him, but couldn't," said Samuel Hausermann. "Our rope wasn't long enough. Then he tried to climb up the cliff, but the snow seemed to blind him and he lost his grip, went down, and disappeared over another cliff about a hundred feet below. And that's the last we saw or heard of him."

CHAPTER XXVII

DAVE STRIKES OUT ALONE

It was dismaying news, and utterly downcast Dave followed the others to the sheep-station and listened to the details of what the newcomers had to tell. It was a long story, and while they related it a good hot meal was prepared for them.

"We reached the top of the mountain in safety and also the plateau of the smaller mountain beyond," said Samuel Hausermann. "That was the place for which we were bound. Shortly after that the snowstorm came on, and the high winds, and it was all we could do to gain one of the old shelters up there between the rocks. In journeying around we lost a good portion of our outfit, including some of the provisions, and all we had to live on for two days was some venison—Mr. Porter shot a small red deer—and some beans and crackers. We had intended to do some more exploring, but the weather put a stop to everything of that sort. Then one of the party, Mr. Jackson, took sick and we had to do what we could to get him well again. At last Mr. Porter went out to see if he couldn't bring down something in the way of game. He could get only some small birds and they lasted only one meal. Then he went out again, after an elk he had seen at a distance. That was when he took the tumble over the cliffs."

"Are you sure he wasn't killed?" asked Dave.

"I am sure of nothing, my lad. But I think the chances are he fell in the deep snow, or on some of the fir trees, and that that saved his life."

"What time was this yesterday?"

"About noon. After that we decided to come down here, and at the same time look for your father. Philip Lapham said he would remain, to look after Jackson, who was as yet too weak to walk. We left all our provisions up there and came down here as fast as we could—and here we are."

This was all Samuel Hausermann could tell, and Charles Davis corroborated his statement. Dave shook his head sadly.

"Even if my father wasn't killed by the tumble he took, maybe he was starved or frozen to death," he said to Roger.

"Hope for the best, Dave," was all the senator's son could answer.

The Norwegian guide, Bjornhof, had agreed to go back to the mountain top with a load of provisions. He had expected to go alone, but Dave said he would go also, to see if he could not find what had become of his parent. Then Granbury Lapham said he would go also.

"Maybe I'd better go too," said Roger.

"No, Roger," answered Dave. "It wouldn't be fair to ask you to do that. There is too much of peril, and you must remember what you promised your mother and father. You stay here with Mr. Davis and Mr. Hausermann." And so it was finally settled.

All of the party were provided with knapsacks, which they filled with the best provisions available. The guide also carried an extra bag of stuff, strapped across the back of his neck. He was a brawny fellow, over six feet in height, and did not seem to mind the load in the least. He had a gun, and Dave and Granbury Lapham each carried a pistol and a box of cartridges.

"Good luck to you, Dave," said the senator's son on parting, and he shook hands warmly. "Remember, I shall be very anxious until I hear from you again." He followed his chum a short distance up the mountain trail, and the two were loath to separate.

The route was rocky and uncertain, and during the next two hours Dave realized what climbing the Alps must be. At certain spots they had to help one another along, using a rope for that purpose. Once they crossed a split in the rocks several feet wide and of great depth, and it made Dave shudder to peer down into the dark and forbidding depths below.

Yet he thought very little of the perils of that arduous journey. His mind was constantly on his parent. Would he find his father alive, or had the fall over the cliffs killed his parent?

"God grant he is alive!" he said to himself, over and over again.

They had started directly after breakfast, and by noon reached a small level spot where they took a well-deserved rest. From this place the guide pointed out the cliffs from which Mr. Porter had fallen.

"But you cannot reach them from here," he explained, in his native dialect, to Granbury Lapham. "To get to them we must walk at least a mile further. And even then I know of no way to reach the spot to which the poor man fell."

"I'll reach that somehow," said Dave, when the guide's words had been translated to him.

"Well, lad, you must be careful," cautioned Granbury Lapham. "No use in your losing your life, you know."

But Dave merely shook his head. He was bound to find his father, dead or alive, no matter what the cost. For the time being he could think of absolutely nothing else. That, and that alone, possessed him, heart and soul.

The air was clear, with little or no wind, which was one comfort. As they went on they had to pass around great ridges of snow and over hummocks of ice, where the water had frozen while tumbling down the mountain side. There were but few trees in that vicinity, although a small forest grew at the foot of the cliffs.

At last they reached a spot where the guide said a small and decidedly uncertain trail led to the bottom of the upper cliff —the first one over which Mr. Porter had fallen.

"Then that is where I am going," said Dave. "Perhaps I can find out something about my father there."

"You had better come with us," answered Granbury Lapham. "As soon as I have met my brother we can all come back to this place."

"No, you can come back anyway—I'll stay here now and look around," replied the youth, firmly.

Bjornhof pointed out the exact spot from which Mr. Porter had fallen, and without waiting Dave trudged off, and the others continued their climb up the mountain. Soon a point of rocks separated them, and Dave found himself utterly alone.

Had he had less to think about the boy might have felt very lonely. But now his heart was filled with thoughts of his parent, and he never gave the situation in which he was placed any consideration. On and on he hurried. Twice he fell on the slippery rocks, but picked himself up just as quickly. In his mind's eye he could see his father helpless at the bottom of the cliffs, with a broken leg or a fractured rib, or suffering for the want of food and warmth. Such thoughts were terrifying, and caused him to shudder from head to foot.

"This must be the place!"

He spoke the words as he came to a spot where footprints in the snow were plainly visible. He looked around eagerly and made out where his father had slipped from that cliff to the hollow below. Here was a long icy slide, and Dave did not dare to venture too close to the brink, for fear of going over.

"That hollow must be at least a hundred feet deep," reasoned the youth. "How am I ever to get down there?"

He called out, but no answer came back. Then he walked slowly to the far end of the cliff, behind and over some jagged rocks which at first seemed to completely bar the way.

He heaved a long sigh, then looked at the very end of the cliff. Here the rocks were notched and uneven, and he found a spot where he could drop a distance of fifteen feet in safety. But after that?

"If I get down there perhaps I won't be able to get back—if I want to," he reasoned. "But I'm going down, anyway—and find out what became of father," he added, recklessly. The drop taken, he found himself on a ledge several yards wide and twice as long. To his delight back of the ledge was a hollow leading downward.

"Perhaps that goes to the bottom of the cliff," he mused. "I'll try it, anyway."

The passageway was dangerous, being covered with ice, and he had to move literally an inch at a time. Once he slipped, but caught fast to a ridge of ice just in time to save himself. It made his heart leap into his throat, yet he kept on. He was

so eager to gain the object of his quest that no peril, no matter how great, could have daunted him. Surely "blood is thicker than water" every time.

Having gained the bottom of the hollow inside of the cliff, he turned to where a streak of light showed. Here was a narrow slit leading to the greater hollow outside of the cliff. It was so small that the youth squeezed through with difficulty and had even more trouble getting his knapsack on the other side.

He now stood where there was a gentle slope leading to the firs growing at the foot of the cliff. Here there was a great drift of snow, in some spots fifteen and twenty feet high.

"I wonder if father came down in that?" he mused. "If he did he wouldn't be apt to break any bones. But he might get smothered before he could find his way out, especially if the fall took his breath away."

He gazed around in the drift and saw a spot where it looked as if the snow had been disturbed. Then he saw what looked to be footprints further on, leading among the firs.

"Hello! hello!" he called, with all the strength of his lungs. "Mr. Porter! Where are you?"

His voice echoed along the rocks and beyond, and he waited with bated breath for a reply, but, as before, none came.

What should he do next—go on or search the immense snowdrift for his father's body?

He deliberated for several minutes, then moved onward.

"I must see if he is alive," he reasoned. "I can always come back for his body later—if I have to."

The edge of the fir forest gained, Dave paused once more. Here was a track in the snow, but whether made by a human being or a wild animal he could not tell. Then he uttered a sharp cry and rushed forward to pick something up.

It was a box that had contained rifle cartridges. It was empty and practically new. Had his father possessed that and discarded it?

Suddenly he thought of something new, and pulling out his pistol fired it off as a signal. The last echo had hardly died out when an answering shot came back. His face lit up with joy, then grew sober again.

Perhaps the shot had come from above, from Granbury Lapham or the others up there. But no, it had seemed to be further down—beyond the line of firs which confronted him. At the risk of wasting too much ammunition he fired again. But this time no signal came back.

"If it was father he'll want to save his shots—especially if his cartridge box is empty," thought Dave. Then he resolved to push on through the timber, calling his parent in the meanwhile.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A JOYOUS MEETING

Dave had proceeded a distance of fifty yards into the patch of firs when he came to a halt. A peculiar sound to his left had caught his ears. He had never heard such a sound before and he wondered what it was.

"Must have been some bird—or a wild animal," he murmured, after he had listened for some time. "There ought to be many kinds of small wild animals in a place like this."

He proceeded on his way again, but a dozen steps further came to another halt. Something lay in the snow at his feet. It was a fur glove. He picked it up, looked it over, and then, in his agitation, dropped it.

The glove was stained with blood!

"Can that be father's glove?" he thought. "And if it is, how does it happen that it is covered with blood?"

A shiver ran down his backbone that was not caused by the cold, and for the minute he could hardly move. He tried to call once more, but his throat was so dry he could scarcely make a sound. Again from a distance came that peculiar noise, low and muttering. He now recognized it as a growl, but whether of a dog or a wild beast he could not determine. He brought out the pistol he had placed in his pocket and held it ready for use.

"Footprints!" The word came from his lips involuntarily. He had reached a spot where the snow was only a few inches deep, and here the footprints of a man were plainly to be seen. They led through the belt of firs and then towards the jagged rocks at the base of a high cliff.

Again that suspicious growl reached him, and now Dave saw a dark object just as it disappeared around a corner of rock close to some brushwood.

"Was that a beast or a man crawling in the snow?" he asked himself. "That sound came from an animal, but the thing didn't look like a beast."

He went on, more cautiously than ever. Then he heard a sudden cry that made every nerve in his body tingle:

"Get back there! Get back, you brute!"

It was a man's voice, weak and exhausted, trying to keep off some wild beast. Then came a low growl, followed by the discharge of a pistol, and a few seconds later there came running toward Dave a full-grown bear, growling savagely and wagging its shaggy head from side to side. The youth was surprised but not taken off his guard, and as the animal came closer he leveled his weapon, took aim, and pulled the trigger. The bear had raised up on its hind legs and the bullet took it straight in the breast, inflicting a bad but not a mortal wound. Then Dave started to fire a second time, but in a twinkling the bear leaped over a low rock and disappeared in the brushwood. Listening, Dave heard it lumbering away, growling with rage and pain as it went.

"Hello!" came a faint voice. "Is that you, Lapham?"

"No, it is somebody else," answered Dave. He could scarcely speak, he was so agitated. "Where are you?"

"Here, near the cliff. I am wounded, and I—I——" The voice died out completely.

"I'm coming!" shouted Dave. "Just let me know where you are."

For a minute there was no answer, and Dave continued to call. Then came what was half call and half moan. With ears on the alert, the boy followed up the sounds and quickly came in sight of a man, wrapped up in a fur overcoat and crouched in a heap between two rocks at the base of the cliff. He held a pistol in his hand, but the weapon was empty.

For the instant man and boy faced each other—the former too weak to speak and the latter too agitated to do so. Dave's heart was beating like a trip-hammer and for the time being his surroundings were completely forgotten.

"Are you—are you——" he began. "Are you David Porter?" he blurted out.

"Yes," was the gasped-out reply. "Yo—you——"

"And you don't know me! Oh, father!"

"Eh? What's that?" asked the man, rising up slightly.

"You don't know me? But of course you don't—if you didn't get the letters and telegrams. I am your son, Dave Porter."

"My son? Wha—what do you mean? I—er—have no son. I had one, years and years ago, but——" Mr. Porter was too weak to go on. He sat staring at Dave in bewilderment.

"You lost him, I know. He was stolen from you. Well, I am that son. I have been looking for you for months. I found Uncle Dunston first, and then we sent letters and cablegrams to you, but no answer came back. Then I started out to hunt you up—and here I am." Dave was on his knees and holding his father's blood-stained hand in his own. "I see you are hurt; I'll——"

"My son? My son?" queried Mr. Porter, like one in a dream. "Can this be true?" He gazed unsteadily at Dave. Then he closed his eyes and went off into a dead faint. The youth was startled, for he saw that his parent might be dying. His hand was hurt and he had scratches on his ear, and one knee of his trousers was blood-stained.

"I must help him—he must not die!" thought Dave, and set to work with feverish haste, doing all that was possible under the circumstances. From his shirt he tore off the sleeves and used them as bandages. Then he rubbed his father's face with snow. Presently the man opened his eyes and stared again at Dave.

"Did yo—you say you were my—my son?" he asked, in a weak, incredulous voice.

"If you are David Breslow Porter, a twin brother to Dunston Porter."

"I am."

"Then I am your son—the one who was stolen from you by the nurse, Polly Margot, and her worthless husband, Sandy."

"It is—is marvellous! I can hardly believe it!" murmured Mr. Porter.

"But it is true—and I can easily prove it, father," answered the youth, in a happy tone. He bent over and kissed his parent. "Oh, I am so glad I have found you!"

"Yes! yes! I am glad too!" Mr. Porter's eyes began to beam. "But I—I—really can't understand it yet! I—my son, my little Dave! Why, it sounds like a fairy tale! I must be dreaming." He caught Dave by the shoulder. "Is it really, really so?"

"It is, father, and I'll explain it all after awhile. But now you are hurt, and you must take it easy. Did you tumble over the cliff, or did that bear——"

"Both, Dave. How queer it sounds to call you Dave, *my* Dave!" Mr. Porter caught the boy around the neck. "I can't believe it yet—I really can't. Where have you been all these years? And how did you learn——"

"I'll tell you afterwards, father—when we are safe. Then you fell over the cliff?"

"Yes, and while I was trying to crawl away to some spot to rest the bear got after me and scratched me in the ear. I let him have a bullet in his neck and that made him retreat. But then he came at me again, and I don't know what I should have done if it hadn't been for your arrival. The pistol is empty, as you can see."

"You heard my shot and you signaled back, didn't you?"

"Yes, I signaled back and shot at the bear at the same time. But that shot didn't hit him, although it made him keep his distance for awhile."

"I see your pistol is the same size as mine, so I'll load them both—in case the bear comes back." Dave set to work immediately and soon had the work completed. "Now you must have something to eat and to drink, and then you'll feel better."

He unslung his knapsack and brought forth his provisions, and sitting in the shelter of the cliff prepared a meal. Over

some lighted brushwood he made a canteen of coffee, of which his father partook with satisfaction, and then ate a sandwich and some crackers and cheese. As he supplied his parent Dave told a good portion of his story, although he went into few details.

"It is queer that I never received any of those letters and cablegrams," said Mr. Porter. "Yet you must remember I thought your uncle was still among the South Sea Islands. He wrote to me that he was going on a trip that might last two years or more and might not be able to write to me for some time. Laura, your sister—how surprised she will be!—and myself traveled down to Rome and through Spain and then came up to Berlin. There I fell in with Hausermann and, later on, with Philip Lapham. They told me of this expedition into Norway, and got me interested financially. Your sister wanted to go to the United States, with some close friends, and I let her go and came up here. We traveled to Norway somewhat in secret, for we did not wish to let the object of our expedition become known. On that account we had some trouble with the police, who took us for political intriguers. After that we left no addresses behind us—which accounts for the non-delivery of the cablegram you sent to me from England."

"But what brought you up into this portion of Norway, father, and at this time of the year?"

"We came to locate a valuable mine, or rather a series of mines, in this section. Hausermann had some information about them, but had no money, and he came to me and then to Philip Lapham, and we 'staked' the expedition, as miners call it. We came up this winter because we heard that three other parties were coming up next spring and next summer, and we wanted to get in ahead."

"And have you done that?" asked Dave, with interest.

"Not as yet. We have found some traces of copper at one point and nickel at another, but not the rich deposits the information we possessed led us to believe could be located."

"Never mind, now we are together, perhaps you'll have better luck, father. I'll help you." Dave smiled broadly. "Tell me about yourself, and about my sister Laura, won't you?"

Both sat in front of the tiny camp-fire, Mr. Porter's bandaged head resting on Dave's shoulder, and a hand clasping that of the boy. They were supremely happy, and for the time being the world around them was forgotten. Mr. Porter told much about himself and of his travels, and Dave related how he had been raised at the poorhouse and taken care of by Caspar Potts and Oliver Wadsworth, and how he had fallen in with Billy Dill, the sailor, and gone to the South Sea Islands and found his Uncle Dunston.

"I know your sister Laura will be overjoyed to learn the news," said Mr. Porter. "She has often said how nice it would be if she had a sister or a brother. Since your mother's death we have been very lonely. Ah, if your mother could only have seen this day!" And the tears stood in Mr. Porter's eyes. Then he drew Dave to his breast, and a warm embrace by both followed.

They had completely forgotten their surroundings when a deep growl close at hand aroused them and caused the boy to leap to his feet. He gazed into the brushwood fronting the jagged rocks and the base of the cliff and uttered a cry of alarm.

"What is it, Dave?" questioned his father.

"Two bears—the one we wounded and another and bigger one."

CHAPTER XXIX

BEARS AND WOLVES

At the announcement from Dave, Mr. Porter tried to rise to his feet. He could not stand on both legs, and so had to rest against one of the rocks. From this point he, too, could see the two bears; but a moment later both animals were hidden completely by the brushwood and the snow.

"I am afraid they mean business," said Dave, anxiously.

"They are hungry and the deep snow has made it hard for them to get food," answered Mr. Porter.

"I thought bears went into winter quarters in a place like this."

"So they do sometimes, but not always. Besides, I disturbed the wounded bear when I fell over the cliff, and I presume that other beast is his mate."

"I wish I had a rifle. I could get a better shot than with this pistol."

"A good double-barreled shotgun would be a fine thing, Dave. But we'll have to use what we've got. Don't shoot until you are certain of your aim," added Mr. Porter.

A portion of his strength had come back to him, and the new alarm gave him temporary vigor. Yet he knew that to fight off two angry bears would not be easy, and he looked around for some better shelter than that which they at present possessed.

"Here is a small opening between the rocks,—let us back into it, if the bears press us too closely," said he.

He had scarcely spoken when the wounded bear advanced, followed closely by its mate. Dave waited until the foremost beast was within a dozen paces of him, then he fired. There was a growl of pain and the bear tumbled back, landing against its mate.

"Good!" cried Mr. Porter. "Look out!" he added, a second later. "The other one is coming!"

He was right. The bigger bear of the two came forward with a bound, landing almost at Dave's feet. Crack! crack! went Mr. Porter's pistol, and the huge animal was hit twice, in the breast and in the neck. The bear uttered a sound that was half growl and half yelp and then came on again. Crack! went Dave's pistol, and the bullet hit the beast directly in the teeth, knocking one of them down the animal's throat. Wounded and alarmed, the bear stood still, and again the boy fired, and then the bear turned and lumbered away into the brushwood, wounded just sufficiently to make it thoroughly disagreeable. The other bear followed; and the battle, for the time being, came to an end.

"Come, Dave, it is dangerous to stay out here," said Mr. Porter. "Let us go back into the hollow, and bring that fire with you if you can."

Mr. Porter crawled back and the youth followed, dragging the burning brushwood behind him. Then Dave took both pistols and reloaded the empty chambers with all possible speed.

"I see you have learned the first rule of hunting," said his father, with a smile.

"What is that?"

"Never to carry around an empty or partly empty weapon. I kept my pistol loaded up as long as I had any cartridges left."

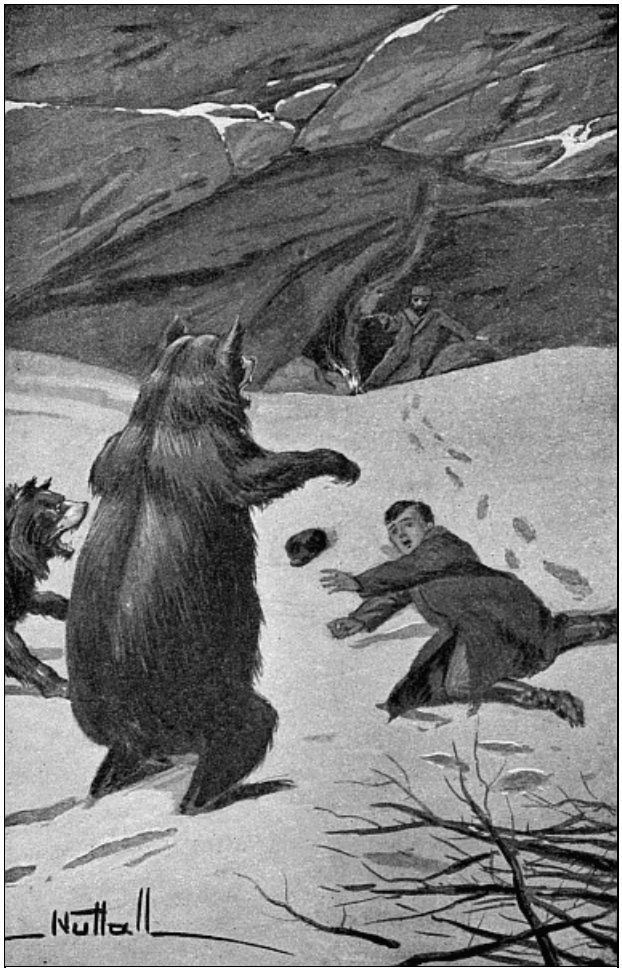
"I wish I had some more brushwood to put on the fire—that would keep the beasts off. Wonder if I can't break some of the stuff off?"

"Don't go out yet, Dave—it's dangerous," pleaded Mr. Porter.

"I'll keep my eyes on the bears, never fear," was the reply.

With caution the youth crawled over to the nearest patch of brushwood, a distance of fifty feet. As he broke off some of the dry twigs a low growl reached his ears. But he kept at the task until he had as much as he thought he could carry.

But Dave never got the brushwood where he wanted it, for as he commenced to drag it along both bears leaped from their hiding-place and one landed almost on top of him. Crack! crack! went his pistol, and the weapon Mr. Porter possessed sounded out three times. Each bear was wounded again, but Dave received a blow from a rough paw that sent him headlong. He rolled over and over in the snow, and then leaped for the shelter, and his father dragged him to temporary safety. While this was going on the bears started to retreat. This time they left the brushwood entirely and stationed themselves behind the nearest belt of firs, about fifty yards away.



Dave received a blow from a rough paw that sent him headlong.—*Page 267.*

"I told you to be careful," said Mr. Porter, as Dave got up and faced about. "Are you seriously hurt?"

"N—no, bu—but that bear knocked me do—down as if he was a pri—prize-fighter!" gasped Dave. "Phew! but they are powerful!"

"If he hadn't been wounded he might have killed you. You must take no more chances. Promise me you won't, Dave. I don't want to lose you right after finding you!" And Mr. Porter turned an appealing look into the lad's eyes.

"I'll be on guard, father. And don't you take any chances either," added Dave, gazing at his father in a manner which spoke volumes.

They found the hollow under the cliff to be less than two yards deep and of about the same width. The rocks overhead hung down so that they touched Dave's head. In front was a small snowdrift, looking over which father and son could just make out the two bears, as they squatted on the ground between the firs. The beasts did considerable growling and did what they could to take care of their wounds, yet they showed no disposition to leave that vicinity.

"They must be very hungry," was Mr. Porter's comment. "Otherwise they wouldn't remain here after being punished so badly;" and he was right: the animals were well-nigh starved, hence their recklessness.

Half an hour went by, and Dave and his parent remained under the cliff. Without a fire it was extremely cold, and they had to stamp around to keep warm. At times Mr. Porter felt rather faint from his wounds, but he kept this from Dave as much as possible. Yet presently the boy noticed it.

"I must get you out of this soon," he said. "You need regular medical attention."

"I shan't mind it, Dave, if only I can keep warm."

"Maybe I can get that brushwood now, father."

"No, do not attempt it."

There was a spell of silence after that, and then Dave raised his pistol.

"Do you know what I am going to do?" he said. "I am going to discharge four shots at the bears. Even at this distance I ought to be able to do some damage."

"Well, you can try it, Dave. But I don't think you'll accomplish a great deal. Their hide is too tough."

Dave brushed the snow from the rocks in front of him, knelt down, and rested his arm with care. Then he took careful aim at the bear that had first appeared. Crack! went the pistol four times in rapid succession. The bear gave a leap, clawed at its face several times, and then, with a grunt of agony, turned and fled among the firs and out of sight.

"Hurrah! that did some damage!" cried the youth, as he started to reload. "Now I'll see if I can hit the other bear—— Hello, he's gone, too!"

The boy was right, the larger beast was also lumbering off, evidently frightened by the way its mate had been treated. Soon it, too, had disappeared from view. Mr. Porter and Dave watched for a long time, but neither animal came back.

"They may possibly return, but I doubt it," said Dave. "Anyway, I don't think they'll come back right away, and that will give us a chance to escape."

"Not if we must go back through that patch of timber, my son."

"Let us try to get away by walking along the base of the cliff. We are bound to strike some sort of a mountain trail sooner or later. But, pshaw, I forgot that you can't walk. Well, maybe I can carry you."

"No, it will be too much of a load, Dave. We had better wait awhile." And so they sat down and waited, after Dave had brought in the brushwood he had previously broken off. A roaring fire cheered them greatly, and once more each related his experiences. Mr. Porter told how he had traveled in many parts of the world, and said that Dave must some day do the same. He asked the youth about his education, and when Dave related how he had won the medal of honor at Oak Hall his face beamed with pleasure.

"I certainly owe Professor Potts and Mr. Wadsworth a good deal," he said. "And I shall not forget them. You could not have fallen among better friends."

"I believe that," answered Dave, warmly. "Professor Potts and all of the Wadsworths have been just as good as they could be to me."

Almost before they knew it darkness came on. Dave brought in more of the brushwood and even dragged over some limbs of a fallen fir. Luckily he had brought along enough provisions for several meals, and they proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the hollow of the cliff. They ate slowly, talking the while and each smiling warmly into the face of the other.

"It seems almost too good to be true," said Mr. Porter, not once but several times.

"And, oh, I am so thankful!" responded Dave.

Mr. Porter was so weak he needed sleep, so Dave told his parent to lie down on some of the brushwood, which he spread out as a couch next to the rocky wall.

"But what will you do, my son?" asked Mr. Porter.

"I'll remain on guard—so those bears don't get a chance to surprise us."

"But aren't you sleepy?"

"No—I'm so happy I don't think I'll be able to sleep for a week."

Mr. Porter lay down and closed his eyes, but it was a good hour before he dropped into a doze. Dave sat by the fire, where he could look at his father's face. It seemed as if he would never get done gazing at those features, so like his Uncle Dunston's.

"Found at last!" he murmured. "Found at last, and thank God for it!"

Two hours passed, and still Dave sat in the same position, thinking of the past and speculating on the future. He thought of his sister Laura and wondered how soon they would meet, and if she and Jessie would become friends.

"What's that?"

The boy leaped to his feet, and the sudden movement aroused his father. Both listened to a yelping and a growling at a distance. The yelping grew louder and louder, while the growling grew fainter.

"I know what it is!" cried Dave, at length. "Some wolves have gotten on the trail of those wounded bears. Now there will be a battle royal!"

"You must be right, Dave. Hark! The wolves must number a dozen or more."

"Sounds like about half a hundred to me, father."

The battle took place at the far end of the forest of firs and gradually grew fainter and fainter. Mr. Porter shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't like this, Dave."

"What, aren't you glad that the bears have been attacked? I am."

"It isn't that. If those wolves want more meat they'll follow up that bloody trail—and it leads directly over here."

"Phew! I never thought of that. I'll stir up the fire—that will help to keep them at a distance." Dave set to work with avidity, piling on nearly all of the brushwood that was left. He had just completed the task when he chanced to look beyond into the waste of snow. He saw a pair of gleaming eyes—then another pair and still another.

"The wolves are coming, father!" he cried, in consternation.

"I see them, Dave, and we are going to have the fight of our lives to keep them off," answered Mr. Porter.

CHAPTER XXX

HOME AGAIN—CONCLUSION

In a few minutes the wolves had come up and were glaring at Mr. Porter and Dave as they crouched close to the camp-fire. There were fourteen of the beasts, all large, lean, and hungry-looking. They sniffed the air and set up yelps and mournful howls. Two found the spot where one of the bears had been wounded and pawed at the blood which had saturated the snow.

"Oh, for a brace of good shotguns!" sighed Dave. "We could scatter them in short order."

"When we shoot we must make every shot tell," said his father. "And keep the cartridges where we can get at them quickly. How many left, Dave?"

The youth counted the contents of the box he carried.

"Seventeen."

"Hardly enough for fourteen wolves. Yes, we must be very careful. If they—— They are coming closer!"

"Let us fire off one pistol at a time!" cried Dave. "Then we'll always have one ready for use."

Mr. Porter did not answer, for he was aiming at the nearest beast. With the discharge of the pistol the wolf leaped high in the air, turned and came down on its side, and began to kick the snow in its death agony.

"A good shot!" exclaimed Dave.

"You can try your luck," said Mr. Porter. "I will take out that empty shell and reload."

The other wolves had surrounded the one that was dying, and taking aim at the center of the pack Dave let drive. One wolf was hit in the nose and the bullet glanced off and hit another in the jaw. Wild yelps of pain followed, and the two wolves turned and ran for cover with all possible speed.

"We have gotten rid of three of them," said Dave, with much satisfaction. "If we keep this up we'll soon get rid of the rest."

"It is snowing again," announced Mr. Porter.

He was right, and soon the downfall became so heavy that they could see next to nothing beyond the circle of light made by the camp-fire. But that the wolves were still near they knew by the yelps and snarls which occasionally reached their ears.

A quarter of an hour went by, and the snow came down as thickly as ever. A light wind had sprung up, and this sent the flakes directly into the hollow under the cliff. Mr. Porter heaved a sigh.

"More bad luck," he observed. "By morning, if this keeps on, we'll be snowed in."

"Look," said Dave. "I believe the wolves are getting ready to rush us!"

Both strained their eyes and soon saw seven or eight of the beasts sneaking softly up through the snow. The light from the camp-fire shone in their eyes and on their white fangs. They were growing desperate, and hoped by sheer force of numbers to lay their human prey low.

"Fire three shots, Dave, and I will do the same," said Mr. Porter, in a low tone. "Aim as carefully as you can, my boy."

The various shots rang out in rapid succession. How much damage was done they could not tell, although they saw two wolves go down and lie still. The others retreated, some limping, and the entire pack went back to the shelter of the brushwood.

They had now only a few cartridges left, and these they divided between them. Then Dave stirred up the fire a little and

placed the burning sticks so they would last as long as possible. Father and son looked at each other and suddenly stepped closer and embraced.

"God grant, now we have found each other, that we get from this spot in safety," murmured Mr. Porter, fervently.

"Oh, we must get away!" added Dave, impulsively.

"All we can do is to fight to the last, Dave."

"Yes."

Both knew only too well what to expect should the wolves get the better of the contest. "As cruel as a wolf" is a true saying. They would be torn limb from limb and only their bones would be left to tell to some later traveler the story of their fate. They decided, with set faces and shut teeth, to fight to the very last.

Another quarter of an hour went by, and soon they heard the wolves coming back. Neither said a word, but both looked at each other.

"Take those on the left,—I will take those on the right," whispered Mr. Porter. "But be careful—every shot means so much!"

"I'll shoot my very best," answered Dave.

After that not a word was spoken. Silently the beasts came closer and closer. Dave's heart began to beat rapidly. Then, when he could wait no longer, he aimed at the nearest animal on the left and pulled the trigger.

Two shots, one from the son and the other from the father, rang out almost simultaneously, and down went two wolves mortally wounded. Crack! went Dave's weapon a second time, and now a wolf was hit in the neck. Then Mr. Porter fired, sending a bullet into a breast that was presented to view. With four of their number out of the fight, the other wolves turned and fled into the brushwood and then toward the forest of firs.

The battle had been of short duration, but the excitement had been intense, and Dave found himself bathed in a cold perspiration from head to foot. His father, too, was weak, and now sank on the rocks, breathing heavily.

Only one small branch of a tree remained for the fire, and this Dave set up, so that it might burn as a torch. When that was gone they would be in utter darkness—and then? The youth shivered as he asked himself the question. He knew that wild animals love the darkness and are braver in it than in the light.

"Hello! hello! hello!"

Loud and clear from above the cliff the cry rang out a dozen times or more. At first Dave thought he must be dreaming, then he roused up and so did his parent.

"What was that?" demanded Mr. Porter.

"Somebody calling, I think." Dave ran out of the hollow and looked upward through the falling snow. "Who calls?" he yelled, at the top of his lungs.

"It is I, Granbury Lapham, and I have my brother and the others with me. Is that you, Porter?"

"Yes."

"Have you found your father?"

"Yes."

"How is he?" came in another voice—the voice of Philip Lapham.

"He is hurt a little, but not much."

"I'll be all right if I can only get out of here," called Mr. Porter, coming out so that he could look up the cliff. "We've been having our own troubles with two bears and a pack of wolves."

"We thought there must be trouble—by the shots fired," said Granbury Lapham. "That's why we started out in the darkness." He waved a torch in the air. "Can you see us?"

"We can see a light," answered Dave. He took up the branch from the fire. "Can you see our light?"

"Yes."

A long talk followed, and the party above, numbering four, said they had brought along a good rope. This they lowered, and after not a little difficulty Mr. Porter and Dave were raised up to the ledge above.

"There come the wolves again!" cried the youth, as he reached the ledge. "Have you a shotgun with you?"

"Yes," said Philip Lapham. "Please lend it to me."

The weapon was passed over, and Dave blazed away twice in rapid succession. A wild snarling and yelping followed, and then the wolves disappeared; and that was the last seen of them.

"We are well out of that," murmured Mr. Porter. "And I am glad of it."

"And I am glad too," added Dave.

As it was snowing heavily the party did not waste time on the edge of the cliff, but moved back to a small hut built on the mountain side and which was easily located by the Norwegian guide. Here they found the others of the exploring party, and here Mr. Porter and Dave were served with a hot meal and made as comfortable as possible.

The snow lasted until noon of the next day, and then it grew clear and much warmer. On the following day Dave and his father and the guide went down the mountain to the sheep-station. Before they left they bade the Laphams and the others good-bye, and Mr. Porter said he would leave the question of locating the mines entirely in Philip Lapham's charge.

"You can draw on me for my full share of the expenses," said Mr. Porter. "And if nothing comes of the venture I won't complain." It may be added here that, later on, several mines of considerable importance were located, and when Mr. Porter sold out to a syndicate that was formed he realized a profit of about fifteen thousand dollars.

At the sheep-station Dave found Roger anxiously awaiting his return. The senator's son was delighted to meet Mr. Porter, and the two immediately became great friends.

As the weather remained fine it was decided to start on the return to Christiania without delay. Mr. Porter took Granbury Lapham's place in the sleigh, and the party took with them a good stock of provisions. The journey was not without excitement, for they met and killed two wolves, and once they rolled down a small hill and were dumped in the snow, but in the end they arrived safely at the nearest railroad station, and from that point the remainder of the trip was easy.

At the Norwegian capital a long cablegram was sent to Dunston Porter by Dave and his father, telling of their meeting and stating that they and Roger would return to the United States at once. They also wanted to send a cablegram to Laura, but could not, for they did not know her exact address.

"I shall have to wait until I hear from her, or until we get on the other side," said Mr. Porter. "More than likely she is somewhere out West,—perhaps on Mr. Endicott's ranch with Belle Endicott, her friend. I had the address of the ranch, but I lost it while I was up in the mountains." From Christiania, or rather the seaport, Dröbak, they obtained passage on a swift-sailing vessel to Hull, and then took a train across England to Liverpool. They had already telegraphed ahead for staterooms on a Cunard steamer bound for Boston, and two hours after arriving at Liverpool were on board and leaving the dock.

"This is fast traveling," remarked Roger, as they stood on the deck, watching the shipping scene around them. "In less than a week we'll be home. Dave, in some respects our trip to Norway seems like a dream."

"That is true, Roger—but what a happy dream!" And Dave's face fairly beamed with thankfulness.

When they took the train from Boston to Crumville Dave could scarcely control himself. Word had been sent ahead to the Wadsworths and Caspar Potts, and at the depot the travelers found all of their friends awaiting them. Mr. Porter was quickly introduced, and shook hands warmly all around.

"Oh, Dave, I'm so glad to see you back!" cried Jessie. "And to think you have really found your father at last! Isn't it splendid!"

"Yes, Jessie; and if I'm not the happiest boy in the world—well, I ought to be, that's all."

"And what a fine man he is—and looks very much like your Uncle Dunston, and looks like you, too," added the girl. She lowered her voice and it trembled a little. "I am so happy—for your sake, Dave!" And the tears stood in her deep, honest eyes.

It was truly a great home-coming, and Dave's father was told to make himself perfectly at ease by Mr. Wadsworth.

"You have been more than kind to Dave," said Mr. Porter. "You and your family, and Professor Potts. Dave has told me all about it. I do not know if I can ever repay you, but I shall try my best." And he shook hands all over again.

On the very day that Dave reached Crumville came a letter from Phil Lawrence, who had received word that Dave was coming home. In this communication Phil said that matters were running smoothly at Oak Hall. Sam Day and Ben Basswood had had some trouble with Nat Poole, and the dude had received a well-deserved thrashing. Gus Plum was keeping very quiet, and had made a few more friends.

> "You will be surprised to hear the news about Link Merwell," wrote Phil. "I cannot tell you the start of it, but it ended in a great row between Merwell and Mr. Dale. Merwell is very bitter about it, and claims that I in some way got him into trouble. He went home for a vacation, and before he left he shook his fist in my face and said, 'I'll get even with you some day, and I'll get even with that friend of yours, Dave Porter, too.' He was fearfully ugly, and acted as if he wanted to eat somebody up."

"Humph, that is cheerful news," remarked Roger, after Dave had shown him the letter. "Dave, you want to watch out for Merwell."

"I certainly will, Roger. Don't you remember what I once said? In some respects he is a worse chap than Nick Jasniff and a good deal worse than Gus Plum ever was." And that Dave was correct will be proved in the next volume of this series, to be entitled, "Dave Porter and His Classmates; or, For the Honor of Oak Hall." In that volume we shall meet all our friends again, and also Laura Porter, and learn how Dave met the underhanded work of Link Merwell and what was the result.

On Friday evening following Dave's return to the Wadsworth home he was surprised to receive a visit from Phil, Ben, Sam, and Shadow. They burst into the house like a cyclone and nearly hugged him to death, and then shook hands all around, not forgetting Dave's father, who was quickly introduced.

"We simply couldn't stay away," said Phil. "We stormed Doctor Clay's office and he let us off until Monday morning."

"We want to hear all about your adventures in the far north," added Ben. "How you discovered the North Pole, and shot bears and wolves——"

"And gave Nick Jasniff his set-back," interrupted Sam. "And how you found your father."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," said Shadow. "A fellow once——"

"Hold hard, Shadow!" interrupted Phil. "Dave has the floor this time. Your stories must wait until he's through."

"All right," answered the story-teller of the school, cheerfully. "I'd rather listen to Dave, anyway, for I know he's got something worth telling."

And then all sat down, and Dave told his tale, just as I have related it here. It took until midnight, and when he had finished, all said good-night to each other and went to bed. And here let us say good-night, too.

THE END

EDWARD STRATEMEYER'S BOOKS

Old Glory Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Net $1.75 per volume.

UNDER DEWEY AT MANILA.
UNDER OTIS IN THE PHILIPPINES.
A YOUNG VOLUNTEER IN CUBA.
THE CAMPAIGN OF THE JUNGLE.
FIGHTING IN CUBAN WATERS.
UNDER MacARTHUR IN LUZON.

Soldiers of Fortune Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Net $1.75 per volume.

ON TO PEKIN.
AT THE FALL OF PORT ARTHUR.
UNDER THE MIKADO'S FLAG.
WITH TOGO FOR JAPAN.

Colonial Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Net $1.75 per volume.

WITH WASHINGTON IN THE WEST.
ON THE TRAIL OF PONTIAC.
MARCHING ON NIAGARA.
THE FORT IN THE WILDERNESS.
AT THE FALL OF MONTREAL.
TRAIL AND TRADING POST.

Mexican War Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume $1.00.

FOR THE LIBERTY OF TEXAS.
WITH TAYLOR ON THE RIO GRANDE.
UNDER SCOTT IN MEXICO.

Pan-American Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume $1.00.

LOST ON THE ORINOCO.
YOUNG EXPLORERS OF THE AMAZON.
THE YOUNG VOLCANO EXPLORERS.
TREASURE SEEKERS OF THE ANDES.
YOUNG EXPLORERS OF THE ISTHMUS.
CHASED ACROSS THE PAMPAS.

Dave Porter Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Net $1.75 per volume.

DAVE PORTER AT OAK HALL.
DAVE PORTER ON CAVE ISLAND.
DAVE PORTER IN THE SOUTH SEAS.
DAVE PORTER AND THE RUNAWAYS.
DAVE PORTER'S RETURN TO SCHOOL.
DAVE PORTER IN THE GOLD FIELDS.
DAVE PORTER IN THE FAR NORTH.
DAVE PORTER AT BEAR CAMP.
DAVE PORTER AND HIS CLASSMATES.
DAVE PORTER AND HIS DOUBLE.
DAVE PORTER AT STAR RANCH.
DAVE PORTER'S GREAT SEARCH.
DAVE PORTER AND HIS RIVALS.
DAVE PORTER UNDER FIRE.
DAVE PORTER'S WAR HONORS.

Lakeport Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Net $1.75 per volume.

THE GUN CLUB BOYS OF LAKEPORT.
THE FOOTBALL BOYS OF LAKEPORT.
THE BASEBALL BOYS OF LAKEPORT.
THE AUTOMOBILE BOYS OF LAKEPORT.
THE BOAT CLUB BOYS OF LAKEPORT.
THE AIRCRAFT BOYS OF LAKEPORT.

American Boys' Biographical Series

Cloth. Illustrated. Net $1.75 per volume.

AMERICAN BOYS' LIFE OF WILLIAM McKINLEY.
AMERICAN BOYS' LIFE OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

Transcriber's Note

The page numbers of illustrations have been changed to reflect their new positions following transcription, and they are now indicated in the illustration list by 'Page' instead of 'Facing Page'.

Printer's errors have been corrected. All other inconsistencies are as in the original. The author's spelling has been retained.

Advertisements have been transferred to the rear of the book.

[The end of *Dave Porter in the Far North* by Edward Stratemeyer]