

CHAPTER VI.

*IN WHICH THE BLUE CLIPPERS GET A NEW MEMBER AND
THE COLLEGE BOYS A HALF-HOLIDAY.*

TOM PLAYFAIR conducted me to the room of the president. At first view of the Father I was somewhat dismayed. He was tall, dark, thin-faced, and wore a pair of sombre spectacles. He was writing at his desk as we entered, and before he looked up I obtained a good view of his face in profile. I took him to be a man of books and of a somewhat saturnine disposition.

"Father," said Tom, "here's a new boy, and his name is Harry Dee."

The president laid down his pen and turned toward us. His face, harsh and austere before, became illuminated with a smile, genial and winning; and as he advanced to greet me all my fears vanished.

His greeting was indeed cordial. After-experience proved to me that I had been deceived by first appearances. Not entirely, perhaps; for I am convinced that by nature Father Delmar was severe, but grace had triumphed over nature, and he had won the secret of sweetness from a life of self-denial.

"Now, Tom," said the president, after the first greetings had been exchanged, "in what class shall we place Harry?"

"In our class, Father. He's been studying Latin and Greek the last two years."

"Indeed?" There was a gratified look on Father Delmar's face. "Well, to make sure I'll examine

Harry. You can wait outside for a moment, Tom, and then I'll put him into your hands."

On Tom's going out the president said very gravely: "Harry, I congratulate you on meeting Tom. He's a good boy, a *very* good boy, but he's not alone in the field. There are others."

"Percy Wynn?" I suggested.

Again a bright smile of gratification lighted up the president's face. He looked more than beautiful when he smiled.

"Ah! you know him. You're lucky. In some respects Percy is marvellous, and, what's best of all, each thinks nothing of himself and all the world of each other. But now for your examination."

The president was an expert at this sort of work; and in five or six minutes he contrived to find out nearly everything I knew, and, to be frank, an infinite number of things of which I was dismally ignorant. For all that he seemed to be satisfied, and I felt more gratified in exhibiting my ignorance to him than my knowledge to others.

"Well," he said at length, "I'll have to stand by the verdict of your first examiner: here's a ticket for First Academic. You are strong in Latin and Greek, fair in English, and somewhat wanting in history and geography, which you must make up by private study. Now, my boy, go, and may God bless you."

Tom met me without and proceeded to guide me over to the small yard. As we drew near the gate between it and the large boys' division, I noticed that Percy, Donnel, and half a dozen of the students were grouped together.

"Hurrah!" said Tom. "Percy and Donnel have

spread the news of your coming and got our fellows together. That's Mr. Middleton over there; he's—well, he's just the best teacher you'd want to meet. There's not a boy in our class who wouldn't stand on his head for him."

Even as Tom spoke Mr. Middleton advanced, smiling a welcome as he neared us.

"What class is it, Harry?" he inquired as he caught my hand and gave it a cordial squeeze.

"First Academic, sir," I answered.

"Splendid. Welcome to St. Maure's, welcome to the small yard, and welcome to the First Academic."

In very deed Mr. Middleton seemed to rejoice over my being in his class fully as much as Tom and Percy. It struck me at once that there was something of the boy in Mr. Middleton—a certain freshness, vivacity, and breeziness of youth. He was a man in every sense of the word and a boy in its best sense. In all his dealings with us little lads he never seemed to forget that he, too, had once been a small boy; his sympathy for us took the edge off his severest punishments.

"Now," pursued my new professor, "come and take a look at your companions."

Within a few moments I was as much at home with my new friends as one of my temperament and experiences could well be. I was taken with them all, especially with George Keenan and Harry Quip. While engaged in conversation with these two a very small boy approached me, took me by the hand, led me apart, and said:

"I'm glad to see you. Percy Wynn likes you, and that proves that you're all right. What do you think of Percy?" As he asked this question this

very small boy turned upon me a pair of piercingly earnest dark eyes.

"I think he's one of the nicest boys I ever met; he's—he's charming," was my answer.

"Charming—charming," he echoed. "That's a good word. Why?"

He almost threw this monosyllabic question at me, and I must confess that I grew so nervous that I was unable to give him answer.

This very small boy perceived my embarrassment, and proceeded to relieve it by putting me another question.

"Do you like mathematics?"

"Not much, I'm sorry to say."

Whereupon the serious little lad sighed, but immediately brightened up and added: "Well, lots of good fellows don't like 'em, but I do—awfully. I like things proved. You're a Catholic, ain't you?" he went on.

"Yes."

"So'm I. I'm a convert, and I converted my father, too. You just ought to have seen me at him." Here he broke into a smile. "I proved him wrong and he couldn't wriggle out of it."

"All by yourself?" I inquired.

"Well, no; not exactly. I had a catechism along. My name's Frank Burdock; your name's Harry. Don't you think Frank is a pretty name?"

"Indeed, I do."

"Why?"

To my great relief I had a fit of coughing at this juncture, and the small interrogation-point went on in this wise:

"I want to tell you that Percy Wynn is the best boy

in the world. I don't say anything against any one else, you understand; but all the same I'll put my money on Percy every time. Now don't you forget that, please," and again breaking into a smile, this very serious small boy walked away.

Few youngsters on first coming to boarding-college escape the ordeal of being teased. Nervous and timid, I had looked forward with no little dread to this stern novitiate in my new life. But, to anticipate, my classmates by some agreement, tacit or otherwise, thoroughly sheltered me from any rough usage.

After an early supper Tom, intent upon business, brought me over to the "blue grass."

"I got permission to bring you here," he remarked, "because I wanted to try your hand at pitching. We've a strong nine; the only thing is we're weak in the box. If you've got it in you, we'll be just right."

Tom produced a "boy's league," and retiring to the proper distance, asked me to pitch the ball.

I gave him an out-curve.

"Very good!" he cried. "That was a big one. Now let's see your in-shoot."

Tom misjudged the ball and dropped it.

"Let it go again," he exclaimed, returning me the ball; "same way."

This time he held it.

"Goodness! but that's the wickedest in-shoot I've seen in the small yard. Send in another."

Tom kept me at the in-shoot for several minutes. His eyes glowed with excitement, and candor compels me to admit that I was not a little proud of the impression I had produced.

"You'll do, Harry; that's certain. You've no idea how glad I am. Now let's try your drop. That's good enough, too," he remarked as he caught the drop, "but you can improve it with practice. How long can you hold out?"

"At present," I answered, "not for more than five or ten minutes."

"You're not very strong yet, Harry, but we'll get you at the parallel bars and the dumb-bells and the boxing-gloves, and in three weeks you'll be able to pitch for nine innings twice a day."

Just as Tom ceased speaking Harry Quip came running over breathless with excitement.

"Oh, I say!" he bawled. "It's two hundred and fifty!"

Both of us stared at Master Quip, who was now dancing.

"In the shade?" asked Tom.

"Who's talking about the weather?" shouted Quip. "It's two hundred and fifty."

And Quip resumed his jig.

"If you'd like to go to a lunatic asylum," Tom observed, "we'll certify that you're a fit subject. Stop your wobbling and talk sense."

Thus adjured, Harry Quip, supporting himself on one leg, roared forth:

"Two hundred and fifty boys. Harry Dee fills the number."

Upon which communication Tom became fully as insane as Quip and joined the dance.

"Hurrah! We'll get a half-holiday, sure. Tomorrow's Wednesday, and we'll have a swim in the river."

Both young gentlemen, now equally breathless,

deluged me with a torrent of words, out of which I gradually fished the meaning. I was to return to the small yard and, accompanied by a delegation, was to repair to the president's room and there, it was confidently believed, obtain a holiday as being the two hundred and fiftieth boy of the college.

Before I had fairly taken in the situation each grasped an arm and began hustling me unceremoniously back to the yard.

My arrival was greeted with a cheer. Other enthusiasts joined themselves to Tom and Harry, and in a trice there were some twenty of us, panting and breathless, outside the door of Father Delmar's room.

Here we all paused to recover our breath.

"Who'll make the speech?" asked Joe Whyte.

"Percy!" suggested several.

"All right," said Percy, who was the calmest one of the party. In fact, he rarely lost his breath or his flow of words. "Come on, boys; I'm ready," and he knocked.

"Father Rector," said Percy, when all had entered, "we've come to congratulate you."

The boys laughed. Frank Burdock threw his hat in the air, but missed it coming down, whereupon he blushed and retired into the obscurest corner.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Father Delmar; "on what?"

"On the fact that you now have two hundred and fifty students."

"Yes, sir—yes, sir—yes sir," came a unanimous chorus of voices.

The president smiled mischievously.

"Well, what about it?" he inquired.

"A great deal," answered Percy. "When you

became president of this college, I am told, there were not one hundred and twenty-five boys in actual attendance; and it is to your energy and efficiency we owe it that the number has been doubled. So permit me to say again, reverend Father, that we, the small boys, congratulate you with all our hearts."

"Well, my dear boys, I thank you for your congratulations; and in return for Percy's pretty speech I am tempted to make one myself."

Here the boys became very serious.

"But I am convinced that you do not want a speech just now."

The momentarily solemn faces of his auditors again quivered into smiles.

"So instead of a speech, which you do not want—now be sure not to shout till you get back to your yard—I'll grant you a half-holiday for to-morrow, which you do want."

There was a multitudinous "thank you, Father," from every boy in the room, and, presto! twenty-odd lads, their eyes shining with pleasurable excitement, scurried lightly through the corridor and broke into the yard with a cheer, which at once spread the good tidings throughout the college.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH WE GO SWIMMING AND MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE.

IN the dormitory that night I was pleased to find that my bed was next to Percy Wynn's. I retired thoroughly exhausted from the varied excitements of the day, and, contrary to my wont, fell

asleep almost at once, to wake only at the sound of the bell next morning.

Mr. Middleton, my professor, more than equalled the expectations I had been led to form of him. The boys of his class to a man (excuse the bull) were all absorbed in their work. So was Mr. Middleton; for their sixty per cent of enthusiasm he returned a hundred fold. The hour of Latin seemed to fly on golden wings; and still not a second was lost. The thoroughness displayed by teacher and pupils was something extraordinary. The theme-work and translation seemed to possess all the charm and fascination of the play-ground. Greek class was conducted much in the same way. Mr. Middleton was equally enthusiastic; the boys, too, were attentive and wide-awake, though they lacked somewhat that spontaneity of enthusiasm which had distinguished the preceding hour. Very quickly, indeed, noon-time came, and with it our half-holiday.

At three in the afternoon some forty of us, accompanied by Mr. Middleton, took the road through the village leading to the river. It was to be the last swim of the year. The mornings were already growing chilly, and in the fall months the river was considered rather unsafe.

Frank Burdock, Percy, and Tom were my companions. Presently, as we passed out of the village, Keenan, Donnel, Quip, Whyte, Richards, Ruthers, and a number of other boys whose names I did not know at the time joined us.

"You see," said Frank to me, "we've got up a little society to say the Litany of the Blessed Virgin whenever we go out swimming; that's to prevent accidents. It's a good idea, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," I replied.

"Percy and Tom got it up," said Frank triumphantly.

Frank was about to add something further, when he was interrupted by Percy, who called out: "Ready, boys?"

"Let her go," answered Tom, imparting to the words a seriousness which took away all their obvious levity.

Then, in his clear, sweet, silvery voice, Percy recited the litanies, while the others, with every sign of reverence, responded "Pray for us" in low, earnest tones.

The spirit of true Catholic faith and devotion was alive in the college. It was a little world in itself—but a Catholic world. Prayer and piety lent a radiance to the atmosphere of play and study. At noon-time I had been not a little astonished when, at the sound of the bell, the scene of bustling life and play in the yard was at once changed to a tableau. The batsman dropped his bat, the pitcher his ball, the game of tag came to a sudden pause and the small boy's shout of triumph to a premature end; every head was bared, and each boy, where the angelus had fallen upon his ears, stood stock-still while reciting the angelical salutation. Presently "the charm was snapt, and all the pent-up stream of *play* dashed downward in a cataract." The pitcher pitched, the batter batted, the tagger tagged, and the gay-innocent life went on all the more merrily for that sweet interruption.

The same spirit showed itself in the recital of the litanies. All joined in with a will; and thus in prayer we came within sight of the river.

"Look!" exclaimed Frank; "did you ever see such a yellow river?"

"Looks as if it had the jaundice from swallowing too many cigarettes," commented George Keenan.

"It reminds me," said Tom, "of a man I knew who had a liver complaint, I think it was."

As the conversation went on we selected a place for undressing.

"I'm afraid it's pretty cold," pursued Tom, throwing off his jacket. "Are you a good swimmer, Harry?"

"No, Tom, I'm hardly able to take a dozen strokes."

"Well, you'd better be very careful to-day. Don't go out of 'bounds'—I'll point them out for you; none of us is allowed to go beyond them; and be sure, by the way, to keep pretty close to the bank."

"Yes," put in little Frank, "that's the way I always did till I learned how to swim well. So did Percy."

"We've had plenty of practice this summer," Percy explained. "You see, several of us went rustivating in Wisconsin on the shore of the prettiest lake one could wish to see. We went in swimming once or twice every day, and now we're all of us quite proud of our skill in the water."

"But Tom and Percy are the best," said Frank, with his mediæval smile.

"Come on there and hustle," exclaimed Tom, who, arrayed in his swimming-tights, was impatiently awaiting the laggards.

In a few minutes we were all plunging about in the water; and there rose upon the solemn air the mingled sounds of splashing and happy laughter.

But for all that the water was intensely cold. It was hard to refrain from shivering.

We were soon engaged in a game of tag. I was "it" for a few seconds, but succeeded in catching Tom Playfair napping. Next to Tom, and standing a little more than waist-deep in water, was Frank Burdock. Tom made a dart at him. With a gay laugh Frank took a leap backward, and as he leaped I gave a cry of dismay. My fears were realized. A huge drift-log had just floated within a few feet of little Frank, who was ignorant of its vicinity. His head struck against the end of it and, to my dismay, he went down.

I struck out at once, never reflecting that it was all that I could do to take care of myself. With a single stroke Tom was beside me.

"Go back, Harry, go back!"

I obeyed instinctively, and felt at once that Tom was indeed a boy born to command. His whilom happy face was now aflush with energy and determination as, with a magnificent overhand stroke, he made for the place where Frank had disappeared. Suddenly there arose another form at his side, as it were from out the very heart of the water. It was Percy Wynn, who had taken a long dive and thus put himself abreast of his brave friend. Just then, twenty feet or so further down the current, emerged the face of poor little Frank. His eyes were closed and his face was extremely pale; there was an ugly gash below his temple, and even for the moment that the cut was free from the washing of the water a stream of blood marked his sinking for the second time.

A clear voice now arose.

"Percy and Tom go on, in God's name! Every one else out of the water."

All of us hastened to the bank, in obedience to Mr. Middleton's command, while Tom and Percy made bravely on. Both used the overhand stroke, and breast to breast cut the water. They were magnificent swimmers. One would almost think that they were racing for a wager.

Suddenly they paused and, treading the water, gazed around and about them. But seemingly they discovered no sign of Frank's presence.

Then, as with one impulse, they dived. The place whither Frank had been carried was far out of bounds and very deep.

All this had come to pass within a few seconds. Mr. Middleton had not been idle in the mean time. Throwing off his coat and shoes, he now plunged into the river and came toward the scene of action with powerful strokes. He was a royal swimmer; for speed I had never seen his like.

As Tom came to the surface Mr. Middleton was at his side. Tom's quest in the underwaters had been fruitless. In another second Percy appeared alone.

There was a groan of dismay from the shore. Many of the boys sank upon their knees as Mr. Middleton, after saying something to Tom and Percy which we could not hear, dived down.

The next few seconds were seconds of agony. The sun went behind a cloud—a deathly stillness came upon the scene. Second after second passed. The only sign of movement or life came from Tom and Percy, who were treading water side by side.

Oh, those terrible seconds! It seemed an hour.

At length there was a ripple and a splash; and a great cry of joy arose as Mr. Middleton broke through the surface with little Frank supported on his strong right arm.

Tom was by his side at once, and catching one of Frank's hands, helped his prefect shoreward with the unconscious boy.

Then, as the party reached shallow water, a cheer arose from the shore, such as nothing but excitement and enthusiasm at highest pressure could arouse.

Eager hands were stretched out to them and helped them ashore.

There never was such hand-shaking since college began, and there was reason for our joy, since no one was harmed and Frank had recovered consciousness before reaching land.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH WE FIGHT OUR BATTLES O'ER AGAIN AND SPEND A PLEASANT EVENING IN THE INFIRMARY.

"THAT Mr. Middleton is one of the pluckiest men alive," observed John Donnel as we took our way home.

"He can swim with hands and feet tied," added George Keenan. "My! it was a sight to watch him making for you, Frank. You'd think he was running in the water."

"By the way, Tom, what was it he whispered to you and Percy when he dived after Frank?" inquired Donnel.

"Say a Hail Mary, boys,' that's all he said; but

I tell you, it worked me up. While he was down in the water I think I got off more genuine praying in those few seconds than I did since the morning I made my First Communion. I said the Hail Mary only once, but when I got to the words, 'Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death'—oh! didn't I mean it!"

"Yes!" put in Percy. "That was my prayer, too; and, really, I never knew before what a beautiful prayer it was."

"Look here," cried little Frank, "perhaps you won't believe me, but it is a fact, even if I can't prove it. After that log struck me I forgot all about myself. I was—what do you call it?"

"Unconscious," suggested Percy.

"That's it, exactly. The next thing I knew I found myself lying on the sandy bottom, and there was a rumbling sound, like thunder, in my ears. Now, boys, wasn't I frightened? I felt that I was choking and that I'd be dead in less than a minute. I was awfully frightened—just crazy—you understand? Then I remembered, all of a sudden, that I had said the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and—would you believe it?—I didn't feel one bit scared. No, sir; I wasn't afraid of death, and I just began saying the Hail Mary to myself, and when I got to 'now, and at the hour of our death, amen,' I felt a hand clutching my arm, and that's all I knew till I found Mr. Middleton and Tom towing me in to the shore."

"Singular!" murmured Percy. "It looks as though all three of us said the same sweet prayer at the very same time."

"That's just my opinion," added Tom, and all

fell to thinking. Miracle or not, it came home to us that prayer was a practical part of life, and that the Mother of God had not been deaf to the wishes of her loving young sodalists.

Shortly before supper Mr. Middleton called Tom aside.

"Tom," he said, "you remember the time Percy crippled himself in running you down out toward Pawnee Creek."

"Do I? Oh, don't I!"

"And the supper in the infirmary?"

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"Well, a good thing will stand repetition. You and Percy and Frank need a good rest this afternoon and a late sleep to-morrow. So you needn't mind your night studies. Don't get up till half-past seven. There's a priest here staying overnight who will say mass at half-past eight. And by the way, your nervous friend, Harry Dee, might go along with you. Such a scene as he has witnessed this afternoon may have a bad effect on him. So just as soon as the bell rings for supper, all of you go quietly over to the infirmary. The Brother has promised me to give you a good supper."

And Mr. Middleton cut short Tom's ardent thanks by hurrying away.

I was standing beside Tom as he received this pleasant communication. I had come to look upon Tom as a hero, and I looked at him with some anxiety to hear what he would say.

"I hope there'll be lots of buttered toast!" ejaculated my hero, with no little ardor, saying which he dashed off to communicate the good word to the others.

And now for that supper! The reader must excuse me, but I can't bring myself to narrate how these life-rescuers demolished the viands. It's too prosaic; and I am tempted even to draw my pen through Tom's remark about the buttered toast. Suffice it for me to say that as they had shown bravery at the river, so they showed appetite at the table; and it struck me with much force that because a boy is good one has no right to grudge him health and appetite.

I had been tossing restlessly in bed for half an hour, when some one touched me on the arm. I turned and perceived by the dim light of the lamp that Tom was beside me. His face was beaming with sympathy.

"Old fellow," he began, "you can't sleep, can you?"

"No," I whispered, "though I'm very tired."

"You've got a shaking up from that river business. I'm sorry for you. The very first minute I saw you I guessed what was the matter."

"I don't understand you, Tom."

"Well, simply this: You've been an eye-witness to something terrible—or something in that line—a *murder*, maybe."

I almost leaped from the bed.

"Pretty good guess, wasn't it?" Tom went on calmly. "But it's all simple enough. You've got the ways of Jimmy Aldine. Poor Jimmy! He's dead now, my best friend. He had seen a murder. I'll tell you the story some day, and you'll tell me yours, won't you?"

"Indeed I will, Tom."

"All right, Harry. I'm told your mother is dead

—is that so?" And Tom gazed down into my face with a sympathy rare and strange in one of his years.

"Yes," I said softly; and as I thought of my mother dead and of her who had filled the place of mother far worse than dead, my eyes filled.

"Same way with me," said Tom gently. "I just remember my mother's face. My father says she was a saint. I believe him; and I'm sure she looks out for me. But, Harry, old fellow (that's between me and you), I have asked another mother to take the place of the one I've lost. You take her too."

For a few moments we were both silent.

"Now," resumed Tom, "I guess I'll turn in. I'd have gone to sleep at once only it occurred to me that the excitement had rattled you, and so I watched and saw you tossing and tumbling about, and then I thought we might as well have a little talk. I want you to feel that you're among friends."

I thanked him in broken words. What a wonderful power of happiness goes forth in a little kindness. But Tom was even more considerate. His kindness rose to the height of invention.

"I'll tell you what," he pursued; "I'll wheel my bed right alongside of yours, without disturbing the other fellows. Now, if you get nervous or scared, just bang me across the chest—hit hard, or I won't know the difference."

"How can I thank you for your kindness!" I exclaimed as Tom brought his bed within a few inches of mine.

"By going to sleep," Tom made answer. "You look as though you thought I was doing something extraordinary. Not at all. There's not a boy in

the place, almost, who wouldn't have done the same thing if they'd known you were so nervous. You see, I came to notice it because I know how it is myself. A little before the time of Jimmy Aldine's death I had the horrors every night nearly, and I tell you I haven't forgotten it, either. Well, good-night. Remember, we'll try our hands on Cicero's letters to-morrow."

And making the sign of the cross, Tom closed his eyes and very, very soon gave evidence by the regular breathing that he was fast asleep.

His presence had a calming effect upon me, and I felt so happy for all his kind and considerate words. Yes, Tom *had* "ministered to a mind diseased." His kind words hovered brightly in my memory, and soon conducted me into the very brightest and pleasantest spot in dreamland—the spot consecrated to love, and purity, and innocence, and ever hallowed by their priceless presence.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH I HAVE A BAD NIGHT AND PRODUCE A SENSATION IN THE DORMITORY.

ACCORDING to orders, we all arose at half-past seven the next morning, thoroughly refreshed. After a substantial breakfast we heard the late mass, and came from the chapel in time to get our books for class.

At noon-time Tom and I had a long *tête-à-tête*. I told him the dramatic incidents of my life, to which he listened with no little astonishment. When I had concluded my tale he fell into a brown-study.

"I'll tell you what I think," he at length said. "I think that there's not an end of this business yet, by any means. You loved your nurse pretty much the same as though she were your mother. Now, that's in her favor. From what I've seen and heard during my three years in boarding-college, I've come to believe that a small boy seldom misses it in the matter of likes and dislikes. Now, if your nurse killed your uncle, I'm willing to bet my head that she didn't do it merely for the sake of the money."

"You think not?" I exclaimed, with a great feeling of relief. The reader should remember that what had given me the greatest shock was the thought that one I had loved so much should prove so base.

"Honest," answered Tom. "Now, another thing: did your nurse ever act queerly—that is, did you ever notice anything in her conduct which might lead you to think that there was something wrong about her head?"

Before replying, I considered for a moment.

"No," I at length made answer. "She was reserved and distant with others, but with me she was ever kind and loving. I can't say that she at any time acted queerly."

"She might have killed him in a moment of insanity," observed Tom. "At all events, I'm quite sure that she didn't kill him in cold blood."

I was inexpressibly soothed by this opinion of Tom's.

"Another thing," he continued: "what about that house? Do you honestly think it's haunted?"

"I can't say for certain, Tom. No one goes near it, but everybody says it is."