"This side the middle of the lake," said Frank Burdock.

"Keep cool," I whispered; "there's a boat coming and we'll be safe in two minutes. See the lights drawing near—they're coming straight toward us." And as I spoke I freed Gordon from the mast.

"Oh, I hope they'll hurry up and save me," cried Gordon.

"Give 'em another cheer," cried Tom.

We gave it with a will.

An answering cheer came gratefully upon our ears.

"Boat ahoy!" cried one of the rescuing party.

"Ahoy!" answered Percy.

"Are you all safe?"

"We are," returned Percy.

"Yes, but we're awful damp," added Tom.

"Are the Scarborough children there?" came another voice.

"Yes, papa!" screamed Rose.

"That's right, little girl; always tell the truth," said Tom parenthetically.

"I do, sir."

Here Gordon made his presence felt.

"Papa! papa!" he bellowed, "I'm drowning."

"No, he isn't," cried Percy, and to my astonishment he went on, addressing himself to Master Gordon, "and it's my impression, sir, that you never will drown."

Even Percy was disgusted.

"Oh, if we only had an ice-chest," groaned Tom.

"Why—why—what for?' sputtered Gordon.

"We'd keep you cool in it."

A minute later we were all safe within a large boat, and Percy presently was in the arms of his mother, and—but the hugging, and crying, and kissing are too much for my pen, and this chapter has been in all reason long enough.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH WE ATTEND A RECEPTION AND SPEND A NIGHT AT MR. SCARBOROUGH'S VILLA.

MR. SCARBOROUGH was a wealthy gentleman of English birth, who, shortly after attaining his majority, had chosen America for his home. During the preceding summer he had taken a week's outing at "our lake," as we boys called it, and was so charmed with the beautiful surroundings that he purchased several acres fronting upon the eastern shore, and commenced at once the erection of a villa, which he had formally occupied on the very day we made the acquaintance of his illustrious son and heir.

Mr. Scarborough had no words to express his gratitude toward our party, and his admiration cost us many a blush. Had we not been resolute in refusing, he would have encumbered us with an extravagance of gifts. Even as it was, he succeeded in forcing upon each of us a complete summer outfit. Vainly did he endeavor to induce Tom to accept the *Aurora*, and it was only owing to our friend's eloquent expostulations that the yacht's name was not changed to *Tom Playfair*.

But his attentions did not end here.

A few days after our perilous adventure we received a warm invitation to take supper and spend a night at his villa.

"I won't go," protested Tom; "I don't care about being lionized."

But for all that Tom did go, as did the rest of us. Imagine Tom's consternation when he discovered on our arrival that the supper was a formal party.

As we walked into the sitting-room, and found ourselves in the presence of a bevy of girls and boys, Tom caught me by the arm.

"Pshaw!" he grumbled. "Harry, honestly, I wish that this was your uncle's haunted house, and that everybody in this room was a ghost. I can stand ghosts, I believe, but a party makes me tired!"

Nevertheless, Tom endured the ordeal of introduction with great apparent composure. Frank Burdock was quite at his ease, while Percy was clearly the most finished little gentleman in the room. Doubtless Tom would have been somewhat embarrassed had it not been for Rose. She sprang forward eagerly to greet him.

"Hallo, little girl."

"Hallo, Mr. Playfair."

"Don't, or I'll faint, little girl."

"Don't what, Mr. Playfair?"

"Don't Mr. Playfair me, or I'll quit the country. I'm Tom, little girl."

I contrived to save myself from attention by keeping beside Percy. He was the bright particular star of the evening, and my little light was but a reflection from him. He was soon surrounded by a listening group, who drank in eagerly his account of our adventure on the lake. Aside from his ease and fluency of speech, I could not but admire the delicacy with which he kept himself in the background, and the judgment he displayed in the omission of

such details as would have reflected on the courage of Gordon.

In due course a young lady seated herself at the piano, and running her fingers lightly over the keys by way of prelude—young ladies always run their fingers lightly over the keys, if I may credit the books—composed herself for a quadrille.

I wondered whether Tom would dance, and fixed my eyes on that young gentleman, who was still busy chaffing the little girl.

"Mr. Playfair," said Mr. Scarborough, advancing upon Tom with a smiling young miss leaning upon his arm. "Permit me to introduce you to my niece, Miss Carruthers."

Tom arose and bowed. He didn't murmur, "Happy to see you," or any such formula, for conscientious reasons.

"A dance," continued Mr. Scarborough, "is about to begin. Could you take Miss Carruthers for a partner, Mr. Playfair?"

"I'm afraid," answered Tom, "that I must decline. That storm came rather hard on me, and I'm still very stiff and sore. In fact, I feel like a cripple. However, Miss Carruthers, you'll lose nothing; if I'm particularly awkward at anything, it's dancing. You see, we're rather a solemn crowd in our family. I have no sisters at home to help me in the matter of parlor amusements; and I suppose that's the reason I have given most of my time to such solemn tasks as kite-flying and baseball."

"You don't look so awfully solemn," said Miss Carruthers, with a puzzled expression. She was not quite sure whether Tom was speaking seriously or not.

"Miss Carruthers," came the grave reply, "I labor to conceal my feelings."

There was no mistaking the twinkle in Tom's eyes this time, and the young miss, breaking into a giggle, was led away by Mr. Scarborough in quest of a more eligible partner.

Tom and myself were content to be "wall-flowers." We were not surprised on seeing Percy taking his place in the quadrille, but we certainly were when our infantine Frank, with Rose for his partner, went through all the figures and changes with the ease of a society young man.

Mr. Scarborough was a kindly old gentleman. Stealing up to us while the little figures were moving lightly about in what to me were literally the mazes of the dance, he invited us for a stroll about the premises.

"I'm half sorry," he said pleasantly, "that I got up this party. You boys are real boys, and would have enjoyed a game of baseball, or a foot-race, or any athletic amusement much better."

"We're all right, sir," said Tom. "I like to see people enjoying themselves. And I'm too stiff for games at present."

As we turned the corner of the house, we came upon Gordon, rather unexpectedly, it would seem; for he dropped a lighted cigarette and crushed it under his foot.

"There you are—smoking again," said the father sternly.

"Perhaps he was only holding it for another fellow," volunteered Tom, consciously or unconsciously borrowing his little witticism.

"I had to do something," growled Gordon. "You

know I can't dance; and I can't bear to see everybody enjoying things and myself out in the cold."

"Well, what can you do?" queried Mr. Scarborough.

"I can play billiards or cards," said the young man plaintively.

"Euchre?" asked Tom.

"What! can you play euchre?" exclaimed Gordon, in no little astonishment.

"Yes; anything wonderful in that?"

"Why, I thought you were pious. Pious people, especially pious boys, don't play cards."

"Nonsense!" said Tom sturdily. "God doesn't insist on our giving up amusements, unless they run up against the commandments. Your idea of piety is a long face. No wonder some boys give up trying to be good."

"Hear! hear!" said Mr. Scarborough; "you've hit the nail on the head. Gordon has been associating with a queer lot of boys at the military academy he attended last year. They consider piety to consist in avoidance of laughter, of cards, baseball, smoking, chewing—in fact, they mix up innocent amusement and decorum with right and wrong, and then go off and violate all the standards of piety they have set up. They don't see how a boy can be good and happy at the same time; consequently they go to extremes and throw aside religion almost entirely."

Gordon took advantage of his father's monologue to give us a familiar wink, and to put his finger to his nose, signals which we ignored.

"Come on, let's play," he broke in. "There's just four of us."

"All right," said Tom.

We were soon engaged at our "impious" amusement in an upper room. To do Gordon justice, he was quite skilful in handling the cards. He and I were partners, and succeeded in winning three games hand-running from Tom and Mr. Scarborough. The fourth game opened with Tom's deal. When Tom turned up the nine of hearts, it was noticeable that there were but *three* cards under the trump.

"Hallo!" I said, "some of the cards are missing."

"Yes," said Gordon, "some fellow's cheating."

"Suppose we turn our cards faces up on the table," said Tom affably.

"Just what I thought, the four Jacks are gone," snarled Gordon, looking over the faces of the cards.

"If only two had been missing," continued Tom suavely, "they might not have been noticed. The fact is," said Tom, with increasing serenity, as he picked the knave of hearts and the knave of diamonds out of his lap, "I've got two here, and I'll trouble you, Gordon, to hand over the other two."

"You're a cheat!" howled Gordon. "Keep away," he suddenly added in terror—"don't strike me. I take it back." For Tom had risen; not, however, to strike this ingenuous young gentleman. Taking him firmly by the collar, Tom assisted him from his chair.

"There!" said Tom sternly, pointing to the missing knaves upon which Gordon had been sitting. "I've been waiting for five deals to spot the man who's been keeping two cards out of the pack regularly. Pious boys don't play that kind of game."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Scarborough, "I didn't know my son was a blackleg."

Gordon was soon brought to his knees. He apologized, and promised to play above-board.

"I'll play fair, Playfair," he unconsciously punned; and it struck me for the first time that there was an accidental fitness in Tom's name. I may add that we won few games for the ensuing two hours.

After the game, there was a late supper, then—joyful announcement—bed.

As quite a number of young people were to stay over-night, the house was somewhat crowded in regard to accommodations. Feeling tired, I was shown to my room some little time before the others. The sleeping apartment had two double beds. One was alloted to Percy, Tom, and myself: the other, I was informed, to Gordon and two of his intimate friends from the military academy. There was, moreover, a cot for Frank.

Some minutes after I had gone to bed, my friends and Gordon with the two strangers entered.

The young gentlemen of the military academy at once set about exchanging confidences among themselves, while Tom took off his coat and Percy knelt down beside the bed and began his night prayers.

"Look," said a yellow-faced student of the military academy, as he pointed to the kneeling form.

The three of them engaged in an unmistakable stare of astonishment.

"Yah! the hypocrite," whispered the second stranger distinctly. "I hate hypocrites. Maybe I didn't see him dancing and laughing."

Tom was now staring, but they were too absorbed in Percy to notice this.

The bilious young man from the military academy

here struck his hand upon his thigh, and catching up a valise drew from it a pair of very prettily embroidered slippers. Selecting one, he turned toward Percy, poising the slipper in the air.

"Don't, Eugene, don't," interposed Gordon. (I must do this noble youth the justice of stating that he actually interposed.) The yellow-faced one lowered his arm.

"Go on," interposed the other. "I dare you."

Few boys of poor principle can take a "dare." He raised his arm and sent the slipper at Percy's head.

Tom caught it on the fly, walked over to the window, and threw it out into the night.

"That other slipper isn't worth much without its mate," he observed. "Perhaps you'd like to throw that."

The yellow-faced individual took on a belligerent air, and, I judge, was about to offer to "fight" Tom, when a whispered word from Gordon changed his purpose. Gordon's words were to this effect: "Look out, he can lick your whole family, you bilious fool."

So the challenge was changed into an apology.

"I only meant it in joke."

"Exactly," answered Tom. "I understand: your style of joke is to throw slippers at the heads of people who don't want to be disturbed. The best joke I know of is to throw slippers out of the windows. I do it regularly."

The young man of the coffee-and-cream complexion attempted a smile; while his companions took no pains to conceal their laughter at his expense.

When Percy rose from his knees, Tom turned to the military trio:

"Gentlemen," he began, "I hate to give offence; but I fear I shall have to hurt your feelings the same way as my friend Percy. In the mean time, if there are any little jokes in the way of flying slippers, Percy Wynn will show what a convenience a window is when a fellow wants to get rid of small objects."

And Tom knelt down and prayed with amazing composure.

The military students presently took to talking in a louder key. The tone of conversation, in form, at least, was not vulgar, but the matter was by no means innocent. As they went on, their converse became worse.

Percy was about to make a remonstrance, when Tom arose.

"Gordon," he said, "I'm sorry to say that we forgot to bring any more cotton along."

"I beg your pardon," said Gordon, who was an adept in the conventionalities of conversation, "but I don't exactly take your meaning."

"Well, the fact is," continued Tom, "we've nothing to stuff our ears with. So if you and your very nice friends want to continue that kind of rot, you'll please to go outside. Either do that or talk decently; otherwise, we'll leave this house right now."

Gordon turned to his companions, who were for the nonce thoroughly ashamed.

"I guess he's right, fellows. Let's get to bed."

They took the hint in all meekness; although the bilious-complexioned young gentleman as a parting salute made some confused remarks about milksops, little girls, and so on, till Gordon invited him to close his mouth.

I have reason to think that Master Eugene

changed his opinion the following morning. Mr. Scarborough brought us all upon the lawn, shortly after breakfast, and urged us to get up a game of baseball. On examination, it appeared that there was not a sufficient number to play.

Rose came to our relief.

"O papa, get up races; I want to see Tom and Percy run."

"Just the thing," said Mr. Scarborough, "who'll try a race. I'll give a fine jointed fishing-pole to the winner."

The bilious young man, who was blessed with long legs, stepped forth at once.

"Who'll run against Eugene?" asked Mr. Scarborough, looking around. "I'm afraid you're all too slow for him."

Eugene glanced disdainfully at Tom, Percy, and myself.

"Go on, Tom," whispered Percy.

"My legs are too short for him, and I'm too sore. Percy, if any of us can do it, you can. But you must make it a long run. Make it a question of holding out. I'll fix it. Mr. Scarborough, Percy Wynn will run him."

Eugene smiled, and glanced at the slim form of Percy with contempt that was not even ill-concealed.

"Hurrah for Percy!" put in Frank. "Make it a long race."

"Of course," continued Tom, "a hundred yards or so would be hardly fair, as Percy is younger and smaller. Give him a chance to show how he can hold out."

Mr. Scarborough glanced about him. There was a gravelled path opening from the gate on both sides,

and leading up to his house. It formed almost a complete circle.

"Would an eighth of a mile be enough?" he asked.

"Pshaw! that's nothing," said Eugene.

"Very good; we will make it a quarter of a mile —that is, twice around this gravelled road. Now, you'll both start from this hitching post here, and the one who touches it first on his second round is the winner."

As these and other preliminaries were being arranged, Rose, who had stolen over to Tom, was begging him to take part.

"Oh, no, little girl. Percy's a better runner than I."

"Is he, sir? Ah, how I hope he'll win!"

"So do I, little girl."

"I like Percy very much."

"So do I, little girl."

"And there's another boy I like, too, and he's not far off, either." And Miss Rose glanced very archly at Tom.

Tom grinned.

"Much obliged, little girl."

"You're all so nice, and kind, and good; and you're not afraid to lose your lives. Oh! how brave you were, when you came to save me and Gordon!"

Tom should have blushed here and said that he had only done his duty. But he didn't.

"Little girl, when you sang 'Jesus, Saviour of my soul,' I felt perfectly happy out there on that ugly lake."

"Did you?" exclaimed Rose delightedly. "Oh, I meant it every word. Mamma taught me to sing it when I was little—that is, I mean," she added,

as Tom broke into a smile, "when I was a baby. I didn't like to drown: but when I thought of Him, it was so nice. I'm not afraid to meet Him." As she gazed up into Tom's face with all the sweet innocence of childhood shining from her lovely eyes, Tom felt a lump rising in his throat.

"That's right, little one," he said, patting her golden hair, "and I hope and pray you never will fear to meet Him."

And the child and Tom turned away, each from the other, with such expressions as we see on the faces of those who have risen from fervent prayer.

The two runners, meantime, were standing on a line, while Mr. Scarborough was counting: "One—two—three—go!"

"God bless me!" ejaculated Mr. Scarborough a moment later, "but that little fellow can run."

"He's not even exerting himself," said Tom. "He's taking it easy; a little too easy, perhaps." For Percy had already in the first hundred yards given his rival a long lead. This lead Eugene continued to lengthen, as they both neared the gate.

"There's *one* quarter of the race over," said Frank anxiously, as Eugene passed the entrance to the drive, "and Percy's away behind."

"At least fifty feet," said Tom. "But look! Percy is putting on more speed. See! he's gaining a little, I think. I'll bet on him yet."

Eugene was now nearing the hitching post; he was breathing somewhat heavily, and the perspiration was rolling down his face. Percy, about forty-five or fifty feet behind him, was fetching his breath quite easily, while his face, just the least bit flushed, was serene and cheerful. Eugene had passed us without moving his head one way or the other. Not so Percy: as he passed, he turned his smiling face upon us, bowed and doffed his cap, which he threw at Tom's feet.

"That means a spurt," said Tom.

And he was quite right. As Percy passed the post, he put on full speed; and then you should have heard the "ohs" and "ahs" from the spectators.

With every step he seemed to gain upon his competitor.

"That's the best base-runner at St. Maure's College," said Frank proudly. "And he can run better than that if he wants to, too."

I think Frank was exaggerating in this latter statement; for Percy was now running at his best. By the time Eugene had made his third quarter of the race Percy was but fifteen or twenty feet behind him.

"I'll bet he'll be up with him inside of one hundred yards," screamed Frank. "I'll put up my head on it."

The words were scarce out of Frank's mouth when Eugene stumbled and fell. And weren't we all proud of Percy and of St. Maure's, when Percy stopped himself almost at once, then went back some twenty feet, and awaited patiently for Eugene to arise and resume his running.

"There's a gentleman for you," ejaculated Mr. Scarborough; "I consider it an honor to know him."

Percy in his generosity goes further than even we who knew him so well had counted upon; he stands still till Eugene had made a start. Then, with a great spurt, he comes pattering closer and closer upon his rival. Now they are neck and neck, and

the goal is scarce twenty-five yards from them. On they come, breast to breast, Percy full flushed but composed, Eugene with swollen veins and panting breath. Now Percy breaks away from him: one foot, two——

"Come on, Percy, run away from him," cried Frank.

With another spurt, Percy comes on, graceful and swift—a second later he is at the post with his companion some ten feet behind.

There were more races and other contests of skill, which I omit for the reason that graver matters are coming.

The quiet tenor of school-life is to be broken upon by a certain train of adventures which are so strange and improbable that, in looking back upon them, I sometimes fancy that they are such things as dreams are made of, not realities of life. The shadow cast upon my early years by my uncle's murder had not yet wholly lifted, as I was very shortly to find. The reader will see that the mystery is to give some hope—whether true or false, later events will show—of being solved; and so, leaving the pretty lake, and innocent Rose, and kind Mr. Scarborough, and all the natural beauties of our vacation resort, I invite the reader to a change of scene.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH TOM AND I SPEND A NIGHT IN THE "HAUNTED HOUSE," AND IN WHICH I MEET WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE.

"YES, Tom, that's Tower Hill Mansion," and I pointed to the gloomy abode which had been my uncle's.

It was the twilight of August 16th. Tom and I were seated in a barouche, hired for the occasion, and rapidly nearing the house whose horrid memories had so important an influence on my life.

"It doesn't look any too cheerful in the gloaming," Tom observed. "What an awful racket those crows are making!" There was a number of these ugly black birds hovering in mid-air, uttering their raucous cries above the house, and very strange and eery they looked in the dying of the day. To my excited imagination they seemed to be incorporate spirits from another world—spirits of bloodshed and robbery and murder, gloating over a mansion consecrated to their darling rites.

We dismissed the driver at the gate, bidding him return for us at six the next morning.

On reaching the massive, gloomy door I put down my valise, and opening it produced a heavy bunch of keys. They were quite rusty.

"Those keys look worse haunted than the house," observed Tom.

"They haven't been used in years, Tom," and I proceeded to fit the heaviest of the keys in the lock. In inserting it, not without difficulty, I shook the door in its frame. Forthwith there came a series