PERCY WYNN.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH PERCY WYNN BOWS TO THOMAS PLAYFAIR AND THE READER SIMULTANEOUSLY.

"SAY, young fellow, what are you moping here for?" The person thus rudely addressed was a slight, delicate, fair-complexioned child, whose age, one could perceive at a glance, must have been something under fourteen. Previous to this interruption, he had been sitting solitary on a bench, in a retired corner of the college play-ground. That he was not a boy of ordinary characteristics was at once apparent. His eyes were large, fringed by long lashes; and their deep blue was intensified by his fair features. His face was an exquisite oval; it was one of those expressive faces which reveal in their every line the thoughts and emotions of the past. And his past must have been bright, and good, and pleasant; for amiability and confidence and innocence had written their traces on every feature. But the rosy cheek and the sunbeam's tint were conspicuously absent, and, in the matter-of-fact parlance of a school-fellow, his complexion and general appearance would be styled girlish. Nor would such appellation be en-

tirely unjust. His hands were small, white, and delicate, while his golden hair fell in gleaming ripples about his shoulders. In perfect keeping with all this, his form was slight and shapely. Even his attire lent its art towards bringing into notice the slender grace of his figure. His neat coat, his knickerbockers which barely reached to the knee, his black silk stockings, and his high-laced shoes, while clearly revealing the nice proportion of his form, were agreeably set off and contrasted, in the soberness of their color, by a bright and carefully arranged neck-tie. No one, indeed, looking at him for a moment would hesitate to set him down as "Mamma's darling."

The boy who put him the question was one of a group, which had just broken upon the solitude of our little friend. He was a contrast in every particular. Stout, freckle-faced, sandy-haired, impudent in expression, Charlie Richards, it was at once evident, was something of a bully. There was an air of good-humor about his face, however, which was a redeeming trait. If he was a bully and consequently cruel, it was rather from thoughtlessness than from malice. If he was unkind, it was not that he lacked generous qualities, but rather because his feelings had been blunted by evil associates. He, too, was a new-comer at St. Maure's, having arrived on the opening class-day. Three weeks had already passed, and by his boldness and physical courage he had gathered about him a following of some nine or ten boys, all of whom were incipient bullies, several of them far more cruel, far more wicked in disposition than their leader.

When this boy's question broke upon the child's

ears, he raised his head, which had been buried in his hands, and gazed in undisguised fear upon the group before him. Evidently he had been so buried in his own thoughts and sorrows that their approach had failed to arouse him.

"Say, young fellow, don't you hear me?" continued Richards, unsympathetically. "What are you moping here for?"

The boy's lips trembled, but he made no answer. He seemed, indeed, at a loss for words.

"Well, at least tell us what's your name," pursued Richards.

"Percy Wynn, sir."

His voice was clear and musical. The name evoked a low, derisive chuckling from the crowd.

"Percy Wynn! Percy Wynn!" repeated Richards in a tone intended to be sarcastic. "Why, it's a very, very pretty name. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Oh yes, indeedy!" answered Percy very seriously, whereupon there was a shout of laughter from the boys. As Percy perceived that his questioner had been mocking him, the blood rushed to his face, and he blushed scarlet.

"My! look how he blushes—just like a girl," cried Martin Peters, a thin, puny, weazen-faced youth, who in lieu of strength employed a bitter tongue.

There was another laugh; and as poor Percy realized that the eyes of nearly a dozen boys were feeding and gloating upon his embarrassment, he blushed still more violently, and arising, sought to make his way through them, and escape their unwelcome company.

But Richards rudely clutched his arm.

"Hold on, Percy."

"Oh, please do let me go. I desire to be alone."

"No, no; sit down. I want to ask you some more questions." And Richards roughly forced him back upon the bench.

"Now, Percy, do you know where you're going to sleep to-night?"

"Yes, sir; over there in that—that—dormitory, I think the prefect said it was. He showed me my bed a little while ago."

"Very well; now you're a new-comer, and don't know the customs of this place. So I want to tell you something. To-night, just as soon as you get in bed—and, by the way, you must hurry up about it—you must say in a loud, clear tone, 'Put out the lights, Mr. Prefect; I'm in bed.'"

The listeners and admirers of Richards forced their faces into an expression of gravity. They were inwardly tickled: lying came under their low standard of wit.

"Oh, indeed!" said Percy. "Excuse me, sir, but can't you get some one else to say it?"

"No, no; you must say it yourself. It's the custom for new-comers to do it the first night they arrive."

"But, dear me!" exclaimed Percy, "isn't it a funny custom?"

"Well, it *is* funny," Richards assented, "but it's got to be done all the same."

"Very well, then; I suppose I must do it."

"Now, do you remember what you are to say?"

"'Put out the lights, Mr. Prefect; I'm in bed.'"

"That's it exactly; you've learned your lesson

well. Now there's another thing to be done. You must turn a handspring right off."

"Turn what?" asked Percy in a puzzled tone.

"Look," and Richards suited the action to the word.

"Oh, upon my word," protested Percy in all earnestness, "I can't."

"No matter; you can try."

"Oh, please do excuse me, sir, this time, and I'll practise at it in private," pleaded Percy. "And when I've learned it, I'll be ever so glad to comply with your wishes."

"Whew!" exclaimed John Sommers, "he's been reading up a dictionary!"

"Oh, indeed I haven't," protested Percy.

"Come on," Richards urged in a tone almost menacing, "you must try. Hurry up, now; no fooling."

Percy could endure his awkward position no longer. Bursting into tears, he arose and again attempted to make his way through his tormentors.

Richards caught him more rudely than upon the first occasion, and with some unnecessary and brutal violence flung him back upon the bench. "See here, young fellow," he said angrily, "do you want to fight? or are you going to do what you're told?"

"Of course he doesn't want to fight, and he'd be a fool to do anything *you* tell him," said a new-comer on the scene, who brought himself through the thick of the crowd by dint of vigorous and unceremonious elbowing. "See here, Richards, it's mean of you to come here with your set and tease a new boy. Let him alone." And Master Thomas

Playfair seated himself beside the weeping boy, and stared very steadily and indignantly into Richards' face. The bully's eyes lowered involuntarily, he hesitated for one moment, then, abashed, turned away.

Tom Playfair was an "old boy," this being his third year at St. Maure's. Now, to be an "old boy" is in itself, according to boarding-school traditions, an undoubted mark of superiority. Furthermore, he was the most popular lad in the small yard; and although Richards was older and somewhat more sturdily built than Tom, it would not do for him to come into collision with one so influential. So Richards sulkily withdrew, and was speedily followed by his companions, leaving Percy alone with Tom Playfair.

Tom Playfair! the same bright, cheerful, happy Tom whom some of my readers have already met. Just as healthy, stronger, a little taller; but the same kind, genial Tom. His sturdy little legs were still encased in knickerbockers, his rounded cheeks still glowed with health; his blue sailor-shirt still covered the same brave, strong heart.

For a few moments there was a silence, broken only by the sobs of Percy. Tom's right hand, meanwhile, was deep in his jacket-pocket. Presently, when Percy had become calmer, it emerged filled.

"Here, Percy, take some candy."

Tom had a way of offering candy which was simply irresistible. No long speech could have had so reassuring an effect. Percy accepted the candy, and brightened up at once; put a caramel in his mouth, then drawing a dainty silk handkerchief

from his breast-pocket, he wiped his eyes and broke into a smile which spoke volumes of gratitude.

"That's good," said Tom, encouragingly. "You're all right now. My name's Tom Playfair, and I come from St. Louis. I know your name already, so you needn't tell me it. Are you a Chicago boy?"

"No, sir, I'm from Baltimore."

"See here," said Tom, "do you want me to run away?"

"No, indeedy!" said Percy, smiling, shaking back his long golden locks, and opening his eyes very wide. "Why, are you afraid of Baltimore boys?"

"It isn't that," Tom made answer. "But if you say 'sir' to me, I'll run away. Call me Tom and I'll call you Percy."

"Very well, Tom, I will. And I am very happy to make your acquaintance."

Tom was startled, and for a moment paused, not knowing what manner of reply to make to this neatly-worded compliment.

"Well," he said at length, "let's shake hands, then."

To his still greater astonishment, Percy gravely arose and with a graceful movement of his body, which was neither a bow nor a curtsy, but something between the two, politely took his hand.

"Well, I never!" gasped Tom. "Where in the world did you come from?"

"From Baltimore, Maryland," said Percy. "I thought I had just told you."

"Are all the boys there like you?"

"Well, indeed, Tom, I really don't know. I

wasn't acquainted with any boys, you know. Mamma said they were too rough. And"—here Percy broke almost into a sob—"they *are* rough, too. You're the only one of the boys I've met so far, Tom, that's been kind to me."

Tom whistled softly.

"Didn't know any boys?"

"Not one."

"Well, then, who on the round earth did you play with?"

"Oh, with my sisters, Tom. I have ten sisters. The oldest is eighteen, and the youngest is six. Kate and Mary are twins. And oh, Tom, they are *all* so kind and nice. I wish you knew them; I'm sure you'd like them immensely."

Tom had his doubts. In his unromantic way, he looked upon girls as creatures who were to be made use of by being avoided.

"Did you play games with your sisters, Percy?"

"Oh yes, indeedy! And, Tom, I can dress a doll or sew just as nicely as any of them. And I could beat them all at the skipping-rope. Then we used to play 'Pussy wants a corner,' and 'Hunt the slipper,' and 'Grocery-store,' and I used to keep the grocery and they were the customers—and oh, we did have such times! And then at night mamma used to read to us, Tom—such splendid stories, and sometimes beautiful poems, too. Did you ever hear the story of Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp?"

"I believe not," said Tom modestly.

"Or Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves?"

Tom again entered a negative.

"Oh, they're just too good; they're charming. I'll tell them to you, Tom, some day, and a good many more. I know ever so many."

"I like a good story," said Tom, "and I'm sure I'll be very glad to listen to some of yours."

"Oh yes, indeedy! But, Tom, do you know why I've come here? Our family has given up housekeeping. Poor, dear mamma has fallen into very delicate health, and has gone to Europe with papa for a rest. Papa has given up business, and intends, when he returns, to settle in Cincinnati. He has sent all my sisters to the school of the Sacred Heart there, except the oldest and the two youngest, who are staying with my aunt who lives on Broadway. But they've promised to write to me every day. They're going to take turns. Do your sisters write to you regularly, Tom?"

"I haven't any sister," Tom answered, smiling. But there was just a touch of sadness in the smile.

"What! not a single one?"

Percy's expression was one of astonishment.

"Not one."

Astonishment softened into pity.

"Oh, poor boy!" he cried, clasping his hands in dismay. "How did you manage to get on?"

"Oh, I've pulled through. My mamma is dead too," said Tom, still more sadly.

The deep sympathy which came upon Percy's face at this declaration bespoke a tender and sympathetic heart. He said nothing, but clasped Tom's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Well, you *are* a good fellow!" broke out Tom, putting away his emotion under cover of boisterousness, "and I'm going *to make a boy out of you.*"

"A boy!" Percy repeated.

"Yes, a boy—a real boy."

"Excuse me, Tom; but may I ask what you consider me to be now?"

Tom hesitated.

"You won't mind?" he said doubtfully.

"Oh, not from you, Tom; you're my friend."

"Well," said Tom, haltingly, "you're—well, you're just a little bit queer, odd—*girlish*—that's it."

Percy's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"You don't say! Oh, dear me! But Tom, it's so funny that I never heard I was that way before. My mamma and my sisters never told me anything about it."

"Maybe they didn't know any boys."

"Oh yes, they did, Tom. They knew *me*."

Percy considered this convincing.

"Yes; but you're not like other boys. They couldn't judge by you."

"Excuse me?" said Percy, still in great astonishment.

"You're not like other boys; not a bit."

"But I've *read* a great deal about boys. I've read the Boyhood of Great Painters and Musicians, and about other boys too, but I can't remember them all now. Then I've read Hood's

> "'Oh, when I was a little boy
> My days and nights were full of joy.'

Isn't that nice, Tom? I know the whole poem by heart."

It was now Tom's turn to be astonished.

"You don't mean to say," he said in a voice

expressive almost of awe, "that you read poetry-books?"

"Oh yes, indeedy!" answered Percy with growing animation; "and I like Longfellow ever so much—he's a dear poet—don't you?"

Just then the bell rang for supper. Tom, absorbed in wonder, brought his new friend to the refectory, and, during the meal, could scarcely refrain from smiling, as he noticed with what dainty grace our little Percy took his first meal at St. Maure's.