

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH PERCY IS CROSS-EXAMINED BY THOMAS PLAYFAIR AND MAKES SOME NEW FRIENDS.

"HARRY! Harry Quip!" shouted Tom as the boys came out from supper, "come here. I want to introduce you."

Harry, making his way out of the crowd, came forward, and was as sheepish as boys generally are on the occasion of an introduction.

"Harry Quip, this is a new boy all the way from Baltimore, and his name is Percy Wynn."

Harry put out his hand awkwardly enough. Suddenly the sheepishness upon his face crystallized into the most violent amazement, as gracetul Percy, with his half-bow, half curtsy, distinctly enunciated:

"Mr. Harry Quip, I am charmed to make your acquaintance."

"He quotes poetry, too," said Tom in a low whisper to Harry, "and he uses bigger words than I've ever seen out of a book." He then added aloud: "Say, Harry, I wish you'd go and see to his desk and things in the study-hall; and when you're through, bring Joe Whyte and Will Ruthers along. I'll be down at the farther end of the yard with Percy. I want to have a little talk with him."

Harry was only too glad to get away, his face still expressing utmost astonishment, and his lips

muttering in stupefied wonder: "And he quotes poetry, too!"

"Percy," began Tom as they sauntered down the yard towards a bench at the farther end, "did you ever play base-ball?"

"No; but I've heard about it."

"Did you ever play hand-ball?"

"Do you mean a returning ball, Tom? Oh, lots of times."

Tom did *not* mean a returning ball, but he went on.

"Did you ever handle a gun?"

"A *real* gun?"

"Of course. I don't mean a pop-gun or a broomstick."

"With real powder and real bullets!" exclaimed Percy in horror. "Oh, Tom! the idea!"

"Ever go fishing with a *real* hook and a *real* line?" Tom next inquired, mischievously employing Percy's turn of expression.

"No; but I'd like to, if some one would fix on the worm and take the fish off the hook."

"Did you ever go boating in a *real* boat, on *real* water?"

"Oh dear, no! Mamma said that boats tip so easily. She wouldn't have allowed me to get in one even if I wished."

"Did you ever go to a circus?"

"Once, Tom: Sister Mary, sister Jane, and myself with papa. And oh, wasn't it splendid! The clown was the funniest thing! He used to make such awfully queer remarks. I wondered where he got them all. After that I used to play circus at home. But really, I didn't succeed very well. I

didn't dare try to imitate the clown, and most of the things I saw were too hard."

Tom was not yet through with his analysis. He thought of all the amusements of his ante-college days.

"Did you ever run to a fire?"

"Oh no, indeedy!" said Percy.

"Can you swim?"

"I used to try in the bath-room at home, but the basin was too small. Mamma said it was dangerous to go in deep water."

Tom reflected for a moment. He was both amused and surprised.

"Well," he resumed after a silence, "most boys are pretty well up in all these things long before they get to be your age."

"You astonish me," said Percy.

"Let's look at your hands. Ah! I thought so. They're soft as—as mush. Here, now, I want you to do me a favor. Shut your hand tight—that's it—tighter still. Now hit me as hard as you can on the muscle—here!" And Tom, holding out his right arm, indicated the upper half.

"Oh, Tom, I don't want to hurt you!"

"Don't be alarmed; I'm tough," said Tom, smiling. "Go on, now, strike as hard as you can."

Percy brought his arm through the air in much the same manner as a woman when attempting to throw something; but as he neared Tom's arm, his courage failed.

"I can't do it. Oh, indeed I can't."

"Come on, all your might," said Tom.

Percy gave his arm another tremendous swing; but he relented at the very last moment, and so

his little knuckles came down on Tom's sturdy limb with a gentleness which was almost caressing.

"Don't pet me," said Tom in mock seriousness, "I'm not used to it. Pshaw! a fly wouldn't have known he was hit. Over again now, and just as hard as you can."

This time Percy, closing his lips firmly and shutting his eyes so as not to lose courage, brought his doubled fist with all the force he could muster against the extended arm.

There was a cry of pain.

But not from Tom.

"Oh laws!" Percy exclaimed, "I've hurt my hand."

Tom sat down upon the bench, and laughed till the tears came to his eyes.

"Why, you're the funniest boy I ever met."

"Am I?" said Percy, doubtfully, and smiling in his perplexity. "Well, I'm glad you enjoy it. Oh, here comes Mr. Middleton," he continued. "He's a nice man, and I like him immensely. Good-evening, Mr. Middleton,"—he gracefully raised his hat and made his curious little bow,—“it's a beautiful evening, sir, isn't it?"

"Very nice indeed," the prefect made answer with a cheering smile. He was much amused by the quaint ways of the new student, although from delicacy he allowed his countenance to give no sign of his feelings.

"You didn't wait for me, Percy," he continued, "outside the dormitory after I gave you your bed; and so I had no opportunity of introducing you to some of the boys before supper. But I've

noticed already that you seem able to make your own way."

"I don't like boys, Mr. Middleton."

"Indeed! that's strange. You're a boy yourself."

"Yes, sir, but I can't help that; I like girls better."

"Do you?"

"Yes, indeedy! My sisters are ever so much nicer than boys."

"But perhaps you don't know many boys."

"Well, that's so, sir. There were a few here came up to me just before supper, and they were awfully rough. Indeed, if it hadn't been for Tom, I don't know what I'd have done. But I do like Tom, Mr. Middleton; I like him just as if he was *Pancratius*."

Tom blushed at the compliment, and was puzzled by the comparison.

"So you've read *Fabiola*, Percy?" pursued the prefect.

"Oh yes, indeedy, every word of it! Isn't it a beautiful book? And *St. Agnes*! I did like her. And do you remember the little boy who was carrying the Blessed Sacrament concealed in his bosom and died rather than let the pagans desecrate and insult it? Oh, that was so noble! *He* was a hero!"

"Clearly this is an extraordinary lad," thought the prefect. "Under all his odd, quaint, girlish ways there is hidden a beautiful soul. He has fallen in, too, with the very boy who will best help to his development."

With a few words of encouragement and a

friendly smile, Mr. Middleton left them. Presently Harry appeared, bringing with him Joe Whyte and Willie Ruthers. After the same startling bow consequent on the formality of introduction had awakened the wonder of the new-comers, a conversation began which, drifting here and there, was finally closed by Tom's proposing a story.

Without the least hesitation, Percy related the adventures of *Ali Baba* with the immortal forty thieves. Certainly his fluency and animation were wonderful. He spoke in tones beautifully modulated, and employed words which—to borrow Harry Quip's subsequent remark—"would give an ordinary boy the lockjaw." In the heat of narration, too, he made gestures which were markedly elegant. In short, the whole proceeding was so extraordinary that the listeners, while fairly carried away by the interest of the story, could not but glance at each other from time to time in silent wonder.

For full twenty-five minutes did the young narrator engage their attention; and when the bell sounded for studies the listeners all agreed that they had rarely spent so pleasant an evening. Girlish of manner, odd of speech, dainty of gesture, though our little Percy was, he had yet found his way into the hearts of Tom and his friends.

That night Mr. Middleton was quietly reading in the dormitory while the boys were slipping into bed, when a clear, sweet voice broke the stillness.

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

Mr. Middleton arose from his chair, and swept the whole length of the dormitory with his eye. There was a general smile, but no loud laughter.

Poor little Percy, dreadfully alarmed at the sound of his own voice breaking upon the silence, shut his eyes tight. Of course, he could scarcely *hear* the smiles, and so, as everything was quiet, he had no reason to think that his proceedings had been in any wise irregular. And thus very soon the singular child fell asleep, with those sacred names upon his lips which a fond mother, bending nightly over the bedside of her child, had taught him to utter in all confidence, innocence, and love.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH PERCY HAS A STRANGE MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

AT half-past five next morning, the wash-room of the junior students literally swarmed with boys, while their number was constantly swelled by fresh additions from the dormitory. There was no talking in the room, but the clatter of basins, the splash and ripple and gurgle of water, the sibilant noise of many brushes, and, like a refrain, the hurried movement to and fro of little lads in all the varying stages of incomplete toilet, gave the apartment an air of animation and crowded life which to an uninitiated onlooker was really refreshing.

As Percy descended the stairs of the dormitory, the sight certainly struck him with a sense of novelty. Boys pulling on coats, boys taking them off, boys baring their arms, boys blacking their shoes, boys brushing their clothes, boys combing their hair, boys lathering their heads till their figures looked like so many overgrown snowballs mounted on live, moving legs—boys, boys, boys, in every conceivable attitude, made up a scene charged with life, vigorous with bustling variety.

In matters of toilet Percy was perfectly at home. So without hesitation or inquiry he filled his basin and acquitted himself of his ablutions with the neatness and precision of an expert. But when it