The Canadian Champion

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VOLUME 34. MILTON, THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 1894. NO. 3

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VICE VERSA.—Continued.

What's the matter with you? What have I done to put you in a wax?"

"Nothing at present," said Paul. "I don't speak to you, merely because I don't happen to have the—ah—pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Oh, very well, then; I dare say you know best," said the other huffy. "Only I thought—considering we came the same half, and have been chums, and always sat next one another ever since—you might perhaps just recollect having met me before, you know."

"Well, I don't," said Mr. Bultitude. "I tell you I haven't the least idea what your name is. The fact is, there has been a slight mistake, which I can't stop to talk about now. There's a cab just driven up outside now. You must excuse me, really, my boy, I want to go."

He tried to work his arm free from the close and affectionate grip of his unwelcome companion, who was regarding him with a sort of admiring leer.

"What a fellow you are, Bultitude!" he said; "always up to something or other. You know me well enough. I'm Jolland. What is the use of keeping it up any longer? Let's talk, and stop humbugging. How much grub have you brought back this time?"

To be advised to stop humbugging, and be persecuted with such idle question as these, maddened the poor gentleman. A hansom really had rolled up to the steps outside. He must put an end to this waste of precious time, and escape from this highly inconvenient small boy.

He forced his way to the door, the boy still keeping fast hold of his arm. Fortunately the cab was still there, and its late occupant, a tall, broad man, was standing with his back to them, paying the driver. Paul was only just in time.

"Porter!" he cried. "Where's that porter? I want my box put on that cab. No, I don't care about the luggage; engage the cab. Now, you little ruffian, are you going to let me go? Can't you see I'm anxious to get away?"

Jolland giggled more impishly than ever. "Well, you have got cheek!" he said. "Go on, I wish you may get that cab, I'm sure!"

Paul, thus released, was just hurrying toward the cab, when the stranger who had got out of it settled the fare with satisfaction to himself, and turned sharply round.

The gas-light fell on his face, and Mr. Bultitude recognized that the form and features were those of no stranger—he had stumbled upon the very last person he had expected or desired to meet just then—his flight was intercepted by his son's schoolmaster, Dr. Grimstone himself!

The suddenness of the shock threw him completely off his balance. In an ordinary way the encounter would not, of course, have discomposed him; but now he would have given worlds for presence of mind enough either to rush past the cab, and insure his only chance of freedom before the doctor had fully realized his intention, or else greet him affably and calmly, and, taking him quietly aside, explain his awkward position with an easy, man-of-the-world air, which would insure instant conviction.

But both courses were equally impossible. He stood there, right in Dr. Grimstone's path, with terrified, starting eyes and quivering limbs, more like an unhappy guinea-pig expecting the advance of a boa, than a British merchant in the presence of his son's school master! He was sick and faint with alarm, and the consciousness that appearances were all against him.

There was nothing in the least extraordinary in the fact of the doctor's presence at the station. Mr. Bultitude might easily have taken this into account as a very likely contingency and have provided accordingly, had he troubled to think, for it was Dr. Grimstone's custom, upon the first day of the term, to come up to town and meet as many of his pupils upon the platform as intended to return by a train previously specified at the foot of the school bills; and Paul had even expressly insinuated upon Dick's traveling under surveillance in this manner, thinking it necessary to keep him out of premature mischief,

It makes a calamity doubly hard to bear when one looks back and sees by what trivial chance it has come upon us, and how slight an effort would have averted it altogether; and Mr. Bultitude cursed his own stupidity as he stood there, rooted to the ground, and saw the hansom (a "patent safety" to him in sober earnest) drive off and abandon him to his fate.

Dr. Grimstone bore down heavily upon him and Jolland, who had by this time come up. He was a tall and imposing personage, with a strong black beard and small angry eyes, slightly blood-tinged; he wore garments of a semi-clerical cut and color, though he was not in orders. He held out a hand to each with elaborate geniality.

"Ha, Bultitude, my boy, how! are you? How are you, Jolland? Come back, braced in body and mind by your vacation, eh? That's as it should be. Have you tickets? No? follow me, then. You're both over age, I believe. There you are; take them."

And, before Paul could protest, he had purchased tickets for all three, after which he laid an authoritative hand upon Mr. Bultitude's shoulder and walked with him out through the booking hall upon the platform.

"This is awful," thought Paul, shrinking involuntarily; "simply awful. He evidently has no idea who I really am. Unless I'm very careful I shall be dragged off to Crichton Hall before I can put him right. If I could only get him away alone somewhere."

As if in answer to the wish, the doctor guided him by a slight pressure straight along by the end of the station, saying to Jolland as he did so, "I wish to have a little serious conversation with Richard in private. Suppose you go to the bookstall and see if you can find out any of our young friends. Tell them to wait for me there."

When they were alone the doctor paced solemnly along in silence for some moments, while Paul, who had always been used to consider himself a fairly prominent object, whatever might be his surroundings, began to feel an altogether novel sensation of utter insignificance upon that immense brown plain platform and under the huge spans of the arches whose girders were lost in wreaths of mingled fog and smoke.

Still he had some hope. Was it possible, after all, that the doctor had divined his secret, and was searching for words delicate enough to convey his condolences?

"I wished to tell you, Bultitude," said the doctor presently, and his first words dashed all Paul's rising hopes, "that I hope you are returning this term with the resolve to do better things. You have caused your excellent father much pain in the past. You little know the grief a willful boy can inflict upon his parents."

"I think I have a very fair idea of it," thought Paul, but he said nothing.

"I hope you left him in good health! Such a devoted parent, Richard—such a noble heart!"

At any other time Mr. Bultitude might have felt gratified by these eulogies, but just then he was conscious that he could not so claim them. It was Dick who had the noble heart now, and he himself felt less of a devoted parent even than he looked.

"I had a letter from him during the vacation," continued Dr. Grimstone; "a sweet letter, Richard, breathing in every line a father's anxiety and concern for your welfare."

Paul was a little staggered. He remembered having written, but he would scarcely perhaps have described his letter as "sweet," as he had not done much more than inclose a check for his son's account and object to the items for pew-rent and scientific lectures with the diorama as excessive.

"But—and this is what I wanted to say to you, Bultitude—he is no blind, doting affection. He has implored me, for your own sake, if I see you diverging ever so slightly from the path of duty, not to stay my hand. And I shall not forget his injunctions."

A few minutes ago, and it would have seemed to Paul so simple and easy a matter to point out to the doctor the very excusable error into which he had fallen. It was no more than he would have to do repeatedly on his return, and here was an excellent opportunity for an explanation.

But, somehow, the words would not come. The schoolmaster's form seemed so tremendous and towering, and he so feeble and powerless before him, that he soon persuaded himself that a public place, like a station platform, was no scene for domestic revelations of so painful a character.

He gave up all idea of resistance at present. "Perhaps I had better leave him in his error till we get into the train," he thought; "then we will get rid of that other boy, and I can break it to him gradually in the railway carriage as I get more accustomed to him."

But, in spite of his determination to unbosom himself without further delay, he knew that a kind of fascinated resignation was growing upon him and gaining firmer hold each minute.

Something must be done to break the spell and burst the toils which were being woven round him before all effort became impossible.

"And now," said the doctor, glancing up at the great clock-face on which a reflector cast a patch of dim yellow light, "we must be thinking of starting. But don't forget what I have said."

And they walked back toward the bookstalls with their cheery warmth of color, past the glittering buffet, and on up the platform, to a part where six boys of various sizes were standing huddled forlornly together under a gaslight.

"Aha!" said Dr. Grimstone, with a slight touch of the ogre in his tone, "more of my fellows, eh? We shall be quite a party. How do you do, boys? Welcome back to your studies!"

And the six boys came forward, all evidently in the lowest spirits, and raised their tall hats with studied politeness.

"Some old friends, here, Bultitude," said the doctor, impelling the unwilling Paul toward the group. "You know Tipping, of course; Coker, too, you've met before—and Coggs. How are you, Siggers? You're looking well. Ah, by the way, I see a new face—Kiffin, I think? Kiffin, this is Master Bultitude, who will make himself your mentor, I hope, and initiate you into our various manners and customs."

"And, with a horrible dream-like sense of unreality, Mr. Bultitude found himself being greeted by several entire strangers with a degree of warmth embarrassing in the extreme.

He would have liked to protest and declare himself there and then in his true colors, but if this had been difficult alone with the doctor under the clock, it was impossible now, and he submitted ruefully enough to their unwelcome advances.

Tipping, a tall, red-haired, raw-boned boy, with sleeves and trousers he had outgrown, and immense boots, wrung Paul's hands with misdirected energy, saying, "How-de-do?" with a gruff superiority, mercifully tempered by a touch of sheepishness.

Coggs and Coker welcomed him with open arms as an equal, while Siggers, a short, slight, sharp-featured boy, with a very fashionable hat and shirt-collar, and a horse-shoe pin, drawled, "How are you, old boy?" with the langour of a confirmed man-about-town.

The other two were Biddlecomb, a boy with a blooming complexion had a singularly sweet voice, and the new-comer, Kiffin, who did not seem much at home in the society of other boys than Mr. Bultitude himself, for he kept nervously away from them, shivering with the piteous self-abandonment of an Italian greyhound.

Paul was now convinced that, unless he exerted himself considerably, his identity with his son would never even be questioned, and the danger roused him to a sudden determination.

However his face and figure might belie him, nothing in his speech or conduct should encourage the mistake. Whatever it might cost him to overcome his fear of the doctor, he would force himself to act and talk ostentatiously, as much like his own ordinary self as possible, during the journey down to Rodwell Regis, so as to prepare the doctor's mind for the disclosures he meant to make at the earliest opportunity. He was beginning to see that the railway carriage, with all those boys sitting by and staring, would be an inconvenient place for so delicate and difficult a confession.

The guard having warned intending passengers to take their seats, and Jolland, who had been unaccountably missing all this time, having appeared from the direction of the refreshment buffet, furtively brushing away some suspicious-looking flakes and crumbs from his coat, and contrived to join the party unperceived, they all got into a first-class compartment—Paul with the rest.

He longed for moral courage to stand out boldly and refuse to leave town, but, as we have seen, it was beyond his powers, and he temporized. Very soon the whistle had sounded and the train had begun to glide slowly out beyond the platform and arch, past the signal boxes and long, low sheds and offices which are the suburbs of a large terminus—and then it was too late.

CHAPTER IV.

A MINNOW AMONG TRITONS.

For some time after they were fairly started the doctor read his evening paper with an air of impartial but severe criticism, and Mr. Bultitude, as he sat opposite him next to the window, found himself overwhelmed with a new and very unpleasant timidity.

He knew that, if he would free himself, this utterly unreasonable feeling must be wrestled with and overcome; that now, if ever, was the time to assert himself, and prove that he was anything but the raw youth he was conscious of appearing. He had merely to speak and act, too, in his ordinary, every-day manner; to forget as far as possible the change that had affected his outer man, which was not so very difficult to do after all—and yet his heart sank lower and lower as each fresh telegraph post flitted past.

"I will let him speak first," he thought; "then I shall be able to feel my way." But there was more fear than caution in the resolve.

At last, however, the doctor laid down his paper, and, looking round with the glance of proprietorship on his pupils, who had relapsed into a decorous and gloomy silence, observed: "Well, boys, you have had an uniformly pleasant vacation this time—owing to the unusually inclement weather."

"Yes, Richard, fortunately in every line a" of the weather. We must try to make up for it by the zest and ardor with which we pursue our studies during the term. I intend to reduce the Easter holidays by a week by way of compensation."

This announcement (which by no means relieved the general depression—the boys received it with sickly interest) was good news to Paul, and even had the effect of making him forget his position for the time.

"I am uncommonly glad to hear it, Dr. Grimstone," he said, heartily; "that's as it should be. Boys have too many holidays as it is. There's no reason, to my mind, why parents should be the sufferers of every snow-storm. It's no joke, I can assure you, to have a great, idle boy hanging about the place eating his empty head off."

A burglar enlarging upon the law of property, or a sheep urging the necessity for butcher's meat, could hardly have produced a greater sensation.

Every boy was roused from his languor to stare and wonder at these traitorous sentiments, which, from the mouth of any but a known and tried companion, would have roused bitter hostility and contempt. As it was, their wonder became a rapturous admiration, and they waited for the situation to develop with a fearful and secret joy.

It was some time before the doctor quite recovered himself; then he said, with a grim smile: "This is indeed finding Saul among the prophets; your sentiments, if sincere, Bultitude—I repeat, if sincere—are very creditable. But I am obliged to look upon them with suspicion." Then, as if to dismiss a doubtful subject, he inquired generally, "And how have you all been spending your holidays, eh?"

There was no attempt to answer this question, it being felt probably that it was, like the conventional "How do you do?" one to which an answer is neither desired nor expected, especially as he continued almost immediately: "I took my boy Tom up to town the week before Christmas to see the representation of the 'Agamemnon' at St. George's Hall. The 'Agamemnon' as most of you are doubtless aware, is a drama by Æschylus, a Greek poet of established reputation. I was much pleased by the intelligent appreciation Tom showed during the performance. He distinctly recognized several words from his Greek Grammar in the course of the dialogue."

No one seemed capable of responding except Mr. Bultitude, who dashed into the breach with an almost pathetic effort to maintain his accustomed stiffness.

"I may be old-fashioned," he said—"very likely I am; but I, ah, decidedly disapprove of taking children to dramatic exhibitions of any kind. It unsettles them, sir—unsettles them."

Dr. Grimstone made no answer, but he put a hand on each knee, and glared with pursed lips and a leonine bristle of the beard at his youthful critic for some moments, after which he returned to his Globe with a snort, ominous cough.

"I have offended him now," thought Paul. "I must be more careful what I say. But I'll get him into a conversation again presently."

So he began at the first opportunity: "You have this evening's paper, I see. No telegrams of importance, I suppose?"

"No, sir," said the doctor, shortly.

"I saw a report in to-day's Times," said poor Mr. Bultitude, with a desperate attempt at the most conversational and old-gentlemanly manner—"I saw a report that the camphor crop was likely to be a failure this season. Now, it's a very singular thing about camphor that the Japanese——" He hoped to lead the conversation round to colonial produce, and thus open the doctor's eyes to the extent of his acquaintance with the subject.

"I am already acquainted with that method of obtaining camphor, thank you, Bultitude," said the doctor, with dangerous politeness.

"I was about to observe, when you interrupted me," said Paul—"and this is a fact that I doubt if you are aware of—that the Japanese never——"

"Well, well," said the doctor, with some impatience; "probably they never do, sir; but I shall have other opportunities of finding out what you have read about the Japanese."

But he glanced over the top of the paper at the indignant Paul, who was not accustomed to have his information received in this manner, with less suspicion and a growing conviction that some influence during the holidays had changed the boy from a graceless young scapegrace into a prig of the first water.

"He's most uncivil," Mr. Bultitude told himself—"almost insulting; but I'll go on. I'm rousing his curiosity. I'm making way with him; he sees a difference already. And so he applied himself once more.

"You're a smoker, of course, Dr. Grimstone?" he began. "We don't stop anywhere, I think, on the way, and I must confess myself, after dinner, a whiff or two—I think I can give you a cigar you'll appreciate."

And he felt for his cigar-case, really forgetting that it was gone, like all other incidents of his old self; while Jolland giggled with unrestrained delight at such charming effrontery.

"If I did not know, sir," said the doctor, now effectually roused, "that this was ill-timed buffoonery and not an intentional insult, I should be very seriously angry. As it is, I can overlook any exuberance of mirth, which is, perhaps, pardonable when the mind is elated by the return to the cheerful bustle and activity of school-life. But be very careful."

"He needn't be so angry," thought Paul; "how could I know he doesn't smoke? But I'm afraid he doesn't quite know me, even now."

So he began again: "Did I hear you mention the name of Kiffin among those of your pupils here, doctor? I thought so. Not the son of Jordan Kiffin of College Hill, surely? Yes? Why, bless my soul, your father and I, my little fellow, were old friends in days before you were born or thought of—born or thought of. He was in a very small way then, a very small—Eh, Dr. Grimstone, don't you feel well?"

"I see what your aiming at, sir. You wish to prove to me that I'm making a mistake in my treatment of you."

"That was my idea, certainly," said Paul, much pleased. "I'm very glad you take me, doctor."

"I shall take you in a way you won't appreciate soon, if you go on," said the doctor under his breath. "When the time comes I shall know how to deal with you. Till then you'll have the goodness to hold your tongue," he said aloud.

"It's not a very polite way of putting it," said Paul to himself, "but, at any rate he sees how the case stands now, and after all, perhaps, he only speaks like that, to put the boys off the scent. If so, its uncommonly considerate and thoughtful of him, by Gad. I won't say any more."

But, by and by, the open window made him break his resolution. "I'm sorry to inconvenience you, Dr. Grimstone," he said, with the air of an old gentleman used to having his way in these matters, "but I must positively ask you either to allow me to have this window up or to change places with you. The night air, sir, at this time of the year, is fatal, my doctor tell me, simply fatal to a man of my constitution."

The doctor pulled up the window with a frown, and yet a somewhat puzzled expression. "I warn you, Bultitude," he said, "you are acting very imprudently."

"So I am," thought Paul, "so I am. Good of him to remind me. I must keep it up before all these boys. This unpleasant business mustn't get about. I'll hold my tongue till we get in. Then, I dare say, Grimstone will see me off by the next train up, if there is one, and lend me enough for a bed at a hotel for the night. I couldn't get to St. Pancras till very late, of course. Or he might offer to put me up at the school. If he does, I think I shall very probably accept. It might be better."

And he leaned back in his seat in a much easier frame of mind; it was annoying, of course, to have been turned out of his own warm dining-room and sent all the way down to Rodwell Regis on a fool's errand like this; but still, if nothing worse came of it, he could put up with the temporary inconvenience, and it was a great relief to be spared the necessity of an explanation.

The other boys watched him furtively with growing admiration, which expressed itself in subdued whispers, varied by little gurgles and "squirks" of laughter; they tried to catch his eye and stimulate him to further feats of audacity, but Mr. Bultitude, of course, repulsed all such overtures with a coldness and severity which at once baffled and piqued them.

At last the eccentricity took a shape which considerably lessened their enthusiasm. Kiffin, the new boy, occupied the seat next to Paul; he was a nervous-looking little fellow, with a pale face and big, pathetic brown eyes like a seal's, and his dress bore plain evidence of a mother's careful supervision, having all the uncreased trimness and speklessness rarely to be observed except in the toilets of the waxen prodigies in a shop-window.

It happened that, as he lay back in the padded seat between the sheltering partitions, watching the sickly yellow rings of oil surging dimally to and fro with the motion in the lamp overhead, or the black, indistinct forms flitting past through the misty blue outside, the pathos of his situation became all at once too much for him.

He was a home-bred boy, without any of that taste for the companionship and pursuits of his fellows, or the capacity for adapting himself to their prejudices and requirements, which gives some home-bred boys a ready passport into the roughest communities.

His heart throbbed with no excited curiosity, no conscious pride, at this first important step in life; he was a forlorn little stranger, in an unsympathetic, strange land, and was only too well aware of his position.

So that it is not surprising that, as he thought of the home he left an hour or two ago, and which now seemed so shadowy, so inaccessible and remote, and prevent a public and disgraceful exhibition of grief.

Unhappily for him, he found this safety-valve in a series of suppressed but distinctly audible sniffs.

Mr. Bultitude bore this for some time with no other protest than an occasional indignant bounce or a lowering frown in the offender's direction, but at last his nerves, strung already to a high pitch by all he had undergone, could stand it no longer.

"Dr. Grimstone," he said, with polite determination, "I'm not a man to complain without good reason, but really I must ask you to interfere. Will you tell this boy here, on my right, either to control his feelings or to cry into his pocket-handkerchief, like an ordinary human being. A good honest bellow I can understand, but this infernal whiffling and sniffling, sir, I will not put up with. It's nothing less than unnatural in a boy of that size."

"Kiffin," said the doctor, "are you crying?"

"N—no, sir," faltered Kiffin; "I—I think I must have caught cold, sir."

"I hope you are telling the truth, because I should be sorry to believe you were beginning your new life in a spirit of captiousness and rebellion. I'll have no mutineers in my camp. I'll establish a spirit of trustful happiness and unmurmuring content in this school, if I have to flog every boy in it as long as I can stand over him. As for you, Richard Bultitude, I have no words to express my pain and disgust at the heartless irreverence with which you persist in mimicking and burlesquing a fond and excellent parent. Unless I perceive, sir, in a very short time, a due sense of your error, and a lively repentance, my disapproval will take a very practical form."

Mr. Bultitude fell back into his seat with a gasp. It was hard to be accused of caricaturing one's own self, particularly when conscious of entire innocence in that respect, but even this was slight in comparison with the discovery that he had been so blindly deceiving himself!

The doctor evidently had failed to penetrate his disguise, and the dreaded scene of elaborate explanation must be gone through after all.

The boys (with the exception of Kiffin) still found exquisite enjoyment in this extraordinary and original exhibition, and waited eagerly for further experiments on the doctor's patience.

They were soon gratified. If there was one thing Paul detested more than another, it was the smell of peppermint—no less than three office boys had been discharged by him because, as he alleged, they made the clerk's room reek with it—and now the subtle searching odor of the hated confection was gradually stealing into the compartment and influencing its atmosphere.

He looked at Coggs, who sat on the seat opposite him, and saw his cheeks and lips moving in slow and appreciative absorption of something. Coggs was clearly the culprit.

"Do you encourage your boys to make common nuisances of themselves in a public place, may I ask, Dr. Grimstone?" he inquired, fuming.

"Some scarcely seem to require encouragement, Bultitude," said the doctor, pointedly; "what is the matter now?"

"If he takes it medicinally," said Paul, "he should choose some other time and place to treat his complaint. If he has a depraved liking for the abominable stuff, for heaven's sake make him refrain from it on occasions when it is a serious annoyance to others!"

"Will you explain? Who and what are you talking about?"

"That boy opposite," said Paul, pointing the finger of denunciation at the astonished Coggs; he's sucking an infernal peppermint lozenge strong enough to throw the train off the rails!"

"Is what Bultitude tells me true, Coggs?" demanded the doctor, in an awful voice.

Coggs, after making several attempts to bolt the offending lozenge, and turning scarlet meanwhile with confusion and coughing, stammered huskily something to the effect that he had "bought the lozenges at a chemist's," which he seemed to consider, for some reason, a mitigating circumstance.

"Have you any more of this pernicious stuff about you?" said the doctor.

Very slowly and reluctantly, Coggs brought out of one pocket after another three or four neat little white packets, made up with that lavish expenditure of time, string, and sealing-wax, by which the struggling chemist seeks to reconcile the public mind to a charge of two hundred and fifty per cent. on cost price, and handed them to Dr. Grimstone, who solemnly unfastened them, one by one, glanced at their contents with infinite disgust, and flung them out of the window.

Then he turned to Paul with a look of more favor than he had yet shown him. "Bultitude," he said, "I am obliged to you. A severe cold in the head has rendered me incapable of detecting this insidious act of insubordination and self-indulgence, on which I shall have more to say on another occasion. Your moral courage and promptness in denouncing the evil thing are much to your credit."

"Not at all," said Paul, "not at all, my dear sir. I mentioned it because I, ah, happen to be peculiarly sensitive on the subject, and——" Here he broke off with a sharp yell, and began to rub his ankle. "One of these young savages has just given me a severe kick; it's that fellow over there, with the blue necktie. I have given him no provocation and he attacks me in this brutal manner, sir; I appeal to you for protection!"

"So, Coker" (Coker wore a blue necktie), said the doctor, "you emulate the wild ass in more qualities than those of stupidity and stubbornness, do you? You lash out with your hind legs at an inoffensive schoolfellow with all the viciousness of a kangaroo, eh? Write out all you find in Buffon's Natural History upon those two animals a dozen times, and bring it to me by to-morrow evening. If I am to stable wild asses, sir, they shall be broken in!"

Six pairs of sulky, glowering eyes were fixed upon the unconscious Paul for the rest of the journey; indignant protests and dark vows of vengeance were muttered under cover of the friendly roar and rattle of tunnels. But the object of them heard nothing; his composure was returning once more in the sunshine of Dr. Grimstone's approbation, and he almost decided on declaring himself in the station fly.

And now at last the train was grinding along discordantly with the brakes on, and, after a little preliminary jolting and banging over the points, drew up at a long, lighted platform, where melancholy porters paced up and down, croaking "Rodwell Regis!" like so many Solomon Eagles predicting woe.

Paul got out with the others, and walked forward to the guard's van, where he stood shivering in the raw night air by a small heap of portmanteaus and white, clamped boxes.

"I should like to tell him all about it now," he thought, "if he wasn't so busy. I'll get him to go in a cab alone with me, and get it over before we reach the house."

Dr. Grimstone certainly did not seem in a very receptive mood for confidences just then. No flys were to be seen, which he took as a personal outrage, and visited upon the station-master in hot indignation.

"It's scandalous, I tell you," he was saying; "scandalous! No cabs to meet the train. My school re-assembles to-day, and here I find no arrangements made for their accommodation! Not even an omnibus! I shall write to the manager and report this. Let some one go for a fly immediately. Boys, go into the waiting room till I come to you. Stay—there are too many for one fly. Coker, Coggs, and, let me see, yes, Bultitude, you all know your way. Walk on, and tell Mrs. Grimstone we are coming."

Mr. Bultitude was perhaps more relieved than disappointed by this postponement of a disagreeable interview, though, if he had seen Coker dig Coggs in the side with a chuckle of exultant triumph, he might have had misgivings as to the prudence of trusting himself alone with them.

As it was, he almost determined to trust the pair with his secret. "They will be valuable witnesses," he said to himself, "that, whoever else I may be, I am not Dick."

So he went on briskly ahead over a covered bridge and down some break-neck wooden steps, and passed through the wicket out upon the railed-in space, where the cabs and omnibuses should have been, but which was now a blank, spectral waste with a white ground-fog lurking round its borders.

Here he was joined by his companions, who, after a little whispering, came up one on either side and put an arm through each of his.

"Well," said Paul, thinking to banter them agreeably; "here you are, young men, eh? Holidays all over now! Work while you're young, and then—Gad, you're walking me off my legs. Stop! I'm not as young as I used to be——"

"Grim can't see us here, can he, Coker?" said Coggs, when they had cleared the gates and palings.

"Not he!" said Coker.

"Very well, then. Now then, young Bultitude, you used to be a decent fellow enough last term, though you were coxy. So, before we go any further—what do you mean by this sort of thing?"

"Because, put in Coker, "if you aren't quite right in your head, through your old governor acting like a brute all the holidays, as you said he does, just say so, and we won't be hard on you."

"I—he—always an excellent father, stammered Paul. "What am I to explain?"

"Why, what did you go and sneak off him for bringing tuck back to school for, eh?" demanded Coker.

"Yes, and sing out when he hacked your skin?" added Coggs; "and tell Grimstone that new fellow was blubbering? Where's the joke in all that' eh? Where's the joke?"

"You don't suppose I was bound to sit calmly down and allow you to suck your villainous peppermints under my very nose, do you? said Mr. Bultitude. "Why shouldn't I complain if a boy annoys me by sniffing, or kicks me on the ankle? Just tell me that! Suppose my neighbor has a noisy dog or a smoky chimney, am I not to venture to tell him of it? Is he to——"

"Will you have you up for assault for that. An old man like me, too!"

But upon this Coggs did the very same thing, only harder. "Last term you'd have shown fight for much less, Bultitude," they both observed severely, as some justification for repeating the process.

"Now, perhaps, you'll drop it for the future," said Coker. "Look here! we'll give you one more chance. This sneaking dodge is all very well for Chawner. Chawner could do that sort of thing without getting cut upon, because he's a big fellow; but we're not going to stand it from you. Will you promise on your sacred word of honor, now, to be a decent sort of chap again, as you were last term?"

But Mr. Bultitude, though he longed for peace and quietness, dreaded doing or saying anything to favor the impression that he was the schoolboy he unlikely appeared to be, and he had not skill and tact enough to dissemble and assume a familiar, genial tone of equality with these rough boys.

"You don's understand," he protested feebly. "If I could only tell you——"

"We don't want any fine language, you

(*To be continued.*)