

Drayson Alfred Wilks

The Gentleman Cadet



Alfred Drayson

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Drayson Alfred W. Alfred Wilks The Gentleman Cadet / His Career and Adventures at the Royal Military Academy Woolwich

Preface

The following pages contain a history of the life of a Woolwich Cadet as it was about thirty years ago. The hero of the tale is taken through the then usual routine of a cram-school at Woolwich, and from thence passed into the Royal Military Academy. The reformation that has taken place – both in the preparatory schools and also at the Academy – may be judged of by those who read this book and are acquainted with existing conditions. The habits and life of a Cadet of the present day are well known, but the singular laws and regulations – written and unwritten – in former times may not be so generally understood; and, as memory of the past fades away, the following pages have been penned, to give a history of the singular life and manners of the old Cadet. The work has no other pretensions than to give this history, and to afford amusement to the young aspirant for military glory.

Southsea, September, 1874.

Chapter One

My Home Life

On the borders of the New Forest, in Hampshire, stands an old-fashioned thatch-roofed family-house, surrounded by cedars and firs, with a clean-shaved, prim-looking lawn opposite the drawing-room windows, from which a magnificent view was visible of the forest itself and the Southampton waters beyond. In that house I was born; and there I passed the first fourteen years of my existence in a manner that must be briefly recorded, in order to make the reader acquainted with my state of education previous to a somewhat eventful career in a more busy scene.

My father had been intended for the Church, but having at Cambridge taken a dislike to holy orders, and finding himself left, by the death of my grandfather, sole possessor of a sum of about thirty thousand pounds invested in Consols, he decided to live an easy life, and enjoy himself, instead of taking up any profession – an error that caused him to be what may be called “a mistake” all his life, and which was the cause of much suffering to me.

Having devoted some eight or ten years to travelling and seeing the world, my father married, and selected for his wife the youngest of seven daughters of a very worthy but very poor clergyman in Wiltshire, who bore him two daughters and myself; after which she sickened and died at the early age of twenty-six.

In order to have some one to whom he could entrust the care of his three children, my father took into his house his eldest sister, who was some fifteen years his senior, and to whom was given the sole charge of myself and my two sisters. Aunt Emma, as we used to term her, was my abhorrence; she had a singular facility of making herself disagreeable, especially with us young people. That she used to teach us our letters and our reading and writing was certainly kind on her part – at least, so she assured me – but she had a way of teaching that was not one at all suitable to gaining the esteem or affection of a child. Her principal object in teaching seemed to be to impress on us children that we were the most stupid, dull, and lazy children in the world, whom it was little short of martyrdom to try to teach; whilst we were informed that she, as a child and as a schoolgirl, had always been famous for quickness in learning, attention to her studies, and love to her schoolmistress.

We were also being daily impressed with the idea that we were awfully wicked and selfish, and quite unworthy of any kindness from her or our father, whilst we were also accused of having a bad motive for everything we did.

Aunt Emma was a great expert in slapping. Often have I lain in bed and cried for hours at the remembrance of the unmerited and severe slaps that my poor little delicate sister had received during the day from Aunt Emma. There was, I feel glad to say, no real anger in those feelings, but a sense of utter misery and regret that Aunt Emma should feel so little for the unhappiness she caused, and for the injustice of which she was guilty. I was a child then, and I had yet to learn that there are people in the world who take a delight in making others unhappy, who attribute to all, except themselves, bad, selfish, or spiteful motives for every word and act, and to whom the world is an enemy on which they are justified in venting their spleen.

It may seem to the reader out of place to speak thus of Aunt Emma, but as she had much to do with my early life, and as her specialities must then be brought forward, there is really no object in concealing either her weaknesses or defects.

At the date to which I am referring, some forty years ago, there was a great taste in many private families for immoderate physicking. Aunt Emma possessed this taste in no small degree; that she believed in its efficacy there can be no doubt, because she used to physic herself with the same generous freedom that she bestowed on us children. Each spring we regularly, for some five

weeks, were put through a course of brimstone and treacle; each morning we were given a spoonful of treacle in which the gritty brimstone had been stirred with a free hand. If we looked pale or tired, or were more than ordinarily stupid at our lessons, Aunt Emma decided that a three-grain blue pill at night, followed by a cup of senna tea in the morning, was urgently needed. These doses came with dangerous frequency, and I can conscientiously say, not once for a fortnight, from the time I was five years old till nearly eleven, was I free of physic.

Whether it was from this or from any other cause, I cannot say for certain, but up to twelve years of age I was a pale, weak, sickly boy, given to sick headaches, sleepless nights, vomitings, and general debility, with a strong tendency to get alone somewhere, and either dream away the hours, or read and re-read any book that I was fortunate enough to procure.

Up to the age of twelve my life was a kind of tideless sea; time passed, but there were no events to mark it. Companions I had none, except my two sisters, and sometimes a forest lad, the son of a gamekeeper, who used to take me out squirrel-hunting or birds'-nesting. These expeditions, however, were all but forbidden by my aunt, who visited with her severe displeasure either absence from a meal or a late arrival for one.

Having given priority in description to my aunt, I must now endeavour to describe my father. If I were to write pages I could not more fully delineate my father's character better than to state that he had but one fault, viz, he was too kind. This kindness actually degenerated into weakness, or, as some people might term it, feebleness or indifference. This peculiar attribute manifested itself in a neglect of my early education, and of that of my sisters. If it were suggested to him that I was old enough to go to a school, he invariably found some excuse, such as that I was just then too much out of health, or he could not spare me, or I was doing very well at home, or he could not select a school where he could be sure I should receive proper attention. The true reason for these excuses was, I believe, that he could not make up his mind to part with me. I was almost his only companion, for our nearest neighbour was three miles off, and he was a man devoted to hunting only, and had none of those refined tastes or love for literature and art that my father was famous for. The result of these conditions was that at the age of thirteen I was very old in manner and thought; I was prematurely old before I was young; but I lacked the knowledge, education, and experience which usually come with age, and I was, as regards other boys, the most veritable ignoramus as to the world – knowing nothing of boys, or of the great school-world, a complete dunce as regards those points of education on which all other lads of my own age were well-informed – having a somewhat exaggerated idea of my own talents, genius, and acquirements, and disposed to look down on those boys, sons of the neighbouring gentry, who about twice a year came to our house to partake of our hospitality, and enjoy a picnic in the forest.

My father was a perfect gentleman, in the full meaning of the word. He was most sensitive himself, and, believing all those with whom he associated to be equally gifted, he was most careful and considerate in all he said or did. With him it was little short of a crime to say or do anything that could by any chance hurt the feelings of even an acquaintance. I remember once hearing an anecdote related about my father, which may show how great was the belief at least of his sympathies with others. A guest at his dinner-table, on one occasion, upset by accident a glass of sherry on the table-cloth. The visitor apologised for his awkwardness, in most humble terms, blushed deeply, and again commenced a second apology. My father tried to place the guest at his ease, but, noticing how uncomfortable he appeared, my father (it was said, purposely) upset his own glass of wine, at which he laughed immoderately, and was joined by all at table, the result being that no further apologies were offered or awkwardness exhibited by the clumsy guest.

My father's pet hobby was Natural History. He had a splendid collection of all the moths and butterflies to be found in England. It was a great treat for me to walk with him under the wide-spreading arms of the giant beech-trees or grand old oaks that grew around us, and watch him select

the grub or cocoon of some insect that would have escaped the attention of common eyes, and hear him describe the changes through which this creature passed in its material career.

Many are the happy hours that I have passed with him watching the gambols of the squirrel, or, with a pair of powerful opera glasses, scrutinising the detail labours of various birds as they built their nests. The peculiar habits of various birds and insects were well known to me long before some of them were made known to the reading world by those gentlemen whose books on natural history were written from their experience gained in the library of the British Museum.

Long before naturalists had begun to speculate on the cause of that peculiar drumming noise made by the snipe when on the wing, my father and I had convinced ourselves that it was due to the bird spreading open the pinion feathers as it stooped in its flight. The New Forest was especially suited for the residence of a naturalist, as in it were many rare birds and insects, and the opportunities for watching the habits of these were frequent.

About my future course in life my father never spoke; he seemed disposed to let matters drift on; and I believe his wish was that I never should leave home for the purpose of taking up a profession, but that at his death I should still continue the quiet, peaceful life that we had hitherto led in the forest.

It is possible that I might have continued contented as a mere forest boy with country tastes, somewhat feeble powers, and what may be termed a wasted life, had I not by chance met an individual who in one short day turned the whole current of my thoughts into a new channel, and raised in my mind longings and wishes to which I had hitherto been a stranger. As my whole future life turned at this point I must devote a new chapter to a description of my meeting with this person.

Chapter Two

My First Adventure

I was in the habit of taking long walks, accompanied by my dog, through the forest and over those wastes of moorland which are to be found in various parts of Hampshire. Whilst thus wandering one day, I saw on a prominent knoll, from which an extensive view could be obtained of the surrounding country, two men, one of whom had on a red uniform. My life had been passed so entirely in the wilds of the forest that I had never before seen a soldier, and my curiosity was at once excited by this red-coat, and I consequently made my way towards him, intending to examine him as I would a new specimen of natural history.

On coming near the two persons I saw at once that the one in civilian dress was a gentleman. To me he looked old, but I afterwards found out he was only twenty-four; but a man of twenty-four is old to a boy of fourteen. This gentleman was busily occupied with a strange-looking instrument, which seemed made partly of brass and partly of wood. It stood on three legs, which were separated so as to form a pyramid, and on the apex of this was the brass apparatus referred to. I had approached to within about twenty yards of this instrument when the gentleman ceased looking at it, and, turning towards me, said, "Now, young fellow, mind you don't get shot."

"I beg pardon," I said, "I didn't know you were going to fire." And as I said so I saw that what appeared rather like a tube was pointing towards me.

"If you get shot it will be your own fault," said the gentleman; "so don't expect me to be responsible. Don't you see the muzzle is pointing at you?"

I slipped round very quickly, so as to place myself, as I supposed, behind the gun, but, in a moment, round went the instrument with a touch of the gentleman's finger, and again the tube pointed at me.

"There you are again, right in the way," said the stranger. "If you are not shot it's a marvel to me."

Seeing a smile on the face of the soldier, I began to suspect that I was being made fun of, so I said, "I don't believe that is a gun."

"Not a gun? Why, what a disbelieving young Jew you are?"

"I'm not a Jew," I replied indignantly. "I'm a gentleman."

"That's good," exclaimed the stranger, with a laugh. "Then you mean to assert that a Jew can't be a gentleman? You'd better mind what you're saying, sir, for I'm a Jew."

I looked at him with surprise, for I had my own idea of what a Jew was on account of a Jew pedlar coming to our lodge twice a year with a pack of all sorts of odds and ends to sell; and certainly, as I looked at the tall, handsome-looking stranger, I saw no similarity between him and the pedlar. I had lived hitherto in a most matter-of-fact world, where such a thing as a joke was rare, and what is termed "chaff" was unknown, so I did not understand the meaning of these remarks, and certainly felt no inclination to smile.

"Do you live in these parts?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," I replied. "Do you know the forest well?"

"Every part of it."

"Now come here," said the stranger. "Do you see those tall pines – those on that hill?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is the name of that place?"

"That's Castle Malwood."

"Castle Malwood; and it's well known about here by that name?"

"Yes, of course it is."

"If I were to ask one of these chawbacon foresters to show me where Castle Malwood was, he would point out that place, eh?"

"Yes; every forester knows that."

"How about the name of that house down there with the yew-trees round it?"

"That's Blackthorn Lodge, where I live."

"Oh, that's your house, is it? And what's your governor?"

"A gentleman."

"I suppose you are home for the midsummer holidays?"

"No; I don't go to school."

"Tutor at home, I suppose?"

"No."

"Who teaches you, then?"

"Aunt did, and now my father does."

"And what are you going to be?"

"I don't know."

"You ought to be a cadet, and join the Engineers."

I made no reply to this; for I had never thought of any career in the future, and had never had any ideas beyond our quiet forest home, so I was not prepared with any remark.

"How do you amuse yourself here?" said the stranger. "Rather a dull place, I fancy."

"I watch the birds and insects, and study natural history," I replied.

"You are fond of that, are you? You should have been with me in Africa, then, where you could have watched a herd of wild elephants, or seen a lion stalk a buck, or a gigantic snake kill a bustard: that's the place for a naturalist."

"Have you ever seen a wild elephant or lion?" I inquired, looking with a sudden feeling of respect at the gentleman.

"Seen them and shot them, too, and have been in a country where you had to burn fires all round you to prevent being trodden down by the herds of wild animals that come about you of a night."

"Are you a soldier?" I inquired.

"I flatter myself I am. I am an officer of Engineers, and am here now surveying, and want all the information I can get about the forest; so, if you like, I'll meet you to-morrow near your house, as I shall be taking angles on the heath near you."

"Then that thing isn't a gun?"

"No; it's a theodolite, used for surveying. I often chaff the chawbacons here, by telling them I am going to fire, and then they don't come bothering. What's your name?"

"Shepard."

"By George! that's odd; why, my governor was at Cambridge with yours, and told me to call on you when I came down here. Is your governor at home?"

"Yes."

"Then pack up the instrument, Roberts. I'll come home with you, and see your governor, for I have a letter for him which I ought to have delivered before."

The officer watched the instrument being packed up, and then started with me towards our house. On the way he described to me the country from which he had lately returned, and gave a vivid description of the vast plains covered with wild animals, of the forest teeming with strange creatures, and the air frequented by monstrous birds. Then he described a leopard-hunt in which he had taken part, and told me how one of the party had been seized and torn by the animal; and how, at last, it had been shot dead by a lucky shot. On his watch-chain were two of the claws of the leopard, which he showed me, and which gave me an idea of the size and strength of the creature. So vivid was his description, that the whole scene was before me, and I looked at him

with mingled feelings of awe and admiration. I had read brief descriptions of lion and tiger hunts, but I had somehow mixed these up with tales from the “Arabian Nights,” and such like stories; but to meet a person who had himself been an actor in a lion-hunt, and who had himself killed some of the most powerful savage animals, was to me like a dream. My new acquaintance was to me a hero; and I was at once ready to follow his merest suggestion, if he would only tell me more of his adventures with wild beasts.

As we approached my father’s house, it occurred to me I had not asked the stranger’s name, and I should have to tell my father who he was; so after a little hesitation I inquired what his name was.

“Howard,” replied the officer. “I’m Jack Howard, Lieutenant Royal Engineers; my governor is the Vicar of Longstone, in Kent; so now you know all about me.”

As we approached the house we met my father, who, on learning who my companion was, welcomed him in the most cordial manner, and gave him a most pressing invitation to take up his residence at our lodge during the time he was surveying near us. That evening he stopped with us, and as we sat near the dining-room window, looking out on the endless glades of the grandest forest in England, Howard entertained us with descriptions of the scenes and adventures through which he had passed in Africa. He was a good talker, and had devoted much of his time to sport and to natural history, and was thus able to give my father descriptions of the rare animals he had met, and which were then but little known in England. As for me, I was simply entranced, and even my father seemed to listen with delight to descriptions of savage life, of which he had previously only read. I felt utterly miserable when Howard left, although he had promised to come on the following evening and stay with us a few days.

When I went to bed that night it was not to sleep; I tossed from side to side without any desire to close my eyes. The scenes of which I had heard were before me as vividly as though I had been an actor in them, and already had I made up my mind that I must be an engineer, and most myself enjoy similar experiences to those of Howard. Of the ways and means by which this result was to be accomplished I knew nothing, but I determined to ask Howard, on the first opportunity, how I could become an engineer officer, and then to try and induce my father to take such steps as would forward my views.

Howard came at the hour appointed, and took up his residence with us. I had counted the hours as they passed slowly and drearily till his arrival, and felt inclined to follow him like a dog as soon as he was in the house. I was anxious for an opportunity to tell him of my wish to be an engineer, and to ask him what I was to do to become one, for now it seemed that every hour’s delay was so much waste time, whilst the uncertainty as to whether I could or could not be one was a great source of anxiety to me.

It was not till the second day after his arrival that I found an opportunity of speaking to him about my wishes. It was towards the afternoon, when he returned early from his surveying, that I met him near the lodge, and summoning courage I said, “I have something I want to ask you.”

“What is it?” said Howard.

“I want to be an engineer officer like you. Can I?”

“There is no reason why you should not if you only work hard, but you have no time to lose. What age are you?”

“I’m nearly fifteen.”

“Then it will be sharp work for you, unless you are tolerably well up in Swat.”

“What is Swat?” I inquired.

“We call algebra and Euclid, and all those things, Swat at Woolwich. Are you good at Euclid?”

This question was an awkward one. I had been so entirely in the hands of my aunt as regards my education, that there were many subjects that I had never heard of, and which other boys of my own age knew well. Up to the time at which Howard asked me if I was well up in Euclid, I

had, to the best of my memory, never even heard of Euclid; whilst algebra was also an unknown science. I had done sums of multiplication, and was supposed to have learnt rule-of-three, but I had yet to learn how little I knew, and to discover the difference between real knowledge and a mere superficial smattering. In reply to Howard's question I had to own I knew nothing of Euclid.

"What have you done in algebra?" he next asked.

"Nothing. I know nothing about it."

"By Jove! you are behindhand then; and unless you are at once sent to a crammer's, you won't get into the Academy even."

"But I will work very hard," I said, "for I am so anxious to be an engineer."

"Of course, but you can no more learn a heap in a given time than you can eat an ox for dinner. You must have a certain time to prepare, and at sixteen and a half you will be too old for entry. Then, have you interest to get a nomination for Woolwich?"

"I must ask my father about that," I replied; "but I wish you would speak to him, and say what a good thing it would be for me."

Howard was silent for some minutes, and then said, "I will speak to your governor, for I think it is a great pity for a young fellow like you to waste his time in the country till he is too old to do anything; and as our governors were cronies, I may, perhaps, take the liberty of talking to him."

It must have been on that evening, after I had gone to bed, that Howard broached the subject to my father; for on the following morning my father took me into the library, and, shutting the door carefully, as though what he was going to say was a great secret, said, "Howard tells me you are very anxious to be an engineer officer, and have talked to him about it. Now I have no wish to part with you, but if you think you would like such a profession, I will do what I can for you. It is a most gentlemanly profession, admits you to good society, enables you to see the world, and you may make your name known as a clever man. Young Howard is a good example for you. He carried off several prizes at Woolwich, and has always been considered a most promising young man, and he thinks you could not do better than go into the Engineers. You will have to work hard for a year or two, but with what you know already you will soon pick up all that is required, and your knowledge of natural history will no doubt help you on and bring you into notice. So if you think it will suit you I will apply for an appointment to the Academy."

On the day following this conversation, Howard left us for a farm-house some eight miles distant, and on the day after his departure my father sent a letter to the Master-General of the Ordnance, asking for an appointment for me to the Academy, and stating that I was clever, and a good naturalist.

By return of post a letter was received, the opening of which I awaited with intense anxiety. It was a long rectangular document, with "O.H.M. Service" on the outside; the contents were brief but most decisive. In answer to the application, the Master-General regretted that there was no prospect of a vacancy at the Royal Military Academy before I had passed the age for admission.

A shade of disappointment only passed across my father's face as he read this letter, but to me it was a shock that seemed to render my future a blank. I had so set my heart on being an engineer officer, like Howard, that I had thought of nothing else for the past four or five days and nights. My usual amusements had become distasteful, and been neglected; the fire of ambition had entered my mind, and repose was no longer attainable. Castles in the air had been built, and seemed to me substantial edifices; and now to find all my hopes thus cruelly crushed was a blow I could not support. I tried my best to bear up, but I felt broken-hearted. I instantly thought of Howard; might he not help me? He was so clever, and so acquainted with everything, that perhaps he might tell my father what to do. I must find Howard and let him know what had happened; so, soon after breakfast, I started for a long walk to that part of the forest where I hoped to find him. I was in luck that day, for I came on Howard as he was going to his work, told him of the disappointment I had just experienced, and asked him if there was no remedy. He smiled at my eagerness, and said,

“Never despair, I will see what can be done. I have a relative in the Cabinet, and he may manage the affair for you; but, really now, it takes as much interest to get a nomination for Woolwich as it does to make a curate a bishop; but I will write about it, and if I get you a nomination you must do me credit, and pass all your examinations well.”

A week passed after this interview, and I saw nothing of Howard; each day as the post came in I looked anxiously for a letter, but none came, and I at length lost all hope. I had told my father what Howard had said, but he smiled at my sanguine hopes, and told me it was unfortunate, and could not be helped; but there really was no chance of success, as he had ascertained that nearly every nomination for Woolwich was given either through parliamentary interest, or to the sons of distinguished military officers.

On the eighth day, however, an official letter was left by the postman at our lodge. My father opened it with eagerness, and scanned its contents before reading it to us. He then said, “Bob, I congratulate you; listen to this: —

““I have the honour to inform you that the Master-General of the Ordnance has granted a nomination to the Royal Military Academy to your son, Robert Shepard, and I am directed to state that he may present himself at the Academy at the next examination in February. I enclose papers, etc.””

I jumped from my chair, gave my father a hug, exchanged kisses with my two sisters and aunt, and performed various extraordinary capers about the room. In imagination I was already an officer, a traveller, a lion-slayer, and very much what Howard appeared to me. Of the thorny path between me and the position I aspired to I knew nothing. I saw the prize only, and little knew what I had to pass through ere I reached it. If I could have seen the life I should lead during the next three years I doubt whether my ambition would not instantly have been extinguished; and I should have remained a dreamy forest boy, and grown up to the position of a country gentleman of moderate means and somewhat limited abilities.

On that morning there was joy in our house; my father was pleased at the success of what he supposed was his application, and because he saw I was pleased. My sisters were pleased at the prospect of having a brother a soldier; and my aunt was, I think, gratified because of late she had lost much of the control over me, which she had wielded when I was a mere child, and did not now care to have me in the house.

When the first excitement of the intelligence was over, my father took me into the library to talk over the papers he had read, relative to the examination.

“There is Euclid,” he said; “three books you will have to take up. That you’ll soon learn, because your mind is fresh and has not been crammed like other boys at your age. Then there is arithmetic, — that of course you know; and algebra up to quadratic equations; this you will soon pick up. I remember at Cambridge I soon learnt all these things. History and geography you were always fond of, and, of course, there is nothing to learn there. French and German, too, you can pick up a smattering of — enough to pass an examination — and I fancy your knowledge of natural history will help to make you stand well at an examination. To February is five months, so there is no hurry, and if you go steadily on you ought to pass well. Perhaps, if I get a tutor to come over from Southampton twice a week, we might manage it well.”

I knew nothing about examinations, or the difficulty of the subjects I was expected to learn, and so could offer no remarks, and could only acquiesce in my father’s suggestion, and should probably have dreamed on a few months longer had not Howard that afternoon called at our lodge, to congratulate us on the receipt of the nomination which, he said, he had heard of that morning. He took but little credit to himself for what he had done; but I felt certain then, and I ascertained afterwards, that it was entirely due to his interest that I obtained my nomination.

Upon hearing what was proposed to be done in preparing me for the examination, he assured us that it would be impossible for me to qualify by February, even if I went to the best cram-school

at Woolwich; but to have a tutor twice a week would be useless. He impressed on my father the necessity for getting my examination postponed till February twelvemonth – the last date that my age would admit of – and recommended that I should at once be sent to Mr Hostler, the best cram-school at Woolwich, who would prepare me if any one could.

The high opinion which my father entertained of Howard caused him not only to listen to, but to act on, this advice; and it was decided that on the Monday week following my father was to start with me for Woolwich, and leave me in charge of Mr Hostler, to be prepared for the Royal Engineers, and for the examination on the February twelvemonth from that date.

Chapter Three

A Cram-School at Woolwich Forty Years Ago

In the days to which this tale refers, railways did not exist; it was therefore by the Salisbury coach that I travelled with my father to London. I will pass over my wonder and surprise at the size and crowds of London, and of the scenes that presented themselves to me as I for the first time drove through the metropolis. Steam-vessels were then novelties, and it was by a steam-vessel that we journeyed from London Bridge to Woolwich, and were deposited in the lower part of that dirty town, from whence a cab conveyed us to the school-house of Mr Hostler at the early hour of eleven a.m. As, from what I was able to gather at the time, Mr Hostler's was a fair specimen of the Woolwich cram-schools forty years ago, this establishment and the life I led there will be somewhat fully described. After long years of roughing it in various parts of the world, the early impressions of that school are fresh in my memory. Coming as I did to that school, fresh from a quiet country home, where I had led the quietest of lives – where a slap from my aunt was the greatest evil that ever happened to me – where politeness and consideration for others was instilled into me by my father as the essential attribute of a gentleman – I was ill-prepared for Mr Hostler's school, where a somewhat different tone prevailed.

On arriving at Mr Hostler's, we were shown into a comfortably-furnished but small room, and were informed that Mr Hostler would come very soon. After about five minutes the door opened, and a short, broad, dark man entered. His eyes were dark and piercing, and his aquiline nose gave him, to my mind, the appearance of a hawk. Without a moment's hesitation he said, "How do you do, Mr Shepard? Lucky to get a nomination for your boy, and lucky I've got room for him. Another day and you'd have been too late." Mr Hostler turned his hawk-like eyes on me and said, "You don't look well: are you ill?"

"No, thank you; I'm a little tired – that's all."

"He's for the Academy?" said Mr Hostler to my father.

"Yes, for the Royal Engineers."

"Ah! you must work hard, and we'll make something of you here, you may depend. I think, Mr Shepard, I'd better take him at once, and show him in the school. 'Go to harness at once' is my motto."

Before I had quite realised my position, I had bid my father good-bye, had cast a longing look after him, and felt a choking feeling in my throat, and a sensation of utter loneliness came over me as I knew I was alone, without a friend near.

Mr Hostler took a long look at me, and then, in quite a different tone to that in which he had spoken to my father, said, —

"Come along, youngster. You are like a young bear, I see; all your trouble's to come. You've a lot before you, I can tell you."

I followed Mr Hostler out of the room, down about half-a-dozen steps, and into a courtyard, where I heard a noise of voices making so great a din that it was impossible to distinguish the words. These sounds came from a long building on the left, to which Mr Hostler led me. He opened a door and pushed me in before him, when I saw one of the most extraordinary sights that I had ever witnessed.

In the room were a number of tables, at which were sitting about fifty boys in about five rows. The majority of these boys were swinging backwards and forwards, like pendulums the wrong end uppermost; others had their hands pressed over their ears, and their heads bent down over a book; the whole of them were repeating words or sentences, portions of which only were audible amidst the deafening din.

In after years, when I have stood at night near a tropical swamp, and have listened to the deafening noise of a thousand bull-frogs, I have always had recalled to me my first visit to the schoolroom of Mr Hostler's cram-school at Woolwich.

Upon our entering the schoolroom several boys looked up from their books, and the noise for an instant decreased; then, from the far end of the room, a shrill voice exclaimed, "Because the triangle ABC is similar to the triangle DEF, therefore the side AB is to the side DE." Then a chorus of voices drowned the first voice, and again the uproar proceeded.

"Stop a minute, boys!" said Mr Hostler in a loud voice. "Here's a new boy – Shepard's his name. He's going into the Royal Engineers. I say, Beck, you look out, or he'll beat you!"

As this speech was made to the whole school, I made a bow – such a one as my father had taught me to make to a lady. A titter ran round the various tables as I did so, and I distinctly saw one boy make a grimace at me.

"Here, Monk," said Mr Hostler; "you take Shepard; set him his Euclid, and see what he knows in Swat."

The person addressed was a hard-featured man, with a surly look about him, who, handing me a book, said, —

"What do you know?"

"No Euclid," I replied.

"Don't know any Euclid? Why, how old are you?"

"Nearly fifteen," I replied.

"Oh I nearly fifteen and don't know any Euclid! and you're going to be an engineer?"

"Yes," I replied; "I'm going to be an engineer."

"Don't you wish you may get it?" said Mr Monk. "Now learn these definitions," he continued, "and let's see what you can do."

The book now placed before me was the mysterious Euclid, my first acquaintance with which I was now to make. I looked at the first sentence under the definitions, and thought I had never seen a more extraordinary statement than that there made, —

"A point is that which has no parts and no magnitude."

I read this over two or three times, but each time I read it and thought over it the statement seemed more and more curious. On looking further down the page, I saw that "a line was length without breadth," which seemed to me quite a mistake; for, however thin a line might appear to the naked eye, yet I knew, from my experience with the microscope in connexion with natural history, that the thinnest spider's web always showed some breadth when it was looked at through a microscope. It occurred to me that, amidst the noise and confusion that went on in this school, it was possible that the fact of looking at a line through a microscope had never been thought of by any one; and as I felt quite certain that it was impossible that a line could exist without breadth, I determined to point this out to Mr Monk.

Watching for an opportunity to catch his eye, I half rose from my seat as I saw him looking at me. He immediately came to where I was sitting, and said, —

"What's the matter? You've only your definitions to learn; can't you understand them?"

"Not quite," I said; "but I think this about a line having no breadth is wrong; for, however thin a line may appear, it looks thick if you bring a microscope to see it through."

As soon as I commenced speaking to Mr Monk, the boys at the table ceased their sing-song noise and listened to what I was saying. There was a look of astonishment in their faces as I spoke, which quickly changed to a broad grin when they heard what I said; and when Mr Monk said in a sarcastic tone, "Oh, you've found that Euclid's wrong, eh? and that we are all a pack of fools? Now, you just learn three more definitions for your cheek, you young puppy?" the boys actually roared with laughter.

“You want a lot taken out of you, I can see,” continued Monk, “and I’ll pretty soon do it; so mind what you’re at.”

I don’t know whether surprise or anger predominated in my mind at the result of my first attempt to show I thought on what I learnt, as well as attempted to learn it by rote. Such downright rudeness I had never before experienced, and I could scarcely believe that the boys around me were the sons of gentlemen, although I had been told by Howard that Hostler’s was a first-class school, where none but gentlemen’s sons were admitted.

I blushed scarlet at the remark made to me, and felt inclined to explain my meaning, but somehow the words would not come, and I therefore gazed steadily at the pages of my book, wondering how it was I seemed so different from other boys. Whilst thus meditating, I raised my eyes to the boy opposite me; he was a cross-looking, sturdy boy, about my own age, and was occupied, as were the rest, in swinging backwards and forwards, whilst he repeated, in a loud tone, “A is to B as B is to C,” etc.

When this boy saw me looking at him, he made a face at me, and said, “Don’t look at me!” As, however, I continued looking at him, he suddenly lowered himself, so that his head only appeared above the table, and, before I suspected what he was doing, I received a tremendous kick on the shins. The noise the boy made caused Mr Monk to look up just in time to see me throw my book at the boy’s head. So quick had been my assailant in recovering himself and resuming his proper position, that, when Mr Monk looked round, the only thing he saw was my Euclid flying across the table at the boy’s head.

“Hullo!” exclaimed Mr Monk, “you’re a nice young fellow; what are you at?”

“He kicked me on the shins,” I exclaimed.

“Didn’t do anything of the kind,” said the boy, whose name was Fraser.

“Didn’t you kick Shepard?”

“No; I stooped under the table to pick up my handkerchief, and he then shied his book at me,” said Fraser, with a bare-faced effrontery that startled me.

“You come out here, Shepard,” said Monk, who seemed not to have got over my remark about the line; “we’ll soon stop your larks.”

I got up from my seat, feeling that I had been most unjustly treated, and that a lie had been told against me; but, not knowing how I could get myself righted, I was puzzling my brain how I should make Mr Monk know what had really occurred, when I received a couple of blows from him on the head that almost stunned me.

“That’s what you want,” said Monk, “to set you to rights! Now go and stand on that stool till you’ve learnt your Euclid, and if you fail you’ll get three cuts as sure as your name’s Shepard. We don’t stand any tricks here, you see; you’ve to learn what discipline is.”

I find it difficult to make the reader fully comprehend my feelings at that time. Up to the age of ten years Aunt Emma had been very free in boxing my ears, and keeping me in what she called “order,” but during the past five years I had been treated more like a young man than as a boy. The companionship with my father had given me an old feeling, and I thought more as a man thinks than as a boy does. With such ideas as to my age, it was a great blow to my pride to find myself treated like a child, to be kicked by a boy smaller than myself, and then to have my ears boxed because I retaliated. I tried hard to command myself, but after a brief struggle I fairly cried like a child.

I was now the object of attention to every boy in the school. Each boy took his quiet look and grin at me whenever he could take his eyes from his Euclid without being seen by Mr Monk, and this continued till the clock struck the hour, when Mr Monk shouted, “Close books! Come up, Jones and Hunt!”

Two boys left their seats and went to the master, who took their books from them and inquired, “What proposition?”

“Eighth of the second,” said Jones.

“Go on, then,” said the master; and away went Jones, repeating like a parrot a number of lines about A to B, etc. I listened to this because it was not only all new to me, but because I fancied that very shortly I should follow probably the course of this boy. Jones went on without a stop till he had finished his proposition, when, with a look of delight, he left the room. The boy called Hunt now commenced his proposition, but before he had gone over a dozen lines he began to hesitate, then to stop altogether, and finally burst out crying. My first idea was that his heart was very much in his work, and that his pride was hurt at having failed in his lesson; but I was soon to be undeceived in this respect. Hunt was sent into a corner of the room, where he sat looking the picture of misery, and another boy was called upon by the master to say his Euclid. About fifteen boys were allotted to Mr Monk, and out of these three remained in school, having “failed,” as it was termed. As the last boy was sent into the corner Mr Hostler came into the room, looking particularly smiling and active. He carried in his hand a short black stick, which I afterwards learned was whalebone. Seeing me standing on a stool he said, “Hullo! in trouble already? Ah! I thought you were not as quiet as you looked. What’s he been doing, Mr Monk?”

I listened with astonishment at the statement of my offences. First I had tried to show off before the boys by trying to chaff the master by saying if he looked with a microscope at a line it would show Euclid was wrong; then I suddenly took a dislike to a boy and threw a book at his head.

Mr Hostler listened to this account very quietly, and then turning to me said, “Now look here; I’ve done a great favour to your friends by letting you come here. There’s lots would have given a fifty-pound note to get their sons into my establishment. Now, I’m a good mind to pack you off to-day, but I’ll give you another trial, so you just look out.”

I was trying to say something in my defence, but the words hung fire and would not come out, and it was, perhaps, as well I did not say anything, for it would not have been attended to, as Mr Hostler was now inquiring about the boys who had failed.

“So you have failed again, Hunt,” said Mr Hostler. “Here, you come up, then, and take your three.”

Hunt left his seat and commenced crying, whilst he blew on and then rubbed his hand in what appeared to me a most singular manner. The reason for this latter proceeding I was soon to learn, for as he came near Mr Hostler he held out his hand as though to show he had nothing in it – the fingers quite straight and the palm horizontal. Mr Hostler took his whalebone stick in his right hand, made one or two feints, and then delivered a smart blow on the boy’s hand. The sound of this blow indicated its severity, but the contortions of the boy also showed that there was no mistake as to the punishment intended.

“Out with it again?” said Mr Hostler, who now seemed in his element, and who jumped about and flourished his whalebone as if he were riding a race. “Two more. Ah! no shirking. There, that doesn’t count.” These remarks were uttered as he made an up-cut on the knuckles of the boy, who dropped his hand to avoid the full force of the expected blow.

“There, you got that!” exclaimed Hostler, as he delivered a smart cut full on the fingers of Hunt’s hands, and elicited a cry of pain as the boy trembled with nervousness and agony.

“Now for the last!” said Hostler. “Quick about it! There you are! Now don’t you fail again!”

Hunt passed me on his way out of the room, and I saw on his hand two blue-looking streaks, that were swollen as though a hot iron had been passed over them. He was crying, but seemed to think less of his pain than I fancied he would. The other boys that had failed were had up by Hostler in the same manner, and each treated to three cuts on the hand with the whalebone.

“Now, Shepard,” said Hostler, “let’s hear you your definitions. Come along sharp, sir; don’t lounge like that?” Hostler here caught me by the shoulder, and shouting “Come up – hi! hi!” shook me almost out of my clothes.

“I’ll wake you up, I will. You’ve been asleep all your life,” he continued. “Now then, go on: – A point – ”

“A point,” I said, “is – a point is part of magnitude.”

“I’ll parts of magnitude you!” said Hostler. “You’ve been an hour doing nothing. You ought to have three cuts, but I’ll let you off as it’s the first time; but you stop in till you know this.”

I now found myself the only boy in the school, where all was as quiet as before it had been noisy. I sat for some minutes as though in a dream. Was all this real? I asked myself, and had I to go through such scenes for a year before I became an engineer officer, or even a cadet? The feeling of loneliness was mixed with utter surprise and astonishment that there should be such a place as this school in England, and that the course here adopted should be found necessary, in order that boys should become learned enough for officers.

My thoughts wandered from the schoolroom. I was in the shady paths of the grand old forest, where I had passed my early life, and I compared my present condition with that which it would have been had I remained at home. I thought of Howard, and wondered whether he as a boy had passed through such an ordeal as this school offered; and as I believed it possible he had done so, I began to learn a lesson which only those learn who have themselves had to win their way to excellence by hard work and by surmounting difficulties. This essential lesson is one that too many never learn. When we are witnesses of skill in anything, too many forget that this skill is the result of long thought, labour and perseverance. We too often fail to recollect the hours of wearying labour that have been devoted to the acquirement of those qualifications which, when seen in the results, are much admired. The mathematician or geometrician who attains to eminence must have devoted many years’ labour to these subjects, whilst the artist, musician or writer must also have laboured many weary years before he attained even to mediocrity. Even those who excel in games of skill, such as chess, draughts, whist, billiards, cricket, or rackets, must be men who think deeply, and reason on what they see others do, as well as on what they do themselves. When, then, we see excellence in anything, those who have themselves arrived at excellence appreciate skill in others, because ever before them is the idea of the hard work and hard thought that most have been gone through before proficiency could be reached. Those, however, who never have worked to any purpose, who have idled all their lives and failed to attain even mediocrity in anything, usually fail to appreciate in others excellence or skill, and when, after long perseverance and thought, any successful results have been won, idlers not unfrequently term such a result “good luck.” When I had seen Howard, and had been impressed by his apparent knowledge and skill on all subjects, I was ambitious at once of being like him. In my ignorance I fancied that just as I grew taller by no thought or trouble, so I might become an officer like him by merely allowing time to work out its course. That I should have to labour, to work my brain in a manner I had never before even dreamed of, had never occurred to me. Now, however, I began to realise the fact that I was a dunce, and that my brain was feeble merely from want of use, and that I was not capable of competing with other boys of my own age, because their brains had been active and used when mine had been merely idle. I was like a horse suddenly taken up from grass, and worked with one that had been thoroughly trained for many months. My brain was flabby and feeble, without that vigour which is requisite for any mental labour. I could feel a presentiment that there was even a greater exposure of my ignorance coming than had yet taken place. Under the most favourable circumstances of quiet which I enjoyed at home, a long-division sum always took me some time, and, though I was supposed to know as far as fractions in arithmetic, yet I was very shaky in a rule-of-three sum, and I knew that, hustled as I was at Hostler’s, I should breakdown at what perhaps I might accomplish if left quietly to myself. I found that it was downright exhaustive work to remember the definitions before me. I knew them for a minute, then they left me, and as I realised my state I buried my head in my hands, and felt overcome with despair.

Suddenly the door opened, and Hostler appeared and said, “Now, Shepard, do you know your definitions?”

“No, sir,” I replied; “it is very hard for me to learn them.”

I expected him to take me out for my three cuts, but instead of this he sat down beside me and said, “Now, look here; you’ve got to learn how to learn. I see you’re been a spoiled child – your mother’s pet, I suppose – and have never worked at all, only just fudged on. Now you begin really, and of course it’s all new to you. Now just listen to me.”

“Please, sir,” I said, “my mother died when I was a baby, and I never was what you call spoiled by her.”

“Ah, well, I’m very sorry I said that, but of course I didn’t know it; never mind, now try and follow me. A point is that which has no parts and no magnitude – that means, that it’s only an imaginary spot, without any size about it. Do you understand that?”

“Yes, I think I do.”

“Then a line is length without breadth – that is, if I draw an imaginary line from here to the moon, that line has length, but it has no breadth. Now think over these, and learn them again tomorrow, and you may go out and join the other boys in the playground.”

It was quite a relief to me to have this conversation with Mr Hostler, for I felt that I could learn after a time, though at first I experienced all the difficulties of novelty in everything I attempted.

Chapter Four

Experiences at School – My First Fight

On entering the playground I saw about forty boys amusing themselves in various ways. Some were jumping with a pole, others were leaping over a tape, whilst several were talking in groups. As I approached the ground, I heard several boys call out, “Here he is!”

“Now where’s Fraser?” whilst eight or ten boys came round me, and seemed looking at me as a curiosity.

“You’re going to be an engineer, aren’t you?” said one boy.

“Yes,” I replied.

A shout of laughter was the result of this remark of mine, the reason for which I could not comprehend.

“You’re very clever, I suppose,” said the same boy; “an awful hand at Swat.”

“I can do rule-of-three,” I replied.

“Lor! what a clever fellow!” replied the boy. “I say,” he shouted, “Ansell, James, come here! We have a Sir Isaac Newton here!”

As he called, four or five boys came up and joined the others near me.

“He’s going to be an engineer,” said the same boy; “and he knows rule-of-three! Isn’t he likely to get them?”

“Where have you come from?” asked another boy.

“From the New Forest, Hampshire,” I replied.

“Then you’d better go back to the New Forest, Hampshire, and feed the pigs there.”

“You are very rude,” I said, “to speak like that.”

A shout of laughter greeted this speech, whilst the same boy intimated that I was “a confounded young prig!”

“Oh, here you are!” said Fraser, who suddenly appeared on the scene. “I’ve been looking for you. What do you mean by shying a book at me?”

“Why, you kicked me for no reason at all,” I replied. “It is I who have cause to complain of you.”

“Oh, you have, have you? then take that?”

Before I knew what was going to be done, Fraser suddenly struck me full in the face. The blow was so severe that for a second or two I scarcely knew what had happened. Then, however, I realised the fact, and, rushing at Fraser, I struck wildly at him. Without seeming to disturb himself much, Fraser either guarded off my blows or quickly dodged so as to avoid them; and when he saw an opportunity, as he soon did, he punished me severely.

Fraser was smaller than I was, but was certainly stouter, and he possessed what I did not, viz, skill in the use of his fists. This was the first fight I had ever been in, whilst he was an old hand at pugilistic encounters. The result, consequently, was what might be expected, viz, in ten minutes I was entirely beaten, all my strength seemed gone, and I was unable to raise a hand in my defence.

“Don’t you shy a book at me again,” said Fraser as he left me leaning against the wall, trying to recover myself.

“Bravo, Fraser! well done!” said one or two boys who had formed a ring round us as we fought. Not a boy seemed to pity me, or to be disposed to help me, and I felt as utterly miserable as a boy could feel.

As I leant against the wall, with my handkerchief to my nose, a boy named Strong came up and said, —

“You’d better wash the blood off your face, Shepard, or there’ll be a row.”

“I don’t care,” I replied, “whether there’s a row or not.”

“Come along,” said Strong; “don’t be downhearted. Fraser is an awful mill and a great bully, and always bullies a new boy just to show off his fighting. Come and wash your face.”

I went with Strong, and removed as much as possible the evidence of my late combat – Strong all the time trying his best to cheer me up.

“You’ve never been at a boarding-school before?” said Strong inquiringly.

“No; and I don’t think I shall stop here long,” I replied.

“Oh, there will be another new boy soon, and then you’ll lead an easy life.”

“But is every new boy treated as I am?”

“Well, very nearly the same. Then they are down upon you because you boasted you were going to get the Engineers’.”

“Boasted? I didn’t mean to boast. I came here to prepare for the Engineers.”

“But don’t you know that it’s only about one in twenty who go to the Academy who are clever enough for the Engineers? and when you say you are going to be an engineer it looks like boasting. You may be very clever, and a first-rate hand at Euclid and Swat; but it doesn’t do to boast.”

This speech opened my eyes at once. In my ignorance I knew no difference between being an engineer or anything else; but I now saw why it was that all the boys seemed to make such game of me when I said I was intended for the Engineers, as it was like asserting that I was very clever, and claiming to have it in my power to beat nineteen out of twenty boys who might compete with me. I now began to realise it as a fact that I was utterly ignorant on nearly every subject that was likely to be of use to me at Mr Hostler’s. I knew nothing either of schoolboys or school-life. To me it seemed most ungenerous that I should be laughed at because I made a mistake, not knowing that schoolboys as a rule are disposed to make butts of those who are not as well acquainted as themselves with the few facts on which they pride themselves.

In the afternoon of this my first day at Mr Hostler’s, my pride again received a severe blow. The subject studied in the afternoon was arithmetic and algebra; and on coming into the schoolroom Mr Monk asked me where I had left off in arithmetic.

In order not to make any mistake, I replied that rule-of-three was what I had last done.

I remember well that Aunt Emma, who used to teach me arithmetic, had a book out of which she used to copy a sum of a very simple nature, but which she as well as I thought at the time rather difficult. She then used to show me an example to point out how it was done; and, when I had finished it, used to compare my answer with that given in the book. She was rather hazy about the problem as a rule, and never ventured to give me any explanation as to where I was wrong in case my answer did not correspond with that in the book; but still I was supposed to have learnt rule-of-three, though I soon found out my mistake. The style of questions that I used to solve at home were such as the following: —

“If a bushel of coals costs two shillings and sixpence, what would be the price of fifty bushels?”

These I could fairly accomplish without much probability of making a mistake; and so I hoped I might succeed in passing Mr Monk’s examination of my rule-of-three.

“Just write down this question,” said Mr Monk; “we shall soon see if you know anything about rule-of-three.”

The following question was then dictated to me: —

“If 10 men and 6 boys dig a trench 100 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 5 feet deep, in 12 days, how many boys ought to be employed to dig a trench 200 feet long, 3 feet deep, and 6 feet wide, in 8 days, if only 5 men were employed, 2 boys being supposed equal to 1 man?”

As I read over this question I felt my heart sink within me. I knew I could not do it properly, and that I should again expose myself to ridicule in having said I could accomplish rule-of-three, when, if this were rule-of-three, I knew nothing of it. I sat for several minutes looking at the

question, and trying to discover some means for its solution. Boys were mixed in my mind with ditches, men with days, and deep holes with width. At least a quarter of an hour passed without my making the slightest advance in the way of solution; at the end of this time Mr Monk looked at my slate and said, —

“So you don’t seem to know much about rule-of-three?”

“I never saw a sum like this before,” I replied.

“Then why did you tell me that you could do rule-of-three? Do you know your multiplication table?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“What’s 12 times 11?” he inquired.

Now, of all the multiplication table, 11 times anything was to me the easiest, because I remembered that two similar figures, such as 66, was 6 times 11, 77 was seven times 11, and so on; but 12 times 11 was a number I was always rather shaky about. I hesitated a moment and then made a wild rush at it, and said, “One hundred and twenty-one?”

Mr Monk looked at me with a mingled expression of pity and contempt, and said, “You’re nearly fifteen, and you don’t know your multiplication table, and yet you think you’re going to be an engineer! Why there’s not a boy at the charity-school who at twelve does not know more than you!”

I listened attentively to this remark, for I felt that Mr Monk was a prophet. It was quite true that I was a dunce. I had learnt it, and realised it in half a day. It had been forcibly impressed on me as I tried to learn Euclid, as I was ignominiously defeated by Fraser in a pugilistic encounter in something like ten minutes, and now when it was proved to me! did not know my multiplication table.

“You’d better commence at simple addition,” said Monk, “and work your way up. You can’t join any class; there’s no one so backward as you are. Your nursemaid ought to have taught you these things. At Mr Hostler’s we don’t expect to have to teach even arithmetic. It will take you three years to get up to quadratics!”

“Well, Mr Monk,” said Hostler, bustling into the room, “I hope Shepard is well up in his algebra?”

“He doesn’t even know his multiplication table?” said Monk.

Hostler stared at me much as he would at a dog with only two legs or a bird with one wing. Having given me a long searching look, under which I blushed and felt inclined to shrink under the form, he said, —

“Poor fellow! your friends have got a lot to answer for! What a pity it is, Mr Monk, that in civilised England people who are gentlefolks are not compelled by law to educate their children! Look at this boy, now. I dare say, at home and in the country, he was thought to be fit to run alone; and yet there he is, a regular dunce! Now, Shepard,” he said, “you must begin to learn; you must work hard; and if there’s no chance of your getting into the Academy, why, what you learn here will always be of use to you; so don’t be idle.”

Having made this remark, Mr Hostler went about the school, looking at the slates of the various boys, talking to several, and explaining their problems to them. As for me, I was soon busily engaged in adding up a long row of pounds, shillings, and pence, which I did not accomplish without three times failing to obtain the right total. At length, however, I was successful, just as it was time to turn out for our afternoon walk.

On going to bed that night I seemed to have passed through more, and to have gained more experience in that one day that I had in years before. I had learnt that I knew nothing — that my supposed knowledge was not real — that I was, in fact, a dunce, far behind all other boys of my own age — that I was weak in physical strength — and though my sisters used to think me awfully strong, yet this, too, was a mistake. Mixed with the depressing effect of this knowledge there was,

however, a slight feeling of satisfaction in knowing that now at least I was among realities, whilst before I was among dreams. I had, too, a kind of presentiment that I had within me a capacity for doing work, if I could only get in the way of it. When I used to help my father in his microscope work, and sketched some of the wonderful details of the wings, legs, or bodies of the insects I saw, he always prophesied that I should do great things some day. Now, however, I realised the fact that I was a dunce – that I was so far behind other boys that it was improbable I could ever catch them up, and so to expect to excel was out of the question; if I could only attain to mediocrity I should be satisfied.

Such thoughts passed through my mind as I dozed off to sleep, and dreamed I was untangling a skein of wire, that as fast as I undid one part another portion gathered itself in a knot.

Suddenly I felt a choking sensation, and started up in bed with a strange bewildered feeling over me. The room was quite dark, and I could not see one of the ten beds occupied by the other boys in the room. I, however, heard a slight noise as of some one getting into bed, and then a smothered laugh. As I fully awoke I found I was drenched with water and my bed and pillow were wet – a fact I was much puzzled at.

As I sat up, wondering what had happened, a boy called out, “Shepard! what are you about?”

“I am wet through, somehow,” I said.

“Ah! some one has given you a ‘cold pig,’ I suppose, because you snored so. Don’t you make such a row again.”

When I was at home it was instilled into me that it was almost certain death to sleep in a damp bed, and numerous instances were quoted to me of persons who had either died of consumption, or been cripples for life in consequence of sleeping in wet sheets. In the present instance, however, there was no help for it. I must either sit up all night, or sleep in the bed, wet as it was. I was so completely tired, so utterly worn out, bodily and mentally, that I did not care who it was had thrown the water on me. My head ached, from over-thought as much as from the blows I had received in my fight, and I again laid down in the wet bed, and slept as well as though in my own room at home.

I had not half completed what would have been a fair night’s rest under ordinary conditions when I was awoken by the shrill voice of a boy shouting “Quarter!” I at first imagined this cry might mean something connected with a battle, and that the enemy were calling out for quarter; but on fully awaking I found each boy jumping up, and rushing to a basin of water and washing in the greatest haste. I followed the example set me by the other boys, from whom I learnt that we all had to be in the schoolroom by six o’clock, and any boy who was not in the room when the clock struck got no breakfast. We all rushed from our room about a minute before the clock struck, and entered the school where I had been on the previous day; and I then found that between six and seven a proposition in Euclid had to be learnt on nearly every morning. So I was at once started at my definitions.

In the hour allotted I managed to learn my definitions, and said them to the satisfaction of Mr Monk, and was able, therefore, to go out with the other boys for the half-hour preceding breakfast.

During the next two days our routine was very similar to that of the first day. I soon fully realised the fact that I was more backward, if not more stupid, than any boy in the school; and I also learnt that no one believed it possible I could ever be prepared to pass the examination for entrance to the Academy. There were boys at the school of only twelve years of age, who were far beyond me, who were not to be sent up for examination until they were fifteen years of age. In those days a boy was allowed only one trial for entrance, and if he then failed he never had another given him; and he consequently lost all chance of becoming a cadet. So it was, at least, a prudent precaution to keep a boy at school until he was well qualified to pass his examination. There was also then, as now, considerable rivalry amongst the schoolmasters who prepared for Woolwich Academy, and it was considered a feather in the cap of the individual who had prepared the first boy on the list. To

send up any boy, therefore, badly prepared was imprudent, and also not likely to reflect any credit on the establishment from which he had been sent.

I used my best endeavours to get on, but found that my brain would not work as would that of other boys: it seemed like a limb that has not been used for many weeks and is suddenly called upon for some hard work; it becomes stiff and unable to work in a very short time. I also noticed that none of the masters seemed to take much trouble about me. It appeared as though they had agreed that I was not in the race for the Academy, and therefore it was unnecessary for them to trouble themselves much about me.

In three days an entire change had come over me. I had lost all pride in myself, and felt that I must merely drag on an existence at this school for a time. I had not the courage to write to my father and tell him it was impossible I could pass my examination, as I was such a dunce; for I knew such an announcement would not be believed by him, or, if believed, it would be most unpleasant news. I hoped, too, that it was possible I might by practice get accustomed to the noise at the school, and might, like other boys, be able to learn like a parrot the problems in Euclid. My life was certainly a most miserable one. I was still the last new boy, and as such had various tricks played upon me; but it seemed that my nature was somehow changed, and that I did not feel as sensitively as I did on first joining Mr Hostler's.

One day per week at Mr Hostler's was devoted to drawing of various kinds, and languages; and this day was a great relaxation after the perpetual Euclid, arithmetic, or algebra. I rather looked forward, also, to seeing Mr Walkwell, the drawing-master, who, I was told, was very amusing and quite a character, and who was very fond of boys. On going into school after breakfast, I saw Mr Walkwell. He was a short, spare man, with a flexible face, which he had the power of altering in a marvellous manner. His arms and legs also he could swing about in a wild kind of way that seemed quite dangerous. As we all entered the school, Mr Walkwell called out in a deep, loud voice that one would scarcely believe possible could emanate from so small a man, —

“Every boy to his seat instantly?”

Each boy jumped into a place except myself, and, not knowing where to go, I stood looking at Mr Walkwell.

“New boy,” said Mr Walkwell, pointing his finger at me threateningly. “New boy! See. Ought to be an artist. Large perceptive, comparison well developed, ideality large, temperament nervous. New boy, you can draw?”

“No, sir,” I said, “I can't draw.”

“What's your name, new boy?”

“Shepard, sir.”

“Gentle Shepard – not of Salisbury Plains – come and sit here. That's always to be your place. Now, boys, listen to the three great rules of drawing.”

Mr Walkwell here took a piece of chalk and sketched on a black board in about half a dozen lines a small landscape. As he drew these lines, he said, —

“Listen, boys! There are three rules in drawing to be attended to. There is the distant, or delicate – see here the distant hills; the middle ground, or spirited; and the foreground, or bold.”

As he completed his remarks, he lowered his voice from the high falsetto at which he had commenced to the deepest base, whilst at the same time he ran his chalk about in a most skilful manner over the lines he had drawn, and filled in a very effective landscape.

“Now, Shepard,” he said, “you, as new boy, always remember these golden rules, and you must draw. Take a pencil now and copy this gate.”

I was here given a copy, a piece of drawing-paper, and a spare piece of paper to try my pencil on. I very soon copied the gate, and then amused myself in sketching a yacht, such as I had seen in the Solent, and making the Isle of Wight the distant, or delicate, and some posts the foreground, or bold. It was a scene I could call to mind, and I seemed to be again in Hampshire, enjoying my

liberty. So engrossed was I with this fancy sketch, that at first I did not notice all the boys' eyes turned on me with curiosity. I soon saw, however, that I was the object of general attention; and on looking round I saw Mr Walkwell leaning over me, watching what I was doing.

"New boy, give me that," said Mr Walkwell; "you are idling."

I gave up the paper, feeling certain that either three cuts on the hand or some other punishment would be given to me. Mr Walkwell looked at the drawing, and then at me, and then said, —

"Shepard, I must report you to Mr Hostler."

"Please, sir, don't!" I said; "I'll never idle again."

At that instant Mr Hostler came into the room and said, —

"Well, Mr Walkwell, how are you? Are the boys doing well?"

"Very fairly, sir, very fairly; but I have to report the new boy to you."

"What, Shepard? Ah, I'm afraid he is a failure. Come here, Shepard!"

I got up from my seat and walked up to where Hostler and Walkwell were standing, feeling ready to faint from nervousness.

"New boy Shepard, Mr Hostler, has told me a story. I asked him if he could draw, and he said 'No,' and I have now seen him out of his own head draw this sketch, sir. Look at the curve of that yacht's sails; see the way he has fore-shortened her; look how she rests on the water. Why, for a man that's a work of art. That boy is an artist, sir, and he told me he couldn't draw."

It is very difficult to describe my feelings during this conversation. I had twice been surprised at discovering my ignorance during the past few days, and now I had a surprise in discovering that I was possessed of a skill in drawing which was above the average. I used to amuse myself when at home in drawing on a slate vessels and boats that I had seen when I had gone down to Lymington or Beaulieu, but that there was any great difficulty in drawing such things I had never imagined, or had I the slightest idea that other boys could not do so well – if not better than I did.

I was certainly pleased to find that there was something in which I was not a dunce; and although I was a laughing-stock of the school on account of my ignorance of mathematics and Euclid, I was held up as something unusually clever in drawing.

"Shepard," said Mr Hostler, "I am glad to find you can do something well, but it's a pity you have wasted your time in learning only drawing, to the neglect of mathematics. Drawing never passed a boy into the Academy, and it doesn't count much afterwards. Very well, Mr Walkwell, make a good artist of him, and he'll then have a profession always ready for him in case he wants it; but I wish, for his sake, he'd some knowledge of Euclid, and less of drawing."

From that day Mr Walkwell paid great attention to my instruction, and I improved rapidly under his tuition, and after some dozen lessons I was considered the best in the drawing-class.

Chapter Five

Mr Hostler's Cram-School

It was the practice for our school to be taken out for a walk on Sunday mornings, and to go on to the barrack-field at Woolwich, to see the march past previous to the troops going to church. At this march past the splendid band of the Royal Artillery used to play at the head of the regiment, whilst immediately following the band, and heading the regiment, were two companies of gentlemen cadets.

At the church-parade on Sundays the cadets turned out in full-dress, which consisted of white trowsers, a blue tailed coat with red facings, a shako and plume. Such a dress now would look old-fashioned, but to my boyish eyes it seemed in those days the pattern of neatness, and of a soldierlike appearance.

To me everything military possessed the charm of novelty, but I must own that nothing I had ever imagined previously came up, in my ideas, to the magnificent sight that I for the first time now witnessed. I had never before heard a military band, and I gazed with wonder at the immense display of musicians, headed by a splendid-looking man, arrayed in gold lace, and swinging a huge gold-headed stick, as tall as himself, which he dexterously manipulated in time with the music. There is always something spirit-stirring in the sound of martial music, and I stood entranced as the band marched past me, turned sharp to the left as though worked by machinery, and, wheeling about, faced me, as they continued the slow march they were playing.

"Here come the gentlemen cadets!" said some of the civilians, who by hundreds had assembled to see the Sunday march past. "Look how splendidly they march?"

"What a fine set of young fellows!"

I pushed myself into a front position as I heard these remarks, and saw advancing at a slow march a line of soldiers, moving as though they were part and parcel of each other. With heads erect, and shoulders well thrown back, this line advanced; the marching was perfect. As the leading company approached a flag, beside which were several officers, who I noticed were covered with medals, a tall cadet shouted, "Bear rank take open order!" and, coming out to the front, led the company onward. So new was the sight to me, so splendid did it all appear, and so imposing, that I felt a half-choking sensation as I looked at and admired every movement. As the leading cadet passed the flag I saw him go through some movement, which concluded with his raising his hand to his cap in what I knew must be a salute. I heard murmurs of applause among the bystanders, and the deep, decided voice of an old officer at the flagstaff exclaim, "Well marched, gentlemen; very well marched."

There was a something, I don't know what to call it, but it seemed like a flash of intelligence passed across the faces of the cadets as they heard these words. They marched on as rigidly as ever, not a cadet an inch before or behind his neighbour, but there was a sparkle in the eye of each cadet that showed the words spoken by the officer had been heard and appreciated by front and rear rank of the cadets.

"Who is that officer?" I heard a civilian ask.

"That is Lord Bloomfield, the commandant," was the reply.

I looked at the commandant, and saw a handsome, soldierlike-looking man in a splendid uniform, but he was too far removed from me in years and rank to produce any special sympathy on my part; the hero of the day in my mind was the cadet who had given the order to open the ranks, whilst every one of the forty cadets forming the first company that had marched past was to me an object of admiration. At that moment I would have given much to have been one among that company, and to have marched past as they had marched.

As the cadets marched before us, I could hear some of my schoolfellows calling attention to several cadets who were known to them.

“There’s Duckworth, who passed third last Christmas,” said one of them. “He’s second of his batch now, and is sure of the Engineers, they say.”

“There’s Hobson in the rear rank, with the brass collar; he got second-class mathematical prize; and see how well Jackson marches; he’s an awful swell now since he got sixty runs and carried out his bat in the last match with the officers. Look at that brute Tims,” exclaimed another; “I hope he’ll be spun at his probationary, or he’ll be an awful bully as an old cadet when I am a neux.”

These and other similar remarks I heard near me, just as a feeling of utter misery came over me as I realised the fact that it was impossible I could ever be a cadet. What I had seen on that parade had instilled into me military ambition, and if I had then and there been offered the option of a peerage or of being a gentleman cadet, I am perfectly certain I should have jumped at the chance of being a cadet. I now fully realised the absurdity of my having said at Mr Hostler’s that I was going to be an engineer, for I had already discovered that I was, compared to other boys, a dunce, and that it required a boy to be not only very clever, but to have been thoroughly well prepared, to stand any chance of being among the first flight in the intellectual race at the Academy. Consequently my remarks about being an engineer, though uttered in all simplicity and ignorance by me, appeared to others as conceited and vain-glorious, as though it were announced that a screw of a horse was going to Epsom to win the Derby. I was now not surprised that I had been, and still remained, a laughing-stock to my schoolfellows on account of my ignorance.

A third of a century has passed since that Sunday morning on which I was first a witness of a military display. During the interval, many strange and wonderful scenes have passed before us, and we have seen a large portion of our globe; but we cannot recall any pageant that has produced upon us half the effect that was produced by a simple marching-past parade, in which the gentlemen cadets, as the first company of the Royal Artillery, marched at the head of the regiment.

Since those days years have produced their effect upon our mind and body, but we are convinced a far greater effect has been produced on society than on us individually. Formerly any man or boy, who by labour, gallant deeds, intellectual power, or skill, had distinguished himself, and had thereby, even temporarily, gained a position of eminence, received the deference considered then due to him.

To the Woolwich schoolboy the gentleman cadet was a being so far above him that he was to be approached only with bated breath and whispering humbleness. To the cadet the officer was an emblem of authority and rank far above criticism, and to be treated only with respect, and obeyed without murmur. To the last-joined cadet the old cadet was an object of mingled fear and admiration – fear because, in the days of which we write, fagging was at its height, and too often was abused, and degenerated into bullying; and admiration because the old cadet had surmounted difficulties which it had yet to be proved the young cadet could surmount. What may be described as “veneration” for rank and seniority was then at its height, and impressed its influence even on the members of a cram-school such as Mr Hostler’s.

He himself, as master of the school, used his best endeavours to keep this sentiment alive. The career of those boys who had done well at the Academy was often referred to by Hostler, and comparisons made between what had been accomplished by other and former pupils, and what was likely to be done by those now at the school. Amongst those whose reputation stood highest at Hostler’s I found the name of my friend Howard was well known. He had done well at the Academy, had gained several prizes, and had left behind him a reputation that was not likely to die out soon.

In those days a boy at school used to look with a mingled feeling of respect and fear at a cadet; to be seen speaking familiarly with a cadet was enough to give a boy a position in a school, whilst an officer was regarded as belonging entirely to another order of being, whose sayings and doings were merely to be quoted as examples for future guidance.

A change, however, has taken place in these things. Now it is no unusual thing for the visitor to Woolwich to see four or five young men at school lounging down the common arm in arm, each with his pipe in his mouth, jostling off the pavement an officer covered with medals, or puffing their tobacco-smoke in the faces of ladies, whom they almost force into the road, and eye in a half sneering, half patronising manner. To them a cadet is nothing superior in any way to themselves; an officer they imagine to be a man behind his time, and one to whom they could give lots of useful hints. Let people only wait till they become officers, and (so they believe) then they will show how things should be done.

Others, again, in the present day, stand on what they imagine their rights, and will not admit that any deference is due to either age, rank, or experience – a sentiment largely demonstrated during the reign of the Paris Commune, a sort of “down with everything that’s up” style, that is more dangerous to a country than are the armies of her enemies.

Thirty years ago such sentiments had little hold in England, and none whatever among those who were candidates for Woolwich, or who wore the coveted uniform of a gentleman cadet; and we cannot but think that much of that military devotion which so characterised every branch of the army during the earlier part of the present century was due to the *esprit de corps* felt by all officers at that time, when soldiering was not so much a business as an honourable profession. That men of the Anglo-Saxon race should ever fail in courage, or in a sense of duty, is not likely, but there is a marked difference between work done from a sense of duty and that done *con amore*; and where discontent is not unknown, we too often find mere duty is most irksome.

During four months that I remained at Mr Hostler’s, previous to a brief vacation, I made very slow progress; it seemed to me that there was a disinclination on the part of the masters to push me forward. I was kept over and over again at the same things, whilst other boys were pushed on to more advanced subjects. I had obtained a reputation for being stupid and having no capacity for mathematics, and this case seemed an example of giving a dog a bad name, and you may as well hang him. The neglect with which I was treated produced its effect on me, for I failed to use all my powers to advance, as it seemed a useless effort on my part; so I only did as much as would save me from the whalebone cane, and this I often failed to escape.

I hailed with delight the day that I left Mr Hostler’s for a three weeks’ holiday, for I hoped I should never return, as I intended to explain to my father how matters were, and to get him either to send me to another school, or to withdraw me entirely from the proposed competition for Woolwich. I had a keen sense of the discredit that would attach to me if I went up for my examination and failed, for I knew slightly a boy near Salisbury, who had been prepared for Woolwich, had gone up to the Academy, and been, as it was termed, “spun.” Many persons who knew nothing of the difficulty of the examination, or were unacquainted with the fact that out of forty who went up for examination it was rare for more than twenty or twenty-five to be taken, yet pitied the friends of this boy on account of his “discreditable failure,” as they termed it. Believing that it was no question of probability, but a certainty, that I could not qualify for my examination, I considered it would be more prudent to withdraw under some excuse, rather than go up and fail. I was also assured by several boys that Mr Hostler would not allow me to go up unless he was tolerably certain I should pass, as it would bring discredit on his school if I failed.

It was late in the evening when I reached my father’s lodge, and was welcomed by all my relatives. The change that had taken place in me was marked, and was noticed by all. I was thinner, and the care and thought of the past four months had given me an aged appearance, that made me look a year older than I was. I could scarcely conceal my feelings as my sisters hoped I was getting on splendidly, and would soon be an engineer, like Howard. To enter into all the details of my difficulties with them would, I knew, be useless, and so I avoided answering them, and made up my mind to wait till I could have a quiet talk with my father, and explain matters to him.

After dinner that evening I found my opportunity of speaking to my father when we were alone. I was most eager to open my heart to him, and let him know how things really stood. Without any preface I suddenly said, "I want to tell you, there's no possible chance of my passing for a cadet."

"No chance! What do you mean? Why, it's nearly ten months to your examination! Don't you mean to try?"

"I may try all I can, and yet it's impossible; it would take me two years to get into the class that goes up for examination."

"Mr Hostler thinks differently, Bob, for he says that he hopes you will pass, if you will work; but that up to the present time you have been very idle."

I listened with astonishment to my father's remarks, and could hardly believe it possible that Mr Hostler had written such words. My doubts, however, were soon removed, by the production of Mr Hostler's letter, in which were the very words quoted. I knew that what I had stated was correct, and that Mr Hostler knew, even better than I did, that there was no chance of my success; but at the time I had no idea of the reason for his sending such a letter to my father. It was, I found, the intention to send me back to Hostler's at the termination of my three weeks' vacation, and I began to count the days and hours of liberty previous to that, to me, unpleasant period.

On the following morning I received an invitation from Howard, asking me to go over and pass a few days with him, and, having obtained my father's consent, I started for his lodgings, which were at a farm-house near Lyndhurst.

Howard was now to me even a greater hero than he had formerly appeared. I looked on him as one who had passed a distinguished career at Woolwich, and had also been abroad, and I felt somewhat afraid of him now that I knew how much he had done. He was, however, so kind and friendly that I was soon at my ease, and as we sat at our *tête-à-tête* dinner I found myself telling him all my disappointments, hopes, and fears at Mr Hostler's, and my difficulties as regarded the future.

Howard seemed much amused at all I told him, and said that the first thing he must teach me was to be a good "mill," – that meant, how to use my fists. He did not mean to bother me with work, as he believed I wanted rest more than anything; but he promised to write to Hostler, and ask him to push me on, and he thought that, although it was difficult, yet it was by no means impossible I might pass.

On the following morning, soon after breakfast, Howard produced a pair of boxing-gloves, and, taking a seat on a chair, gave me instruction in what he called "the noble art of self-defence." He first showed me how to stand, how to raise and hold my fists, how to strike out and make the foot and hand work together. He pointed out the danger of an open guard by giving me light taps in the face, and then explained how to guard them.

"We'll have an hour a day at this fun," he said, "while you are here, and I'll back you to lick Fraser when you go back to Woolwich. There's nothing that can't be done by thought and work."

During the week I passed with Howard I changed from a condition of despondency to one of Hope. I learnt from him the power to be derived from thought and work. He explained to me his own difficulties, and how he had overcome them, and encouraged me by saying that, although I was backward, he believed I had brains enough to come to the front after all. By constant practice I had become, as he said, quite a "dab" with my fists, and ought to hold my own with heavier weights than myself. "Don't you ever seek a fight," he advised, "if you are even sure to win, because that's bad style; but, if a boy tries to bully you, never avoid a fight, and you'll soon find you'll lead an easier life, even though you get licked."

I returned home from my visit to Howard with a lighter heart than I had gone there, for hope now took the place of despair. If I could only manage to pass into the Academy, I thought, what a triumph it would be! but then the knowledge of the work before me cropped up, and it seemed as impossible I could accomplish what I had to do as that I could accomplish flying, or any other

impossibility. Any way, I would try hard on my return to Hostler's, and perhaps he would now push me on faster than he had done before.

My three weeks soon passed, and I once more joined Hostler's school at Woolwich. There were two new boys, who had, however, been to other schools, and were fairly forward both in Euclid and algebra, and got on very well after the first few days. I soon became better friends than I had been with Strong and two or three other boys; but Fraser, who was the bully of the school, was still very uncivil to me, and more than once had threatened to thrash me if I interfered with him.

Remembering the advice that Howard had given me, I told Strong one day that if Fraser gave me any reason for doing so, I intended to challenge him to fight. Strong warned me against doing anything so rash, for he assured me he knew a case where Fraser had completely cut a boy's cheek open in a fight, and that I should not be able to stand up against him for five minutes.

Chapter Six

My First Victory

It was about a month after I had returned from my vacation that Mr Hostler gave us a holiday, and arrangements were made for our playing a match of cricket on Lessness Heath, a piece of open ground near Belvedere. Each boy took out his lunch, and the whole school turned out for the day, Mr Monk being in charge of us. We walked to Belvedere, and soon arranged sides and commenced our match – Mr Monk leaving us to take care of ourselves whilst he went down to Erith to see some friends.

After my side had been in and scored forty runs, the other eleven, of which Fraser was one, went in, and had scored thirty-six runs, when Fraser, who had retained his bat during the whole match, was “stumped,” and given out by the boy who was umpire. Fraser disputed the decision, and refused to go out, although even his own side owned that there was no doubt about it. At this Fraser became very angry, and declared he would not give in as he had never gone out of his ground. I stood “point,” and saw he was more than a foot out of his ground when stumped by the wicket-keeper, and, on being appealed to, said there was no doubt about it. No sooner had I said so than Fraser dropped his bat and rushed at me, striking me on the side of the head. In an instant I returned the blow, and a fight commenced.

Several of the older boys, seeing there was to be a fight, suggested we should go into a gravel-pit near the heath, as we should not be seen there, and if Mr Monk came back we should be able to see him from a distance, before he saw us. We both went to the gravel-pit, and a ring was formed – Strong acting as my second, whilst the majority of the boys, feeling that Fraser was in the wrong, were on my side. The reputation, however, which Fraser had obtained as a “mill” caused several of the smaller boys to stand by him for fear of future punishment if they excited his displeasure.

We were soon opposite to one another, with our coats off, and our shirt sleeves rolled up, ready to commence, most of the boys looking upon my defeat as certain, and half afraid lest I should be severely punished by my opponent. Fraser was confident of success, and exclaimed, “I’ll soon stop your cheek for you; now look out!”

He made a rush at me, hitting out vigorously, but I remembered Howard’s advice, and determined to keep my head, and try to put in practice what he had taught me. I guarded myself against Fraser’s blows, and succeeded in twice giving him straight hits in the face without receiving a touch from him in return.

The first round seemed to astonish every one, but none more than Fraser himself. When he had thrashed me before, I knew no more about the use of my fists than a girl, and simply stood up to be knocked about. Now, however, I made use of my legs as well as my fists, and jumped away from Fraser’s rushes and blows as expertly as a cat; whilst I instantly recovered myself, and, making my hand and foot keep time, dealt two or three such staggering blows that Fraser was quite bewildered.

There is nothing that so soon puts off a bully, or a man accustomed to easy victory, as being “collared.” The effect is not unusually to make the too confident man lose his head, forget his skill, and fall an easy victim to his opponent. This was the case with Fraser. In the second round he hit wildly and unskilfully at me, and exposed himself to my blows several times, opportunities which I did not neglect, and, finally, I gave him a fair knock-down blow. There were now cries of “Bravo, Shepard!” whilst several small boys who had been quietly watching the fight, and who had been bullied by Fraser on former occasions, jumped about outside the ring with a delight that they did not attempt to conceal.

Three more rounds were fought, during each of which I became more and more confident, as my fear of my adversary's skill and strength was gradually dispelled, and at the sixth round I commenced the attack and completely knocked Fraser out of time.

Cheers greeted my victory, whilst I was patted on the back by nearly all the boys, and looked at with admiration by the smallest. Even the older boys looked at me with surprise, for, excepting one blow on the cheek, I was unmarked, and seemed untouched.

Strong helped me on with my jacket, and seemed quite delighted at my victory.

"This is a great day for you," he said. "There's no one in the school can lick you now; but I'm astonished to find what a mill you are, for six months ago you knew nothing about it."

"Ah," I replied, "I did know nothing then but I determined to learn something, and so I got a friend to teach me. Who do you think gave me lessons?"

"I can't guess."

"Why Howard, who was at the Academy some years ago."

"Howard!" exclaimed Strong. "Why, he was the best boxer that was ever at the Academy, and it was he who licked the prizefighter at Charlton Fair. No wonder you thrashed Fraser so easily."

Fraser took his defeat with a very bad grace. He was a good deal punished, and I was surprised myself at the effect of my blows. It was my first experience of the result of skill in opposition to brute force, and of the advantage of practice before attempting any performance. It was a small thing, it was true, to merely thrash the bully of a school, but the means by which I had achieved this performance gave me a lesson that has never been forgotten. Labour and thought were the means by which I had gained this victory, as they are the means by which nearly every successful result in life is achieved.

From that day I took quite a different position in the school, and led a life free from quizzing or bullying. Fraser hated me, but he feared me too, and to make up for his dislike I found the generality of the boys now sought my society, and always tried to walk with me when we went out for our daily constitutionals. It is a small thing at a school or in afterlife that makes the difference between popularity and unpopularity.

Four months passed after my return from my vacation, and my life at Mr Hostler's had grown into a sort of routine. I went through the various daily works there much as did the other boys; but I was not advanced as were the other pupils, and as the time went on and drew nearer to the limit of age at which I could go up for examination I felt more and more certain that my chances of being prepared grew less and less. There were now only six months to the date of my examination, and I had not commenced algebra, yet I had to take up cubic equations and three books of Euclid. In this difficulty and anxiety I wrote to Howard, and told him all my fears and anxieties. As I penned my letter to him I felt ill, and out of health and unfit to do anything; but I sent off the letter, and then hoped I should be more at my ease.

On the following morning, when the "quarter" was shouted as usual, I tried to get up, but was unable to stand, and I knew I was very ill. I asked one of the boys to tell Mr Hostler I was too ill to get up, and in an hour a doctor came and immediately ordered me to be removed to a separate room, where I was physicked and attended by an old servant, who acted as nurse to the establishment. I became worse during the day, and at night was delirious, and it was then known that I had a bad attack of measles.

During three weeks I was confined to bed, and of course made no progress towards qualifying for my examination, and at the end of that time was only able to walk about my room.

It happened that the room in which I had been ill was separated by only a thin partition from a room in which Mr Hostler usually saw visitors, and what was said in the next room could be easily heard in mine. I was sitting one evening looking out of my window and wondering what my future would be, when I heard Mr Hostler's voice in the next room, and my own name mentioned.

I listened eagerly to what was said, for I fancied it might be Howard come to see me; but I was soon undeceived, for the second person I ascertained was Monk.

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