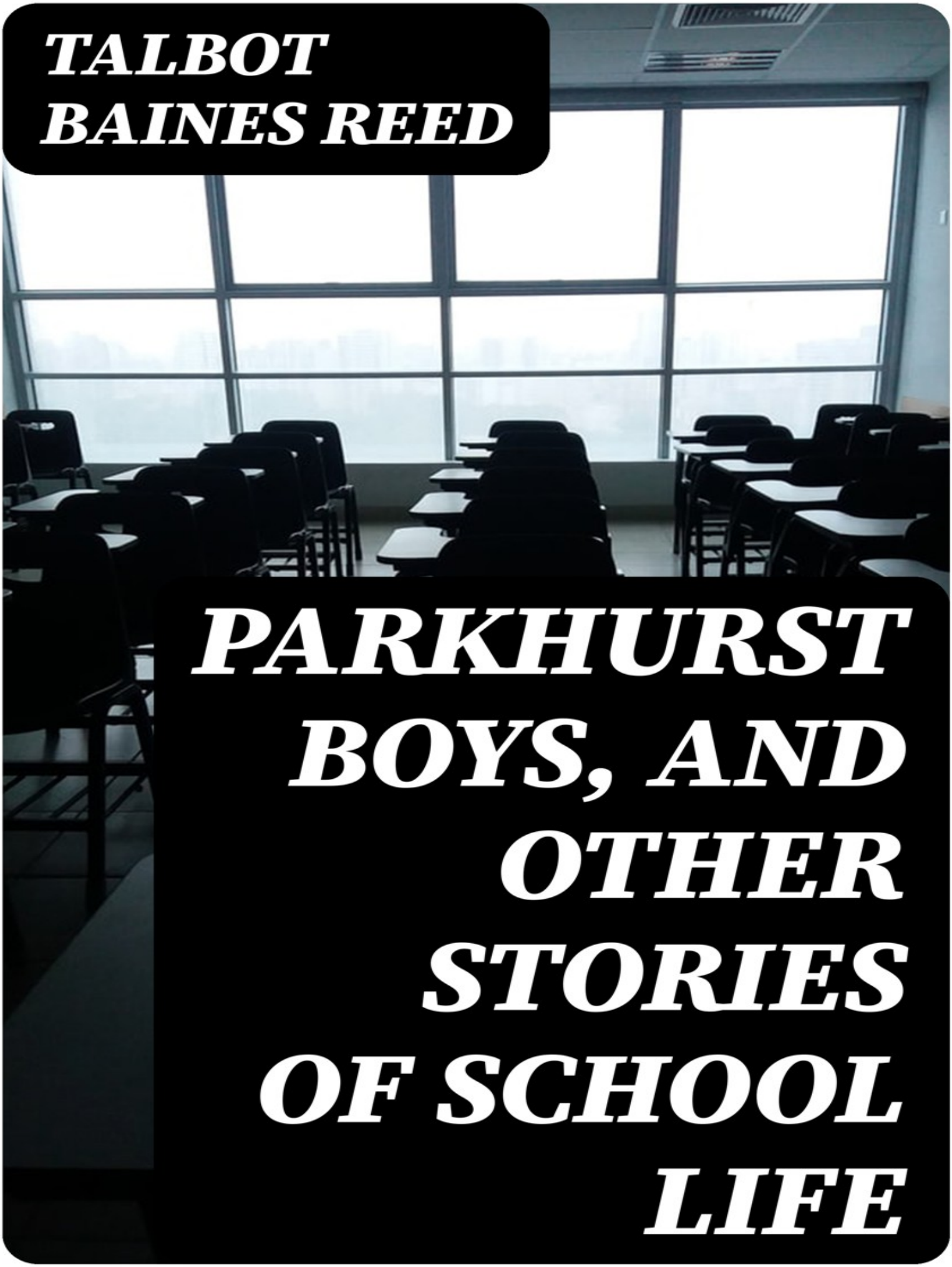
TALBOT BAINES REED



PARKHURST BOYS, AND OTHER STORIES OF SCHOOL LIFE

Talbot Baines Reed

Parkhurst Boys, and Other Stories of School Life

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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"Parkhurst Boys"

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Chapter One.

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My First Football Match.

It was a proud moment in my existence when Wright, captain of our football club, came up to me in school one Friday and said, “Adams, your name is down to play in the match against Craven to-morrow.”

I could have knighted him on the spot. To be one of the picked “fifteen,” whose glory it was to fight the battles of their school in the Great Close, had been the leading ambition of my life—I suppose I ought to be ashamed to confess it—ever since, as a little chap of ten, I entered Parkhurst six years ago. Not a winter Saturday but had seen me either looking on at some big match, or oftener still scrimmaging about with a score or so of other juniors in a scratch game. But for a long time, do what I would, I always seemed as far as ever from the coveted goal, and was half despairing of ever rising to win my “first fifteen cap.” Latterly, however, I had noticed Wright and a few others of our best players more than once lounging about in the Little Close, where we juniors used to play, evidently taking observations with an eye to business. Under the awful gaze of these heroes, need I say I exerted myself as I had never done before? What cared I for hacks or bruises, so only that

I could distinguish myself in their eyes? And never was music sweeter than the occasional “Bravo, young ’un!” with which some of them would applaud any special feat of skill or daring.

So I knew my time was coming at last, and only hoped it would arrive before the day of the Craven match, the great match of our season—always looked forward to as *the* event of the Christmas term, when victory was regarded by us boys as the summit of all human glory, and defeat as an overwhelming disgrace.

It will therefore be understood why I was almost beside myself with delight when, the very day before the match, Wright made the announcement I have referred to.

I scarcely slept a wink that night for dreaming of the wonderful exploits which were to signalise my first appearance in the Great Close—how I was to run the ball from one end of the field to the other, overturning, dodging, and distancing every one of the enemy, finishing up with a brilliant and mighty kick over the goal. After which I was to have my broken limbs set by a doctor on the spot, to receive a perfect ovation from friend and foe, to be chaired round the field, to be the “lion” at the supper afterwards, and finally to have a whole column of the *Times* devoted to my exploits! What glorious creatures we are in our dreams!

Well, the eventful day dawned at last. It was a holiday at Parkhurst, and as fine a day as any one could wish.

As I made my appearance, wearing the blue-and-red jersey of a “first fifteen man” under my jacket, I found myself quite an object of veneration among the juniors who had lately been my compeers, and I accepted their homage

with a vast amount of condescension. Nothing was talked of during the forenoon but the coming match. Would the Craven fellows turn up a strong team? Would that fellow Slider, who made the tremendous run last year, play for them again this? Would Wright select the chapel end or the other, if we won the choice? How were we off behind the scrimmage?

“Is Adams to be trusted?” I heard one voice ask.

Two or three small boys promptly replied, “Yes”; but the seniors said nothing, except Wright, who took the opportunity of giving me a little good advice in private.

“Look here, Adams; you are to play half-back, you know. All you’ve got to take care of is to keep cool, and never let your eyes go off the ball. You know all the rest.”

A lecture half an hour long could not have made more impression. I remembered those two hints, “Keep cool, and watch the ball,” as long as I played football, and I would advise every half-back to take them to heart in like manner.

At noon the Craven team came down in an omnibus, and had lunch in hall with us, and half an hour later found us all in a straggling procession, making for the scene of conflict in the Great Close. There stood the goals and the boundary-posts, and there was Granger, the ground-keeper, with a brand-new lemon-shaped ball under his arm.

“Look sharp and peel!” cried our captain.

So we hurried to the tent, and promptly divested ourselves of our outer garments, turned up the sleeves of our jerseys, and tied an extra knot in our bootlaces. As we emerged, the Craven men were making their appearance on the ground in battle array. I felt so nervous myself that I

could not, for the life of me, imagine how some of them could look so unconcerned, whistling, and actually playing leapfrog to keep themselves warm!

An officer in the Crimean War once described his sensation in some of the battles there as precisely similar to those he had experienced when a boy on the football field at Rugby. I can appreciate the comparison, for one. Certainly never soldier went into action with a more solemn do-or-die feeling than that with which I took my place on the field that afternoon.

“They’ve won the choice of sides,” said somebody, “and are going to play with the wind.”

“Take your places, Parkhurst!” shouted our captain.

The ball lies in the centre of the ground, and Wright stands ten yards or so behind it, ready for the kick-off. Of our fifteen the ten forwards are extended in a line with the ball across the field, ready to charge after it the moment it goes flying. The two best runners of our team are stationed quarter-back, where they can skirmish on the outskirts of the scrimmage. I am posted a little in rear of them at half-back—an unusual post for so young a player, but one which was accorded to me by virtue of my light weight and not inconsiderable running powers. Behind me are the two backs, on whom, when all else fails, the issue of the conflict depends. The Craven players are similarly disposed, and waiting impatiently for our captain’s kick.

“Are you ready?” he shouts.

Silence gives consent.

He gives a quick glance round at us, then springs forward, and in an instant the ball is soaring high in the

direction of the Cravens' goal amid the shouts of onlooking friend and foe.

Our forwards were after it like lightning, but not before a Craven back had got hold of it and run some distance in the direction of our goal. He did not wait to be attacked, but by a clever drop-kick, a knack peculiar to all good backs, sent it spinning right over the forwards' heads into the hands of one of our quarter-backs. He, tucking it under his arm and crushing his cap on to his head, started to run. Going slowly at first, he steered straight for the forwards of the enemy till within a pace or two of them, when he doubled suddenly, and amid the shouts of our partisans slipped past them and was seen heading straight for the Craven goal. But although he had escaped their forwards, he had yet their rearguard to escape, which was far harder work, for was not one of that rearguard the celebrated Slider himself, who by his prowess had last year carried defeat to our school; and the other, was it not the stalwart Naylor, who only a month ago had played gloriously for his county against Gravelshire?

Yet our man was not to be daunted by the prestige of these distinguished adversaries, but held on his way pluckily, and without a swerve. It was a sight to see those two cunningly lay wait for him, like two spiders for a fly. There was nothing for it but to plunge headlong into their web in a desperate effort to break through. Alas! brave man! Naylor has him in his clutches, the Craven forwards come like a deluge on the spot, our forwards pour over the Craven, and in an instant our hero and the ball have vanished from sight under a heap of writhing humanity.

“Down!” cries a half-choked voice, from the bottom of the heap. It was rather an unnecessary observation, as it happens, but it served as a signal to both parties to rise to their feet and prepare for a “scrimmage.”

Now, if truth must be told, our school always had the reputation of being second to none in “going through a scrimmage,” so while the players are scrambling to their feet, and waiting for the ball to be “grounded,” I will explain what our method of doing the thing was.

It was nothing more nor less than a carrying out of the principle of the wedge. The ball formed the apex; the fellows got up close to it, so as never to let it out of reach of their four feet. Behind these two came three with locked arms, and behind the three, four. The men in the middle pushed straight ahead, and those at the sides inwards towards the ball, while the two or three remaining forwards lent their weight to one side or other of the base, according as the exigencies of the scrimmage demanded. Thus our wedge, embodying a concentrated pressure in the direction of the ball, the farther it advanced the farther it scattered asunder the foe, who fell off from its gradually widening sides without hope of getting again within reach of the ball except by retreating to the rear and beginning the struggle over afresh. When this manoeuvre was well executed, it was almost certain to carry the ball through the scrimmage, and when that happened, then was the time for us half and quarter-backs to look out for our chance.

Our men went at it with their customary vigour and address, and presently the ball emerged on the far side of the scrimmage. In an instant it was caught up by one of the

Craven quarter-backs, and in an instant our men were upon him again before he could get a start for a run. Scrimmage after scrimmage ensued, the ball was constantly in Chancery, but each crush brought us a yard or so nearer the enemy's goal than we had been before.

All this time I was little better than a spectator, for the ball never once came within reach of my fingers, and I was beginning to think that, after all, a big match was not so exciting a thing as one is apt to imagine.

At last, however, after one scrimmage more desperate than any that had gone before, the ball flew out suddenly, and bounded off one of the Craven men into my grasp. Now was my chance. "If only I could—"

The next thing I was conscious of was that about twenty people had fallen to the ground all of a heap, and that I and the ball were at the bottom.

"Down!" I cried.

"Pack up there, Parkhurst!" sang out Wright.

I extricated myself as quickly as I could, and got back to my place in the rear, thinking to myself, after all, there *was* some little excitement in football.

At last the ball got well away from the scrimmage, and who should secure it but the redoubtable Slider! I felt a passing tremor of deep despair, as I saw that hero spring like the wind towards our goal.

"Look out, Adams!" shouted Wright.

Sure enough he was coming in my direction! With the desperation of a doomed man I strode out to meet him. He rushed furiously on—swerving slightly to avoid my reach, and stretching out his arm to ward off my grasp. I flung

myself wildly in his path. There was a heavy thud, and the earth seemed to jump up and strike me. The next moment I was sprawling on my back on the grass. I don’t pretend to know how it all happened, but somehow or other I had succeeded in checking the onward career of the victorious Slider; for though I had fallen half stunned before the force of his charge, he had recoiled for an instant from the same shock, and that instant gave time for Wright to get hold of him, and so put an end for the time to his progress.

“Well played!” said some one, as I picked myself up. So I was comforted, and began to think that, after all, football was rather a fine game.

Time would fail me to tell of all the events of that afternoon—how Wright carried the ball within a dozen yards of our opponents’ goal; how their forwards passed the ball one to another, and got a “touch-down” behind our line, but missed the kick; how Naylor ran twenty yards with one of our men hanging on his back; how our quarter-back sent the ball nearly over their goal with as neat a drop-kick as ever it has been my lot to witness.

The afternoon was wearing. I heard the time-keeper call out, “Five minutes more!” The partisans of either side were getting frantic with excitement. Unless we could secure an advantage now, we should be as good as defeated, for the Craven had scored a “touch-down” to our nothing. Was this desperate fight to end so? Was victory, after all, to escape us? But I had no time for reflection then.

“Now, Parkhurst,” sang out Wright, “pull yourselves together for once!”

A Craven man is standing to throw the ball out of “touch,” and either side stands in confronting rows, impatient for the fray. Wright is at the end of the line, face to face with Naylor, and I am a little behind Wright.

“Keep close!” exclaims the latter to me, as the ball flies towards us.

Wright has it, but in an instant Naylor’s long arms are round him, bearing him down.

“Adams!” ejaculates out captain, and in a trice he passes the ball into my hands, and I am off like the wind. So suddenly has it all been done that I have already a yard or two start before my flight is discovered. There is a yelling and a rush behind me; there is a roar from the crowds on either side; there is a clear “Follow up, Parkhurst!” from Wright in the rear; there is a loud “Collar him!” from the Craven captain ahead. I am steering straight for their goal; three men only are between me and it—one, their captain, right back, and Slider and another man in front of him.

I see at a glance that my only hope is to keep as I am going and waste no time in dodging, or assuredly the pursuing host will be upon me. Slider and his companion are closing in right across my path, almost close together. With a bound I dash between them. Have they got me, or have I escaped them? A shout louder than ever and a “Bravo!” from Wright tell me I am clear of that danger, and have now but their last defence to pass. He is a tall, broad fellow, and a formidable foe to encounter, and waits for me close under their goal. The pace, I feel, is telling on me; the shouting behind sounds nearer, only a few yards divides us now. Shall

I double, shall I venture a kick, or shall I charge straight at him?

“Charge at him!” sounds Wright’s voice, as if in answer to my thought. I gather up all my remaining force, and charge. There is a flash across my eyes, and a dull shock against my chest. I reel and stagger, and forget where I am. I am being swept along in a torrent; the waters with a roar rush past me and over me. Every moment I get nearer and nearer the fatal edge—I am at it—I hang a moment on the brink, and then—

“Down!” shouts a voice close at my ear, and there is such a noise of cheering and rejoicing that I sit up and rub my eyes like one waking bewildered from a strange dream.

Then I find out what has happened. When I charged at the Craven captain the shock sent me back staggering into the very arms of Wright and our forwards, who were close at my heels, and who then, in a splendid and irresistible rush, carried me and the ball and the half of the other side along with them right behind the enemy’s goal-line, where we fall *en masse* to the earth—I, with the ball under me, being at the bottom.

Even if I had been hurt—which I was not—there was no time to be wasted on condolences or congratulations. The time-keeper held his watch in his hand, and our goal must be kicked at once, if it was to be kicked at all. So the fifteen paces out were measured, the “nick” for the ball was carefully made, the enemy stood along their goal-line ready to spring the moment the ball should touch the earth. Wright, cool and self-possessed, placed himself in readiness a yard or two behind the ball, which one of our side held an

inch off the ground. An anxious moment of expectation followed; then came a sharp “Now!” from our captain. The ball was placed cunningly in the nick, the Craven forwards rushed out on it in a body, but long before they could reach it, Wright’s practised foot had sent it flying straight as an arrow over the bar, and my first football match had ended in a glorious victory for the Old School.

The terms used here describe the Rugby game as it used to be played prior to 1880.

Chapter Two.

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The Parkhurst Paper-chase.

“The meet is to be at one o’clock, sharp, in the Dean’s Warren—don’t forget!”

So said Forwood, the “whipper-in” of the Parkhurst Hare and Hounds Club, to me, one March morning in the year 18—. I had no need to be reminded of the appointment; for this was the day of the “great hunt” of the year, always held by the running set at Parkhurst School to yield in interest to no other fixture of the athletic calendar.

In fine weather, and over good country, a paper-chase is one of the grandest sports ever indulged in—at least, so we thought when we were boys—and the “great hunt” was, of course, the grandest run of the year, and looked forward to,

consequently, with the utmost eagerness by all lovers of running in our school.

This year, too, I had a special interest in the event, for it was my turn to run “hare”—in other words, to be, with another fellow, the object of the united pursuit of some twenty or thirty of my schoolfellows, who would glory in running me down not a whit less than I should glory in escaping them.

For some weeks previously we had been taking short trial runs, to test our pace and powers of endurance; and Birch (my fellow-“hare”) and I had more than once surveyed the course we proposed to take on the occasion of the “great hunt,” making ourselves, as far as possible, acquainted with the bearings of several streams, ploughed fields, and high walls to be avoided, and the whereabouts of certain gaps, woods, and hollows to be desired. We were glad afterwards that we had taken this precaution, as the reader will see.

I can’t say if the Parkhurst method of conducting our “hunts” was the orthodox one; I know *we* considered it was, as our rules were our own making, or rather a legacy left to us by a former generation of runners at the school.

We were to take, in all, a twelve miles’ course, of nearly an oval shape, six miles out and six miles home. Any amount of dodging or doubling was to be allowed to us hares, except crossing our own path. We were to get five minutes’ clear start, and, of course, were expected to drop our paper “scent” wherever we went.

Luckily for me, Birch was an old hand at running hare, and up to all sorts of dodges, so that I knew all it was needful for me to do was to husband my “wind,” and run

evenly with him, leaving him to shape our course and regulate our pace.

It was a lively scene at the Dean’s Warren, when we reached it a few minutes before the appointed time that afternoon. The “pack”—that is, the twenty or thirty fellows who were to run as “hounds”—were fast assembling, and divesting themselves of everything but their light flannels. The whipper-in, conspicuous by the little bugle slung across his shoulders, and the light flag in his hand, was there in all the importance of his office; and, as usual, the doctor and a party of visitors, ladies and gentlemen, had turned out to witness the start.

“Five minutes, hares!” shouts Forwood, as Birch and I came on the spot.

We use the interval in stripping off all unnecessary apparel, and girding ourselves with our bags of “scent,” or scraps of torn-up paper, which we are to drop as we run. Then we sit and wait the moment for starting. The turf is crisp under our feet; the sun is just warm enough to keep us from shivering as we sit, and the wind just strong enough to be fresh. Altogether it is to be doubted if a real meet of real hounds to hunt real hares—a cruel and not very manly sport, after all—could be much more exciting than this is.

“Half a minute!” sings out the whipper-in, as we spring to our feet.

In another thirty seconds we are swinging along at a good pace down the slope of the warren, in the direction of Colven meadows, and the hunt has begun.

As long as we were in sight of the pack we kept up a good hard pace, but on reaching cover we settled down at

once to a somewhat more sober jog-trot, in anticipation of the long chase before us.

We made good use of our five minutes' start, for by the time a distant bugle note announced that the hounds were let loose on our track we had covered a good piece of ground, and put several wide fields and ditches and ugly hedges between us and our pursuers.

Now it was that Birch's experiences served us in good stead. I never knew a fellow more thoroughly cunning; he might have been a fox instead of a hare. Sometimes he made me run behind him and drop my scent on the top of his, and sometimes keep a good distance off, and let the wind scatter it as much as it could. When we came to a gap, instead of starting straight across the next field he would turn suddenly at right angles, and keep close up under the hedge half-way round before striking off into the open. Among trees and bushes he zigzagged and doubled to an alarming extent, so that it seemed as if we were losing ground every moment. So we should have been if the chase had been by sight instead of by *scent*; but that would have been against all rules.

If the hounds were to see the hares twenty yards in front of them, and the scent lay half a mile round, they would be bound, according to our rules, to go the half-mile, however tempting the short cut might seem.

It was after a very wide circuit, ending up on the top of a moderate rise, that we first caught sight of our pursuers. As they were a full six minutes behind us, we agreed to sit down under cover for a minute and watch them.

At that moment they had evidently lost the scent, and were ferreting about among some low trees and bushes in search of it. We saw the flag of the whipper-in marking the spot where it was last visible, and round this, on all sides, the hounds were exploring busily in search of the “new departure.” Then, presently, came a cry of “Forward!” and off they all started in our direction; and as the scent after that seemed to lie pretty clear we considered it high time for us to resume our flight.

So we made off again, and being refreshed by our brief halt, made over a couple of ploughed fields, which Birch suggested “would make a few of the hounds look foolish”; and so on till we reached the first water we had encountered since the start. This was a trout-stream, well known to some of us who were fond of fishing—nowhere more than half a foot deep, and in some places easily passable, dry shod, on stepping-stones. Birch, however, avoided these, and boldly splashing into the stream over his ankles, bade me follow.

“We’ll soon dry up,” he said, “and this will gain us a minute or two.”

Instead of going straight across, the wily hare began to paddle up the middle of the stream for twenty or thirty yards, and, of course, in so doing our scent was soon drifted away down the current. So we flattered ourselves, when we at last did make the opposite bank, that our pursuers would be puzzled for a minute or two to know what had become of us.

After a further quarter of a mile we thought we might venture to take another brief halt on the strength of this last

manoeuvre. We were unable to do so where we could command a view of the hounds, but as we reckoned we had at least gained three minutes, we felt we could quite afford to take it easy for that length of time.

Fancy, then, our horror when, after about a couple of minutes, we heard a cry of “Forward!” close to us, and evidently on this side of the stream.

Off we dashed like mad, in a regular panic, and never checked our pace till we had put three ploughed fields and a couple of wide ditches to our credit. We did not discover till it was all over how it was our cunning scheme to perplex the hounds had thus miscarried. Then we were told that some of the scent, instead of dropping into the water, as we intended, had lodged on the top of some stones in mid-stream, and this had at once betrayed our dodge to the practised eyes of the foremost hounds. It was a caution to be more careful another time.

We had to work hard to make up for the ground we had lost by this mistake, but our next sight of the hounds showed that we were fairly ahead again, and that the ploughed fields had (as Birch predicted) told on a good portion of the pack, who now (at least, those of them who were at all well up) scarcely numbered a dozen.

Half a mile farther brought us to Wincot village, down the main street of which we sped, greatly to the admiration of the inhabitants, who turned out in force to see the sport.

By this time we had fairly got our “second winds,” and began to realise the benefit of the steady training of the past fortnight. At an ordinary pace, with the second wind well laid on, we felt we ought to be able to hold out for the

run home, unless some very unexpected accident should intervene.

Past the village, we rattled on till we came to the railway embankment, across which we trespassed, not without some difficulty, as it was steep and railed off on either side by high palisades. Once over this, we turned at right angles, and ran for half a mile close alongside the line, and past Wincot station. Here it was necessary to recross the line (down a cutting this time), and as we were doing so we caught sight, on our left, of the leading hounds scrambling to the top of the embankment, which we had passed only a minute or two before.

Clear of the railway, there remained a good steady piece of work cut out for us to reach home, across an awful country, full of hedges and ditches, and as hilly as a pie-crust.

But Birch and I were well in the humour of the thing by this time, and determined it should not be our fault if the “great hunt” of this year ended in a victory for the hounds. So we spurted for nearly a mile, jumping most of the narrow ditches and low hedges that crossed our path, and making as straight a course as the hilly ground allowed of. But, despite all our efforts, the occasional glimpses which we caught of our pursuers showed us that we were unable to shake off four or five of the leading hounds, who, with Forwood at their head, were coming on at a great pace, and, if not gaining on us, at least not losing ground.

This would never do. It would be all up if things went on so, we could see; so the cunning Birch had once again to resort to his dodges to gain time.

Suddenly altering our track, and leaving the fields, he struck a dusty lane, which wound in and out in the direction of Parkhurst. Now, as this was a very dusty and a very chalky lane, and as the wind was blowing the dust about very freely, it was easy to see why the artful Birch made use of it on the present occasion. Our white scraps of paper, falling on the white road, and being fallen on by the white dust, had a good chance of escaping detection, unless looked after very carefully; and to make matters more secure, we dodged off into the fields, and back again into the lane, pretty often, leaving our pursuers a ditch to jump each time.

This manoeuvre answered fairly well, for the next time we saw the hounds they were searching about by the side of a ditch for our track, a good way to the rear.

We had now to face the hardest bit of work of the afternoon. The last two miles home were over a perfectly flat bit of country—so flat that the hounds would have us in view nearly all the way, and, consequently, to dodge or double would be simply useless. Our only course was a straight hard run for it, trusting to our legs and our wind to pull us through. So we settled down to the task with a will. Scarcely had we emerged into the open ground for a couple of minutes, when we saw a figure dash out of the lane in full cry after us.

It was Forwood, the whipper-in, a terrible “scud” across country, and he was only fifty yards or so ahead of three others, also celebrated for their pace. So we hares had our work cut out for us, and no mistake!

For a mile we ran as hard as we well could, turning neither to right nor left, and halting neither at ditch nor dyke. Parkhurst Towers rose before us in the distance, and more than one boy was already strolling out in our direction to witness the finish.

Next moment the splash of a double 'header.'

How we wished we were as fresh as they!

"Put it on, hares!" shouted the first who met us, "you'll do it yet."

“Hounds are gaining!” cried the next we passed—a young urchin sitting on a bank and eating toffee.

And now there met us not single spectators only, but groups, who cheered loudly, backing, some the hares and some the hounds, till we hardly knew where we were. Some even began to run along with us, at a respectful distance, in order to be “in at the death.”

The playground wall was now visible only half a mile away, on the other side of the Gravelshire Canal, which had to be crossed by a bridge which we were fast approaching.

I gave a rapid look back. Forwood was now only a hundred yards behind us, with lots of running still in him. He would certainly run us down in the next half-mile.

“Birch,” I said, as I ran beside him, “are you good for a swim?”

“Rather!” he exclaimed; “if you are. Quick!”

We swerved suddenly in our course, and, to the amazement of all spectators, left the bridge on our left. In another minute we were on the margin of the canal, and the next moment the splash of a double “header,” and the shouts of the assembled onlookers, proclaimed that we had made a plunge for it. The canal was only about thirty feet wide, and we were across it in a twinkling, our light flannel clothes scarcely interfering with our swimming, and certainly not adding much to the weight we carried after being soaked through.

Three hundred yards now! Ah! that cheer behind means that Forwood has followed our plunge. What are they laughing at, though? Can he have foundered? No! Another shout! That means he is safe over, and hard at our heels.

For the last three hundred yards we run a regular steeplechase. The meadows are intersected with lines of hurdles, and these we take one after another in our run, as hard as we can. Only one more, and then we are safe!

Suddenly I find myself on my face on the grass! I have caught on the last hurdle, and come to grief!

Birch in an instant hauls me to my feet, just as Forwood rises to the leap. Then for a hundred yards it is a race for very life. What a shouting there is! and what a rushing of boys and waving of caps pass before our eyes! On comes Forwood, the gallant hound, at our heels; we can hear him behind us distinctly!

“Now you have them!” shouts one.

“One spurt more, hares!” cries another, “and you are safe!”

On we bound, and on comes the pursuer, not ten yards behind—not *ten*, but more than *five*. And that five he never makes up till Birch and I are safe inside the school-gates, winners by a neck—and a neck only—of that famous hunt.

The pack came straggling in for the next hour, amid the cheers and chaffing of the boys. Three of them, who had kept neck and neck all the way, were only two minutes behind Forwood; but they had shirked the swim, and taken the higher and drier course—as, indeed, most of the other hounds did—by way of the bridge. Ten minutes after them one other fellow turned up, and a quarter of an hour later three more; and so on until the whole pack had run, or walked, or limped, or ridden home—all except one, little Jim Barlow, the tiniest and youngest and pluckiest little hound that ever crossed country. We were all anxious to know what

had become of this small chap of thirteen, who, some one said, ought never to have been allowed to start on such a big run, with his little legs. “Wait a bit,” said Forwood; “Jim will turn up before long, safe and sound, you’ll see.”

It was nearly dusk, and a good two hours after the finish. We were sitting in the big hall, talking and laughing over the events of the afternoon, when there came a sound of feet on the gravel walk, accompanied by a vehement puffing, outside the window.

“There he is!” exclaimed Forwood, “and, I declare, running still!”

And so it was. In a minute the door swung open, and in trotted little Jim, dripping wet, coated with mud, and panting like a steam-engine, but otherwise as self-composed as usual.

“How long have you fellows been in?” he demanded of us, as he sat down and began to lug off his wet boots.

“Two hours,” replied Birch.

The little hero looked a trifle mortified to find he was so far behind, and we were quite sorry for him.

“Never mind,” he said, “I ran on the scent every inch of the way, and only pulled up once, at Wincot, for five minutes.”

“You did!” exclaimed one or two voices, as we all stared admiringly at this determined young hound.

“Yes; and a nice dance you gave a chap my size over the railway and across those ditches! But I didn’t miss a single one of them, all the same.”

“But what did you do at the canal?” asked Forwood.

“Why, swam it, of course—obliged to do it, wasn’t I, if the hares went that way? I say, is there any grub going?”

Plucky little Jim Barlow! After all, he was the hero of that “big hunt,” though he did come in two hours late.

This was the last big “hare and hounds” I ever ran in. I have many a time since ridden with a real hunt over the same country, but never have I experienced the same thrill of excitement or known the same exultation at success as when I ran home with Birch, two seconds ahead of the hounds, in the famous Parkhurst Paper-chase of 18 hundred and something.

Chapter Three.

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The Parkhurst Boat-race.

“Adams is wanted down at the boat-house!” Such was the sound which greeted my ears one Saturday afternoon as I lolled about in the playground at Parkhurst, doing nothing. I jumped up as if I had been shot, and asked the small boy who brought the message who wanted me.

“Blades does; you’ve got to cox the boat this afternoon instead of Wilson. Look sharp!” he said, “as they’re waiting to start.”

Off I went, without another word, filled with mingled feelings of wonder, pride, and trepidation. I knew Wilson, the former coxswain of the school boat, had been taken ill and left Parkhurst, but this was the first I had ever heard of my being selected to take his place. True, I had steered the

boat occasionally when no one else could be got, and on such occasions had managed to keep a moderately good course up the Two Mile Reach, but I had never dreamed of such a pitch of good fortune as being called to occupy that seat as a fixture.

But now it wanted only a week of the great race with the Old Boys, and here was I summoned to take charge of the rudder at the eleventh hour, which of course meant I would have to steer the boat on the occasion of the race! No wonder, then, I was half daft with excitement as I hurried down to the boathouse in obedience to the summons of Blades, the stroke of the Parkhurst Four.

I should explain that at Parkhurst we were peculiarly favoured in the matter of boating. The River Colven flowed through the town only half a mile from the school boundaries, and being at that place but a short distance from the sea, it was some fifty yards broad, a clear, deep stream, just the sort of water one would choose for rowing. There was no lock for six miles or so up, and the few craft which came in from the sea rarely proceeded beyond Parkhurst; so that we had a long, uninterrupted stretch of water for our boats, which, as soon as ever the spring set in, and the weather became too hot for football and hare and hounds, appeared in force every half-holiday on its surface.

Some of the fellows on such occasions used to amuse themselves by starting off for a long, leisurely grind up-stream; or else with set sail to tack down the lower reaches towards the sea; but most of us who laid claim in any degree to the name of enthusiastic oarsmen, confined our operations mainly to the Two Mile Reach, on which most of

the club races were rowed, chief of which was the Old Boys' Race, already referred to.

This race had been instituted some years before my time at the school, by an old Parkhurstian, who presented a cup, to be rowed for annually, between the best four-oared crew of the present school, and any crew of old pupils who had been at Parkhurst within two years.

This race was the all-absorbing topic in our boat-club for several weeks before the event. How carefully the crew were selected, how strictly they trained, how patiently Mr Blunt, one of the masters, and an old Cambridge oar, "coached" or tutored them; how regularly the boat went over the course morning after morning, before breakfast; how eagerly the fellows criticised or commended the rowers; how impatiently we all looked forward to the coming contest!

This year our prospects were doubtful. The Old Boys had got together a strong crew, who were reported by some who had been over to see them to be very fast, and in splendid form; while we, at the last moment, had had the disadvantage to lose our coxswain and have to fill his place with a less experienced hand. Still, the school "four" was a good one, carefully drilled, with plenty of power; one which Mr Blunt pronounced ought to hold its own with any other average crew. So, on the whole, there was no saying how the chances stood.

I found I had all my work before me to get accustomed to my new duties before the day of the race. Daily I was out with the four, and several times besides I was taken over the course in a punt, and carefully shown all the shallows,

and bends, and eddies of the stream, and made familiar with the ins and outs of either bank.

Luckily, I was a light weight to begin with, so that I did not lose much by my limited period of training, being indeed not so heavy as the former coxswain of the boat, whom I had succeeded.

Well, the eventful day came at last. The Old Boys arrived the day before, and from the two trial rows which they took over the course, we could see they were a first-rate crew and formidable opponents. Still our “coach,” who had watched them minutely, told us we had the better stroke of the two, and if we could only hold out, ought to win after all. This was comforting information, for the showy style of our opponents had struck terror into not a few of those whose sympathies were on the side of the present boys.

The school turned out in force to witness the event. The towing-path was lined with spectators, many of them from a distance, attracted by the prospect of an exciting race. A goodly muster of old fellows revisited the haunts of their school days, and congregated about the winning-post, while others, of a more athletic turn, prepared to run along with the race from beginning to end.

Meanwhile, in the boat-house, we had stripped for action and launched our boat. As we were ready to put off, and make for the starting-point, Mr Blunt came up and said to Blades, our “stroke”,—

“Now remember, row a steady stroke all through. Don’t be flurried if they get the best of the start. If you can stick to them the first half of the way, you ought to be able to row them down in the last; and mind, Adams,” he said,