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PRELUDE

A SENSITIVE observer, who once spent a week in theatrical lodgings in Thrigsby, has described the moral atmosphere of the place as "harsh listlessness shot with humor." That is about as far as you can get in a week. It is farther than Herbert Jocelyn Beenham, M.A. (Oxon.), got in the twenty-five years he had given to the instruction of the youth of Thrigsby in its Grammar School—the foundation of an Elizabethan bishop. Ambition ever leads a man away from Thrigsby. Having none, H. J. Beenham had stayed there, achieving the sort of distinction that swelled Tennyson's brook. Boys and masters came and went, but "Old Mole" still occupied the Sixth Form room in the gallery above the glass roof of the gymnasium.

He was called Old Mole because whenever he spied a boy cribbing, or larking, or reading a book that had no reference to the subject in hand, or eating sweets, or passing notes, he would cry out in a voice of thunder: "Ha! Art thou there, old mole?" Thrigsbian fathers who had suffered at his hands would ask their sons about Old Mole, and so his position was fortified by a sort of veneration. He