

The Inglenook

Lon's Patriarch.

BY E. H. SCOTT.

Our class in college certainly had its share of "characters,"—men who are made conspicuous throughout a long four years' course by the unkind fact that they are not as other men are.

Among those thus distinguished was our patriarch. Almost every class has its patriarch. He is usually over thirty, an age which to the average undergraduate seems far along in life. Moreover, he is often a man of experience in business, turned away for the time from a longed-for education by circumstances which have finally yielded to his strong desire. More often than not he has felt "called" to prepare himself for the clerical profession after years of service in other and far different surroundings, and so comes to take his place among boys hardly half his age.

Our own "patriarch" was of this class, a clean, manly, modest fellow of thirty-five or so. Outdoor work and exercise had given him muscles like bunches of knotted cords, and an unconquerable nerve. With a brain to match his superb physical organism, "Pa" Hadley was fitted as few men could be to be the adviser, friend, and hero of the lads who made themselves his devoted body guard.

Be friendly as one may with all the boys, it is in the atmosphere of college to have a "chum," and freshman year was hardly well begun before "Pa" had found his side partner, Lonnie Eastbrook.

I liked Lonnie. He was a thoroughbred. You could tell that by the poise of his finely shaped head and the invincible energy that was concealed somewhere in his slender body.

"Only a hundred and thirty pounds of him, but you can bet that's all clear sand," said one of his mates. And that is the seventh heaven of compliment.

I guess all the boys thought a deal of Lon, but "Pa"—he just loved him. Yes, like a father; that was honestly so. And Lonnie, why he would have given his eyes to "Pa" Hadley if he had wanted them.

Pa—his real name was James DeWitt Clinton Hadley—took to football. It was like a bit of his old life to be right in the rush and scramble of it all. He seemed to pick up the skill and strategy of the game by instinct, and was never so happy as when he could be struggling down the field with three or four sturdy fellows hanging to him and trying in vain to stop his progress. As for his punts, the boys were superstitiously inclined to believe that they couldn't be blocked. And Lon played because Pa did.

Fortune had smiled on the big fellow's efforts. His position as full back was not only undisputed, but was even unenvied,—that rarest of occurrences where competition enters. Even "Spur" Lee, lordliest of the seniors, was heard to remark: "That Hadley is not half bad for a freshman. In football he's way up." And "Spud" was not usually supposed even to see a freshman.

But there sat a Mordecai at the gate. He chanced to be a worthy deacon in the Congregational Church of Avondale, the spiritual interests of which had been committed to the Rev. James DeWitt Clinton Hadley during that gentleman's sojourn at Haldberg College.

It was one Sunday in October, after a week of unusual activity in football circles, that good Deacon Bryant was shocked and scandalized to see his pastor enter the pulpit with one eye heavily draped in black with purplish trimmings. The sermon was

as vigorous and as well laden with suggestive thoughts as were its predecessors. Pa vouched for that himself. But its effect was sadly marred through the diverting influence of that black eye. Old Mrs. Shaw, to whom all men were as trees walking, was alone in her blissful unconsciousness of the pastor's abnormal appearance.

At the close of the service Pa and Deacon Bryant were closeted in the retiring-room just beyond the pulpit. What passed at that awful session Pa has never to my knowledge revealed, but the next day came the news that Pa had played his last game; and the consequent mourning and rebellion among the students was long and loud.

It was soon noised about that Lon was, in college parlance, trying for full-back. Pa decreed it and spared neither time nor pains to make "his boy" the best player on the team. That hundred and thirty pounds of "clear sand" became, under his vigorous tuition, the speediest, pluckiest, and most hopelessly slippery young fellow one could find in seven counties.

"Yes, sir," said one of his mates as we were ruling run and amica on our respective bruises in a sociable sort of way, "he's about three feet up and round as a ball when you're after him; but when he's after you, he's all over the field." All of which, in the mystery of football, is not so impossible as it sounds.

With the coming of November the interest of our class was divided between two subjects beside which societies, hazing, and even the Thanksgiving homegoing paled.

First and perhaps most engrossing was the coming game—the football match of the season—with Granby University. For years the rivalry between the two institutions had been fostered by the see-saw regularity with which victory perched first on one banner and then on the other.

The score of games won and lost now left nothing to choose. It was Granby's turn to win; and the boys of Haldberg were determined this time to upset any such reckoning by a display of their very best skill.

The other event, which to some old-fashioned collegians might seem the more important, was the great game of studies on entrance studies. This always took place just before Thanksgiving, and gave the successful competitor a cash prize of two hundred dollars.

To take this prize and to play full back in the great game were desires which had grown into Lon Eastbrook's heart until they had shut out about everything else. He was as ambitious a beggar as he could be.

I saw and I knew the other fellows did, how heart sick Hadley was as he realized that Lon seemed to have forgotten him as a friend. He was now only a coach for football or an equally serviceable coach for the examinations to come.

One evening the two had been quietly "boning" at the lesson for the next day when Lon looked up suddenly, pushed his eye-shade back into his curly hair and blurted out to the silent figure opposite him, "Say, Pa, why don't you try the exams?"

Hadley scanned the boy's face with a half-concealed eagerness, and then, with one of those queer smiles that seem two thirds disappointment and the other third a loving patience, said: "O, you boys come in for these things. We old fellows have enough to do."

Lou turned to his books again with that moment's questioning of his better self fully answered. But

his friend gave him another look, and then sat for a long time before turning the next leaf.

The next day was Saturday, just a week before the great game. The practice was hard and long. The players on the college team were on their mettle, and yet Eastbrook was easily and constantly the star. Cheer after cheer greeted his squirming runs down through the midst of the "scrub" eleven. Even two young strangers who stood a little apart from the crowd of supporters, with their caps drawn down to meet their ulster collars, joined in the shouts of "What's the matter with Eastbrook? He's all right."

Before the practice was fairly over Pa Hadley had started on a brisk trot for the train which was to carry him to his country parson. Just before the "All aboard" the two strangers whom he had seen at the football field rushed into the car and tumbled into the seat in front of him. After looking about cautiously and failing to see in the gentleman of clerical appearance a dangerous companion, one of the pair remarked, "Well, Jack, they play a rattler of a game, don't they?"

"No mistake about that. Our fellows have got their hands full this year," returned his seatmate.

"What are we going to do about it?"

"Play our prettiest and kill that full back," coolly replied his friend with an air of settling the whole matter.

After a few moments of silence the first speaker whose whole bearing marked him as ordinarily a gentleman, said slowly: "I hate to think of it but I suppose it must be done. It will never do to let that man Eastbrook play the game out. We are beaten before we start if we allow it."

The two "delegates" from Granby might have shouted their conversation from this point on. Pa would not have heard a word. He sat with his eyes fixed on the outside world with unseeing intensity, and with a strange gripping pain at his very heart. "Kill that full-back." He knew what that meant. College tradition had treasured the history of the annual matches too carefully to let such details escape. One terrible year it had meant, in very truth, the death of a bright, ambitious fellow, the captain of the team, bled to live a hundred years.

For two years the matches between the two colleges were forbidden. Then the faculty yielded to the entreaty of the students, and since then—? Perhaps no one had been killed, but there had not been a game when some one or two or three or more of the eleven had not been carried from the field racked with pain from broken bones, or mercifully insensible to the hurt of even worse injuries. Over and over again it had been morally certain that some, at least, of those who were injured had been marked beforehand, like cattle in the shambles, and were disabled through the carrying out of a deliberate plan.

The affection which Pa Hadley felt for young Eastbrook welled up in all its strength at this time when the lad was in the presence of real danger. But how to avert that danger was a problem that seemed unsolvable.

He knew the temper of the typical collegian too well to believe that a hint of danger would take Eastbrook from the team. It would be a point of honor to hold the position at all hazards.

To give circulation to the conversation which he had overheard would rouse his own friends to retaliation by "doing up" their opponents.

To warn the umpire before the match would be worse than useless, for in the face of deliberate plotting an umpire is helpless. The rough work of a moment of passion he can detect and punish. The deliberately planned injury is seldom charged to the guilty party.

So far Pa had thought only of the possible danger that threatened "his boy." Now he turned on his pillow with a groan. The prize exams! He had forgotten all about them for the moment; yet they were to follow close after the football match. "Lon's heart is set upon gaining that prize. The