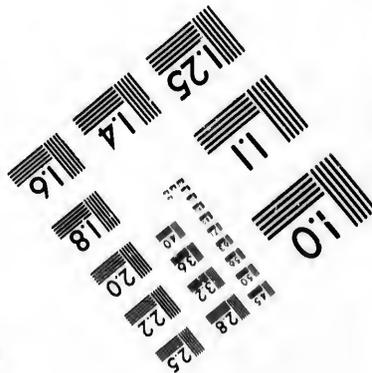
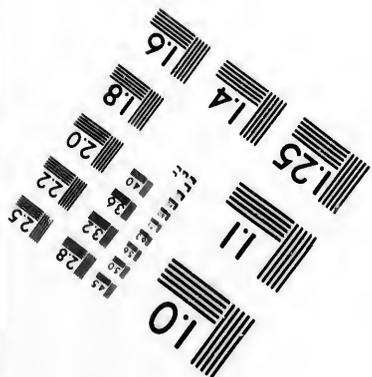
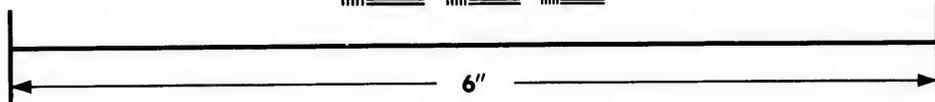
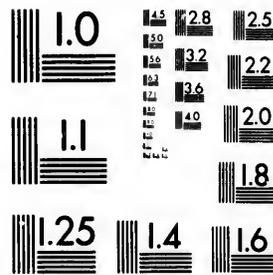


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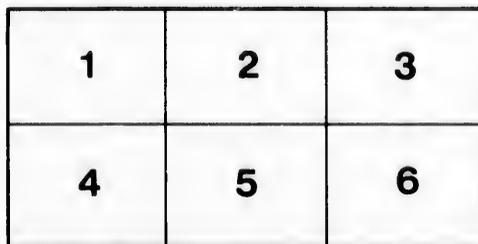
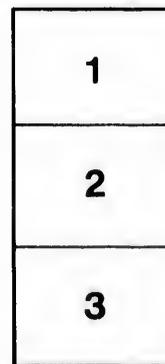
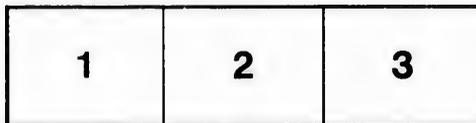
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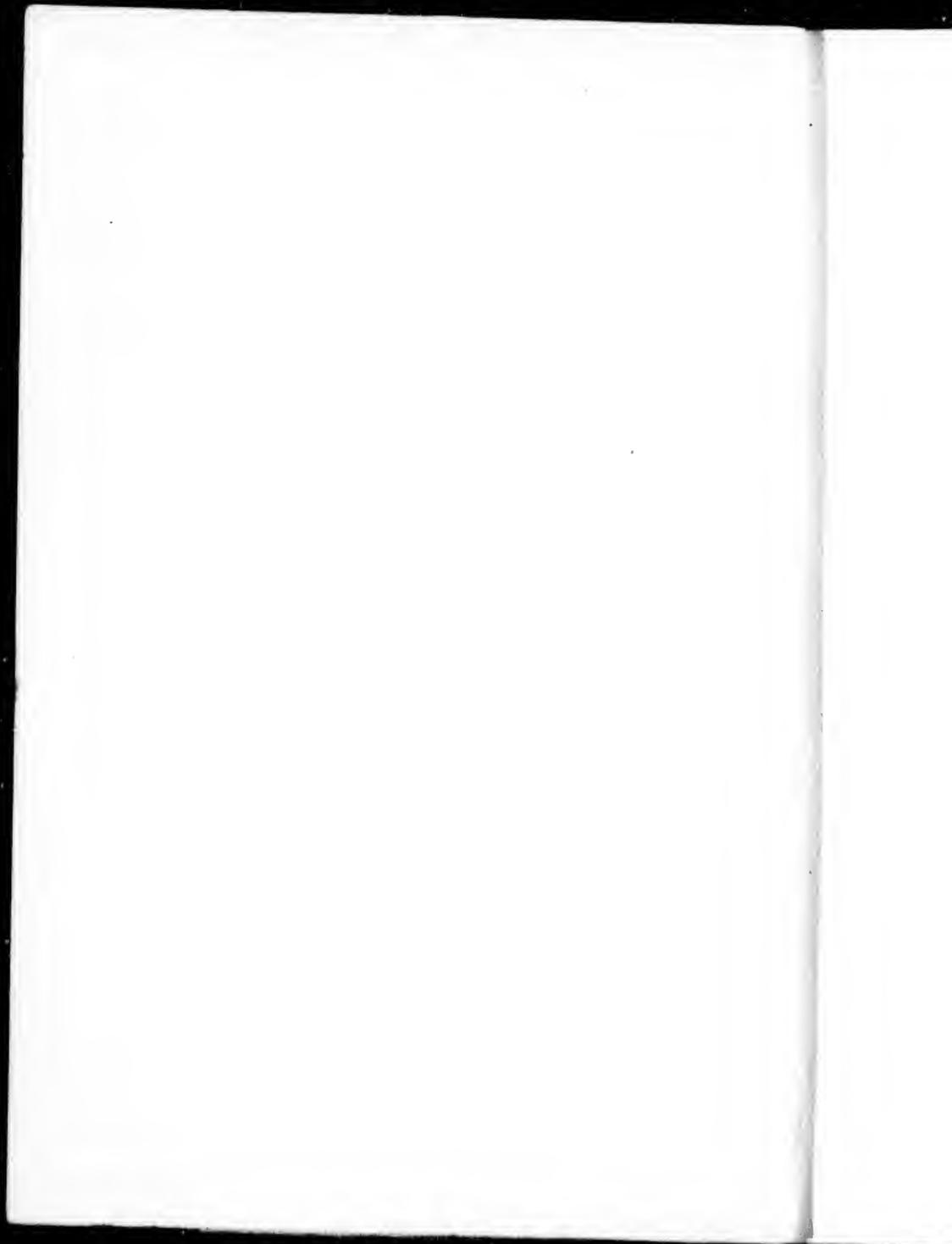
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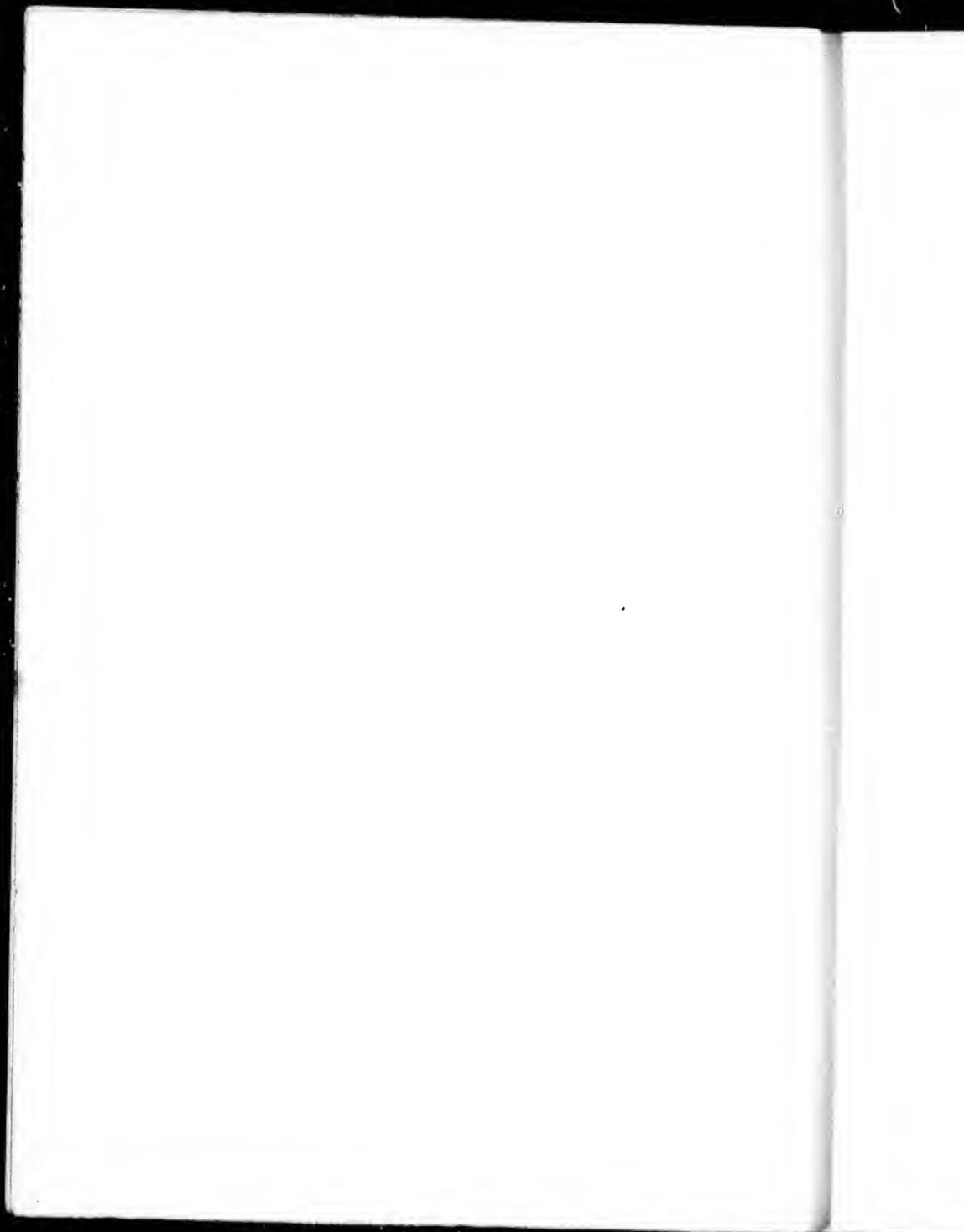
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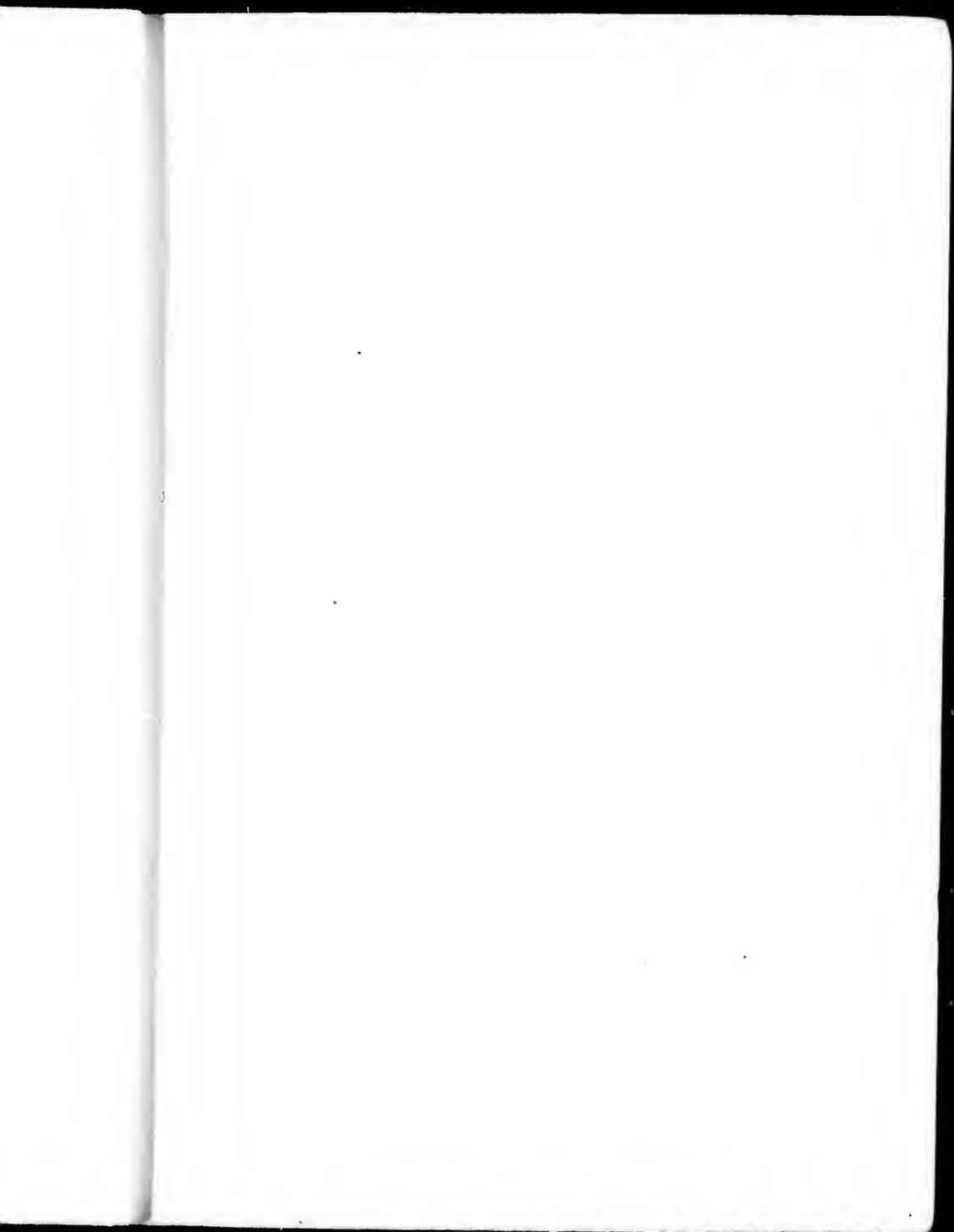
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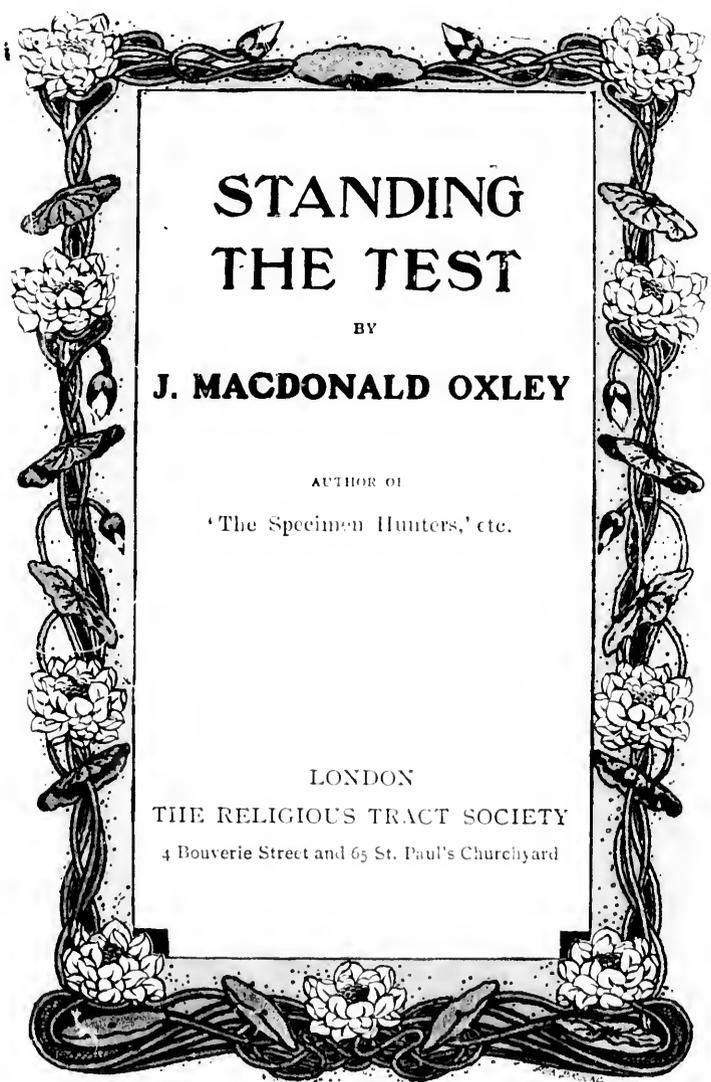
STANDING THE TEST







HAROLD HAD, BY A MIGHTY EFFORT, TORN RALPH
FROM THE QUICKSAND.

A decorative border of stylized flowers and leaves surrounds the central text. The flowers are arranged in a rectangular frame with a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance. The leaves are interspersed between the flowers, and the overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century book design.

**STANDING
THE TEST**

BY

J. MACDONALD OXLEY

AUTHOR OF

'The Specimen Hunters,' etc.

LONDON

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HAWTHORNE

OUT OF TWO

THE TRIP TO

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Contents

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
HAWTHORNE LODGE.	9
CHAPTER II	
OUT OF TWO-FOLD PERIL	20
CHAPTER III	
THE TRIP TO BLOMIDON	32
CHAPTER IV	
GIVING GOOD FOR GOOD	44
CHAPTER V	
THE DECISIVE STEP	56
CHAPTER VI	
UNDER STRESS	67

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER VII	
THE SNOW-SHOE TRAMP	78
CHAPTER VIII	
AT THE TOBOGGAN SLIDE	91
CHAPTER IX	
LOST IN THE FOG	103
CHAPTER X	
WON FROM DEATH	115

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CHAPTER I

Hawthorne Lodge

BEING an only son has its disadvantages as well as its advantages. It is of course a fine thing to have no brothers or sisters to compete with in regard to the affections of one's parents, and therefore to be the sole object of their care and bounty. But, on the other hand, this very fact is apt to make them so anxious and nervous concerning you, that you are not likely to have the freedom of choice and action enjoyed by other boys who happen to form part of a lusty quiverful.

Ralph Gardiner found this out before he was many years old, and did not take to such a condition of things at all kindly. His home in Halifax, Nova Scotia, was upon a street whose lower end touched a section of the city occupied principally by Irish labourers and truckmen. These all seemed to rejoice in

large families, and Ralph was thus continually made to compare his lot with the numerous Sheas, and Moriartys, and O'Connors, whose noisy play made the street resound.

Now, as to clothes and food and home comforts, there was, of course, no comparison between Paddy Shea and Ralph Gardiner. The one went in tatters, and lived principally on bread and molasses, the other wore broadcloth and fine linen, and fared richly every day.

Yet, such is human nature, because Paddy could come and go at will—beginning his play at daybreak and keeping it up until long after dark if he wanted to—Ralph envied him keenly, and was at times quite willing to exchange lots with him.

As he grew into his teens his craving for larger liberty intensified. He had small sympathy for his mother's solicitude. He laughed at her fears for his safety when he went boating or bathing, and could not be brought to understand why she should get into such a state of anxiety if he was late in returning from his afternoon's play.

'Oh, mother!' he would say in reply to her tender reproofs, 'you're too fussy. You

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know I can take care of myself all right. I do wish you wouldn't bother so much about me'; which was all well enough for him to say, but it had no effect upon Mrs. Gardiner, who seemed quite unable to accustom herself to her son's energy and enterprise.

'I should have been a girl instead of a boy,' Ralph said to her once, in an indignant tone, when she objected to his going out for a day's fishing with some older companions, 'then you'd have had me around as much as you liked.'

Matters having come to this pass, it was not to be wondered at if Ralph hailed with lively satisfaction the proposition that he should be sent to a boarding-school for a year.

Mrs. Gardiner's state of health had been a cause of concern for some time past; and in hope of effecting a permanent recovery, her doctor had recommended her to spend a year in Europe, taking the baths and so forth.

When it was first mooted, she was determined to have Ralph accompany her, but Mr. Gardiner overruled that. He thought it would be far better for the boy to continue at his lessons than to have a twelvemonth's holiday

just then, and he would not consent to taking him with them.

Ralph did not mind. He already knew something about the school to which it was proposed to send him, a neighbour's boy being one of its pupils, and he was well pleased at the idea of going there.

Indeed, he showed his satisfaction so emphatically that his mother felt quite hurt.

'Why, Ralph darling,' she said reproachfully, 'one would think you were rejoicing at being rid of us for a while. Surely that is not the way you feel.'

'Well, mother,' he responded, in protest against any such thought being in his mind, 'how can you say that? You know I'm sorry to have you go away, but since you are going I'm glad I'm to go to Hawthorne Lodge, for Ned Easton says they've grand times there.'

Mr. Gardiner took a very common-sense view of the matter throughout. Going to Europe would, he hoped, greatly benefit his wife, and the year at the boarding-school would be a good thing for Ralph. By careful enquiry he had satisfied himself as to the excellence of the institution to whose care his

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son was to be committed, and thus having done the best he knew, he could with confidence leave the rest in the hands of Providence.

The glory of summer was just beginning to wane when the Gardiners brought Ralph to Hawthorne Lodge. They had both gone with him, because Mrs. Gardiner wanted to see just what sort of place was to be her boy's home for the coming year, and to do all that a loving and indulgent mother might to ensure his comfort.

It was not a large school, there being only twenty resident pupils, although twice as many more came by the day. With a fluttering of the heart that he was very anxious should not be detected Ralph made his bow to the headmaster.

Mr. Ferguson was a man of middle age and middle size, whose grey eyes looked keenly through a pair of gold-bowed spectacles, that somehow greatly enhanced the dignity of his bearing. He had a shrewd yet kindly countenance, marked by decision and vigour. Evidently not a man to be trifled with, yet one whose friendship would be well worth winning, and better worth retaining.

Mrs. Gardiner at once gave him her confidence, and her heart felt easier than it had done since the idea of parting with Ralph was decided upon.

'You'll take good care of my boy, won't you?' she said, with a note of earnest appeal in her voice; 'and if he does give you a little trouble sometimes, don't be too hard upon him. He has a good heart, although he is perhaps too fond of mischief.'

Mr. Ferguson's smile expressed a thorough knowledge of boys, and of how to manage them.

'You need have no concern on that score, Mrs. Gardiner,' he said reassuringly. 'My aim is to be neither too severe nor too lax with my pupils, and I think I may, without undue pride, claim that my school has had its share of success.'

After a rather tearful parting with his parents, whom he would not see again for the space of a year, and who would during that time be separated from him by many thousands of miles, Ralph Gardiner pulled himself together, and began an exploration of his new home.

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Hawthorne Lodge, once the residence of a well-to-do farmer, and adapted to its present purpose by various alterations and additions, was fortunate in possessing a situation of wonderful beauty and picturesqueness. It stood far up the slope of a hill clothed with spreading orchards and fields of grain, and commanded a clear view of the whole sweep of the Grand Pré, that level sea of richest verdure immortalized by Longfellow in his *Evangeline*.

So far-reaching was the view that it included within its range the blue waters of Minas Basin, and even the dark majestic mass of mighty Blomidon.

Ralph's eyes sparkled with delight as they rolled over this glorious prospect. He had a keen appreciation of the beauty of Nature, and did not need to have the fine features of a landscape pointed out to him.

But it was more than the loveliness of Nature he saw in the scene outspread before him. Here was a splendid country for a healthy, vigorous boy. What a grand place it must be for cherries, apples, plums, and other kinds of delicious fruit, when every white-

walled home was an island amid dark green billows of orchards! He hoped the farmers were big-hearted folk, and did not object to having their products sampled by hungry school-boys.

What games of cricket and football might be played on one of these level fields at the foot of the hill! What rattling paper-chases might be had across the farms after the crops had been garnered! And then in winter there would be coasting and tobogganing, and skating, and snow-shoeing to one's heart's content!

Ralph thought of all this as he looked about him, and he felt well satisfied with his lot, nor did he make any pretence of concealing from himself the fact that while, of course, he was sorry to part with his parents, still there was much consolation in his being free for a season from his mother's excessive solicitude. He did not know how much liberty he would be allowed under Mr. Ferguson's *régime*, but he felt sure there would be no one worrying about him every time he was off 'having some fun.'

He had arrived a day in advance of the regular opening of the school after the mid-

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summer vacation, and this was quite an advantage, as it gave him the opportunity of getting his bearings before the other boys crowded in.

They came in a body by the first train on the following day, and made such a rumpus on their arrival that Ralph felt very glad he was already on the ground.

The most of them were old pupils, but there were several new recruits, and Ralph scanned these with special interest.

There is scant formality about schoolboys not far advanced in their teens, and saluting one another abruptly with such enquiries as: 'Hullo! What's your name? Where do you come from?' they soon reached an easy footing of mutual acquaintance.

Upon the whole Ralph was favourably impressed by those who would be his daily companions for the coming year. They were for the most part about his own age, and of the same social standing. None of them did he previously know, but that was a small matter. He was himself a frank, open-hearted, sociable sort of chap, inclined to think the best of everybody, and ready for friendship with any one who was well disposed towards him.

Mr. Ferguson wisely allowed the boys to spend the whole day in getting acquainted, and this, of course, gave the old pupils a fine opportunity to initiate the new-comers into the ways of the institution.

Ralph, instinctively seeking a leader, attached himself to Harold Lyster, a boy two years his senior, and in his third year at the school, who also hailed from Halifax, and who seemed to be recognised by the others as entitled to leadership amongst them.

Harold was a tall, well-built, fine-looking lad, who hid beneath a graceful, gentle manner a spirit of uncommon fire and strength. Capable of great things, both physical and intellectual, if roused, he preferred taking the world easily as a rule; but there was in him that subtle essence of power which won for him his companions' allegiance without his making any conscious effort to secure it.

Ralph soon felt his heart going out to this new friend, and Harold, on his part, took a fancy to Ralph more quickly than was usual for him, so that when the latter, in the course of the morning, as they chanced to be by themselves, said to him with an appealing tone in

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his voice, that showed how much a favourable reply meant to him :

‘Will you be my friend here, Harold? I never knew any of the boys before, and I feel pretty swange, but I think if you will be friends with me, I won’t mind.’

It was, although Ralph knew it not, a fine tribute to Harold’s faculty of inspiring trust, and Harold was not altogether unconscious of the implied compliment.

‘I will be very glad to be friends with you, Ralph,’ he said heartily. ‘You can’t help feeling a little strange at first, but you’ll soon get over it, and be as thoroughly at home here as any of us.’

CHAPTER II

Out of Two-fold Peril

IT did not take Ralph many days to get on an easy footing with his schoolmates, and to lose all sense of strangeness.

He was not a bit troubled by home-sickness, although the fear of his being overcome by this had given his mother no small concern. But he entered at once with all his heart into the life of the school, and found too much to engross his attention to leave any room for repining.

The class work did not frighten him with its amount or difficulty. He could be a good student if he chose, and being among strangers put him on his mettle, so that he bid fair to take and hold a good place in the ranks of pupils.

This promise won him the approval and liking of the head-master and his two assistants. They were always glad to have a boy

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begin well. It was easier keeping him up to the standard he thus set for himself at the start, than bringing him up from a low one to what they required of him.

Of course Ralph missed many of the little luxuries with which a fond mother had surrounded and supplied him at home. The fare was as simple as it was substantial. He shared a dormitory with three other boys, who were no more particular about keeping things in order than he was himself.

No 'extras' of any kind were allowed by Mr. Ferguson, for he wished so far as possible to prevent jealousy and rivalry among his boys in such things, and Ralph found that the liberal supply of pocket-money granted him would be of service only on the rare occasions when he would be permitted to pay a visit to Wolfville, a bustling town some six miles distant.

As the days slipped by, each one full to the brim of work and play, Ralph's friendship with Harold Lyster deepened, until they became recognised 'chums,' and an adventure they had in the Gasperean River added an element of gratitude to Ralph's regard for Harold, that strengthened it beyond ordinary friendship.

It was one of those clear hot days that come in the early autumn, when for a boy to catch sight of open water is at once to suggest a bathe, and the two chums with some of their schoolmates had gone down to the river bank for the afternoon.

The tide which there rose and fell full thirty feet or more, as it does throughout every part of the Bay of Fundy, happened to be dead low, and they decided to wait until it came in half-way at least before going into the water.

The retreating waters had left behind them a vast expanse of red sand, through the centre of which the river, wasted by the long summer heat, ran in a narrow gulley cut into the soft bottom.

Above high-water mark stretched great level meadows, now rich with aftermath, and far beyond them could be seen the blue waters of Minas Basin, and the huge dark bulk of Cape Blomidon.

While waiting for the return of the tide, the boys, having laid aside their shoes and stockings, and most of their clothing, began chasing one another across the sand-banks.

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It was capital sport, and some of them became greatly excited over it—Ralph in particular.

‘You fellows had better be careful, now,’ said Harold warningly, as he saw them going farther and farther out on the sand. ‘There are some sink-holes about here, and if you get into one of them, you mightn’t get out again any too easy.’

Harold had not joined in the game of chase. It was a delicious afternoon for being lazy, and he preferred lying in the deep grass, and watching the other boys tiring themselves out with their exertion.

His warning was well worth heeding. Here and there in the river bottom now exposed were quicksands, which, although not of great extent, were yet capable of doing mischief if one went into them when the tide was rising, and could not immediately get out again.

These ‘sink-holes,’ as they were called, did not betray their presence by any special sign, and it was only by the sudden sinking of the foot, and the difficulty of withdrawing it, that their victim knew of his danger.

Being more than ordinarily fleet of foot, Ralph had successfully evaded capture at the

hands of his companions, until at last they all combined to run him down, shouting and laughing merrily as they chased him out towards the river channel.

Harold's attention being otherwise attracted, he did not notice what they were about until they were farther out than he considered safe.

'Hie! come back, there!' he shouted, springing up. 'You're going out too far! It's not safe there.'

But they were all making too much noise to hear him, and kept right on.

'Oh, they'll turn back soon,' said Harold to himself, resuming his comfortable pose, from which, however, he was aroused the next minute by a shout of alarm, that brought him to his feet again with a look of anxiety on his face.

Ralph, determined to outwit his pursuers if possible, had run to the very edge of the channel, and then, instead of returning by the same way, had dodged off in an oblique direction, hoping thus to get by the others, and so reach the shore uncaught.

But, unfortunately, in doing this he had run plump into a quicksand, which seized both

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his bare feet with so tenacious a grip that he found himself powerless to break away from it.

His playmates, instead of running to his rescue, became panic-stricken on their own account, and paying no heed to his appeals for help, fled frantically ashore.

Now it was not merely the fear of having a like mischance befall them that caused them to act in so cowardly a fashion.

Up the bed of the river there rushed a low wall of turbid water crested with foam, that advanced at a rate which would soon send it all over the broad sand-banks.

This was the famous 'bore,' caused by the incoming of the tide, and its sudden onset fearfully aggravated the peril of Ralph's position.

'Shame on those chaps for being such ninnies!' cried Harold, in a voice full of impatient indignation, as he hastily flung aside his coat and tore off his shoes. 'Ralph would drown quick enough if he had to depend on *them*.' Then, raising his voice, he shouted cheerfully, 'Keep cool, Ralph; I'm coming out to you'; and suiting the action to the

word, he sprang down the bank and out upon the sand with the speed of a greyhound.

Poor Ralph needed no exhortation to keep cool. The icy chills of terror were already coursing down his spine as with eyes fixed upon the swiftly approaching tide he strove vainly to extricate his feet from the vicious grip of the quicksand.

He had already sunk almost to the knees, and he found it very hard to maintain an upright position, so that he needed the inspiration of Harold's call to sustain his spirit.

The situation was as strange as it was thrilling. Harold and the 'bore' were engaged in a race as to which would reach Ralph first, while he, mid-way between them was struggling for his life in the deadly sink-hole.

Harold thoroughly realized the full extent of the danger, and strained every nerve to the utmost in his gallant effort for rescue.

Over the yielding sand he sped, hardly seeming to touch it with his feet, and up through the river channel charged the 'bore' with a soft, dull roar as of a far-distant train.

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shore, watched the wonderful contest with bated breath.

By but a yard or two at most Harold won.

'Throw yourself towards me,' he panted as he pulled up as near to Ralph as he dared.

Without a moment's hesitation Ralph flung himself on his face with outstretched arms, both of which Harold grasped tightly just as the mass of water rushed upon them.

But before it swept him off his feet, Harold had, by a mighty effort, torn Ralph from the quicksand, and when the tide overwhelmed them it was only for an instant.

They could both swim well, and their heads soon appeared above the muddy waves, where-at the relieved boys on the bank shouted together for joy.

The getting ashore was an easy enough matter. Indeed, Harold seemed disposed to make light of the whole affair, now that it was all over without harm to any one.

But Ralph and the others would not have it so, and they showered praises upon him until at last he vowed he would go off and leave them if they said anything more about it.

Ralph's gratitude was very deep. He was

ready to do anything within the range of his powers for Harold, and it was certain that henceforth the latter would never lack for an admirer and helper while he was at hand.

When Mr. Ferguson heard what had occurred, he praised Harold warmly, but gave strict injunctions that the boys were not to go out on the sand-banks again, lest a worse thing might happen to them.

This of course did not preclude them from going bathing when the tide was high. To have interdicted that would have been altogether unreasonable, as Mr. Ferguson well understood, and Ralph had many a good swim over the very spot that had threatened to prove his grave.

Another service that Harold rendered him was to open his eyes to the historic and poetic association of the beautiful landscape which the school commanded.

Ralph's reading, outside his school-books, had been left pretty much to his own inclination, and so he knew far more of Mayne Reid and Ballantyne than he did of Milton or Tennyson, and of Cooper and Jacob Abbott than of Hawthorne and Longfellow.

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Harold, on the other hand, had a distinctly literary bent of mind. He could enjoy fine poetry as keenly as exciting narrative, and it had been an immense delight to him on coming to Hawthorne Lodge to find himself within sight and reach of the land of *Evangeline*.

He soon had the whole lovely poem by heart, and was in the habit of quoting its mellow musical lines with manifest relish and intelligent expression.

On finding that Ralph was entirely ignorant of Longfellow's poetry in general, and of *Evangeline* in particular, he at once set about to repair his deficiency.

Ralph proved an apt and appreciative pupil, and was not slow in taking the poem into his own mind, and finding delight in identifying its word pictures in the scenes before him.

As a matter of course his warm nature was profoundly stirred to sympathy for the Acadians and their woeful fate, and to hot indignation against the supposed brutality of the British authorities.

Knowing nothing of the historical inaccuracy of the poem, there were times when his heart so burned within him that he wished he had

lived in those bygone days, that he might have shouldered a musket, and shot a bullet into one of the red-coats at least, even though his own life were the forfeit.

One thing about which Mr. Ferguson was most particular was regular attendance at church and Sunday school on the part of his boys.

It was not imperative that they should go to both services. They were free to choose between the morning and evening, if they did not wish to attend twice. But only sickness was accepted as an excuse for absence altogether.

The church was within easy reach of the school, and Ralph began attending both services as a matter of course.

From the very outset he conceived a liking for the minister, who was a comparatively young man, with a very pleasing if not handsome face, and an earnest, sincere style of preaching that rarely failed to win for him an attentive hearing.

Mr. Rose, on his part, was attracted by Ralph the first Sunday he sat before him, and resolved to cultivate his acquaintance at the first opportunity. He always took a deep

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interest in the boys of Hawthorne Lodge, and was careful to adapt his preaching so as to enlist and retain their interest.

Little did Ralph imagine as he sat before him how momentous in its influence upon his life his acquaintance with Mr. Rose would prove.

CHAPTER III

The Trip to Blomidon

THE great event of the autumn at Hawthorne Lodge was the annual excursion to Blomidon :

‘That black rock bastion, based in surge,
Pregnant with agate and with amethyst,
Whose foot the tides of storied Minas scourge,
Whose top austere withdraws into the mist.’

The first fine Saturday in September was usually chosen, and a start made as early as possible in the morning, that no hours of daylight might be lost.

Having heard so much about this wonderful place, which was in full view from his dormitory window, Ralph anticipated the trip with intense eagerness.

Twice, owing to unfavourable weather, there had to be a postponement, which he found hard to bear patiently, but at last the third Saturday proved as fine as heart could wish.

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They set off in large express waggons, each holding ten persons, and being drawn by a pair of powerful horses. Besides the resident scholars there were a few friends, including Mr. Rose, the minister; and Ralph was perfectly content because he was placed in the same waggon with him and Harold Lyster.

The sun had only got well started on his journey across the cloudless blue dome of the heavens when, with many glad hurrahs, the merry party rattled down the hill from the Lodge out on to the level road leading to Wolfville.

Everybody was in the highest spirits, Mr. Ferguson himself looking as happy as the youngest boy, and tongues wagged busily as they drove onward past rich farms, and wide-spreading orchards already dropping their luscious fruit.

By a little bit of management Ralph had secured a seat on one side of Mr. Rose, Harold being on the other, and the three were soon engaged in conversation.

Mr. Rose knew many of the legends of the land through which they were passing, and of the mighty promontory whither they were

going, and the boys listened with keen interest as he related them in picturesque phrase.

Ralph was particularly taken with the myth of the Diamond of Blomidon—that mysterious jewel which is fabled to shine out with such magical brilliancy when the searcher for it is at a distance, but which so shrouds itself in obscurity when he draws near, that it has never been found.

Many a time, according to popular belief, had mariners, tossing about on the waves before Blomidon, seen this marvellous gem gleaming in the rays of the moon, and gone ashore fully confident of securing it, only to have all their pains for nothing, if indeed they did not suffer injury or loss of life in the fruitless quest.

‘I am afraid that they were far more anxious to obtain the Diamond of Blomidon than the pearl of great price,’ said Mr. Rose with tender emphasis, as he finished his narrative. Then, with an earnest look into Ralph’s face, he added :

‘Which would you rather possess, Ralph?’

Ralph blushed, and was silent. He clearly perceived the drift of the minister’s question, but shrank from replying to it, and Mr. Rose,

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noting his confusion, forbore to press the matter until a more convenient season.

After a brief halt at Wolfville to water the horses and procure some supplies, the waggons rolled on through the beautiful Cornwallis Valley, the richest and loveliest portion of the whole province. Orchards bending beneath their wealth of red and golden fruit, vineyards heavy with green and purple clusters of juicy sweetness, and gardens brilliant with a hundred hues surrounded the snow-white green-shuttered homes of the happy dwellers in this land of plenty, and made Ralph feel as though this was the place he wanted to live in for the rest of his days.

Beyond Canning, a half-way village where another short stop was made to rest the horses, the road began to wind up the side of the North Mountain; and the ascent being quite steep in places, the boys got out of the waggons and stretched their legs by walking up.

In this way they came to the Look-off, a lofty point of vantage whence a glorious panorama embracing portions of no less than five counties lay outspread like a vast picture before them.

The air was free from all haze; hardly a cloud broke the blue expanse of sky; the sun shone with a splendour that was not trying because already the cool touch of autumn could be felt in the atmosphere; in every way it was an ideal day, and the boys were loud in their chorus of praise, as, glad to rest a bit after their climb up the steep road, they gazed upon the glorious landscape.

'Of what does it make you think, Ralph?' asked Mr. Rose, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder as they stood together.

'I don't know,' answered Ralph, 'but it's very beautiful, isn't it?'

'Don't you remember in your *Pilgrim's Progress*,' continued Mr. Rose, 'how when Pilgrim was about to set forth from the Palace Beautiful, where he had been so kindly entertained and so wisely instructed by the maidens Piety, Prudence, and Charity, they led him to the top of the house, and bid him look south, and behold he saw at a great distance a most pleasant mountainous country, beautiful with woods, vineyards, fruits of all sorts, flowers also, with springs and fountains very delectable to behold? and when he asked the name of the

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country they said it was Immanuel's Land, and when he came there he would see thence the gate of the Celestial City? You have not forgotten that, have you, Ralph?'

The colour mounted to Ralph's forehead, as, with some hesitation, he replied :

'I am afraid I have, sir. It's a long time since I read *Pilgrim's Progress*.'

'Ah, my boy,' responded Mr. Rose, with a smile of gentle reproof, 'you ought not to neglect John Bunyan. Outside the Bible there is no book more full of help for the Christian life. I have read him so often that I know most of him off by heart now, and I love to quote his strong and stirring language.'

'I will start to read *Pilgrim's Progress* again to-morrow,' said Ralph with sudden determination. 'Mr. Ferguson has it with lots of pictures in it.'

'That's right, Ralph!' cried Mr. Rose, giving him a clap on the back in token of his warm approval. 'Read that blessed book through carefully and imagine yourself in Pilgrim's place as you read. You could not spend the leisure hours of the Sabbath to better purpose.'

Mr. Rose was a wise student of human
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nature. His heart had already gone out towards Ralph in warm solicitude for his soul, but he knew better than to startle him by too hasty measures. He would win his way slowly, in order that the advance might be sure, and not imperil the issue by any haste.

The waggons having come up, the party resumed their seats, and drove along the ridge of the promontory until they reached the place where the North Mountain breaks suddenly down to the tossing waters of Minas Basin some six hundred feet below.

Here the drive ended, and all hands helped in putting up the horses, and getting ready the lunch for which they had the keenest appetites.

Mrs. Ferguson had seen to this filling up of the baskets, and there was nothing lacking in either the quality or quantity of their contents.

When the good things had been duly appreciated, Mr. Ferguson called the boys around him, and said :

‘Now, my boys, you are free to ramble at your own pleasure for the next three hours. All I ask of you is not to be rash in climbing about the cliff. There are many dangerous places, and you will need to be careful where

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you go. If you hunt hard enough, you will find amethysts, garnets, agates, and opals along the ledges, and in the niches of the cliff, and, as usual, I offer a prize of a fine book for the largest and best collection of specimens. Now then, away you go, and be sure that all of you are back here by four o'clock.'

With a hearty cheer for their master, who was never so popular as on these excursions, the party broke up into little groups, and set out to explore Blomidon.

Much to Ralph's pleasure, Mr. Rose said :

'Will you and Harold have me for a companion, Ralph? I know the locality pretty well, and perhaps may help you to find some good stones.'

'Why, of course, sir,' both boys responded at once. 'We'll be very glad if you will come with us.'

Mr. Ferguson intended to spend the time in a shady nook with a favourite book, so that Mr. Rose felt free to go off with the boys.

'Can we get right down to the beach?' Ralph asked, eagerly gazing at the crinkled surface of the Basin far below.

'We can, Ralph,' replied Mr. Rose. 'But I

warn you it is a tremendous climb getting back again.'

'Oh! I'm not afraid of it,' responded Ralph confidently. 'I can stand lots of climbing.'

He was inclined to be boastful, and to cherish a high opinion of his own powers, and Mr. Rose's countenance bore a quiet smile of meaning as he led the way down a steep and narrow path.

Ralph felt in great spirits. The whole outing was a novel and delightful experience to him, limited as his life had hitherto been in many ways by the over-solicitude of his devoted mother. He was in the humour for undertaking all sorts of risks, and more than once Mr. Rose felt bound to check his ardour as he sprang downward in a decidedly reckless fashion.

The descent at first was through close-set trees, whose tough, gnarled roots offered good foothold; but presently they came to the bare cliff, and here much caution had to be exercised, as a false step might lead to serious injury, if not to death.

Harold, having been to Blomidon several times before, knew just what to do, but Ralph

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found considerable difficulty even with his example before him, and it was just as well that Mr. Rose kept close behind him, ready to lend a helping hand whenever necessary. Half way down he was fain to confess weariness.

'Hold on a minute, Harold,' he panted. 'You're going too fast for me. I can't keep up.'

'It's a little harder than you thought for, isn't it?' said Harold, sitting down on a projecting point of rock. 'But you'll get used to it presently.'

They rested a few minutes, and then proceeded, reaching the foot of the cliff not far from the very end of the cape.

The waves were splashing so invitingly upon the shingle that Ralph at once wanted to jump into them.

'Do let us have a dip,' he urged. 'It'll cool us off finely, and won't take long.'

Harold had no objections to the proposal, but Mr. Rose shook his head.

'You boys can have a swim if you like, and I'll look on,' he said.

So the two of them undressed and plunged in, finding the water deliciously cool and invigorating.

When they had dressed, the hunt for precious stones was begun, first among the *débris* at the foot of the cliff, and then up along the steep sides wherever a safe foothold could be secured.

Ralph entered into this with great vigour. He was intensely anxious to win the prize offered by Mr. Ferguson, and in his eagerness and inexperience was continually picking up bits of stone which he thought were valuable, but which Mr. Rose or Harold declared to be no good whatever.

Mr. Rose was very helpful, pointing out many a promising spot, and instructing him on the indications of good specimens.

They had worked their way about half the distance up the cliff again, and their pockets were already heavy with fine amethysts and agates, when Mr. Rose, who was in front of Ralph, Harold being off to the right a little, while endeavouring to make a big step forward, found the rock suddenly break away beneath him.

'Look out for yourself, Ralph!' he cried, as he shot down the slope towards his companion.

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way, in order to avoid being carried down with him, and so Ralph understood it. But that was not what his heart prompted him to do.

Realizing Mr. Rose's danger, he instantly resolved to help him if he could. and so getting a good grip with both hands in a cleft of the rock, he braced himself to meet the minister's swift descent upon him.

CHAPTER IV

Giving Good for Good

IT all happened so suddenly that Harold had no chance of rendering assistance, although no one would have been prompter, were it in his power to do anything.

Down came the minister full upon Ralph, who, flattening his body against the face of the cliff like a limpet, nerved himself to stand the collision.

After his first cry of warning Mr. Rose had kept silence. He knew that Ralph was beneath him, and could not have failed to hear him, but he was unable to see whether he had got out of his way or not.

In a minute he had reached the boy, striking him a blow on the head with his feet that came near stunning him for the instant.

Nevertheless Ralph held on desperately, and so sturdy was the resistance he offered, that Mr. Rose came to a stop long enough to

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enable him to get a grip of the rock, and thus prevent a further fall.

As soon as he had accomplished this he threw one arm around Ralph, and asked him anxiously :

‘Did I hurt you, my brave boy? I must have given you a fearful knock with my feet, but I really could not help it.’

Swallowing down the sob that rose in his throat, for the excitement and pain had for the moment overcome him, Ralph responded with an admirable attempt at indifference :

‘Oh! I’m all right, thank you, Mr. Rose. You didn’t hurt me much. Did you hurt yourself?’

‘Scraped my shins a trifle, that’s all,’ Mr. Rose replied. ‘Come now, let us get on to firmer footing as quickly as possible.’

They had not much difficulty in doing this, and in due time rejoined the rest of the party at the waggons.

There was much excitement as to the winning of the prize for the best collection of precious stones, and when all the boys had emptied their pockets, and arranged their ‘finds’ in little piles for Mr. Ferguson’s inspection, it was

evident that the task of awarding the prize would be no easy one.

He went very carefully into the matter, examining each collection stone by stone, while the boys watched him with absorbed interest. At last, after conferring with Mr. Rose for a minute and having a word with Ralph, he announced his decision.

'I find that the best collection has been made by Ralph Gardiner, who has been particularly successful in finding amethysts ; but, as he has very frankly told me that Mr. Rose helped him a little in his hunt, I have decided to give the first prize to Harold Lyster, and to give a second prize to Ralph.'

The cheers that followed this announcement showed plainly that it met with general approval, Ralph's honesty being fully appreciated by his schoolmates, and Harold's popularity making it easy for the other contestants to yield first place to him.

The incidents of this day drew Ralph still closer to Mr. Rose, and the young minister's heart yearned for the spiritual welfare of the boy who seemed hitherto to have given little more thought to religion than a bird.

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Mr. Rose always regarded the boys of Hawthorne Lodge who attended his church as a very important part of his congregation. He never preached a sermon without having a word for them in it, and he neglected no opportunity of influencing them for good.

Harold Lyster had ever since his coming to the school been an especial object of his interest and concern. But, in spite of all his efforts to reach his heart, he had to confess himself at the end of two years apparently no nearer the goal than at the start.

Always friendly and courteous, regular in his attendance at the services, and a good listener, he nevertheless kept the minister at arm's length whenever the latter sought to press spiritual concerns home upon him, and Mr. Rose had come to feel that it was not given to him to lead this noble boy into the fold.

The beautiful autumn days, full to the brim of work and play, slipped happily by. Football took the place of cricket as the chief school sport, and Ralph, entering into the game with his wonted *vim*, soon became able to hold his own with the other boys. It was a proud day for

him when, at the close of a practice match between the 'ins' and the 'outs,' as the resident pupils and the day scholars were respectively called, the result of which had been determined in favour of the 'ins,' thanks to a touch-down pluckily gained by Ralph, Harold Lyster said in a tone of warm approval :

'You played a fine game to-day, Ralph. That touch-down won us the game. You shall certainly have a place in the team in the match against the Academy.'

Ralph jumped high in the air, swung his cap around his head, and gave a shout by way of expressing his delight.

'Oh! thank you, Harold! he cried exultantly. 'I was so anxious to be allowed to play, but I was afraid you wouldn't think me good enough.'

'I wasn't quite sure about it myself until to-day,' returned Harold. 'But if you do as well at the match as you did this afternoon, I'll be quite satisfied.'

Mr. Rose dropped in that evening, and the moment Ralph saw him he rushed up with beaming face to say :

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The minister glanced down into the bright face, and with a smile of congratulation said gently:

'I am very glad, Ralph, and I am sure I wish you every success as a player. You know, my boy, I wish the best things for you, and want you to give your thoughts to the best things.'

As he spoke the last sentence he laid his hand upon Ralph's shoulder, and looked with deep meaning into his eyes.

Ralph blushed, and his head drooped before the minister's earnest gaze. He understood the purport of his words, but made no response to them. His mind was too full of the football match just then to give attention to the weightier matter.

The match came off on the Saturday of the following week, and Ralph fully justified Harold's awarding him a place in the team by playing a useful, steady game throughout. He had no opportunity of especially distinguishing himself, but he was 'always on the ball,' and was successful in spoiling more than one dan-

gerous attack on the part of the Academy boys, who in the end had to confess defeat by one goal to two.

With this match the season for out-door sports ended until the skating should begin, and the boys were fain to be content with long walks and an occasional paper-chase across the fields for their open-air recreation.

Mr. Rose felt that now the time had come to enter upon the special services at his church for which he had been earnestly praying and working for the past two months.

A rising tide of interest was very manifest in his congregation, and many hearts were in unison with his in the matter.

He accordingly announced one Sunday that there would be service each evening save Saturday in the church, and pleaded fervently with the people to do their best to be present as regularly as they could.

Harold and Ralph were walking home together from church as usual, when the latter said :

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Mr. Ferguson esteemed Mr. Rose, he presumed the head master would urge his pupils to attend.

'We can do just as we please about them,' answered Harold in an indifferent tone. 'We're not obliged to go if we don't want to.'

'Do you intend to go, Harold?' Ralph inquired rather timidly, for there was something in his companion's manner that he could not understand.

Harold did not answer immediately, but kept on switching off the tops of the grass spears growing beside the road.

After a pause that was beginning to feel awkward to Ralph, he replied :

'I don't think so ; I've been through the same sort of thing once before.'

Ralph looked puzzled. From the way Harold spoke the special services might have been some sort of epidemic, like the measles or mumps ; and having been deeply impressed by Mr. Rose's earnest appeals to be present at them, he did not understand the drift of his friend's words.

'Didn't you like those that you were at before ?' he asked.

Again Harold hesitated before replying. For some reason the subject was not one which he cared to discuss.

'I did, and I didn't, Ralph,' he at length replied. 'But never mind; let's talk about something else.'

The effect of this conversation was to give a check to Ralph's good intentions with regard to the services, so that he was not present for the first few evenings.

Toward the end of the week Mr. Rose, who had been looking for him, and had been disappointed at not seeing him, came over to the school, and, with Mr. Ferguson's approval, gave the boys a warm invitation to the meetings.

Not content with this, he seized the opportunity to have a quiet word with Ralph before leaving, and to specially urge upon him to come.

Ralph readily enough promised. He had no clear idea of the character of the services, but for Mr. Rose's sake he was willing to attend some of them. If he found them interesting, he might go often.

Having thus pledged himself, he tried to persuade Harold to accompany him. But

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Harold was not to be moved. He had nothing to say against the services, yet he flatly refused to go to them, and there was something in his refusal which made Ralph a little regretful that he had promised.

He had too much respect for himself, however, not to keep his word, and so Mr. Rose was glad to see him come quietly in during the opening hymn, and slip into a back seat.

It was with very curious feelings that Ralph looked upon the service. He had never before been present at a meeting of the kind, and the difference between the regular routine of the Sabbath and the exercises of this evening at once struck him.

He could not fail to be impressed by the intense earnestness, not only of the leader, but of a number of men and women, for the most part well advanced in years, who, though grave and silent as wooden images on Sunday, were now quick with fervent exclamations of 'Amen' or 'Bless the Lord' or 'Glory,' with which they accentuated the prayers and addresses of those who took part.

He did not like these interjections. They were rather startling at first, and caused him to

stare about the room in search of the persons from whom they came.

'I do wish they wouldn't shout like that,' he said under his breath. 'It makes me jump every time.'

But, instead of meeting his wishes in this respect, the good brethren and sisters only grew more fervent as the meeting progressed, and presently Ralph found himself getting used to their ways, and, in fact, rather enjoying them.

By the time Mr. Rose began to speak Ralph was in the mood to listen, and the minister had not a more attentive hearer, while for twenty minutes he preached the Gospel of salvation.

His earnest, tender words stirred Ralph's heart strangely. They turned his thoughts in a direction they had never before taken.

Although he had been hearing sermons ever since he was old enough to accompany his parents to church, they did not seem to be meant for him in any way, and had made no more impression upon him than raindrops on a tin roof.

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ent. His words were like arrows shot into a target. They went right home to Ralph just as though they were intended for nobody else, and when he ceased speaking the boy's mind was much perturbed. He had been awakened to an altogether novel line of thought.

CHAPTER V

The Decisive Step

As soon as the meeting came to a close Ralph slipped away and hurried home, evading Mr. Rose, who had taken his place by the door, to have a kindly word and a warm hand-shake with his people as they went past him.

His mind was in a strange state of ferment, and he wanted to be alone with himself for a while.

So strong was this feeling, that instead of going back to the school he took a long way round, while his thoughts coursed swiftly through his brain.

What was this step that Mr. Rose urged upon him? Why was it that the minister's earnest words seemed to have been meant so directly for him? What was the hurry about being a Christian, any way?

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He was surely too young to concern himself about religion. It was all well enough for Mr. Rose, who was a minister and had charge of a church, and for Deacon Boggs, who took up the collection, and old Mrs. Hart, who could not expect to live much longer, and people like that.

But for himself—a mere boy with ever so many years ahead of him, and any amount of time to attend to religion—he had no need to think about it now.

Indeed, this view of the case presented itself so strongly to him, that he was inclined to resent Mr. Rose having taken such an interest in him, urging him to attend the meeting, and then preaching right at him.

‘Let him look after the grown-up people,’ he murmured, trying to work himself up to a state of indignation that would give him strength to vow that he would not attend another of the special services. ‘It’s more for them than it is for youngsters, anyhow.’

Perplexed and disturbed in mind as he was, he felt no impulse to go to Harold and take him into his confidence.

On the contrary, he was conscious of shrink-

ing from any such action. Somehow or other, Harold's stand with reference to the services had put up a barrier between them on that subject, and so, when Ralph reached the school, he did not go to Harold's dormitory for a little chat with him before bed, as he would have done under ordinary circumstances, but went straight to his own room and to bed.

But not to sleep for some time. The struggle in his mind kept him awake long past his usual hours, yet without his arriving at any definite conclusion, except that he wished he had not gone near the meeting.

The next day routine work kept him occupied, and diverted his attention until the afternoon, when, in the course of a walk with Harold, Mr. Rose was encountered.

The minister's face lit up as he saw the two boys. He was evidently pleased at the meeting, and had something to say to them.

They both would have preferred not seeing him, but they could not with any show of courtesy avoid him.

'Well, Harold and Ralph,' he said quickly, giving each a hand, and then turning to walk the same way with them, 'I am so glad I

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chanced upon you. You have both been in my thoughts to-day. I was pleased to see you, Ralph, at the meeting last night, but you skipped off before I could shake hands with you. You were not there, were you, Harold?’

‘No, sir,’ replied Harold with a firm setting of his lips, as though to say, ‘and I don’t intend to be there, either.’

Mr. Rose had no lack of keen perception. He read the signs of Harold’s face, and was too discreet to press the matter then. It was agreement, not discussion or difference, that he sought at the moment ; so, turning to Ralph, he went on pleasantly :

‘We had a very good meeting I thought, didn’t you, Ralph ? I am greatly encouraged by the indications of an outpouring of the Divine Spirit. The fields seem white unto the harvest.’

The boys were silent. They naturally did not share the minister’s enthusiasm, and found nothing to say in response to his remark.

Understanding this fully, Mr. Rose passed on to speak of something else, and soon all three were entirely at their ease and conversing

freely, so that the boys enjoyed their walk with him far better than they anticipated.

As they separated at a cross-road, Mr. Rose again laid a hand upon the shoulder of each, and in his most winning way said :

'It will not only make my heart glad, but cause joy in the presence of the angels, if you will both come to our meetings often. Be with us, won't you? and we will seek to do you good.'

Moved by an impulse he could not resist, Ralph quickly responded :

'I'll come as often as I can, Mr. Rose.'

But Harold turned away in silence, and the minister, hiding his disappointment under a smile of warm approval for Ralph, said :

'That's right. I shall always look for you,' and went on his way.

By mutual consent, Ralph and Harold said nothing to each other on the subject of the meetings.

Ralph's impulsive nature had received quite a chill when his companion made no response to the minister's entreaty, and he was conscious of a feeling of regret that he had so fully committed himself.

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Harold, on the other hand, having seen Ralph give his promise, was altogether too fine of spirit to say anything that would influence him in the other direction.

He was quite clear in his own mind as to a course of action for himself, but he had no wish to assume responsibility for his school-mate.

When evening came, Raiph found himself in a very divided frame of mind. There was really nothing to prevent him from going to the meeting, for Mr. Ferguson had so arranged the study hours that they would not be interfered with.

'I didn't promise Mr. Rose to go every time,' he reasoned with himself. 'I only said I'd go as often as I could.'

Yet, in spite of the truth of this, his conscience kept urging him to go, and the end of this matter was that he went, moving with slow, reluctant steps, not at all characteristic of him.

But when Mr. Rose greeted him warmly at the door and led him to a seat well to the front, his depression of spirits vanished, and he felt glad that he had persevered in coming.

The power of the Spirit was very manifest at this meeting, and several of those present were moved to take a decided step Godward.

Ralph felt sure that Mr. Rose's eyes looked very directly into his again and again, when he was pleading with the people to surrender to their rightful Lord. Yet, although the minister's affectionate appeals touched him deeply, he held out against them that time.

The fact was, he still was in much perplexity and doubt as to what the yielding to the minister's urging implied. He had very vague ideas as to the duties of religion, and the notion that it was a matter for old folks rather than for boys was too deeply implanted to be readily uprooted.

Nevertheless the influence of the service was to bring him a little nearer the point of decision, and as he left he readily enough promised Mr. Rose to be there the next evening.

The third service being held on Wednesday evening, which was the time of the regular week-night meeting, was much more largely attended than the preceding ones

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had been, and the interest was correspondingly greater.

Mr. Rose seemed inspired in his almost passionate earnestness of persuasion, and Ralph, who sat right in front of him, felt all his objections and prejudices melting away like snow before the heat of the sun.

'I am only asking of you the most reasonable thing in the world,' urged the minister, 'when I plead with you to give your hearts to Christ. If you are still in the days of your youth, then be glad that you can enter so early into the blessed service of the Master; and if you have been spared to see many years without giving God His due, then let no more time be lost in repairing the wrongs which you have been committing.'

'To young and old alike I say, "Now is the accepted time." Never again in your lives, be they long or brief, will you have a more fitting opportunity. Your Saviour stands with open arms ready to receive you. I beseech you, delay no longer, but come, come, come.'

There was marvellous power in the preacher's appeal. Not in the words only, but in the

tones of his voice and the expression of his countenance.

Ralph, sitting right before him, and losing nothing of the force of his influence, was lifted from his seat by an impulse he made no effort to resist, and moving swiftly forward, he knelt at the communion rail.

'Praise be to God!' Mr. Rose murmured, placing one hand on the boy's bowed head and lifting his eyes upward.

As if moved by Ralph's example, others went forward also, until the railing was filled with those who thus manifested their determination to be numbered among the followers of Jesus.

Frequent and fervent were the exclamations of praise that came from the lips of the veterans who had been earnestly praying for such a scene as was now before them; and when the ordinary service had been dismissed an after-meeting was held, at which Mr. Rose sought to have a few words with each of those who had gone forward.

Ralph was glad when his turn came to be spoken with. His heart was in a strange tumult, and his feelings so overcame him that

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he could hardly control himself sufficiently to make any answer to Mr. Rose's tender questions.

Yet there was comfort in his presence, and it seemed as though he would have been willing to remain all night if the minister would only keep him company.

But there were many claims upon Mr. Rose's attention, and after a few words of prayer with him, and a promise to try and get over to see him the next afternoon, he had to go on to others, who were no less eager for his ministrations.

Ralph went home that night with feelings so divided between exaltation and depression that he hardly knew himself.

One moment he was glad that he had come out frankly on the Lord's side, and the next he was tempted to despondency lest he would never be able to stand, but would be overcome by the first temptation that beset him.

It was all so new to him, this matter of religion. He had really everything to learn, and, naturally enough, imagined that it would all have to be learned at once, and then these were the questions he put to himself :

'What will Harold think when I tell him? Will he laugh at me, and say I've made a goose of myself?'

He could not conceal from himself with what anxiety he looked forward to the avowal.

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CHAPTER VI

Under Stress

THERE was no one in the dormitory when Ralph returned, and he took advantage of the solitude to kneel down by his bed and pray for strength to keep the vow he had taken of fidelity to Christ.

He rose from his knees with his heart so aglow that for the time all fear of his fellows had vanished, and without hesitation he went into Harold's room to tell him what had taken place.

Harold, by virtue of being the head boy of the school, had a room to himself, a little chamber at the end of the hall, of which he was very proud.

Ralph found him deep in a difficult problem of mathematics, but as soon as he entered Harold looked up with a bright smile of welcome.

‘Hullo, Ralph!’ he said. ‘Where have you been? I haven’t seen you since supper.’

‘I’ve been at the meeting, Harold,’ replied Ralph, ‘and it was such a good one, and—and—’ In spite of himself the words hesitated on his lips.

‘And what?’ asked Harold, still looking up into his face.

‘And I decided to be a Christian,’ continued Ralph, finishing the uncompleted sentence, while a rosy blush suffused his cheeks.

‘Indeed,’ responded Harold in a tone whose significance was by no means plain; and then, as if anxious to forestall further confidences on Ralph’s part, he hastened to add, ‘Mr. Rose must be glad that the meetings are doing so well. But you mustn’t go in for religion, you know, and neglect your studies, or you’ll stand a poor chance for the prizes.’

While Harold was speaking, Ralph felt the glow that had filled him a few moments ago yielding to a sense of chill which made him ill at ease, so that only with much difficulty was he able to say:

‘Oh, I’ll not let my lessons suffer. I must go and finish them now before bed-time.’

'Bring your books in here,' said Harold cordially. 'You can study better here than in the big room. There's not so much noise.'

'I've only a little work to do, thanks,' replied Ralph, 'and my books are all in the schoolroom. It's not worth while lugging them up here. Good-night, I hope you'll get the answer to that problem all right.'

At any other time Ralph would have accepted his friend's invitation gladly, but now a feeling of estrangement sprang up suddenly.

Harold's attitude towards the special services, and the way in which he had received Ralph's announcement, seemed to separate the two friends, to place a barrier between them that gave Ralph much concern.

'I do wish he wasn't so queer about the meetings,' he murmured regretfully. 'I wonder why he acts so. You would think he was afraid of them doing him harm instead of good.'

He was eagerly awaiting Mr. Rose, when he called the next afternoon, and they had a long talk together, which gave him great comfort and cheer.

'You have a big battle before you, my dear

boy,' said the minister, 'but never for a moment forget that the Lord is on your side, and that leaning upon Him you cannot fail. Be faithful in prayer, and in the reading of the Word, and day by day grace will be given you sufficient for all your needs. Strive to be not only good, but good for something in God's behalf. Let your light shine at all times, and in all places. That is what it is to be a Christian.'

While the meetings continued Ralph attended them regularly, and found them a great source of strength. It was when they came to an end, and he fell back into the ordinary routine of life that the real trial of his religion came.

He was the only one of the boys at the school that had been led to give his heart to God, and this made his position peculiarly difficult.

Being naturally impulsive and high-spirited, he could be easily led into exhibitions of temper, and it seemed to him as if the other boys were only too eager to give him causes of irritation, in order that they might have the laugh on him if he gave way to anger.

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name upon him—' Religious Ralph '—of which he soon heard, although they never used it to his face, and it tried him sorely, for he was keenly sensitive to ridicule in any form.

If only he had had the help of Harold's sympathy and support, he would not have had so hard a time of it, but it seemed as if a chill had come upon their friendship, and they were no longer the inseparable companions they had been previous to Ralph's conversion.

In the early part of the winter, before the snow fell heavily, there was always some good skating on a large pond within walking distance of Hawthorne Lodge, and the boys were wont to make the most of their spare time while the sport lasted.

Ralph, having been a regular attendant at the rink in Halifax, was quite a good skater, in fact, one of the best in the school, and he hailed the return of the skating season with great delight.

On Saturday afternoons they used to have exciting games of hockey, into which he entered with characteristic ardour.

' Ralph's religion hasn't spoiled his play anyway,' remarked one of the boys when, after a

brilliant run and some very clever dodging, Ralph had sent the puck flying through the goal posts, and so won a long-contested game.

'No, indeed,' was the response. 'He's a rattler at hockey, and no mistake. I wish I could play as well, even if I'm not pious.'

Ralph was captain of one of the teams that afternoon, and the contest had been very exciting, Harold being captain of the other side.

As dusk drew near each side had won three goals, and the feeling of rivalry had grown so keen that the players were losing control of their tempers, and becoming inclined to fly at one another in the heat of the struggle.

Among those on Harold's side was a big rough boy named Budd Joyce, who followed Ralph persistently, and strove by every means, fair or foul, to check him, and interfere with his play.

He did not belong to the school, but had begged to be allowed to join in the game, and as he was a good player Harold was glad to have him.

Several times he had tripped Ralph up with his hockey-stick, and although he was ready

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enough with profuse regrets and apologies for his awkwardness, Ralph knew well enough that the tripping was by no means accidental.

'Look here now, Budd,' Ralph had said to him, not threateningly, but in a voice that showed he understood his tricks. 'That's not fair, and you know it's not. You can keep from tripping me if you like.'

Budd's only reply was a sneering laugh as he circled off after the puck, leaving Ralph to recover himself from the tumble.

Just as it was getting so dark that the game would soon have to cease, Ralph, getting the puck in front of his own goal, made one of his dashing charges down upon his opponents.

Evading, by a sudden turn, Harold, who came out to meet him, and dodging a couple of his supporters, he had a straight run for the goal, when Budd rushed at him from the side, and without making any pretence of attempting to get the puck thrust his stick in between Ralph's feet in such a way as to hurl him headlong on the ice, fortunately not giving him any serious hurt, but causing him a great deal of pain, and utterly foiling his attempt on the goal.

Cries of 'Foul! foul!' were uttered by players on both sides when they saw Budd's dastardly expedient, and they quickly gathered together, in expectation of a row, for which the most of them were in just the right temper.

Ralph picked himself up as rapidly as possible, and went after Budd with his eyes flashing and his fists clenched so tightly that the knuckles were white.

'You mean coward!' he cried, his whole frame quivering with passion. 'What did you do that for? You might have broken my neck!'

'Punch him! Ralph—punch him!' shouted the boys, relishing keenly the prospect of a fight. 'He played you a dirty trick. Give it to him!'

For an instant it seemed as if Ralph was about to do as they bid him. Drawing himself up, he bent towards Budd, who had a scared look on his face, for, like all bullies, he was a coward at heart.

The boys held their breath, in expectation of the blow that seemed so imminent.

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himself. His clenched fists were opened, his arms dropped to his sides, and in a voice that was subdued almost to gentleness, although it still shook a little from stress of feeling, he said:

'I am sorry I called you such names, Budd, but I was so mad I did not know what I was doing. If you hadn't tripped me, I'd have got that goal sure. But it's no use crying over spilt milk.' Then turning to Harold, he asked brightly: 'Is it too dark to play any more?'

These kind, pleasant words, breathing as they did the genuine spirit of religion, filled the boys with astonishment. So complete a victory over unholy temper they had never before witnessed, and they hardly knew what to make of it.

None of them was more taken aback than Budd Joyce. Fully anticipating the attack which he had so maliciously provoked, Ralph's remarkable self-restraint fairly dazed him.

'Well, I never!' he exclaimed, gaping foolishly, while his arms, which assumed a posture of defence, dropped nervously in front of him.

Had he been a boy of breeding, he would have shown his appreciation of Ralph's be-

haviour by promptly apologising for his own misconduct.

But so fine an action was beyond him, and all he could do was to look foolish and ill at ease until Harold relieved the situation by saying in his own frank-hearted way :

'Say, boys, Ralph has given us a lesson I hope we won't forget in a hurry. We are too fond of getting into rows about trifles. Hurry up now, and let's have one more game before it's too dark.'

Harold's proposition was warmly received, and in the excitement of the final game, which was won after all by Ralph's side, they soon forgot what had occurred.

But Harold did not forget. Ralph's conduct, under the trying circumstances in which he had been placed, made a profound impression upon him, and it was only in accord with his honest sturdy character that as they walked home from the pond he should take the opportunity of expressing his admiration.

'You came out of that grandly, Ralph,' he said, giving his arm a warm clasp. 'Budd richly deserved a good crack over the head for his mean trick.'

Ralph's face filled with joy at Harold's words.

'It's very good of you to say so, Harold,' he replied. 'I oughtn't to have lost my temper at all, even if Budd did act meanly, but I'm glad I didn't strike him.'

'The boys won't call you "Religious Ralph" for fun after this,' said Harold with a meaning smile. 'You've shown them that you're in earnest, and they won't doubt you any more.'

The radiant expression on Ralph's countenance as Harold said this was beautiful to witness.

CHAPTER VII

The Snow-Shoe Tramp

THE incident of the hockey match did much to restore the old relation between Ralph and Harold, and their intimacy seemed as cordial as before ; still Ralph could not fail to be conscious of the fact that with whatever freedom they might converse on other topics there was one that Harold firmly tabooed ; and yet that was the very one upon which Ralph was most eager to unburden his mind.

Realizing, however, that in Harold's present temper nothing could be gained by unwise persistence, Ralph resolved to keep his own counsel, and to bide his time, trusting that the opportunity would yet come for what he so eagerly desired.

The event of that winter was a memorable snow-shoe tramp out to the farthest edge of the Grand Pré.

The idea originated in Harold Lyster's fertile brain.

As already explained, Hawthorne Lodge commanded a clear view of the wonderful expanse of rich level land which had been redeemed from the sea by means of great dykes ; and one day in January, Harold, looking out over the vast area now covered with a dazzling blanket of snow, turned to Ralph and said :

'Do you see those farmhouses away out there on the edge of the Grand Pré?'

'Yes,' responded Ralph. 'What about them?'

'Well, I was just thinking,' returned Harold, 'that it would be a good notion to have a snow-shoe tramp out there and back on Saturday afternoon. The snow is in fine condition just now.'

'Hurrah for you, Harold!' cried Ralph, clapping his companion on the back enthusiastically. 'What a great head you have! That's a splendid scheme. How many will you ask to go?'

'Oh, as many as care to come,' answered Harold. 'The more the merrier's the rule for a snow-shoe tramp. You're all ready, I suppose?'

'Yes, I'm ready. My snow-shoes are in good shape, and I'm just aching for a long tramp,' Ralph replied.

There was no difficulty in making up the party for the tramp.

Every one who could boast a pair of snow-shoes wanted to go, and Harold made no objections until the two smallest boys in the school volunteered their company, and then he felt bound to put in a protest.

'No, no, youngsters,' he said kindly, yet firmly. 'It's too long a tramp for you. You'd be sure to peg out before we got home, and some of us would have to carry you. Wait until next Saturday, and we won't go so far.'

Their eyes filled with tears and their lips quivered, but they saw that Harold was quite decided, and so they resigned themselves to being left behind.

As soon as possible after dinner the snow-shoe party got off, Harold leading the way with Ralph next him, and one of the senior boys acting as whipper-in.

There were just a dozen of them, and they looked very well indeed, as strung out in Indian file they made good progress right across

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country, their blue and scarlet *tuques*, white blanket coats, and scarlet sashes, giving them a very picturesque appearance.

They were all in high spirits, for, although the day was not as fine as could be wished, the sky being heavily overcast and the air a trifle too keen, the freedom from school tasks, and the delightful sense of healthy vigour, set their nerves a-tingle with joy; and they shouted, and laughed, and sang lustily as they traversed the swells and hollows of the drifted snow.

When they reached the level of the Grand Pré, where no fences broke the absolute whiteness of the expanse with their straight dark lines, nothing would do the boys but they must have some races. Harold opposed the idea.

'You'll need all your wind and muscle before you get back to the Lodge,' said he warningly, 'and you'd better not waste them in foolish racing now.'

They were too full, however, of the idea to be persuaded out of it, and so he consented to act as starter and referee, rather than seem to be disagreeable.

Ralph being influenced by his chum's opinion, did not at first enter into the races, which

evoked abundant amusement and excitement, owing to the frequent falls of the competitors.

But after several contests had taken place he was challenged by Lem Anderson in a way that he felt he must respond to.

Lem was in some respects the most unpopular boy in the school. He was a tall, angular chap, with lantern jaws and high cheek bones, and had a rasping voice, which he used in a drawling way that gave it a peculiarly irritating quality.

Ralph had always felt an antipathy towards him, and the fact that since he had given his heart to God, Lem had been especially free in his attempted sarcastic remarks and sneering asides could not fail to render him still more repugnant to him.

'What do you say to a little brush with me, Ralph?' Lem called out in such a way as to attract the attention of the others. 'You've been lying low for somebody, I guess, and I don't mind having a try with you, if your church-going notions don't interfere.'

The mere words were harmless enough. By themselves they might have been no more than a bit of banter. It was the tone in which they

were spoken, and the look that accompanied them, which made them sting like the stroke of a whip. Ralph flushed hotly, and Harold, foreseeing trouble, was about to interfere, when the former, drawing himself up, and setting his lips so that they might keep back the angry retort that rose to them, said in a tone whose steadiness surprised himself :

'All right, Lem. I'll give you a race if it won't keep us too long.'

Lem's ugly features were lit up with a triumphant smile, as he bent down to tighten the strings upon his snow-shoes.

He felt quite confident of his ability to defeat Ralph, and keenly relished the prospect of thus humiliating him in the presence of his companions.

Ralph, on the other hand, had little hope of out-running Lem, who had been snow-shoeing for several years, while this was only his second season.

But he was determined to put his best foot forward, and not to confess defeat until he was incapable of further effort.

In another minute the contestants were ready to start. A two hundred and twenty yards

course had been agreed upon, one of the boys going out one-half of the distance to act as turning-post.

The different expressions of the two boys as they stood side by side was certainly very striking, and from the countenance of the on-lookers it was not difficult to judge which of them had their good wishes.

Lem's sharp, sallow face gleamed with a confident smile of triumph that was enough in itself to make one hope that he would be defeated, while Ralph's showed a quiet determination to do his best that could not fail to command sympathy.

The start was delayed a few minutes by Lem's endeavours to get some advantage, and by Harek's precautions to prevent him.

But at last the two got away on perfectly even terms amid shouts of 'Go it, Ralph! Hit her up, Lem!' and so forth, there being two shouts for the former for one for the latter.

Side by side the boys sped over the firm snow until they were near the turning-post, and then Lem, making a great spurt, drew ahead slightly.

He was set upon turning first, and Ralph, foreseeing a collision if he disputed the point with him, allowed him to hold his advantage until they had both circled the boy who acted as turning-post, and had straightened out for home.

Then he summoned all his powers of will, nerve, and muscle for a supreme effort.

He felt sure that if he could only once get by Lem the latter would lose heart, and not be equal to recovering the lead.

Inch by inch he gained, in spite of Lem's frantic efforts, as testified by his laboured breathing and lurching of his head from side to side.

Now he was within a stride of him. Three more strenuous strides, and the point of his shoe was in a line with the end of Lem's, when the latter, making a mis-step, caught his shoes together, and pitched headlong into the snow, leaving Ralph free to run in at his ease.

There was a hearty cheer at his victory, and a round of taunting laughter for Lem, when he, having with some difficulty got on his feet again, came furiously in.

'A foul! I claim a foul!' he cried, his face aflame with anger and his fists clenched, as though he would use them upon Ralph. 'He stepped on my shoe and tripped me—the mean hound, that he is—he knew he could not beat me fair!'

Ralph's countenance, which had been radiant with exultation—for having been forced into the racing made success all the more gratifying—grew white with wrath as this unexpected charge fell upon his ears.

He was as innocent of having caused Lem's tumble as was Harold Lyster himself, and he felt sure that the former was not really sincere in his claim of foul, but was simply making it to cover his discomfiture.

'I never touched you, Lem!' he cried indignantly. 'You know well enough that I didn't. I did not pass within a foot of you.'

He was conscious as he spoke that some of the boys were eyeing him questioningly, and this brought a heightened colour to his cheeks, conscious though he was of his own integrity in the matter.

'You lie!' screamed Lem, who was quite

beside himself with rage. 'You did foul me, and you did it on purpose, too, else you'd never have beaten me!'

Now, there is nothing harder to stand than being called a liar, and when this charge is coupled with the allegation of acting in an unfair and unmanly manner so as to win a race, no ordinary self-control is required.

Ralph's temper, tried to the utmost, succumbed to the strain, and he was about to rush upon Lem with upraised fist when Harold Lyster intervened.

'No, Ralph,' he said, with quiet firmness. 'Don't do that, or you'll be very sorry.' Then turning to Lem, he continued, 'Now, not another word, Lem; you've said too much already. Ralph did not trip you; I saw it all perfectly; you tripped yourself. Come along, fellows. That's the end of the racing. Let us get ahead.'

Glad to be relieved of what they felt to be an unpleasant situation, the boys fell into line with alacrity, and set off again, Ralph taking his place next to Harold as before.

Lem, thus left to himself, stood for a moment irresolute, and then, muttering something that

was inaudible, but was no doubt the reverse of complimentary, started after the rest.

The snow-shoeing was excellent, and the little party made good time out to the edge of the Grand Pré, where they climbed the dyke, and looked out over the heaving bosom of Minas Basin, whose dark waters were far from attractive in the drear afternoon light.

'Any chap feel inclined for a dip?' called out Andy Bell, who was always trying to be jocular.

'Go ahead, and we'll follow you,' answered Harold laughingly.

'Not to-day,' rejoined Andy, with an exaggerated shiver; 'I'm going to have a bath to-night any way, and I won't need both.'

'Then I move we go over to that farmhouse, and see if we can't get a good drink of milk,' said Harold. 'I'm as dry as a lime-kiln.'

'Happy thought!' exclaimed Ralph. 'I've got my purse, and I'll pay for the crowd, if there's no objection.'

A chorus of 'No, sirree!' 'Thank you kindly,' and other expressions of assent made it plain that Ralph's generosity was fully ap-

preciated, and then all moved towards the farmhouse.

Here they were warmly received by the good woman, and milk in abundance placed before them, for which the charge was a mere trifle. The big kitchen felt so warm and comfortable that they were disposed to dally there longer than was wise, and Harold had to be very much in earnest before he could get them all out on to the snow. When they turned their faces homeward, they found a nasty wind blowing against them, and flakes of snow beginning to fall freely.

'We're going to have a tough time of it getting back,' said Harold, with a shade of concern in his tone. 'We shouldn't have stayed so long at the farmer's. It will soon be getting dark.'

It was evident that the boys realized the need of concentrating their energy upon their work, for there was little talking as they pressed forward, and none of the singing and whistling in which they indulged on the way out.

The snow fell more heavily, and the wind gathered strength as the darkness drew on.

Presently it became difficult to keep the right course, and Harold was fain to seek out the road, which, as being a longer route than across country, he had not been following.

'We must get back to the road or we'll lose our way, Ralph,' he said in an undertone, and there was no mistaking the note of apprehension in his voice.

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CHAPTER VIII

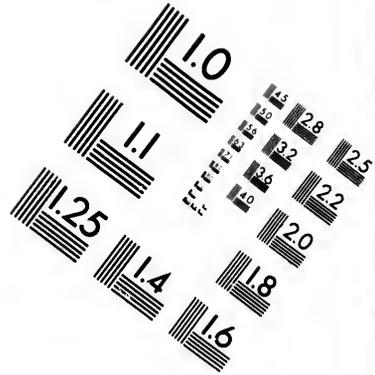
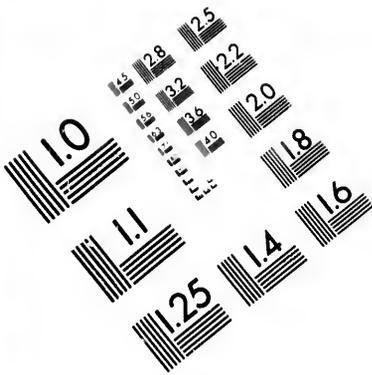
At the Toboggan Slide

THE getting back to the road proved a more difficult matter than Harold had feared.

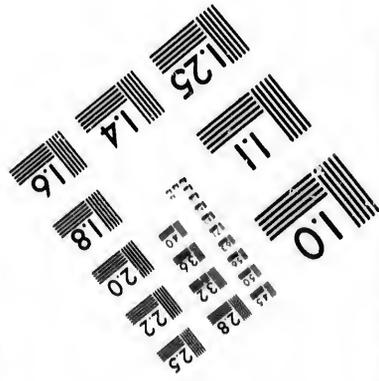
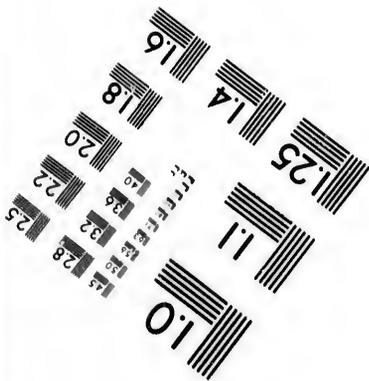
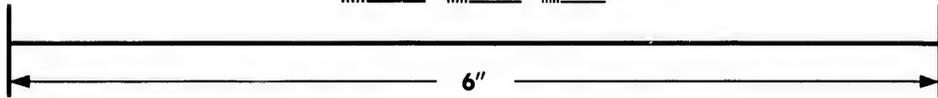
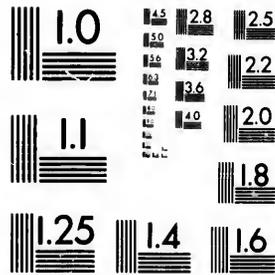
The snow-storm developed into a veritable blizzard, against which the boys found it hard work to struggle. It blinded them with heavy snow-flakes. It beat against their faces so that they could hardly breathe, and it made the walking so heavy that they were rapidly becoming fatigued.

Yet they had at the very least two miles to go before reaching home. One of the most discouraged members of the party was Lem Anderson. All the spirit seemed to have gone out of him, and he lagged behind until Ralph, feeling anxious lest he should lose the others in the bewildering storm, went back to him and said encouragingly :





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‘Brace up, Lem. We’ll soon get to the road, and then it won’t be half such hard work.’

Lem looked at Ralph in a sort of dazed fashion. Was this the boy whom he had been vilifying but a little while previously? He certainly had a queer way of taking revenge for the insults which had been heaped upon him.

Taken aback as he was, the best that Lem’s churlish spirit would permit him to do was to mutter ungraciously :

‘Don’t you worry about me. I’ll manage all right.’

But the words had hardly left his lips when he caught his shoes together in such a way as to tumble him headlong ; and in an instant Ralph was beside him, helping him to his feet, and saying kindly :

‘That was a cropper, Lem. Did you break your shoe?’

A little softened by such persistent good offices, Lem replied in a more amiable tone :

‘No, thanks ; nothing broken.’

‘Then let us catch up to the others,’ rejoined Ralph ; and so they quickened their pace until they were close up to their companions.

Harold was still peering through the blinding snow for the anxiously sought road, and at last hit upon it just when he was beginning to despair of finding it, and to wonder if it would be possible to find their way back to the farmhouse.

With the well-defined road to guide them, the getting home was only a matter of time and trudging, and after another hour's steady work the weary boys hailed with joy the lights of Hawthorne Lodge sending their welcome gleam through the thickening gloom.

They found Mr. Ferguson in a state of considerable anxiety.

Indeed, he was meditating getting some of the neighbours to join him in a search party if the boys did not soon return, and he gave his pupils a sharp scolding for having overstayed their time at the farmhouse, and thus brought upon themselves the danger through which they had passed.

After this incident Lem Anderson manifestly softened in his bearing towards Ralph, and although it was not possible for them to be what the boys call 'chummy,' for they had

little in common, still they could get along well enough on the new basis.

That was a famous winter for snow. Not only was the snow-shoeing unusually good, but the tobogganing left nothing to be desired by the most captious schoolboy.

Within easy reach of Hawthorne Lodge was a long hill that sloped steeply down to the Gaspereaux River, offering natural facilities for a toboggan slide that could hardly have been surpassed by artificial means.

Here not only the boys from the Lodge, but many others from the homes round about gathered every fine afternoon, and had glorious times shooting like meteors down the smooth incline, and then hastening back to the top to repeat the performance.

They would have thought it hard work, this long walk back, dragging the toboggan after them, were it imposed them as a task, but being done for their own amusement, they never dreamed of demurring, or of loitering over it, for the more slides they accomplished in an afternoon the better they were pleased.

No one enjoyed the sport more than Ralph. Thanks to the ample allowance made him by

his father, he was able to have a toboggan of the finest make, luxuriously cushioned, and provided with three silver sleigh bells hung beneath the upward curving front, which rang out merrily as the toboggan shot down the slide.

He was proud of his toboggan, which ran faster than the majority, and of his skill in steering it to victory in the 'brushes' that were continually taking place.

Saturday afternoon was always the gayest time on the hill, for then the girls of the neighbourhood put in an appearance, and shared with the boys in the delights of the sliding.

Ralph was still too much of a schoolboy to feel at ease in the society of the other sex, and while he was ready enough to lend his toboggan to Harold Lyster in order that he might take a couple of the girls down, he could not muster up courage to do the same thing himself, despite the meaning glances that fell upon him from more than one pair of sparkling eyes.

One afternoon, when the crowd at the slide was greater than it had hitherto been, and there were far more eager candidates for a trip down than there were toboggans to accommo-

date them, Ralph's compunctions were aroused by seeing so many waiting their turn, and he felt that he must be more hospitable with his toboggan.

To break the ice, so to speak, he turned to one of the poorest-looking girls, a shabby little creature about twelve years of age, the daughter of a shiftless farmer living near by, and said pleasantly :

'Would you like to go down with me?'

The girl was so surprised at the unexpected invitation that she hung back bashfully for a moment, blushing warmly, although she was wild to accept, and Ralph repeated his request, taking no notice of the meaning looks of some of the other boys, who thought he was exposing himself to ridicule.

At the second asking the girl responded gladly :

'Just wouldn't I! I'm dying to have a slide.'

There was a titter among the bystanders at the naïve response that made Ralph eager to be off, so he said rather brusquely :

'Sit down then, and we'll start.'

Whereupon the girl plumped down awkwardly upon the cushions, and after directing

her to hold on to the hand-rail, he gave the toboggan a push, and threw himself upon it.

At the same moment Tom Burns, with whom he had already raced several times, without the question of superiority being definitely settled, called out :

'I'm after you, Ralph,' and giving his toboggan a great shove, sent it down beside the other.

The way seemed clear for a race, and Ralph answered the challenge with a gay 'All right, beat me if you can,' while the two toboggans shot down the icy slope.

Now, not content with the natural inequalities of the hill, which were quite enough to impart a considerable amount of variety to the descent, the boys had improved upon nature by building 'bunkers,' as they called certain banks of hard snow, over which the toboggans leaped after the manner of horses going over hurdles.

These bunkers not only lent excitement to the sliding, which might otherwise have become monotonously uniform, but a spice of danger also, as, if not dexterously managed, the toboggans were apt to 'slew' from their

course, or even to turn over, and thus give those on them a nasty tumble.

Ralph and Tom were careering down so close together that they could almost touch each other, and had passed the first two of the bunkers all right.

But as they approached the third and largest there ran out upon the slide a foolish little dog, which proceeded to bark at the flying toboggans, and to frisk about right in their way.

Now Ralph had a tender heart, and was particularly fond of dogs, and he could not bring himself to run over the provoking creature.

He accordingly, with a swift, hard stroke of his foot, made his toboggan swerve sharply aside, while Tom, not being troubled with any compunctions, went straight over the dog, knocking the breath out of it completely, yet not killing it, and it was able to crawl away looking the very picture of abject terror.

Tom went on with his speed in no way slackened, but Ralph was not so fortunate. The sudden swerve of his toboggan threw it out of the well-beaten course, and it came violently into collision with a hard frozen hummock.

The shock was a severe one, and the little girl flying up into the air described a short parabola, and fell head first ten feet away.

To Ralph nothing worse happened than to be pitched forward on the toboggan, and bump his nose against the curve of the front.

The girl, however, was made insensible by her fall, and Ralph, having hastened to pick her up, was greatly alarmed at her seeming lifeless condition.

'Can she be killed?' he asked himself, holding her limp little form tenderly in his arms. 'Maybe her neck is broken!' A natural enough apprehension, in view of the way the poor thing had been thrown.

Just then a couple of the girls who were returning from a slide came up and inquired what was the matter.

On Ralph expressing his fears, they laughed them away.

'Why, she's only fainted,' one of them said; 'she'll be all right again in a minute.'

Sure enough the girl presently opened her eyes, and seemed much perturbed at being the object of such keen interest.

'I'm only hurt a little,' she murmured; 'I

can go back myself ;' for Ralph in his solicitude was holding her arm, and gently pushing him aside, she went off to her home.

The boys, of course, could not resist chaffing Ralph over the incident, taking him to task ironically for having preferred the dog to the girl; but he took it all good-humouredly, and to show that he was not to be daunted, or sent into the sulks, forthwith challenged Tom Burns for another race, each to take one of the elder girls on his toboggan.

Tom promptly accepted. There was no difficulty in securing companions. The course was clear all the way down, and after a very exciting race, Ralph, amid the cheers of the other spectators, won by a good length, thanks quite as much to his excellent steering as to the speed of his toboggan.

After this Ralph felt much more at his ease, and was very generous in the issuing of invitations to slide with him, so that he soon became one of the most popular frequenters of the hill.

What with work and play, study and recreation, the winter months slipped pleasantly by, and the spring drew near.

Ralph and Harold had imperceptibly but

surely slipped back into their former relations, and to all outward appearance were as intimate as ever.

Yet, as both clearly understood, there was one subject with regard to which they stood aloof from each other, and intensely as Ralph longed to bridge the gulf, he came to recognise, after more than one futile attempt, that his efforts were vain, and that he must needs abide his time, and trust in Providence to afford him the fitting opportunity he so eagerly desired.

As winter melted into spring, and spring bloomed into summer, Ralph took an increasing interest in his studies, for the examinations were drawing nigh, and he was laudably ambitious for success.

Mr. Ferguson had a very excellent system of measuring and rewarding the diligence of his boys. The prize list did not by any means depend upon the final examinations, so that a bright boy, quick at cramming, could by a spurt at the end make up for neglect during the term. The honours awarded were based upon the daily work, as well as upon the results of the examinations, and the steady plodder

consequently had fair play no less than the brilliant pupil.

Ralph had no remarkable ability, but ever since the change in his life he had applied himself faithfully to the school work, and now stood an excellent chance of winning one, if not more, of the prizes that would be awarded at midsummer.

So anxious was he to hold his ground that when, one lovely Saturday in May, Harold proposed a boating trip on the Basin, he at first declined, as he wanted to stay in his room and study, and it was only after some persuasion that his chum prevailed upon him to accompany him.

They set off from the wharf in a large, roomy sail-boat under the charge of its owner, four of the boys comprising the party, and sailed away in highest spirits, little imagining what an exciting experience they were to have ere they returned to the Lodge.

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CHAPTER IX

Lost in the Fog

THE tide was just on the ebb when the sailing party started, and the wind favouring, they made good progress down the river, and out into the broad basin.

So thoroughly fine and settled seemed the day that Harold, looking across the dancing blue water to where the vast dark bulk of Blomidon loomed up grandly, was moved by the sight to exclaim :

‘What do you say to going across to the cape? The tide is with us, and we can stay there until it returns, and then come back with it. I’ve never been to Blomidon by water, and I’d like to go that way.’

The proposition was received with a chorus of approval and assent from all but the owner of the boat.

He demurred, on the ground of the distance, and of the chance of the wind becoming contrary. He also suggested the possibility of a fog coming in from the Bay of Fundy, and altogether seemed much indisposed to accede to Harold's suggestion.

But the boys were so determined that he had perforce to give way, and the boat's course was headed for Blomidon, whither the steady breeze carried her at a fine rate of speed.

When the cape was reached, the boys landed to search for amethysts awhile, receiving from the boatman the injunction not to go far away, nor stay long, as he was none too sure of the weather.

With the best of intentions they set off on their quest, and soon separated into two pairs, Harold and Ralph keeping together as a matter of course.

They found no amethysts near at hand, and were thus led to wander farther from the boat than they really intended.

In fact, they had left it quite out of sight, and in their anxiety not to return empty-handed had forgotten about it for the moment, when the boatman's hail reached Ralph's ears, and

presently he appeared waving his arms and shouting at the top of his voice :

‘Ahoy, there ! come back ! come back !’

Apprehending some trouble, Ralph and Harold were about to promptly obey, when they bethought themselves of their two companions, and on looking around for them were dismayed to find that they were nowhere to be seen. ‘Why—what’s become of Bob and Frank ?’ asked Ralph with a tinge of concern in his tone. ‘They can’t have got very far already.’ Then raising his head, he shouted at the top of his voice :

‘Bob ! Frank ! where are you ? Come back !’

There was no response, and after waiting a moment, Harold said, ‘You didn’t fetch them. Let me try,’ and he sent forth a hail that startled the echoes of the cliff, for he was very strong of lung.

This stentorian summons reached its object, for an instant later Frank Hill appeared around a distant corner which had hidden him from sight, and beckoned for the other boys to go to him, at the same time calling out something that they could not understand.

'No, no. You come here, and hurry up,' Harold shouted back.

But instead of obeying, Frank pointed around the corner, and then repeated his beckoning.

'What's the fellow about?' exclaimed Harold somewhat angrily. 'We'll have to run over and find out.'

'All right!' responded Ralph, and the two started off, greatly to the wrath of the boatman, who had all the time been continuing his calls.

On reaching Frank his action was soon explained.

Bob had slipped on a sea-weed covered boulder, and got an ugly fall, which had partially stunned him, besides spraining his ankle, so that he was quite incapable of moving.

Harold acted with prompt decision.

'Here, Ralph,' he said, 'let us make a chair for him with our hands, and hustle back to the boat.'

No sooner suggested than acted upon. The groaning boy was tenderly lifted, and his kind porters made as rapid progress as they could over the rough beach, Frank relieving them by turns, as Bob was rather a heavy weight for his age.

When, nearly exhausted by their efforts, they at last reached the boat, they found the owner in a state of wrath that even poor Bob's mishap did not serve to moderate.

He rated the boys for their delay, and pointing out to the Bay of Fundy, exclaimed angrily :

'Look at that, will you? I was nothing but a fool to let you have your own way, and now we are in for it finely.'

Glancing in the direction indicated, they saw a great bank of fog moving slowly but steadily towards them, and then they understood the reason for the man's excitement.

It would not take long for the fog to overspread the whole Basin of Minas, and their only chance lay in getting across before it enfolded them.

Without loss of time Bob was lifted into the boat, and fixed as comfortably as was possible in the stern.

Then they shoved off, hoisted the sail, got out oars, and put forth every effort to reach the opposite shore in advance of the fog.

The wind had shifted so as to enable them to make a long straight tack, and the boat under

the double impulse of sail and oar moved so swiftly through the water that the boys' spirits, at first depressed, began to rise again.

'We'll get across all right, I think,' said Harold, who was tugging away manfully at the stroke oar.

'Of course we will,' chorussed Ralph, looking to the boatman for confirmation of his sanguine statement.

But the boatman shook his head grimly.

'You're crowing too soon, young fellows,' he growled. 'If you'd a come when I called you first, we'd have been all right.'

For a quarter of an hour they toiled away, the silent fog ever creeping insidiously nearer, until at last it enveloped them completely, and with a half-smothered oath the boatman flung the tiller from him, muttering :

'That settles us. We're in for it now.'

The situation of the boat was certainly one to cause grave apprehension on the part of the occupants.

They were now in the very centre of the broad Basin, and to make a course for home was quite impossible, seeing they had no compass nor any other means of guidance.

So dense was the fog that it altogether shut out the sun; and moreover the wind, which had hitherto been blowing steadily, now became light and baffling, so that the boatman, fearing a sudden shift that would take him unawares, deemed it wise to lower the sail.

As there was no use in rowing about aimlessly, the oars were shipped, and the boat allowed to drift at the bidding of the wind.

The boys strove manfully to maintain a cheerful front, and Harold was particularly talkative, doing his best to conceal his real concern under a pretence of serene indifference; but the unrelaxing gloom of the boatman, who paid no more heed to his amusing speeches and stories than if he had been stone deaf, presently proved too much even for his well-meant energy, and he gradually fell into silence.

Poor Bob, who was suffering a great deal of pain, could not suppress his moans entirely, and this naturally added to the distress of the situation, for the boy really required a doctor's hand to attend to the hurt in his head.

Ralph did all he could to soothe and cheer him, and when other means failed started singing a familiar hymn, in which the other

boys quickly joined, and the beautiful melody of 'Jesus, Lover of my soul,' went out over the tossing waters with all the vigour of their young voices.

This proved so comforting that they sang that hymn through twice, and then called upon Ralph for another and yet another, until he could respond no longer, having exhausted both his *repertoire* and his voice.

The hours dragged slowly by, and still there was no sign of the fog lifting. With the approach of evening the wind fell to a dead calm, and the boat seemed completely motionless, although it was in reality moving slowly at the bidding of the current.

'It looks like being out all night unless we run ashore somewhere,' said Harold in a tone of cheerful resignation. 'We're safe enough anyway so long as the wind doesn't rise.'

'Safe enough, oh yes,' growled the boatman, 'unless we're run down by something, or get caught in the tide-rip.'

Neither of these contingencies had presented themselves to Harold's mind before, and the suggestion of them brought back the gloom to his face, noticing which, Ralph gave him a

sympathetic grasp of the arm, and said in a low voice :

‘We’re in God’s hands, Harold. Let us put our trust in Him, and hope for the best.’

When night fell, the darkness was so intense, owing to the fog shutting out the starlight, that the boys could scarcely see one another, and for the sake of the comfort of companionship they crowded close in the stern, all of them being too hungry and weary to think of much else than their own miseries.

And so the long hours drearily dragged on, the boat still drifting aimlessly, and the fog giving no hope of lifting, until at last, about half-way between midnight and daybreak, the boat bumped against a rock, then against another, and finally got herself caught between two in such a position that she could not move in either direction.

‘Now we’re done for!’ exclaimed the boatman, who certainly took pains to make the situation as bad as possible. ‘We’ll be swimming for our lives in a minute or two.’

But in spite of his startling prophecy the boat seemed to have suffered no injury, and the boys’ panic subsided when they saw that they

were really no worse off than they had been previously.

The tide being on the ebb, nothing could be done in the way of freeing the boat until it rose again, and the return of day found the castaways high and dry on a rocky shore whose location they would not be able to determine until the fog gave them the opportunity.

Happily, as the sun rose, the fog began to lighten, and presently vanished altogether, letting the sun shine unchecked upon the broad expanse of the Basin, whose blue waters dimpled and smiled as innocently as if they could not be capable of doing harm to any one.

The weary, hungry occupants of the boat now found themselves on the extreme point of Cape Blomidon, with a great stretch of breeze-ruffled water between them and the place whence they had set forth the previous morning.

And then at last the ill fate which had hitherto persistently befell them gave way to a better fortune. The rising tide soon lifted the boat off her rocky bed; the breeze, which rapidly strengthened, was blowing in just the right direction, and making good use of both

sail and oars, they traversed the Basin so rapidly that ere midday they were back at the wharf, where they found Mr. Ferguson just getting another boat ready to set off in search of them.

He was so rejoiced at their safe return that he quite forbore to give them the lecture they fully expected, contenting himself with the execution of a promise that they would never again venture so far unless he accompanied them, which pledge they were only too glad to give.

Bob's broken head and sprained ankle troubled him considerably for some days afterward, but otherwise none of them were the worse for their experience, and the boatman, being paid double the amount originally stipulated, had the grace to admit that he was quite satisfied.

This was the last of their all-day excursions that season, for the midsummer examinations were drawing near, and all the boys in the school who were ambitious for a good showing gave themselves diligently to the work of preparation.

There was a keen rivalry between the resident pupils and the day-scholars of Hawthorne

Looking with reference to the winning of the prizes, Mr. Ferguson's impartiality in awarding them being above all question, and in this rivalry none shared more ardently than Harold Lyster and Ralph Gardiner.

Without in any sense considering themselves the champions of the residents, they were determined to do their best, no less for the sake of their class than for their own satisfaction.

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CHAPTER X

Won from Death

THE former intimacy between Ralph and Harold being now thoroughly restored, they always studied together in the evenings, and were of great mutual help, although they had not many subjects in common, Harold being for the most part in advance of Ralph.

Ralph's *forte* lay in the direction of such studies as arithmetic, history, and geography, while Harold was strong in classics and mathematics.

In their hearts they aspired to a first place in these branches, and would spare themselves no pains to attain it.

Ralph's thoughts at present did not go beyond the completion of his course at Hawthorne Lodge. He did not yet know what

might be his father's plans concerning his future.

But Harold had his career already outlined. Having won his way to the headship of the school, he would retain that honour until the end of his residence. Then in due time he would proceed to the University, and having graduated thence with honours, would go out into the world of work and striving, and not be content until he had established his right to a prominent place among his fellows.

But how often it happens that while man proposes, God disposes! Undreamed of by either Harold or Ralph, an event was approaching that would frustrate all their hopes of prizes that midsummer.

About a fortnight before the examination Harold showed signs of illness—headache, flushed face, and sore throat, that gave Mr. Ferguson much concern, although at first he kept his fears to himself.

On the doctor being called in, he, too, shook his head gravely, and directed that Harold be placed in a room as far as possible from the rest of the household until he felt quite sure as to the nature of his sickness.

On the following day all doubt was dispelled by the increasing gravity of Harold's symptoms, and the announcement was made that the disease was the much-dreaded diphtheria, and that the utmost care must be taken to prevent it spreading.

Great was the consternation in Mr. Ferguson's household at the doctor's declaration. The school would have to be closed for a week at least, to make sure that none of the other boys were affected, and accommodation would have to be arranged for the sufferer outside Hawthorne Lodge, so that the other resident pupils might not be exposed to risk of infection.

In the rear of the house was a small cottage, which had not been occupied for some time, but was in thoroughly good condition, and the doctor said that it would serve admirably as a temporary hospital.

It was accordingly fitted up for the purpose without delay, and poor Harold carefully removed thither.

Then arose the question, Who was to take care of him? There were no trained nurses to be had. His own home was so far away that

his parents could not come to him for several days, and in the meantime he imperatively needed constant attendance.

The question did not go long unanswered. So soon as Ralph knew of what was needed, he volunteered for the service.

'I will look after Harold,' he said, with quiet resolution. 'The doctor can tell me what to do, and I'll promise to do it faithfully. I think Harold would rather have me than any of the other boys. We've always been such good friends.'

Mr. Ferguson felt reluctant to accept Ralph's offer, but he was in great straits; and as the doctor, after a little talk with Ralph, expressed his approval, it was finally so arranged, and that afternoon Ralph entered upon his duties.

He was quite aware of the risk he was running, but he had not a tremor of fear about it. His heart was too full of love and sympathy for his friend to have room for thought of self, and before he went over to where Harold lay, he spent many minutes on his knees praying for Harold's recovery, and committing himself to the protection of his Heavenly Father.

The days that followed were full of anxiety. Harold's case proved to be a very serious one, and the time came when even the doctor, a man of no small skill, and great faith in himself, had small hopes of his recovery.

Ralph's devotion to his self-imposed duty could not have been surpassed.

'You are a born nurse,' said the doctor, with warm approval. 'You seem to be able to anticipate your patient's needs, and that means much in cases like this. If we get Harold through all right, you'll be fairly entitled to one half the credit.'

Ralph's face, already pale by confinement and long hours of watching, lit up at the doctor's kind words.

'It's very good of you to say so, doctor. But Harold will get well, won't he?'

The doctor was slow in replying to the eager question.

'The disease is going hard with him,' he said at length. 'But he has a splendid constitution, and I am far from giving him up yet.'

It was not a very definite answer, yet Ralph had to be content with it, and being of a san-

guine nature, he was cheered by the element of hope it contained.

Harold was too ill to speak his thanks for Ralph's faithful nursing, but his grateful looks expressed them fully, and Ralph knew that he had got nearer to his heart than he had been in the very height of their friendship.

Side by side with the intense anxiety for Harold's recovery there was in Ralph's mind the affectionate desire that the illness might be the means of opening his heart to the Saviour.

'Surely if God spares his life he won't resist Him any longer!' he murmured to himself in the course of a long watch by the bedside, when Harold seemed nearer death than ever before.

Many were the prayers Ralph sent up, not only that his friend's life might be spared, but that his soul might be saved. With nothing less would he be fully content.

What a glad day it was for him when the doctor announced that the crisis was passed, and that the tide had turned in Harold's favour! Unless some unexpected change set

In, the worst was over, for Harold's splendid constitution had conquered.

In his joy at the news, Ralph for the time forgot all his own weariness, and felt like running around the neighbourhood to spread the good tidings.

He did hurry over to Mr. Rose's, and the two held a little praise-meeting in the minister's study, and then joined in fervent petition that the danger through which he had passed might lead Harold to realize his soul's need, and no longer withstand the Gospel message.

The following afternoon, as Harold was already beginning to mend, and could converse without difficulty, he and Ralph had a long talk together, in the course of which Harold tried to express his gratitude to his friend for his loving devotion.

Ralph now saw his opportunity to say what had been in his heart for so long.

'But oh, Harold!' said he, taking the boy's thin white hand between his own, and pressing it tenderly, 'if you think so much of my being willing to be your nurse while you were sick, how much more you ought to think of Him who laid down His life for you, and who

loves you now far more than any one on this earth possibly can !'

A deep flush came over Harold's pallid features, and his eyes filled with tears, but it was some moments before he made any reply, and Ralph had too much perception to break the silence by any further words of his own.

Presently Harold looked up at his friend with a strange yearning expression on his face.

'You must think me very wicked, Ralph,' said he gently. 'And so must Mr. Rose. But don't be too hard on me. I am different from most other people, I think ; and although I believed every word Mr. Rose said, it didn't seem to touch my heart at all. But since I've been so sick and you've been so good to me I've come to see how much I need the religion that you have. Won't you pray for me, Ralph ?'

Ralph's countenance glowed with joy as he listened to Harold, and he could not withhold a little shout of joy.

Pray for him indeed ! When had he knelt in prayer since his own conversion that he had not lifted up his heart fervently for Harold,

who stood next in his affections to his own parents ?

'I *have* been praying for you, Harold dear,' he exclaimed, 'often and often ; and oh ! how glad I am that you have asked me now ! Won't you pray for yourself too, and wouldn't you like Mr. Rose to come and see you ?'

'I would like Mr. Rose to come,' replied Harold, 'if he'll forgive me for being so obstinate before.'

Ralph needed no further permission, and Mr. Rose promptly obeyed the summons, braving the risk of infection in his loving zeal for souls.

The three friends had many meetings during Harold's convalescence, and as the latter grew stronger in body he also grew clearer in understanding of the way of peace, and of faith in the atoning love of the Saviour, so that he came forth from the sick-room to enter into the service of the Master.

In the great joy over his friend's recovery and conversion, Ralph found ample compensation for the loss of the hoped-for prizes ; and Harold was too glad and grateful to repine, though his absence from the school-room

cost him for a time at least his place as leader.

The influence exerted by the two boys during the remainder of their stay at school was very marked.

Without a whit abating their interest in the studies or sports, or in any wise holding themselves aloof from their companions, they yet seemed to live on a higher plane, toward which others were led to aspire.

Mr. Ferguson did not hesitate to affirm that never before were his pupils so easy to manage as during the following term. The example of the two friends was a constant check to insubordination or neglect of work. As he said one day in a laughing way to Mr. Rose :

‘It seems hardly fair for Harold and Ralph to be paying full fees. They are as much help to me as two assistant masters.’

When in due time the inevitable separation came, the two friends found it very hard to bid one another farewell.

But it chanced that their ways in life lay far apart, and in the years that followed they seldom met.

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