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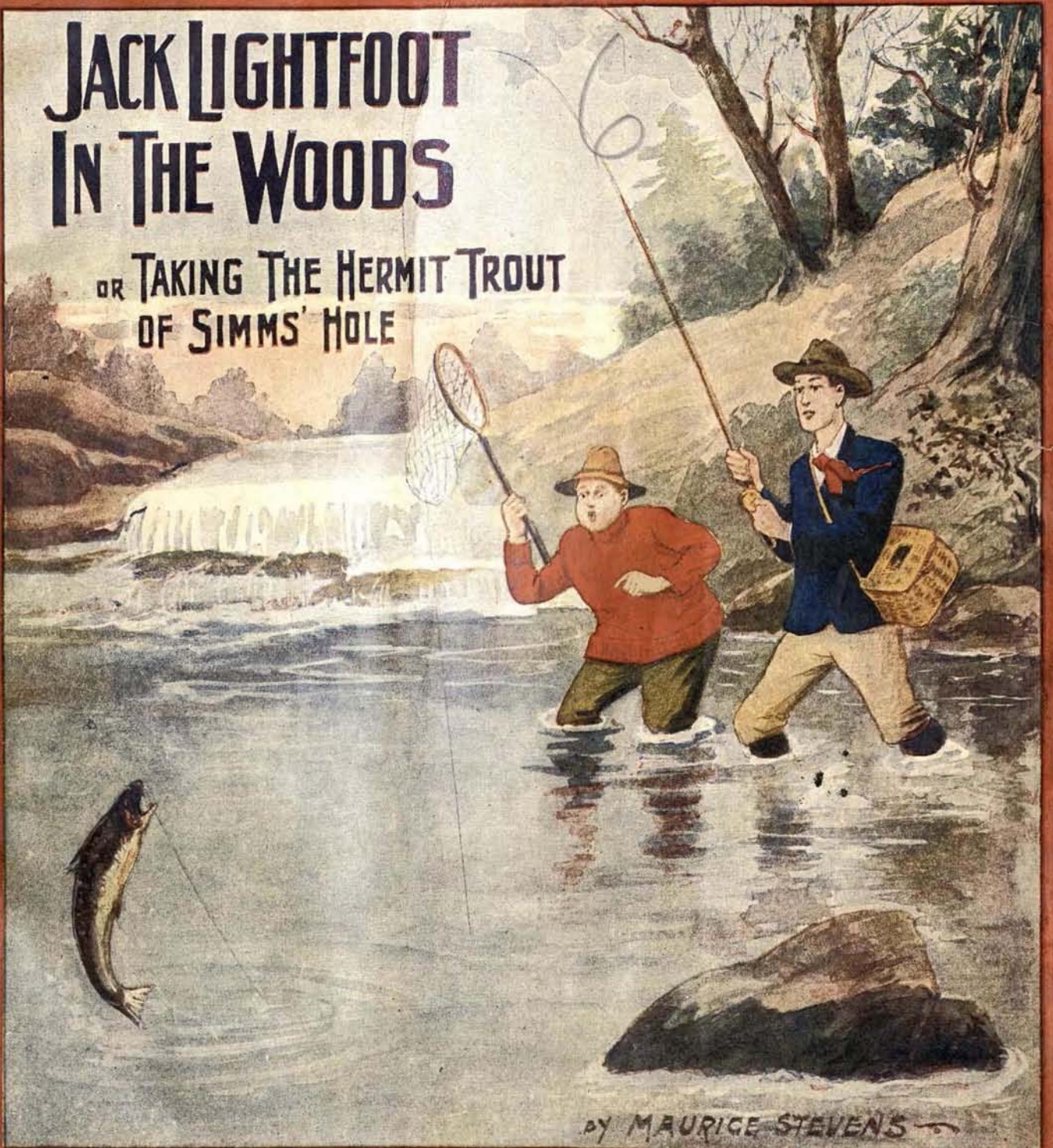


ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY



JACK LIGHTFOOT IN THE WOODS

OR TAKING THE HERMIT TROUT
OF SIMMS' HOLE



BY MAURICE STEVENS

There was a sudden splash, a flash of silver in the air, and a shout from Lafe, for Jack Lightfoot had actually hooked the foxy old trout of the swimming-hole.



Publishers' Note. "Teach the American boy how to become an athlete, and lay the foundation for a Constitution greater than that of the United States."—Wise sayings from "Tip Top." There has never been a time when the boys of this great country took so keen an interest in all manly and health-giving sports as they do to-day. As proof of this witness the record-breaking throughs that attend college struggles on the gridiron, as well as athletic and baseball games, and other tests of endurance and skill. In a multitude of other channels this love for the "life strenuous" is making itself manifest, so that, as a nation, we are rapidly forging to the front as seekers of honest sport. Recognizing this "handwriting on the wall," we have concluded that the time has arrived to give this vast army of young enthusiasts a publication devoted exclusively to invigorating out-door life. We feel we are justified in anticipating a warm response from our sturdy American boys, who are sure to revel in the stirring phases of sport and adventure, through which our characters pass from week to week.

ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

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No. 5.

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JACK LIGHTFOOT IN THE WOODS;

OR,

Taking the Hermit Trout of Simm's Hole.

By MAURICE STEVENS.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Jack Lightfoot, the best all-round athlete in Cranford or vicinity, a lad clear of eye, clean of speech, and, after he had conquered a few of his faults, possessed of a faculty for *doing things* while others were talking, that by degrees caused him to be looked upon as the natural leader in all the sports Young America delights in—a boy who in learning to conquer himself put the power into his hands to wrest victory from others.

Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, and sometimes his rival; though their striving for the mastery was always of the friendly, generous kind. Tom was called the "Book-Worm" by his fellows, on account of his love for studying such secrets of nature as practical observers have discovered and published; so that he possessed a fund of general knowledge calculated to prove useful when his wandering spirit took him abroad into strange lands.

Ned Skeen, of impulsive, nervous temperament, one of those who followed the newcomer, Birkett, being dazzled by the dash of his manner, and the free way in which he flung money around.

Nat Kimball, an undersized fellow, whose hobby was the study of *ju-jitsu*, and who had a dread of germs.

Lafe Lampton, a big, hulking chap, with an ever present craving for something to eat. Lafe always had his appetite along, and proved a staunch friend of our hero through thick and thin.

Bob Brewster, a brawny lad, against whom Kimball tried his Jap tricks with poor results.

Saul Messenger, one of Jack's cronies, and called "Fighting Saul" by his mates.

Nicholas Flint, who had a rod in pickle for Jack.

Bat Arnold, Flint's ally in mischief making.

Kennedy, the town constable.

Peleg Brown, an odd character living near the "ole swimmin' hole."

Jerry Mulligan, the jolly owner of a part and horse.

Ezra Bean, who delights to play the wild man, and scare honest people by appearing as a ghost.

CHAPTER I.

THE HAUNTED GYM.

Whack, crack! whack, crack! Lub-brub-blub!
Bang! Thump!

These were the sounds that came from the gymnasium over the old carriage shop and caused Jack Lightfoot and the boys with him to jump for the doorway, for the purpose of investigating.

"Howling mackerels!" Ned Skeen gasped, as the sounds continued. "Hear that? It's getting worse."

Even lazy Lafe Lampton was stirred into a quick run.

The boys had been near the gym, on their way to it, for a meeting of the high-school athletic club was to be held there that night.

They had expected to light the lamps and get the fire to going well in the big stove, so that everything would be comfortable when the other members arrived.

Thump! Crack! Blub-rub-bub! Whang, thump! "Jiminy crickets!" said Lafe. "Somebody's got in there and is smashing everything up for us."

That was the thought of all.

They knew they had some enemies in Cranford; and they suspected these evil wishers, rather than any of their rivals of the Cranford Academy club.

Yet there were some members of the academy organization who were mean enough, they believed, to do that very thing—smash up the apparatus in the high-school gym.

It may be well to explain to any who have not read the previous stories in this series that the gymnasium, spoken of here as the high-school gym, did not belong to the high school in any proper sense, but to the club of young students, whose captain and leader was Jack Lightfoot.

The clubroom and gym occupied the upper floor of an old and abandoned carriage shop, and was given, rent free, to the boys by Norwell Strawn, proprietor of Strawn's, dry-goods store, whose daughter, Kate, had been saved from drowning by Jack Lightfoot at a time when she skated into a hole in the ice of Cranford Lake.

"Wow! the scamp must be tearing the doors down!" said Bob Brewster, the big, red-haired giant of the club. "If I get my grippers on him I'll twist his neck."

"We'll paste him for that, fellows!" cried Ned Skeen.

Jack Lightfoot had done more running than talking, and reached the door first.

He fitted the key quickly to the lock and flung the door open.

Then the boys raced for the stairs that led to the upper floor.

Before they gained the stairway the sounds had ceased.

"Go outside, some of you," Jack commanded. "Some may try to get out by the windows and jump down from the shed roof."

Bill Brewster and Nat Kimball turned back, Nodding fairly falling on himself as he struggled to get out the door quickly.

Jack mounted lightly to the top floor, with Ned Skeen and Lafe Lampton at his heels.

The gym was still dark—so dark that when they reached the door at the head of the stairs and had thrown it open they could not even see the furnishings.

They stood there a moment, breathing hard and listening.

There was not a sound, other than what they made themselves.

"Look lively out there; don't let him get off the roof!"

Jack shouted this to the boys outside.

Then, with trembling fingers, he struck a match.

One of the kerosene lamps used in lighting the gym was on a stand by the door, and when the flame of the match revealed nothing he lit the lamp.

"He isn't in here!" said Skeen, and turned to descend the stairs, in order to watch from the outside.

In doing so he stumbled and fell half the length of the stairway, bringing up at the bottom with a clatter.

"Any bones broke?" Jack queried.

"N-no; I'm all right!"

With a sense of relief they heard him leap up.

One of the boys outside, having heard that clatter, came bounding through the doorway.

"Stay outside!" Skeen bellowed at him. "I don't think he's in the gym."

"Then he's on the roof," Brewster was heard to

clare. "He hasn't got off of it, for we've been watching."

Jack now advanced into the gymnasium, holding the lamp before him, and was followed by Lafe Lampton.

When he had proceeded a yard or two he stopped and looked about, trying to flash the light into the dark corners.

Both Jack and Lafe had a nervous feeling, that was not fear, as they expected momentarily to see the author of those strange sounds bounce out of some corner and leap for the stairway, or for a window.

When nothing of the kind happened Jack went on again, holding up the lamp.

They crossed the room, discovering nothing.

"No one in here!" said Lafe.

"No!"

"What's become of him?"

Jack walked up to a pile of boards, from which some new gymnastic apparatus was to be made by the club members.

He looked behind this; then swept his glance round the whole of the room.

What surprised him as much as anything was that not a thing within the gym seemed to have been disturbed. The Indian clubs, dumb-bells, leaping pad, chairs, in fact all the movable articles, were in place, and appeared not to have been touched.

Jack was mystified.

Going to the nearest window opening upon the shed roof, he looked out on the shed.

As before, Lafe followed him, and also looked out. The night was rather dark, though stars were shining.

"There's no one on the shed, I think," said Jack.

Then he called to the boys below:

"You must have let the fellow get by you!"

"Not on your life we didn't!" came the answer.

"Well, there's no one here."

"Oh, he's in there somewhere."

Jack withdrew his head, and made another search of the gym, with the same result.

"There's nobody in here, and I know it!" Lafe declared, when they had gone over the whole upper floor three or four times.

"You're right; there's no one here."

"And nobody on the shed roof."

"We couldn't see anyone there."

Lafe whistled.

"Jiminy crickets, this is queer!"

"Too queer for anything," admitted Jack, feeling undeniably foolish and nervous. "He must be either here or on the shed roof, or else he got away."

"He might be in the room below," Lafe suggested.

It seemed almost impossible that this could be so; for the boys had been almost at the foot of the stairs before the strange whacking and thumping in the gym had ceased.

Nevertheless, Lafe lighted a lamp, and with this in his hand he went downstairs and began a search through the old carriage shop.

Jack went to the window again, and informed the boys of what Lafe was doing, and asked them to still keep a sharp lookout.

By and by he went himself down into the lower room, carrying his lamp, but leaving another one lighted in the gymnasium.

The boys outside were in a state of mingled suspense and mystified curiosity. It seemed to them that anything might happen now.

On the lower floor were stored some old buggies, wagons and broken-down carriages, together with rusty tires, splintered wheels, and the like.

Jack searched all over this lower floor, accompanied by Lafe, and did not stop until it was certain no one was hiding there.

Then he went to the door.

"Well, this is a puzzler, fellows! There isn't a soul upstairs nor down. There's no other place that chap

could have gone to; so he must have slipped out upon the shed roof. I'm going up to the gym and climb out on that roof. If he's there I'll find him."

"Look out that he don't tackle you and pitch you off," Skeen warned.

"He must be on that roof," said Jack, "unless you let him hop down and skip out here right under your noses."

"Not so much as a mouse hopped down here!" Nat Kimball asserted.

Jack went again into the gymnasium and climbed out on the shed roof.

He took with him a lantern, not willing to trust his sight in that poor light; and with this means of illumination, he searched the shed roof from one end to the other.

"Nothing up here!" he shouted.

"Howling mackerels!" cried Skeen, who was now in a nervous fever.

Jack retraced his way to the gym, and closed the window.

Then he went downstairs again.

"Fellows," he said, and his tone was serious, "where did that chap go? It's a riddle, and I'm not good at guessing."

Even yet the boys were not willing to believe that the person, who had invaded the gym and made all that noise, could have escaped from the building; and they proposed a further search.

Other members of the club began to arrive, and they joined in this search when they heard the strange and startling story.

Upstairs and downstairs, on the shed roof, under and in the old buggies and carriages, the club members looked.

When at length they gave it up as hopeless, and gathered in the gymnasium, with nearly every member present now, some of them had passed from astonishment to superstition.

Arlo Kilfoyle gave voice to what some of the others were beginning to think, when he said:

"It looks to me as if the old place must be haunted!"

"Haunted, your granny!" cried Nat Kimball.

"Well, you believe in things as queer as that!"

"What? Tell me what?"

"Germs, for instance."

"Well, that's science and common sense. Everybody knows there are germs, and a lot of them; but whoever saw a ghost?"

"Whoever saw a germ?"

"They can't be seen, of course, without a micro——"

"And ghosts can't be seen unless you're in a proper condition to see them!"

Jack Lightfoot laughed.

"We must have been in proper condition to head them to-night!"

"That's just it; you were!"

"All of us?"

"Every one of you."

Jack laughed again, for Kilfoyle seemed to be in sober earnest.

"Oh, that's all rot!" said Lafe Lampton.

He took out an apple, which he split open with his hands, intending to give half to the boy who sat next to him.

Then everyone laughed, when they saw the two halves of the apple.

"That's rot, all right—that apple!" cried Skeen.

Lafe opened the door of the stove, in which a fire was now roaring, and tossed the rotten apple into it.

"It's all rot about ghosts."

"Well, then, Smarty, you explain what made those noises!" said Kilfoyle. "There was some one in here, according to your own story; but when you came he wasn't in here, and he had no chance to get out."

Kilfoyle looked round; and then almost fell out of his chair, as a strange sound seemed to come from the floor beneath him.

It was like a groan.

"Say," cried Nat Kimball, anxiously and almost angrily, "if any of you fellows have been practicing up on ventriloquism and are trying it here I don't think it's smart of you."

All declared their innocence.

Nat happened to think of ventriloquism, because, in addition to his jiu-jitsu studies, he had been poring over some pamphlets that professed to explain the methods of the ventriloquist.

All sat listening, Kilfoyle with his eyes wide open in a glassy stare of fright.

Nothing more was heard, however.

Kilfoyle got up.

"I'm going home," he said. "You fellows can stay here as long as you please."

He arose and beat a retreat to the stairway, and then drew back when he observed that the lower floor was unlighted.

Taking a lamp, he descended with it; and, leaving it on the floor of the lower room, he departed from the old carriage shop, to tell the story of the strange "manifestations."

The other boys remained, talking the thing over seriously.

But the mystery was not to be solved by talk.

When, at a rather late hour for the club, whose members tried to reach home early after a meeting, they had left the building and were proceeding up the street, their ears were again assailed by those mysterious noises.

Whack! bang! Blub-bub-blub! Thump! bang!

They ran back as quickly as they could; and again, while the outside of the shop was guarded, another search was made.

This search resulted as before.

Nothing could be found, and nothing further was heard.

There were no evidences, the next morning, that the

carriage shop had been visited, except by the club members, and not a thing could be discovered that would give the slightest clew to what appeared to be an impenetrable mystery.

And, as a result, more than one aged woman and man in Cranford stood ready to declare that the old carriage shop was haunted; and they told tales of strange happenings in the shop in days gone by, and especially dilated on the fact that the man who built the shop and ran it at first had fallen into the lake one night and been drowned, and his body had never been recovered.

A more than a ten-days sensation in Cranford seemed to be promised.

CHAPTER II.

PRACTICE ON THE DIAMOND.

The call of spring was stirring in the blood of the boys of the high-school athletic club, as they gathered on the diamond, in the old fair grounds, where the athletic events had been pulled off in the recent tournament.

Signs of spring were becoming apparent.

The snow was gone, the lake and the rivers were clear of ice, and robins were hopping about in search of worms, perking their heads and looking wisely at the passers-by.

Yet, in our changeable climate, winter might return with a suddenness that would cause these signs to be forgotten, and the land might be covered again with snow.

But the high-school boys did not think this likely; and as they stood about, and the ball was thrown from one to another, while bats were flourished, they began to talk of the trip into the woods, which they had planned should take place as soon as the weather was fit.

"By hemlock, I know the fish air bitin'!" said Jubal

Marlin, spreading his wide, good-humored Yankee mouth in a grin.

Marlin attended the high school only when he felt like it, and that made him a very irregular student, indeed.

Yet, as he could play baseball pretty well, and was eligible for membership in the high-school athletic club, he had been chosen as one of the substitute players, and was on the diamond that day for the first practice work of the season.

Ned Skeen slapped a hand to his cheek.

"Howling mackerels, spring is here, fellows! There's the first mosquito!"

"Yeou got the first bite!" said Jubal. "I allow yeou'll make a record when we go fishin'."

"I think I'd like a bite."

It was Lafe Lampton who spoke, and the inevitable apple came out of his pocket.

"How long is that barrel of apples your folks bought last fall going to last?" Jack Lightfoot asked, as Lafe bit into his prize.

"Barrel! We bought ten barrels last fall."

"And you've eaten the most of them."

"Well, you fellows helped."

He broke the apple in two and handed a half to the boy nearest him, as was his habit; then took another bite out of the portion he had reserved for himself.

"By gravy, I feel strong enough tew knock the cover off'n that one ball, this mornin'!" said Jubal, swinging his bat at an imaginary ball. "Just send it over here, fellers, and see me paste it."

He swung the bat left-handed.

"You ought to be a good run-getter, Jube," Jack remarked. "A left-handed batter has an advantage over a right-handed one. He is likely to trouble the pitcher, in the first place; and then he has the advantage of a fine start from the home plate after hitting the ball, and if he is a good runner he will make first base twenty per cent. oftener than a right-handed man."

Jube grinned in a pleased way.

"We'll put you in the outfield," said Jack. "You a good thrower."

Jube grinned again; and the ball being sent to him by Bob Brewster, he proceeded to "knock the cover of it" by lifting a high fly, which Ned Skeen caught without trouble.

"Judgment!" Skeen howled.

"Out!" yelled Lafe Lampton, his mouth filled with apple.

"Give him another, Bob," said Jack, as the ball was thrown to Brewster, "and let's see if he can land it in the left field."

"I can land it any old place," said Jube, with another grin.

Crack!

His bat struck the ball, and again he knocked a high fly, which Skeen again smothered.

"Howling mackerels, baseball practice tingles my heart all up!" said Skeen, as he sent the ball to Brewster.

Lafe threw down his apple core and got behind the batter.

Jack Lightfoot went down to the pitcher's box, and taking the ball, sent in a twister.

"Knock the cover off this!" he invited.

Jubal, with a left-handed swing, drove at the ball, but it dipped downward as he struck, and he fanned the air.

He grinned, as before.

"Oh, that ain't fair! That didn't come straight."

"Try this, then."

Jack threw another drop, but a slow one, this time. Jube struck at it before it reached the plate.

"Judgment!" roared Ned Skeen, falling back on the new green grass and kicking his heels in the air.

"Two strikes!" said Bill Brewster, volunteering umpire.

"Yeou can't dew that ag'in," Jubal declared.

Jack threw another.

It came like a bullet, and twisted to the right, and again Jubal threshed his club through the empty atmosphere.

"Out! Three strikes and out!"

"Now, I'll give you an easy one," said Jack, "and I want you to try to bunt it. A left-handed batter has a good chance, if he can stop the ball with skill; he can, if he is quick, bunt the ball and be away from the plate before it hits the ground. Now, look out; ready!"

He sent in an "easy one," but it was high, and Jubal failed to get it.

But he did better the next time, and bunting the ball down in front of the plate, he was able to reach first.

"You've got to look lively there, Lafe," Jack warned. "No time for apple eating."

Lafe Lampton walked out leisurely, and as leisurely threw the ball down to the box.

"But this isn't a real game," he urged.

"No, it isn't—just practice; but if we're slovenly and slow in practice we'll be that way when we go into a real game. Quickness, alertness and sureness—those are the things that count."

Nat Kimball took up the club and stepped into position.

"What's the best way to stand?" he asked, as he faced the pitcher.

"That depends on the man," Jack answered. "Some like to stand as close up to the plate as the rules will allow; others stand away from it a little. There used to be a professional player on the Bostons who stood nearly three feet away from the plate, and he was a great batter; but he was a remarkable exception."

He was turning the ball round in his hands as he talked, and looking at Kimball.

"That's a pretty good position you've got now," he said. "But remember one thing, you're to watch me. If I were pitching in a game I'd try to throw you just

the kind of ball you weren't looking for; or, if I had found out what was the hardest ball for you to bat, I might throw you that. If you keep your eyes well peeled you can often detect a curve, just as it breaks in its course, and have time to land on the ball."

He threw, with a quick jerk, and the ball coming straight, though with good speed, Kimball cracked it out into left field.

Arlo Kilfoyle, who was out there, fumbled it, and almost fell down, and Kimball took second.

Kimball, on second, began to look for a chance to steal.

Jack spoke to him.

"There's just one thing, Kimball, I want to call your attention to now. When you hit the ball and get away for first, never look back to see where the ball has gone; judge that from the action of the first baseman. You slowed up, when you looked back, and you might have been put out."

"But I made second!" Kimball argued.

"True, you did, this time. But I'm giving you rules to cover your base running generally.

Thus the practice on the diamond went on; and all the while Jack Lightfoot was carefully sizing up his men, and judging as best he could in what positions they would be able to do their best work.

All kinds of sports, and baseball especially, seemed to come as a natural knack to Jack Lightfoot; yet no boy in Cranford had studied the game more closely, or practiced more assiduously.

In addition to this he was a born leader, knowing how to get the best work out of those under him; and, though he had his failings, as most boys have, he had innumerable good qualities to offset them.

The entire time of the boys was not given, however, to practice and the discussion of the rules and the fine points of ball playing.

They could not get out of their minds the strange occurrences in the gymnasium the preceding evening.

"Oh, this talk that the gym is haunted by the ghost of that old fellow who was drowned, and who first owned the building, is the worst kind of rot!" said Lafe, emphasizing his belief by a wise shake of his head.

"Well, I'd just like to meet the guy who is trying to be smart in that way," was the assertion of fighting Saul Messenger.

"We'll watch for him to-night," said Jack. "I've already spoken to Kennedy, and he's going to keep an eye out down there, to see if he can discover anybody lurking round the building."

None of the fellows, not even Arlo Kilfoyle, was willing to believe now that there was anything supernatural in the noises they had heard, strange as those noises had been.

Daylight had strengthened Kilfoyle's nerves.

Ghosts are never seen by daylight, and even the most superstitious feels that he can defy them when the sun is shining brightly over his head.

"Still, fellows, the thing was awfully queer!" Nat Kimball asserted.

"Howling mackerels, queer was no name for it!" said Ned Skeen.

And everyone there could agree to that.

CHAPTER III.

A PAIR OF PLOTTERS.

Nicholas Flint, dark, sinister of features, with high cheek bones, and black eyes that glittered like those of an Apache, was making his way across lots, some distance above the diamond.

His way lay between the old fair grounds, where the high-school boys were practicing, and the railway, that ran from east to west through the town of Cranford.

From his higher elevation he could look down into the fair grounds and see the boys, as he had already heard them.

As he looked, the black eyes glowed and snapped with hidden fire.

Flint did not like Jack Lightfoot.

"It will do me good to get a chance to punch the head off of that guy!" he muttered, standing in the open lot and looking down at the pitcher's box, from which Jack was handing out those practice balls. "He thinks he's too smart for anything! Oh, I'll hammer him!"

Flint's particular grievance at this time was that Jack had refused to let him substitute on the new high-school nine.

He did not attend school much, but he fancied that this should not disqualify him.

It did not, in truth, for Jube Marlin, who could not be called a regular school attendant, was on the list of substitutes.

What disqualified Nicholas Flint, in Jack's estimation, was his utter unreliability, his untruthfulness, his quarrelsome disposition, and the fact that, altogether, he was about as unpromising a boy as could be chosen for he was no ball player, and likely never could become one.

What Jack Lightfoot sought for, was good baseball material; and while he was glad to have his friends on the nine, if they were good players, he would not ever put a chum on, unless that boy could add strength to the nine.

And, certainly, if he would not put on a friend who was a poor player, he would not use so wretched an athlete as Nicholas Flint, just to please him and avoid his anger.

"When I get through with him he won't be able to lift his arm above his head, let alone pitch a ball," Flint threatened, mouthing away to himself in his rage as he walked on. "Oh, I'll hammer him!"

Then he stopped; for, coming to a little hollow where the sun beat in warmly against a stone, he saw

lying there the one boy he was just then anxious to see—Bat Arnold.

"Hello!" said Bat, looking up lazily, for the warm sunshine made him feel indolent.

Nick Flint glanced quickly around, and then dropped as quickly into the cavity where Bat lay.

"I've been watching the high-school crowd down here," said Bat; then added, in an ironical way—"you ought to be on that nine!"

Nick did not catch the irony in this; he thought the words were spoken in sober earnest.

"I would have been, but for that puppy, Jack Lightfoot!"

Bat laughed lazily.

"Oh, I mean it! I wanted to play substitute. You know I can run!" continued Flint.

"Oh, you can run, all right!" admitted Bat, laughing again, when he remembered that he had once seen Nick running like a sprinter from Kennedy, the night watchman.

"What are you laughing about? I don't see anything funny."

"I don't see anything funny—but you!"

"Me?"

"Yes, it's funny that you should imagine for a minute that Jack Lightfoot would let you sub. He'd never do it. You don't belong in his crowd; you ain't fine-haired enough. You've got to be swell and away up, you know; a nice little, clean little, honest little boy, to play with such a darling as Jack Lightfoot!"

He spoke with a sneer; then laughed again, in a way to make Flint's dark cheeks flush.

"Jube Marlin isn't swell, or rich, or away up; and, when you come to that, Jack's mother hasn't got any money much, that I ever heard of!"

"Oh, well, you can be swell without money. Comb your hair nice, you know, and get the girls to think you're it, and the ladies to speak sweet things about you, and you are all right. I know!"

There was little danger that the ladies of Cranford, or anyone else, would be likely to speak in very favorable terms of Bat Arnold, if he did not mend his ways and his disposition; but Bat did not think of that.

Flint looked down upon the diamond, that flush on his face, and his black eyes snapping.

Then he shoved a hand into his pocket.

When it came out it held a hundred dollars in green backs.

Bat Arnold's eyes rounded, and he stared in amazement.

He had never seen Flint with so much money, and felt sure he had not come by it honestly.

The sight of those bills almost frightened him.

"Where did you get that?" he asked, in awe.

Flint counted out five ten-dollar bills, and threw them to him.

"What do you want me to do with them?"

"They're yours."

"To keep?"

"Yes, to keep—perhaps."

"Where'd you get 'em; that's what I want to know?"

"Oh, don't look at 'em that way; they're not counterfeit!"

"But where did you get 'em?"

Flint took them again, and held them alluringly in his hands.

"How would you like to have this fifty dollars, and fifty more on top of it?"

A covetous look came into Bat's eyes, and he thrust out his round, bullet head significantly.

"Try me," he said, at length. "What you got up your sleeve?"

Flint wadded the bills together.

"I know of a feller who'll give that much, and more, to have Jack Lightfoot done up."

"Killed?" Bat gasped.

"No, of course not."

"What's he want done?"

"Well, if we thump the very old tar out of Lightfoot the feller I'm speaking of will be satisfied."

"Is this chap a man?"

"Yes, he's a man."

"Why don't he do it himself, then?"

"That's his business!"

"See here, did somebody give you that money just to get you to whip Jack Lightfoot?"

"He wants him more than whipped; he wants him used up."

"What for?"

"That's his business!"

Bat Arnold looked incredulous.

"I'll bet I know who that man is!" he said, finally.

"I'll bet you don't!"

"It's Prof. Sanderson."

Flint stuck his tongue in his cheek and winked.

"Go ahead with your guessin'."

"I know it's Sanderson."

"Would he take such a risk?"

"He don't like Jack."

"But would he take such a risk? The people of Cranford wouldn't stand for a thing like that."

"If they didn't know. Ah! come; it's Sanderson!"

Nick Flint winked again.

"It's no difference to you, is it, who hands over the swag, if you get it?"

Bat Arnold was silent again, thinking this over.

He had discovered that Prof. Sanderson, of the Cranford Academy, did not like Jack Lightfoot.

Yet it did not seem to him that Sanderson would be such a fool as to risk his position and his popularity by such an undertaking as Nicholas Flint had outlined.

"You won't say it's Sanderson?"

"I won't confess who it is. All I'll say is, that here is a hundred dollars, and there's to be a hundred more, when Jack Lightfoot is put out of business for the season."

"For the season?"

"That's what I said, didn't I? For the season! I wants to be made a subject for a doctor and a hospital. Not any little cheap thrashing, but a regular hammering, that will simply half kill him."

"So that he won't be in shape to lead his athletic team this summer and beat the academy boys at basketball? Is that the ticket?"

Bat was still thinking that the man who wanted it done must be Prof. Sanderson, who would naturally not like to have Jack Lightfoot head a nine that would lay it over the nine from the academy.

"I'm not giving this thing away," said Nick Flint. "I've told you all you need to know."

"Why didn't you take the contract, instead of coming to me with it? Then you'd had the whole to yourself, a hundred."

Flint's Apache face flushed again.

"You knew you wasn't equal to the undertaking, guess!"

"Think what you please," said Flint. "Do you want to get into this thing with me, or not? I've told you all I'm going to. Here's a hundred, and you can have half of it right now. When Jack is polished off in good shape there's to be another hundred, and you can have half of that."

Bat Arnold twisted uneasily on the grass. Plucking one of the grass blades, he set it between his teeth and chewed at it reflectively.

"Say," he said, suddenly, "is the feller that gave you that the one who kicked up that hullabaloo about Lightfoot's gym last night?"

"Do you think Sanderson would have done that?"

"I hadn't thought so, no; but it came to me that maybe this millionaire that's throwin' his money round so free might be the feller that kicked up the racket about the gym."

Nicholas Flint again stuck his tongue into his cheek and winked knowingly.

"Bat, what you don't know will never hurt you!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"That if you don't know too much, you'll not have to tell too much, if our game falls through and we get caught. If anything happens, I'm a regular Know Nothing; I never heard of any man, nor ghost in the gym, never saw any money, haven't the slightest knowledge of Prof. Sanderson—don't know anything. I simply join the Know Nothings, and keep my mouth shut. You might be leaky; and that's why I'm not going to tell you any more than I've got to."

Bat Arnold did not like this plain speaking.

"Can't you trust me?"

"Sure; I'm trusting you, when I stand ready to hand over this fifty dollars to you!"

"You ought to tell me the whole thing," Bat insisted.

"I won't. I'll tell you this, though. If I felt sure I could handle Jack Lightfoot alone I wouldn't have come to you. I'm offering to divide with you to get your help. Might's well be frank, you know!"

Bat Arnold rose to his feet, as if angered; then, thinking better of it, or longing too much for that money, he dropped down again.

"How's this going to be done?" he asked.

"Are you ready to go into it with me? I want to know that first."

"Maybe."

"You haven't any cause to like Jack Lightfoot any more than I have. He's done you mean, just as he has me. He thinks he's away above you, and looks down on you; you're no better than the dirt under his feet, to him."

He was appealing now to the baser feelings of the boy he was trying to overpersuade.

"He didn't treat me bad, at the time of the tournament!" said Bat.

"And another thing—you want the academy nine to win in the games that are being talked of for this season. Knock Jack out, so that he can't play, and

can't lead his nine, and your fellows of the academy will have a walk-over."

"Oh, we can beat those high-school scrubs, anyhow!" Bat boasted.

"Well, you'll see."

"Jack didn't do such-a-much in the baseball games last season."

"He batted your fellows out of the box, in the next to the last game; and in the last game he simply struck you out like one—two—three. I was there, and I saw it."

"Oh, he can't do it again! He's got a nine that will go to pieces, all right, all right!"

Nicholas Flint began to lose his patience. He stuck the money into his pocket.

"All right," he said. If you don't want that hundred dollars I can find a fellow who does. And if you say anything of what I've said to you about it, why, then, you and I will mix, and I'll pound your face off."

Bat Arnold chewed hard on the grass blade, and ignored this.

He wanted that hundred dollars.

"You haven't told me how this thing is to be done?" he reminded.

"Well, I'll tell you. Lightfoot and his friends are going on an outing into the woods, down by Simm's Hole. We'll lay for him down there."

"Is that the only plan you've got?"

"I've got some other things in my mind, but I'm going out to Simm's Hole first and take a look around before I'm ready to say what they are. Does that satisfy you?"

Bat Arnold did not answer at once.

The good and the bad in him were struggling for supremacy.

He wanted that money, but he did not like the means that were proposed to enable him to get it; and, worse

than that, he did not want to do anything that might get him into trouble with the officers of the law.

"I feel sure of one thing!" he declared.

"What is it?"

"For all that you won't say it, I'll bet Prof. Sanderson is back of this thing, and that he knows all about that monkey business in the gym last night. That was done to scare Lightfoot's crowd. I don't see what it amounts to, though. What does it accomplish, if they do get frightened by that?"

Nick Flint again winked, and thrust his tongue knowingly into his cheek.

"Bat, what you don't know will never hurt you!" he said again.

And he would explain no further.

"Will you go into it?" he demanded, finally.

"Ye-yes, I think I will; but I'll tell you to-night."

"You never had a chance to make a hundred dollars so easy," Flint urged. "Make up your mind quick. I'm going down to Simm's Hole this afternoon, and when I get back I must have an answer. If you don't want the hundred dollars, I know of a fellow who'll be glad to finger it, and do what I want done."

CHAPTER IV.

A REQUEST.

One of the places in which Jack Lightfoot loved to work and to study was the shed room, at home.

It was back of the house, and connected with it, so that it was a part of the building.

Being warmed by a good stove in winter; there Jack had his books, his tools and workbench, and some gymnastic apparatus, which he had used industriously long before the gift of Norwell Strawn made the upper floor of the old carriage shop into a gymnasium.

Here came Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, Lafe Lampton, and others of Jack's friends, to talk and while away spare hours, and to study, or use the workbench and the tools.

Jack's friends found the shed room a pleasant place whether in summer or in winter, and Jack Lightfoot a pleasant company and a staunch friend at all times.

Lafe Lampton chanced to be in the shed room on that particular afternoon, talking with Jack of the practical work of the morning, and of the mysterious happenings in the gymnasium the night before.

Suddenly a man came round the neat, white-painted house, having admitted himself into the yard by the front gate, and, advancing to the door of the shed room, knocked on it.

Lafe got up and opened the door.

The man who stood there was a singular character known throughout the county as Deaf Peleg. His name was Peleg Brown.

He lived in a cabin not far from Simm's Hole, and made his living, such as it was, by a little gardening and a good deal of hunting and fishing, with occasional trapping in the fall and winter.

Peleg stood hesitating in the doorway, then came into the shed room.

"No use to ask him what he wants," said Lafe; "he's so deaf he couldn't hear thunder."

Peleg walked straight across to the writing desk at the further end of the room, where the window gave a good light and a bookshelf showed its volumes; and stooping over the desk began to write on some paper he found there.

Thus bent over and scribbling away, he presented a queer figure.

Though the day had been warm, he was muffled and had on an overcoat, a red woolen "comforter" round his neck, and his cap pulled down over his ears.

He wore no more beard than an Indian, his swarthy face had a cunning look, something like that of a fox, and his little eyes seemed to want to hide themselves in their deep sockets.

In addition, Peleg was toothless; and, though he could not speak, for he was dumb as well as deaf,

lunched his toothless jaws together, as if he were trying to say something, whenever he was communicating with anyone, either by signs or written words.

Having scribbled for some time at the writing desk, Peleg came back toward Jack Lightfoot, working his jaws as he came, and then thrust out the paper he had written.

Both Jack and Lafe read it, and it was a singular and startling communication.

Here it is, just as old Peleg wrote it:

"Twict I have seen a ghost at my house. Night before last he came and stud by my bed. Last night he come again. I was by my pig pen, feedin' my pig; and he come and stud by the corner of the pen."

"Jiminy crickets!" said Lafe Lampton.

Jack took the paper and wrote:

"Tell us more. What did he look like?"

Then Peleg wrote:

"He was tall; hadn't any head nor any neck, but went straight up like a stovepipe from his shoulders."

"Jiminy crickets!" said Lafe.

Again Jack wrote.

"What did he do?"

"Nothing," was the answer.

"Nice ghost," said Lafe, commenting.

Jack wrote:

"Did you see him good; and what do you want to do?"

"Seen him all right," wrote Peleg, "and I want you to come out and see him, too, to-night, or soon's you can."

"Do you believe in ghosts?" Jack asked, writing the question.

"I do, havin' seen one; you come out and take a look; and if it is a man help me trap him."

"Then he isn't sure that it is a ghost," said Lafe. "He isn't as big a fool as he looks."

Peleg wrote other things, but they did not add to the store of information already furnished.

Jack wrote once more:

"We're coming out to Simm's Hole, to camp and fish. I'll hurry the trip, so that we can get to see your ghost."

Then Peleg departed, and the boys sat down to talk it over.

"I'm getting all balled up," Lafe acknowledged; and he took out an apple and set his teeth in it, as if fancying that setting his jaws to working would help to limber up the machinery of his mind.

"What do you think about it?" he asked, not able to make any good guess himself.

"I don't know what to think."

"Is there any connection between the 'ghost' Peleg says he saw out there, and the noise we heard in the gym last night?"

"It's queer that Peleg came to me," said Jack; "or, rather, came to us, here in this room. Why didn't he go to Kennedy, the constable?"

"Perhaps he did; we didn't ask him about that."

"I didn't think of it then; but we'll find out if he went to Kennedy."

"Of course this ghost business is all rot!" said Lafe.

"Of course."

"Somebody's working a trick. Or it may be one person here, and another out there at Simm's Hole."

"We'll watch the gym to-night," said Jack. "If we can get sight of the fellow who is cutting up perhaps we'll learn more. But, anyway, we've planned to go to Simm's Hole."

Tom Lightfoot came in, and as the written statements of the queer deaf mute had been saved, they were shown to him.

Tom had not been at the gymnasium the preceding night, but he had heard of the mysterious invader and the strange sounds made.

Every person in Cranford had heard these facts.

Tom sniffed contemptuously.

"I think this whole business, at the gym and down

at Simm's Hole, is just the work of kids, who are trying to have what they'd call fun."

"Tom," said Lafe, speaking seriously, "you weren't at the gym last night! The kid who made that racket there must have been a mighty little fellow, to have got out past us without our seeing him, or to have remained in there without our discovering him."

"You'd have seen him, probably, if he came out," Tom admitted. "So it's certain he stayed in there. There are a lot of old holes in and under those carriages and buggies."

"We looked everywhere."

"Everywhere but in the right place. Why, you don't mean to claim that he was neither there nor went away? If he didn't get out past you, where could he have been but in the gym? Don't slip a cog and begin to talk silly!"

"Yes, it does sound silly!" Lafe acknowledged. "But I wish you'd been there!"

"We're going to watch for him to-night," said Jack.

"I'll go with you," Tom volunteered.

CHAPTER V.

A WARNING.

Jack and Tom Lightfoot, Lafe Lampton and nearly every member of the athletic club of the high school spent several hours that evening in watching the old carriage shop.

They first ascertained that no one was in it or about it; and then, hiding out in the darkness, they tried to make sure that no one came near it, or that if anyone came, his identity should be made known.

Tom Lightfoot was a student at the academy, and on the nine that was expected to play against Jack Lightfoot's high-school team that summer.

Nevertheless, as Jack's cousin, and having a warm regard not only for Jack, but for other members of his team, Tom Lightfoot was willing to assist in try-

ing to discover the "ghost" that was troubling the quiet of the high-school boys' gymnasium.

The suggestion, lightly made by some one, that the academy fellows were at the bottom of it he repudiated rather warmly; so that it was not brought up again that night.

While the boys lay out in the gloom, with ever sense on the alert, there came a repetition of the sound heard the night before:

Whack! Bang! Blub-rub-bub! Whack! Bang!

Tom Lightfoot laid his hand on the shoulder of his cousin Jack, as the two were lying close together.

"There it is!" said Jack.

"Some one is in there now, all right," said Tom starting up. "Keep the place surrounded, and we'll see who it is, and what he's doing."

The cordon of watchers guarded the carriage shop so that no one could leave it or approach it without discovery; while Tom, Jack and Lafe Lampton, entered the building, lighted lamps, and made a search.

This night they did not find everything upstairs in such perfect order. The leaping pad had been turned over, and the Indian clubs were at the other side of the room from the place where they were usually kept.

"No ghost here!" Tom announced.

"And nothing else," said Jack.

It seemed true.

No one could be found on the upper floor, down below, or out on the shed roof; and there were no other places to look.

Tom Lightfoot began to feel queer, himself.

"This rather gets me, fellows," he admitted.

"We thought it would," said Lafe, almost maliciously. "Yet I remember you said that if the fellow didn't get out he was still in. He hasn't got out; and if he's still in, I'd be glad to have you show me where he is."

Tom scratched his head, as he went downstairs.

As they came out of the doorway there was an e-

clamation and a cry of excitement; then Ned Skeen exclaimed:

"We've got some one!"

"Oh, cut it out!" came in the voice of Bat Arnold. "I just came down here to see if you fellows had discovered anything. I heard uptown that you was watchin' the gym to-night."

"You didn't drop off the shed roof?" asked Jack, flashing a match and looking Bat in the face.

"Off the shed roof? Nixy. I came right down this street, and if your crowd hadn't been staring at the shop they'd have seen me."

A dozen boys stood ready to declare that Bat had not dropped from the shed roof, though his presence there had somewhat surprised them, for they had not heard his approach.

Released, Bat went uptown, and the watch was resumed.

But nothing came of it.

The mystery was too deep for easy solution, and the boys went home at last, baffled, though some of them hung round the carriage shop until nearly midnight.

Jack Lightfoot did not believe in late hours, and went home early, yet he could not sleep, because of worrying over the mystery.

He wondered if it had any connection with the singular message brought by the deaf mute.

"We'll hurry up that outing to Simm's Hole," was his conclusion.

As if his decision had brought it, there was a crash at his window—the crash of a breaking pane—and something fell with a thump on the floor.

Jack was out of bed instantly.

He ran to the shattered window, but saw no one; which was not strange, for the night was cloudy, nor did he hear the sound of footsteps.

Trembling and startled, he struck a match and lighted his lamp.

He saw a small stone on the floor, with a paper wrapped about it and tied there with a string.

That was the object that had come through the window.

On removing the string and the paper, Jack found a communication.

It had not been written; but, to conceal the identity of the one sending it, letters and words had been cut from newspapers and pasted together into sentences, thus:

"DO not Go to Simm's hole. YOU Will be IN danger. take my ADVICE and stay AWAY. Stay Away. THIS is a WARNING. I KNOW what I am TALKing about. STAY AWAY."

Again Jack went to the window and looked out.

"Who could have thrown this through the window, and what danger can there be in going to Simm's Hole?" was his thought.

He turned the paper over and looked at the back, which was blank.

Again he went to the window.

At first he was disposed to go downstairs and tell his mother what had happened.

"No use to disturb her," was his second thought. "In the morning will do as well."

He did not go to bed again for some time.

The shattered glass lay on the floor. This he picked up carefully; and to keep out the chill wind that came through the broken pane he stuffed some clothing in it.

Think as he would, he could come to but one conclusion; and that connected the "danger" with the deaf mute.

"Peleg is a queer old duck, and if this warning is anything more than a joke it must refer to something he is up to. That ghost story of his may have been a lie."

Of course Jack Lightfoot had never suspected that Peleg Brown had seen a ghost; but he was willing to believe that the deaf mute had really beheld some-

thing, which his superstitious imagination had taken for such.

Now he doubted even that; and was almost disposed to think, if the warning were not a practical joke, that Peleg was up to some mischief, which the one sending the warning wished to caution him against.

"Why couldn't he have said what it was? This thing of throwing a stone through my window is sneaking, of itself. It broke the window; and doesn't tell me anything, more than that there is danger. What kind of danger, and from whom?"

Jack went to bed pondering these questions, and fell asleep before he had arrived at any conclusion.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE WOODS.

"In the good old summer time,
In the good old summer time,
Rambling down a shady lane
With your Baby Mine!
You hold her hand, and——"

"Cut it out!" said Lafe Lampton, speaking to Nat Kimball, "the sweet warbler of Simm's Hole," as the boys called him; "this isn't summer time—it's spring!"

"And we didn't think he'd spring that on us!" added Ned Skeen.

Jack had disregarded the warning so strangely sent him, and was at Simm's Hole, with his friends.

The day was glorious; not a fleck of cloud in the azure sky, a warm wind, and the budding trees sending out woodsy odors.

Simm's Hole lay to the westward of the town of Cranford, two or three miles distant.

Laurel River, heading up in the hills, flowed into the western end of Cranford Lake, which was a somewhat oblong body of water, set between a wild woodland on one side, and the level country containing the town of Cranford and many fine farms on the other.

Laurel River, flowing into Cranford Lake, and Malapan River, flowing out of it at the other end,

might have been considered in a sense as one stream flowing from the timbered hills through the lake and on to the sea; but they were two rivers, to the Cranford people, and bore separate names.

Malapan River, emptying into the sea, was a timbered channel.

Laurel River, emptying into the lake, was fresh, and was fed by some famous trout streams.

Simm's Hole was a deep cavity in the bed of Laurel River, a few hundred yards above the upper end of the lake.

All about Simm's Hole lay heavy woodlands, which in some places became a wild tangle.

Just above Simm's Hole, and really hanging over it, or rather projecting into it, was an old dam.

This dam was much broken. In places it stood up and over these places the water tumbled with a roar and a beautiful waterfall effect.

In the broken places there were here and there projecting sticks of timber, that thrust themselves upward and whipped at the water like saws.

Swinging back and forth, they sometimes threw water into spurting jets, which glistened brightly in the sunlight.

At one end of the dam, and built out upon it, was a tumble-down cabin, almost in ruins now.

Peleg Brown, the deaf-mute, had lived there a long time, and had put up the cabin in that queer place that he might be right at the fishing ground he loved without having to take the trouble even to walk to it.

Peleg's present home lay further up the stream.

He had abandoned the old cabin, that hung and swayed at one end of the dam, because of a flood which came suddenly one night, and rising into the cabin gave him the fright of his life.

Peleg, when that water rose, threatening to wash him from his bed, climbed out on the cabin roof; and there some people passing in the morning discovered

him, sitting astride the ridge pole, making signs and working his toothless jaws.

Peleg had been on that roof for hours, unable to utter a sound, and expecting every minute that the roof would be carried away.

He took no chances with the treacherous spring of Laurel River, after that.

The old cabin made a famous place for the boys to come to camp at Simm's Hole; and often they sat on the porch, or hung out of its window, with their lines whipping the river below in the "hole."

A better spot than the vicinity of Simm's Hole could not have been chosen for a boys' camp; and here in the spring came fishing and camping parties from all parts of Cranford, and from other points more re-

cently. Lightfoot and his friends had brought up a tent, and a complete camping outfit, with cooking utensils, and a supply of food.

The tent stood deserted. Some of the boys, Jack was one of the number, had not even slept in it the previous night, but had lain out under the trees, with their backs to the ground, covering but their blankets, for the ground was very dry.

Lafe Lampton was the self-appointed cook of the party, not because he liked so much to cook, but because he liked to keep close to the eatables, and while cooking he could satisfy his palate by tasting the various dishes he was preparing.

Cooking was really the only work that Lafe Lampton thoroughly enjoyed; and he could hardly understand why all the other boys had not clamored for a share in the position.

He was now stirring something in an iron pot that hung on a tripod over a fire out of doors.

The blue smoke drifting up through the yet leafless trees toward the bluer sky, and Lafe stirring, and then tasting, made a picture of contentment,

with the other boys standing or lying about in various attitudes of lazy enjoyment.

This was the situation, when Nat Kimball, carried away by the spirit of coming summer, began to pipe out that old chestnut, "The Good Old Summer Time."

"Hit him with a brick, if he tries to sing it again!" grunted Bob Brewster, who would never have heaved a brick at anyone, except under the severest provocation.

"Oh, say, I'm too lazy for anything!" declared Tom Lightfoot, who, because he was Jack's cousin, was there, though he belonged with the academy crowd.

But then Tom was a royal good fellow, who was welcomed anywhere.

Ned Skeen began to sing:

"Oh, the spring is a finer time
Than the good old summer time;
Lying in the shady woods——"

"Oh, you don't need to be in the woods, to enable you to do that!" Nat Kimball declared.

Skeen looked at him reproachfully.

"Isn't a fellow to be allowed to sing anything?"

"Not when he doesn't know how."

"Haw, haw!" laughed Jube Marlin, the wide-mouthed Yankee.

Stepping back, to avoid the kick which Skeen delivered as a jocular return, Nat Kimball sat down suddenly, and in trying to save himself from the fall plowed his fingers into the soft earth.

"Now Kimball has got germs," chirped Arlo Kilfoyle. "He always finds germs whenever he puts his hands on the ground."

"Well, if I do believe in germs, I don't believe in ghosts!" Nat retorted. "You'd better go away back and sit down! A fellow that's queer enough to believe in ghosts shouldn't try to poke fun at anybody else."

"I don't know that there are any ghosts, and I don't know that there aren't," said Kilfoyle; "but you ex-

plain that business at the gym, will you? You can't do it."

"Oh, gee! here's a nasty worm crawling over me!" cried Kimball, knocking it away with a look of disgust.

Tom Lightfoot began to sing:

"Light is the breeze in the treetops astir,
Fragrant the breath of the hemlock and fir;
Bright is the sky as the eyes that we love,
Sweeter the brook song than note of the dove.
Deep in the woods,
Deep in the woods."

Ned Skeen, who had been called down for his singing, yet fancied he could sing, and had a real gift for hasty parody, cut in:

"Kilfoyle sees spirits, and Kimball finds germs;
When there are no germs he is fighting with worms;
He bats them, and cuffs them, and, oh! how he squirms!
Deep in the woods,
Deep in the woods."

"Cut it out!" Kimball commanded, sharply.

Tom Lightfoot continued:

"Bowers of beauty and vistas so fair;
Far, far behind us each sorrow and care!
Lighter our thoughts than the branches that swing,
Joyous our hearts as the birds on the wing.
Deep in the woods,
Deep in the woods."

Again Ned Skeen broke in, "like a musical sea gull," some of the fellows claimed:

"Catching fresh colds that will make us all sneeze,
Bored by mosquitoes and bitten by fleas;
Snakes for our playmates, and ants for our fare—
Tell me, oh, tell me, who wouldn't be there?
Deep in the woods,
Deep in the woods."

"Fellows, there are fleas here, or ants, or something, and a lot of them," said Kimball, jumping up and beginning to scratch his legs.

"Pshaw, those are just germs; you got them off the ground!" declared Kilfoyle.

"You'll see a ghost, or something, if I punch your head!"

Jack Lightfoot began to squirm; he had been lying at his ease, under one of the trees, enjoying the joking and the quick repartee; now he, too, got up.

The warm sunshine was bringing out various forms

of insect life, but the ants predominated; they were the big, black, hungry variety, with jaws like

Jack brushed away the ants that troubled him; he found a new seat; while the boys began to talk of the insect life of the woods.

Jim Bright, whose one great ambition was to come an actor, leaped to his feet and stretched his hands with a stagy air:

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard!"

He declaimed this; then started on something else.

"My name is Norval! On the Grampian Hill my father feeds his flock. A worthy swain——"

"Stop! stop!" said Skeen, the little joker; "you're not getting that right!"

"Why isn't it right, me lord?"

"Because it isn't."

Jim Bright laid his hand on his heart and

"Will Your Muchness be kind enough to show me the right way?"

"Sure!"

Ned Skeen sprang to his feet.

"Hear me!" he cried, facing the other boys and throwing himself into the stagy attitude assumed by Bright. "This is the way that oratorical gem school readers should be delivered."

He squared his shoulders.

"My name is Norval, on the Grampian Hill my father feeds his flock a worthy swain!"

"A swain is a man," said Bright.

"Sure!"

"And your father feeds him to his flock?"

Footsteps were heard behind him, and there came an interruption, in the form of the deaf-mute, Peleg

He had some fish, which he delivered to Jack Lightfoot, as a present for the boys; and then took out a piece of paper.

Jack read aloud the words written on it by Peleg:

"I seen the ghost again last night, right by this

CHAPTER VII.

ALONG THE STREAMS.

Whipping the trout streams that made down from the hills into Laurel River furnished some of the finest sport the boys could desire.

To throw the fly out on the surface of the whirling water, and let it drift down, taking care to keep even your shadow from being seen by the wary fish that lie under the edge of some rock or in a dark hole, is no easy accomplishment.

To throw, and throw again; to wade, and creep; to quiver with expectation; and then, in almost an unexpected moment, to have the trout rise to the fly!

After that, the singing of the reel; and the careful work.

Ho, there! Careful, careful; he'll break your tackle, or get away! Careful!

To see the beautiful fish throw himself in a shining leap clear out of the water; to feel the pull and tug; to reel in; and then to have him go plunging, with the reel singing again!

Is there anything finer in the way of sport, for either man or boy?

There may be, yet it is doubtful.

The cool wind of spring blowing in your face, the tang of spring in the air, the spirit of spring throbbing and leaping in your veins, swelling your heart; the song of the racing brook in your ears, and the song of the breeze in the trees above your head, while the sun shines brightly, and the air is filled with a thousand odors, and a thousand signs of new and budding life.

All this is yours, while you play the gamy trout, and your reel sings.

Now you work him in nearer to the shore. He is well exhausted by this time, but still game; and he deserves well of you, for he made a fine, even a glorious, fight.

He comes in sulking, perhaps; or, with a fresh acces-

come out of the old cabin. I never seen anything like that in a fisher."

"What do you say to that?" said Kilfoyle, almost triumphantly.

"I say if that ghost comes fooling round the dam this evening I'll put him on my hook and catch a trout with him," was the irreverent response of Bill Brewster.

Before Peleg turned away, the rattle of a cart was heard, and Jerry Mulligan, the warm friend of the high-school boys, came into view along the woodsy road with his horse and his cart, bringing some things out from the town for the camp.

"Whurroo!" he cried, swinging his cap when he saw the tent and the camp. "I think, begorra, that I'll lay off worruk fer the rist av the week and play lazy, too.

This worrukin' all the toime makes a man a dull b'y."

"'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' you mean," cried Kimball.

"Jack was niver a dull boy!" said the humorous Irish lad.

"You didn't get it right, either of you," cried Skeen.

"This is the way it goes: All play and no work, makes a boy a poor shirk!"

Jack Lightfoot clapped his hands.

"Skeeney, that's the best thing you've got up this morning!"

"You overlook my poetry," said Skeen.

Jack took the piece of paper which held Peleg's message, and wrote on it for the deaf-mute:

"All right; thank you for the information. We'll keep a sharp watch for that ghost to-night. And we thank you for the fish."

Then Peleg went away; and Jerry, hitching his horse, forgot for the time that he was a hard-working cart driver, and became as much of a rollicking boy as any there.

sion of courage and strength, he strikes again for the black shadows in the stream, or in the pool.

Then, when at last you have him near the shore, you must still use your utmost skill.

The landing net now, and more careful work; then you lift him out of his element, and he is yours!

With such pleasure as this, Jack Lightfoot and his boy comrades failed to remember the "ghost" that had troubled the gym, forgot all about the "ghost" seen more than once by old Peleg; and neglected, or disregarded, the warning message that had come crashing through Jack Lightfoot's chamber window at home.

But at night, when they came in tired, yet glowing, with innumerable stories to tell of the fish "they didn't get," of the many trout that got away, bigger, far bigger, than the ones caught; and they sat down before the tent in the gathering darkness, to sample the fish, done to a turn by Lafe Lampton, the talk turned frequently to the mystery of the gym, and to the ghost that had stood in the door of Peleg's old cabin, and had walked the broken dam before that door.

Apparently this ghost knew that a party of skeptical, rollicking young rovers was camped near the shore at Simm's Hole, and were so lacking in a proper spirit of reverence that they would not have hesitated to take the said ghost by the collar, presuming that he wore one, and chuck him into the water, just to serve him right for night walking.

So the ghost kept away.

But the fun and the sport were fast and furious, yet of a perfectly harmless and jovial kind; the sort of fun that never yet injured any boy, or made him less manly when he became a man.

Peleg came in, the second evening, to ask by means of signs if the "ghost" had walked as yet.

Receiving an answer in the negative, he drew out his writing pad and a pencil and began to write.

Usually, when Peleg did that, something interesting might be expected.

This was what he wrote, on the evening in question:

"In Simm's Hole lives the hermit trout. I hooked him once, but he broke my pole and my line, and got away from me; and nigh about drowned me. Maybe you catch him; I never could, except that one time, and then I didn't land him."

Jack read this aloud to the boys, while Peleg looked on, smiling and working his hairless, toothless jaws.

He was still dressed as if he expected an early return of winter, with a big coat on, and that "comforter" round his thin neck; but he had discarded his woolen mittens, and no longer pulled his cap down over his ears.

Jack wrote:

"Where had a fellow better fish, to get him?"

Peleg answered:

"Right before the cabin door; right out in front. He hangs round under the logs of the old dam; and onct I seen him rise there, and snap a fly off'n the water, when the fly dropped down on the water. He was a whopper—nigh about big as a sturgeon, I thought. He's been there ten year, I guess; and if you git him, you git a whale."

"That's a whale of a lie," said Ned Skeen, when this was read.

"All right; we'll try for him," Jack wrote.

And Peleg, when he had read this, worked his hairless jaws again, and smiled.

Jack wrote many questions on Peleg's pad that evening, some of them about the "ghost"; and Peleg answered, to the best of his ability.

"He never saw any ghost there, and he never hooked any such trout," Skeen persisted. "He's stringing us and's been stringing us from the first."

"Begorra, I'll take his string to-morry, and thry mesilf fer that fish!" said Jerry, who still lingered unable to leave the joys of the camp at Simm's Hole.

"Take his string? Oh, yes; the string he's stringing us with! Wow! Jerry, I'll duck you in the hol

that, first chance I get; and that will give you an opportunity to catch that whale with your hands!"

Jerry grinned.

"He might dhrowned me, av he's as big as Peleg!"

More than one of the boys believed that Peleg was "fishing" them, both about the fish and with regard to the "ghost."

They paid so little attention to his stories of the "ghost," that they went to sleep that night as usual, tucked in their blankets, under the trees; and were deep in the land of dreams, when Jerry, himself awake, suddenly aroused them.

"Whoosh!" he whispered. "An' phat the divvil is now, I wanty know?"

His hand touched Jack Lightfoot.

Jack, aroused on the instant, lifted his head.

The moonlight had come again, after many nights of darkness, and it glanced whitely across Simm's face, and lighted up the old cabin and the broken dam.

On the dam near the cabin, sitting as if looking down into the stream, holding a fishing pole, too, was a strange, tall figure, clad in something that looked almost white in the moonbeams.

"I'm shwearin' that's the ghost, though I niver seen him before!" whispered Jerry.

Jack rolled over and touched Tom and Lafe, whispering their names, to arouse them.

Lafe threw up his hands, with an exclamation that echoed very loud in that deep stillness.

Apparently it reached the strange form sitting on the broken dam, for the figure rose up suddenly, standing when erect, to an enormous height, and straight as a "dovepipe" from waist to head, as Peleg had described.

As it thus stood up, it seemed to slip, without motion, to melt as it were, into the very walls of the dam.

Then it was gone, without a sound.

The camp had been aroused by Lampton's exclamation.

"The ghost!" said Jack. "Whatever it was, man or spirit, it went into that cabin. Come on, and we'll find it."

He did not stop to dress, but with his blanket drawn about him, ran toward the dam and the cabin, which were but a few yards away.

The other boys followed hot at his heels, clad in the same way; and with them came Jerry, who had been the one to discover the "ghost."

But when the dam and the cabin were gained they could find nothing.

A search of the interior resulted in the same way.

Apparently no man had been in the cabin or on the dam. No fishing pole could be found, no wet tracks—nothing.

Jack Lightfoot and his companions were puzzled.

"Niver a ghost was that!" said Jerry, decidedly, as he hunted through the cabin.

"What became of him, then," Kilfoyle asked.

"He made a shneak into the woods, do ye' see! He could 'ave done ut. He could have jomped aff the dam here, and scooted into the thimber, and the bushes would soon hide him. I'm bettin' me owld hat ut was that way."

It was the best theory that could be conjured up, yet not entirely satisfying; and Jack and the others returned to the camp and to their blankets, to lie awake a long time, thinking it over.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK.

The next morning, when Jack awoke, he saw Nicholas Flint sitting on the dam, while Bat Arnold was just coming out of the woods.

"Hello!" Jack called, rolling out of his blankets, and in so doing, and in calling out that way, waking the other members of the camping party.

But the sun was rising, and the time had come for them to arise, so Jack did not mind that.

Nick Flint did not appear to notice Jack's civil salute.

"He's no good," Lafe grunted, when he saw Flint. "What's he doing up here, while we're in camp? We don't want him."

"Perhaps he doesn't want us," remarked Jack, easily. "He seems to have been first on the dam, this morning."

Having dressed, he walked out to the dam.

"Hello, Flint!" he said again; then added: "You didn't see anything of a ghost round here, early this morning?"

"I haven't lost any ghosts," Flint answered, surlily.

"But we're hunting one. He was sitting last night right where you are sitting now, and he seemed to slide into the door there. We couldn't find him; though we came over and looked around."

"Huh!" Flint grunted, skeptically.

Bat Arnold came up, smoking a cigarette.

"Mornin'!" he growled.

He did not look at Jack, but kept the visor of his cap pulled down over his eyes.

"The fishing is great," said Jack. "We've been up and down all of the creeks, and the trout are biting fine. Perhaps you'd like to sample some that we've caught; we'll have them for breakfast in a little while?"

But neither Bat nor Nick seemed to care to accept this hospitable invitation.

They acted as if they had something on their minds; something disagreeable, or unpleasant, which was troubling them.

Jack noticed this, and wondered what it was.

He had no great respect for either of the boys, nor desire for their company; but he always tried to treat everyone civilly, just as he would like to be treated himself.

That was one reason why Jack Lightfoot had such a host of friends.

Though he was so far above these two boys in many ways, he had no feeling of superiority.

Apparently they had come out to Simm's Hole for a good time, as he and his friends had, and he was willing that they should enjoy themselves to the utmost.

Finding that neither Nick nor Bat were in a talkative mood, Jack gave over his efforts in that line and returned to the camp.

"What are those fellows doing here?" Lafe asked.

"I couldn't find out; fishing, I presume."

"I wish they'd stayed away; they'll make trouble."

Saul Messenger thrust forward his shock of yellow hair and his pugilistic jaw.

"Let 'em try it!"

Jack Lightfoot was forced to laugh.

"Saul, I don't know whether you like to fight as well as Lafe does to eat, though I rather think you do. But there is nothing to fight about yet."

"Just let 'em try to make trouble for us," said Saul, clinching his fists. "I've been longing for a chance to hammer in the face of that low-down nigger, Nick Flint!"

"That Indian, you mean!" said Lafe.

"Indian or nigger, it don't make much difference to me; when I get through with him he won't know that he's got a face."

Saul's attitude was so much that of the eager pugilist that Jack laughed again; and, sitting down, with pencil and paper, he drew a caricature of Saul Messenger in the act of reducing Nick Flint to something that looked like a bag of jelly.

"That's what I'd like to do to him," said Saul, trying to grin, when he saw the picture. "And it's what I will do, if he goes to making trouble round here."

Nick Flint and Bat Arnold disappeared while the boys were eating breakfast.

It was a fine breakfast, too, showing that Lafe Hampton was well up in the culinary art.

"I'd like to know where you learned to fry fish so well?" said Ned Skeen. "Howling mackerels, this

"Not a howling mackerel, nor any other kind; that's trout. Don't disgrace it by calling it a mackerel."

Ned Skeen's mouth was filled with fish, but he condescended to ask again how Lafe had learned the trick of frying them to such a turn.

"From my mother," said Lafe. "She's a good cook."

"You take after her naturally," Jack remarked.

"I'll take after you," said Lafe, with a laugh, "if you don't praise that fish as you ought to. It's this trout: I always liked to eat, you know!"

"Oh, yes, we know that!"

"So I used to hang round the kitchen a good deal."

"You used to? Oh, that's good!"

"Well, I do still, of course; and so, watching her, I'm helping her now and then when she'd let me, I know the hang of cooking a good many things. And I'd like to cook."

"Because you can eat while you're cooking?"

"Sure!"

In addition to the fish, there was bread, which Jerry had brought from the town, crackers, canned goods of various kinds, principally canned fruits, together with butter, eggs, condensed milk, canned vegetables and other things; though all of these were not served for breakfast, of course.

The boys were living well; and they were, besides, enjoying the time of their lives.

Nick Flint and Bat Arnold, who had refused to partake of that bountiful breakfast, were practically forgotten, while the boys ate, laughed and joked, and planned for the fishing trips of the day.

"I'm going to try for that hermit trout!" said Jack. "If a fellow could hook him——"

"He'd pull you into the hole," said Nat Kimball.

"I'd risk it. If I could once get my hook in his mouth, there'd be a pretty fight, anyhow, if I didn't land him."

Though Jack meant to try for the hermit trout which Peleg said inhabited Simm's Hole, he desired first to whip a certain section of one of the creeks of the neighborhood, where, the year before, he had had good luck.

He set out for this point after breakfast, going alone, as most of the other boys had plans of their own for the morning, which would scatter them to various places.

As Jack walked along he chanced to see Bat Arnold moving in the woods before him. It was just a glimpse he caught, but it set him to thinking.

"I wonder what those fellows are doing up here? Maybe they're making for the same point I am, and intend to fish there."

He hurried on.

Reaching the creek, and seeing no one, he began to whip the stream, carefully selecting his flies, and using all the skill of which he was master.

He had landed one speckled beauty, and was so deeply immersed in the sport that he had again forgotten about Bat and Nick and the warning which had been so strangely thrown into his room.

Then a club, whirled from a low tree over his head, struck him a blow on the shoulder, and at the same time a form dropped out of the branches.

The club had been so aimed that if Jack had not shifted his position just at the instant it was thrown it would have struck him full on the head, and the form that shot downward must have struck him also.

But, hitting him on the shoulder, the injury was not so great, though the blow was heavy enough to deaden and numb the arm.

Jack recovered, dropped his rod, and turned just in

time to see a disguised and masked figure spring at him, striking again with a club.

Jack avoided this blow by springing backward, and in so doing put his back against a rock.

He saw now that he had two masked enemies to meet; and, having seen Bat in the woods, he at once jumped to the conclusion that they were Bat Arnold and Nicholas Flint.

His left arm and shoulder, struck by the club, pained and numbed by the blow, were almost useless.

Neither of his assailants uttered a word, as they rushed upon him.

"I know you, Nick," said Jack, judging that Nick was the one who had hit him. "Put down that club!"

Instead of putting it down, Nick struck with it.

With a quick jump Jack hit the club with his foot and sent it spinning into the creek, wrenching and stinging the hand that had held it.

Believing that the two of them were more than enough "to do up" Jack Lightfoot, the boys rushed in again.

The dastardly character of this unprovoked attack fired Jack's heart and filled him with almost an ungovernable rage.

Jack had a hot temper, which he had exhibited on more than one occasion, but which he tried to hold in check.

It burned to a fury now, and made him reckless and implacable. And when Jack Lightfoot was thus aroused he had the quickness and the fighting power of a tiger.

He set his back against the rock, as they rushed in.

Though his temper was boiling, his brain was clear; his face was pale, and his gray-blue eyes were shining and wide open.

Crack!

Bat Arnold received a stinging blow in the face that sent him reeling.

Hampered by his injured left arm, Jack could not

swing again with his right in time to smash his fist into the face of Nick Flint; he only struck Flint on the arm.

The next moment he and Flint grappled, and fell to the ground together.

With his jaw feeling as if it had been broken, Bat had stumbled backward, and fallen into the water.

"Help, here!" yelled Flint, thus revealing his identity by his voice.

Jack Lightfoot had him by the throat.

Bat staggered up, dripping with water, and rushed to the aid of his friend.

Jack tripped him with his foot as he came on, and Bat fell on top of the struggling boys.

In the wild struggle that ensued, Nick Flint released himself; and then, mistaking Bat for Jack Lightfoot, he began to hammer him in the face.

Bat yelled for all he was worth.

Before Nick understood what he was doing, Jack Lightfoot had writhed out of his grasp and sprung to his feet.

Nick and Bat rolled apart.

Nick now whipped out a knife.

Seeing that in his possession, Jack again backed against the rock.

The numbness and pain were going out of his injured arm. Even if that had not been so, Jack Lightfoot would have forgotten the injury now, or ignored it.

Both of his assailants rushed at him again, Nick with the knife, cursing furiously.

In the scuffle on the ground Nick's hat and mask had fallen off, and his dark Apache face was now revealed.

Bat still had his mask on, but that hammering had twisted it awry, revealing a bruised and swollen cheek where Nick's hammering fist had done its work.

"Come on!" Jack yelled, wild and defiant. "Come on, you cowards!—you sneaks! Come on!"

They were accepting the invitation. Jack dodged to avoid the knife; and, fainting, drove his strong right fist into Nick's face. He struck at Bat with his other fist almost at the same time. But the blow was not so effective, and Bat landed one that jarred Jack's head and made it sing. The knife was knocked from Nick's hand by his fall; and while he was trying to recover it, Jack threw his left arm about Bat Arnold's neck and plunged his strong right fist into his face. It was a bad-looking countenance after that. Bat howled. Jack struck again, in his rage. Bat fell, unply; and Jack released him, just as Nick rushed in again. "You murdering coward, I'll settle you!" Jack screamed. He drove a terrific blow at Nick, and received a thrust from the knife that ripped the sleeve of his coat; then struck again; and this time with a force so effective that both knife and boy went into the creek. Bat was trying to get up. Jack jumped at him, with his foot lifted to deliver a kick. "Don't! don't!" Bat groaned. "You've killed me now; don't!" Nick Flint was thrashing the water with his hands. Jack again backed against the rock and stood ready for his enemies. Bat crept to his feet, groaning; one of his eyes was closed. Nick flounced, and flailed at the water. "He's drowning!" said Bat, with a hoarse cry. "Can't you see?" Jack was still furious. "Help him out, then!" he shouted. "But I—I can't; you put him there!" It was true. Jack looked at Arnold. His brain was clearing; that

terrific fit of passion which had made him so tigerish and so furious in the fight was passing.

He saw that Nick Flint seemed to be growing weaker and was in no condition to aid himself.

"You won't jump at me?" he asked of Bat.

Bat, with his hands to his face, groaned as a reply.

Jack passed him with a quick leap; and, springing into the stream, caught Nick Flint by the arm and literally pulled him out of the creek.

Nick was gasping and strangling, and seemed but half conscious.

A feeling of remorse, mingled with something almost like fear, swept over Jack. The thought that he might have killed Nick came to startle him.

Seeing that Bat was not likely to renew the attack he bent over Flint now and began some effort to restore him.

Nick was a hardy youngster, who was not likely to give up easily; and he soon came out of his confused state, which would have brought his death no doubt if he had remained in the water.

He looked almost shamefaced, when he saw that it was Jack Lightfoot who was aiding him.

Bat, with his mask awry, his clothing ruffled and torn, stood by the rock, one eye swollen shut, and his features badly battered.

Bat had had enough and to spare.

Just then there was a crashing in the underbrush.

Saul Messenger, the fighting man of the fishing crowd, came upon the scene.

He had seen something of that furious struggle from a distance, and to his great regret had been too far away to take part in it.

"Just let me at 'em!" he panted.

"No," said Jack.

"Don't—don't let him hit me!" Bat begged, piteously.

"Stand back!" Jack commanded, speaking sharply to Saul.

It was a picture for an artist, Jack Lightfoot, strong, slender, his handsome face pale, but unmarred, his gray-blue eyes flashing, as he waved back Saul Messenger with that commanding gesture.

Saul himself, rushing forward, with fists clinched, hat off, his yellow hair tousled over his head like a shock of wheat, his sturdy, pugilistic jaw thrust out.

Bat Arnold—bullet-headed Bat—limping away, to escape Saul's rush, his coat torn, his disarranged mask hanging over one ear, one eye closed, and his face bruised and bloody.

And on the ground, his clothing soaked, his hat gone, his Indian-like visage scratched and pummeled, Nick Flint, of the murderous heart and the Apache temper.

Then there was the trout stream, fringed by trees; the open path through the woods; and the murmuring, purling brook; with a fish line and rod on the ground, and a small trout beside them.

"Stand back!" Jack commanded, with imperious gesture.

Fighting Saul fell back before that stern order and the fire of those eyes.

"They're in no condition to fight," said Jack.

"And you'll let them go scot-free?" Saul protested.

"Yes; they may go now, for all I care; and the sooner they get out the better I shall be pleased."

CHAPTER IX.

TAKING THE HERMIT TROUT.

Jack Lightfoot stood on the rim of the broken dam, by the cabin, flinging his trout fly out into Simm's Hole.

He had been doing that for more than an hour, trying different flies.

"The felly's wantin' a gold bug," said Jerry. "Common throuth flies, made out av feathers an' the loike, ain't good enough for 'um."

Silently Jack tried another fly, and cast again.

The boys of the camp were in various places, engaged in various things.

In the cabin door almost behind Jack stood La Lampton and Bob Brewster.

With them was Orson Oxx, who had appeared at the camp during the day, wearing something of mystery and nervousness in his manner.

The story Orson had heard of the attack on Jack and the manner in which Jack had "laid out" his assailants, had caused Orson to assume a still more singular air.

It was known that Orson followed often in the track of Nick Flint, and the boys accounted for his queer manner in that way; yet Orson had not said a word in defense of Nick and Bat.

As for those thoroughly whipped youngsters, they had headed for town as soon as they were in a condition to travel.

"I'll try the old hermit with a silver fly, this time," said Jack, smiling, as he prepared to try yet again. "Here's a silver one with black spots, making it look like a spotted butterfly."

"Ut will have to be a gold wan or a diamond wan," Jerry insisted. "So cheap a thing as silver can't tempt a delicate crayter loike that. He's so shy he must be Irish; thry him wid a grane wan."

"We're making too much noise," said Jack.

He stepped back, to get his shadow off the water, and tried other flies.

A plump butterfly, one of the earliest of the season, came batting by, and flopping into the hole.

Instantly there was a swirl of the water, a monstrous trout rose, and the butterfly was gone.

"By the cove av Cork, did yees see that? Ut wuz him! He was big as an ellyphant," said Jerry, in a hoarse whisper.

"Peleg said as big as a whale."

"He wuz that, begorra! Oh, the iligant crayther

he's wantin' real mate; no bugs made out av wings and the loikes fer him."

"There's another one of those butterflies," cried Ned, and he took after the mate of the first, with that.

He returned with it in a little while, having knocked down and killed it.

Jack set it on his hook; and with a flirt sent it out the hole.

The butterfly settled on the water, and with wings had floated along while Jack, moving his pole gently, tried to give it a simulation of life; as if it were struggling to rise from the water.

"He wants his mate alive!" whispered Jerry. "Oh, ye ticklar crayther! He don't want anny butther that's been knocked on the head an' kilt, bedad!" It did seem so.

Jack moved his rod, and the butterfly, apparently struggling, seemed on the point of lifting itself from the pool.

Then there was a swirl of the water, as a shadow seemed to dart from under the dam; this was followed by a flashing leap—then the line straightened.

There was a sudden splash, a flash of silver in the air, and a shout from Lafe; for Jack Lightfoot had suddenly hooked the foxy old trout of the swimming

the reel sang!

Jerry threw his hat into the air and yelled.

"Gorra, ye've got him! Can yees howld him?"

The hooked trout went to the bottom of the hole; it seemed determined to make wildly for the lake.

Jack paid the line out, and when it eased, he began to reel in.

Again the trout struck out for a healthier climate; and once more the speeding line made the reel hum.

"Look out er he'll br-reak yer line; he'll shnap yer line like a broom sthraw!"

Jack was well aware of that.

He knew that skill alone could land that big trout. Feeling the wrench of the hook it threw itself out of the water, in a clear leap that showed its big body and superb markings.

"Howly shmoke, did yees see 'um!"

The trout, having made that leap, was coming upstream.

The reel spun under Jack's fingers as he took in the line.

Under the edge of the dam the trout darted; then stopped and lay there.

"He's home, an' he knows it; an' he won't come out."

Jack brought him out by a lift of the rod; and again the startled trout headed downstream.

Jack was playing the big fish with consummate skill, having a care all the time for the security of his line and rod.

When he could he tightened the line, in an effort to tire and discourage the trout; when he could do nothing else he let the reel sing, yet with enough pressure to give the line a continuous pull.

Again the great fish threw himself out of the water, in a skipping jump; and again Jerry and the other boys roared.

Peleg Brown came up on the shore and fairly danced, clapping his hands, when he saw the fight that was on.

For years he had tried to lure that trout to his hook, and once he had succeeded, only to let him get away again.

"Howled 'um!" Jerry cried.

Jack was "holding him!" He was doing more, he was tiring the big fish.

Up and down, from end to end and side to side of the hole, the trout rushed, feeling the pull of the hook constantly. He threw himself from the water in great leaps, and sinking to the bottom stalked.

Then, when forced to start again, he repeated the same tactics, over and over.

The fight was on. The slender rod and comparatively weak line, and the skill of a boy, were matched against the strength of the big fish.

But the skill of the boy was telling.

For more than half an hour the combat lasted; then, when Jack thought the trout was worn out, the struggle started anew, and continued for another fifteen minutes, until Jack began to find that he was getting pretty tired himself, in spite of the thrill and the excitement.

Lafe grabbed the landing net, as Jack, walking along the dam toward the shore, began to lead the exhausted fish in that direction.

"Where there's one trout there's always its mate," said Ned Skeen, and he threshed his line into the pool where the fish had been hooked.

Lafe thrust his landing net under the big trout, which Jack drew to the shore.

Within the cabin, looking from the door, Bob Brewster and Orson Oxx, who had been hopping up and down in their excitement, joined hands, and began to sing and dance with joy, roaring out the words of a fishing song.

As they thus danced and roared, they broke the half rotten boards of the floor, and Bob Brewster dropped through with a yell.

At the same instant there was a terrific splash under the edge of the dam.

Then there was another yell, this time in the voice of Ned Skeen.

"Howling mackerels," he exclaimed, "I've got a bigger one!"

His rod bent almost double as he tugged and strained.

He began to pull in.

"Here fellows," he called, "help me; he'll get away from me!"

Jack Lightfoot and Jerry Mulligan were busy in getting the big trout out of the water.

Saul Messenger rushed to Skeen's assistance.

"Play him easy," he said, putting out his hand to take hold of the rod; "play him easy, or he'll break your pole."

Then both he and Ned Skeen stared, as well howled, for the thing that came to the surface was not a fish—but a man!

CHAPTER X.

THE RESCUE.

Throwing the big trout well up on the shore, where it could not possibly get back into the hole, Jack Lightfoot, Lafe Lampton and Jerry Mulligan raced out upon the broken dam to the assistance of Ned Skeen.

The boys in the cabin came out also; followed by Bob, who had dragged himself from the hole into which he had tumbled, and who was not hurt by his fall.

Ned Skeen's hook had caught in the man's coat, in the back, between the shoulders, and being a strong hook, with a good line, it was holding.

The man was threshing the water wildly with his hands, and seemed unable to swim.

When Jack observed this, he threw aside his coat, kicked off his shoes, and sprang into the hole.

Jerry Mulligan imitated him.

They came up by the man, as he was rising once more to the surface.

Skeen's hook was still in the man's coat, and Skeen, in spite of his nervous and excited condition, was still hanging to the rod.

"Now, get him by that side, Jerry!" said Jack. "And be careful that he don't get you."

The warning was needed; for the man, in his frightened and wholly irresponsible condition, was trying to lay hold of something.

He caught Jerry by the coat and ducked him under.

Jack evaded the clutch of his hand, and then secured a grip of his coat.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERIES CLEARED AWAY.

Wilson Crane at various times had talked a great deal about the Wild Man, who had been seen by different persons in the vicinity of Cranford.

Wilson had seen this so-called Wild Man once himself; and at another time, thinking he was to get a second look at him, he had stumbled upon some tramps who were holding Jack Lightfoot a prisoner in The Painted Cave.*

When seen by Wilson and other people of Cranford, the Wild Man had been clothed in these tattered outer clothes, and no one guessed that he had a good suit underneath them.

The efforts of Jack Lightfoot and his friends to restore the so-called Wild Man to consciousness were effective, after a time; and the fellow, sitting up, stared about him in a strange way.

Before this occurred Bob Brewster had told a queer story of finding a small room below the cabin floor. He had tumbled into that room, falling upon an old coat, which was rolled up as if it had been used as a bed.

The search which some of the boys now made brought other things to light, among them a queer stovepipe arrangement, covered with dirty white cloth, which the Wild Man had used, setting it upon his shoulders to give him a supernatural height.

When the Wild Man looked around in that strange way, observed the excited group of boys gathered about him, and saw his wet clothing, he doubled himself together, and, shaking his thin sides, laughed like a hyena.

*See last week's issue, No. 4—"Jack Lightfoot's Athletic Tournament; or, Breaking the Record Quarter-Mile Dash."

erry came up, with the man still clinging to him.
"Let him wan!" he begged. "He's dhrownin' me."
Ned dashed water in the man's face; and sought to help him.

The current was doing the rest; for it was setting the man free toward the shore below, on the same side.

Safe Lampton, having thrown off coat and shoes, was swimming in now, and came swimming boldly to the assistance of Jack and Jerry.

At this time the man whom the boys were trying to rescue was so nearly drowned that he was helpless to defend himself or injure those who were trying to aid him.

Ned Skeen had cut his line; and all the boys were running round to the shore on that side, to render what help they could.

When the current threw the swimmers in close to the shore, they drew the man to the land; and then all gathered and lifted at him until he was out of the water and well up on the dry ground.

But even then the victory was not won, for brisk efforts were required to bring him back to life.

While they made these efforts they made also a surprising discovery.

The man was clothed in two complete suits; the outer one being a thing of shreds and patches, the inner one of respectable cut, make and cloth.

The man was well along in years, and bearded; his hair being somewhat shaggy, and his hair and eyebrows grayish.

Wilson Crane, who had joined the fishing party that morning, stared, thrusting his long nose forward as if he wished to probe the man in the face with it.

"Say, fellows," he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, "this is the Wild Man!"

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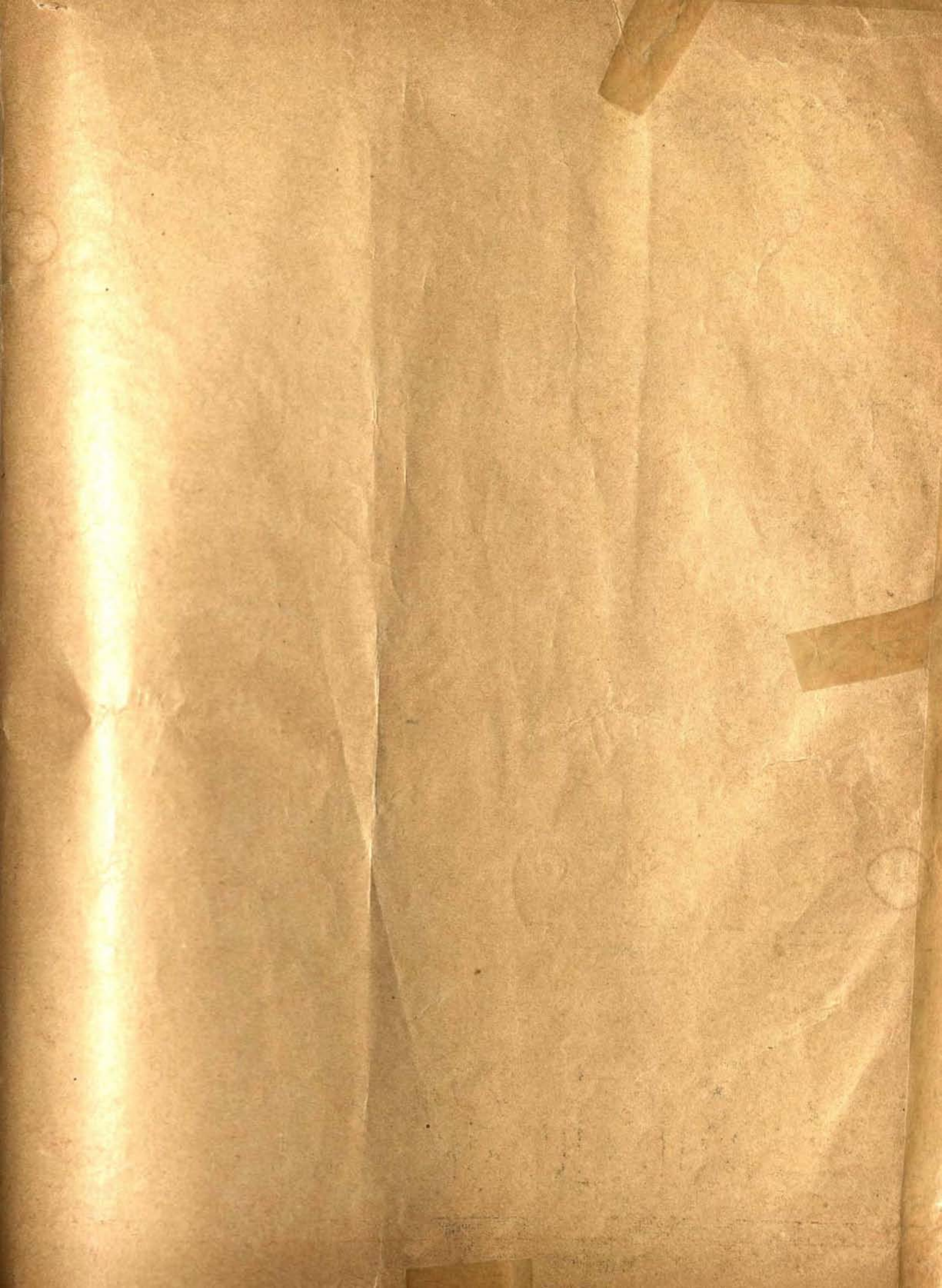
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