



By
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CHAPTER I.

A Morning-School "Skirmish."

ON the whole, boys are not naturally selfish. Nay! Lest anyone should object to a merely negative statement on so important a topic, I will go further and assert, conscientiously, that the average English schoolboy is the most unselfish and forgiving little scamp under the sun. He is also—mind, I am still thoroughly in earnest, and let it not be forgotten, that I said "average"—the most thoughtless, careless, and inconsiderate (where the feelings of others are concerned) specimen of humanity beneath the shade and dominion of the British flag. To others, my acquaintance does not extend.

Take Master John Elliott—of the Upper Fifth of Clifford School—for an instance. Tall; well-built; good-looking; the perfection of health; excellent at work; and at games a host in himself; consequently popular with masters and boys alike. He scorned to tell a lie, as every one of his masters and school chums knew; and no one could rightly accuse him of any mean or under-hand trick. Constantly he lived up to the motto, unconsciously his, "Play the Game."

Yet he was always in the proverbial "hot-water"; nor can it be said that his frequent immersions did anything at all to improve the complexion of his character. Whose growlings and muttering did the Detention-room "wall-ears" hear oftenest? Whose fingers tingled most frequently from unwilling and long-restrained applications of the form-master's cane? Who could "dash off" an "impot" with such speed and skill; or so accurately compute the time required to "do" a given number of lines—both the outcome of long experience?

Alas! John Elliott! Strange? Not a bit. There wasn't a straighter, manlier, more popular boy in the school, or one that had more "real grit" in him than John; but, unfortunately, he had coupled with these excellent attributes a notorious degree of thoughtlessness, and love of mischief, which accounted for numbers of his every-day "skirmishes," and deluded casual observers, as to his real character.

When the matter was brought home to his notice, John excelled in generosity and sheer kindness of heart, and would defend or assist any untidy, blubbing "scally-