

Much Ado About Nothing

William Woods

A STRANGER, passing through the grounds of the Smithtown seminary on the evening of the fourth of May, 185-, would have noticed that something unusual had happened. The students, instead of rushing to the ball ground after recitation as was their wont, collected in groups about the yard, and, finally, more from habit than from a desire to play ball, slowly walked to the ground and commenced to play.

It was very evident, however, that none of them had any interest in the game. Harry Lovejoy made a fly catch which would have been received with shouts and clapping, ordinarily, but was now hardly noticed by the spectators or players, who were generally on the lookout for good play. Tommy Haskins bit a lick which sent the ball far beyond the centre field, and made a home run. This was the first time a home run had been made that season, but nobody seemed to notice it, and even Tommy himself forgot he had done a "big thing," and hurried to join a group of fellow-students, who were discussing some question of such importance that it kept them from paying any attention to their base ball. Not even did the "Smithtown Nine," who had been practicing hard so as to beat the Fly Aways of Benton, and the alerts of Blackstone, in the coming matches, play with any life, and evening came on before six innings were over.

The cause of all this excitement was as follows: There had been a robbery at the seminary. The term had commenced about a fortnight before, and all of the students, except Gorham de Lancey, had returned at the proper time. He lived in New York, and, since he was enjoying himself at home, had delayed his departure as long as he possibly could. Moreover, all the other students, and especially the "digs," were always on hand at the very first recitation, and Gorham thought it was rather manly to show an utter disregard of school rules. Then, too, the students would wonder when he was to come back, and all crowd round him on his arrival.

Well, Gorham stayed in New York almost a fortnight after school commenced, and then deigned to come to Smithtown. His classmates had crowded around him, and had told him they were glad to see him, and tickled his vanity in several ways. But misfortune was in store for him. He had brought three hundred dollars with him from home to pay his debts with, and to supply him with spending money. This had disappeared—had been stolen from his room in some mysterious way. The money was in an envelop. He took it from his pocket-book and put it in his writing-desk, intending to settle his bills on the following day. While he was putting it in his desk, a man had knocked at the door. Gorham, supposing it was a student, told him to enter, and in walked a tolerably respectable-looking man, who asked the way to the Museum. Gorham had shown him, and the man, thanking him politely, left. Next day the money was gone.

This was the story told by the unfortunate loser, for perhaps the tenth time. All but one of the boys had heard it before, and it was repeated for his benefit. You may think that it was a matter of little importance, but Smithtown was a very small place, and very little happened to break the monotony of the place; so when anything unusual *did* happen, the students were ready to make

the most of it, and were perfectly willing to hear the account of the robbery ten more times, and to offer wise suggestions as to how the thief should be caught.

On Harry Mason, particularly, the story made a deep impression. He was of a romantic disposition, and loved anything that savored of excitement or mystery. Now he was as eager with his questions as a lawyer examining a witness.

“What sort of a looking man was he, Gorham?”

“Rather stout, medium height, bushy brown hair and whiskers. Not very noticeable, any way,” answered Gorham de Lancey.

“About how old?” queried Harry.

“Between forty and fifty, I should think.”

“And he saw you putting the money in your desk when he entered, did he?” Harry went on.

“I suppose he did. I’m not sure whether I had put it in, or was putting it in, when he came in. I supposed it was one of you knocking, and took the envelop from my pocket-book and, without opening it, put it in the desk.”

“Then you did not take the money out of the envelop after you left home?” said Harry.

“No, not once.”

“You say your watch was in the desk, too, and that was not taken.”

“No. I found my watch all safe, but the envelop was empty.”

“Perhaps you never put the money in the envelop; perhaps you left it at home.” This remark was made by Tommy Haskins, but seemed to all too absurd a supposition to deserve any notice. Harry and Gorham simply cast a look of withering pity on Tommy, and some one told him he was too bright for this world. Something ailed him. Tommy subsided.

Meantime, Harry Mason had been thinking over the evidence laid before him, and was now ready to give his opinion:

“The man who asked the way to the Museum was, without doubt, the thief. He supposed you would have money, coming right from New York, as you were, and knowing your governor was rich. He dogged your footsteps from the cars and saw just where you went, and just what you did. Saw, in fact, that you did not spend any money. He saw the desk open when he entered your room. You left the door unlocked for the ‘sweep.’ He entered. Your desk was unlocked. He easily got the money. He was probably startled, and fled, leaving the watch. You say you did not see any one go up stairs, and you were sitting on the steps all the time; that’s nothing. He might have been in a coal bin watching you go out.” This last suggestion made an impression on

Harry's listeners. What more probable than that the thief should hide in a coal bin and watch Gorham leave his room? Nothing more likely. Everybody remembered he had read of just such things happening.

"I should have thought Old Judy (the 'sweep') would have seen him, shouldn't you?"

"Perhaps she did see him. Perhaps she let him in." Harry spoke in a low, solemn tone.

"Good gracious! Harry, you're a regular detective!" Luke James said and all the boys looked at him with admiration for his cuteness. Of course the "sweep" let the man in. It was a regular deep-laid plot, agreed upon beforehand. The matter was getting more and more interesting.

"I don't believe she'd do such a thing; she's too stupid and too honest," said Tommy Haskins.

Now that Tommy mentioned it, it did not seem every probable that the stupid Irish woman, who had taken care of the rooms for years, should now, in her old age, be found guilty of stealing. Perhaps they were rather hasty in taking away the good character she had borne for years.

"I don't know," said Harry Mason. "These stupid Irish women are not so stupid as you think. Half the time they're only shamming. I'll allow that Old July is the last one I should suspect, but there's no telling. These thieves are mighty smart, and often come it over old women. Perhaps he made love to her and promised to marry her. They often play that trick, you know."

All the boys remembered having read of just such things. There was no doubt of it. Judy's honesty had fallen a prey to the wiles of the thief.

"If we could get a detective from New York or Boston, he would ferret out the truth. These Smithtown constables are good for nothing. If I were you I'd send for a detective at once."

How coolly he said it! Again the boys cast glances of admiration on him, and wondered how he had acquired such penetration.

"If we could only get Sidney here! he'd be just the man."

Tommy Haskins made this remark. He had lately read a biography of this remarkable person, and was duly impressed with his ability to catch a thief.

"He's dead," said Harry, in disdain; "and we can't unearth him. Moreover, his body is over three thousand miles away. I think, Tommy, on the whole, that you had better dry up."

"Well, fellows, I'll tell you what it is. It's very evident the 'sweep' knows something about the matter, isn't it?"

"Yes," from every one.

“Well, to-morrow Harry Mason and I will pump Old July, cross-question her, you know, and if we can’t get the truth out of the old woman set us down for a couple of asses. Meantime, I [won’t] write home (the governor might be angry, you know,) until I’ve done all I can. Then if I can’t find anything, I’ll write to the governor, and have a detective as sure as my name is Gorham de Lancey.”

This decision was highly approved by all, and they separated to go to their rooms to make ready for supper, thinking over the robbery, and the cuteness of Harry Mason.

Meantime, Harry Mason walked alone to his room, pondering, as he went along, upon the proper way for Gorham and him to conduct the business of cross-questioning. A hundred stories he had read passed through his brain. Recollections of Jack Shepard, of Dick Turpin, of sharp lawyers, occurred to his mind. How could they put questions to the “sweep” so that she would be caught contradicting herself? “Of course we must not let her suspect what we’re up to, or she’d be on her guard. It wont do to approach the subject too abruptly, and yet that might be the very best thing we could do. Ask her point blank what she knew about the matter. She would grow red, and look confused, but then she is so old, and her complexion is so dark, it might not be so easy, after all, to read her feelings. On the whole, I think we had better approach the subject gradually, and when we have made her contradict herself, and got her confused, we’ll come down on her and make her confess. Threaten state prison for life, but let her off if she discloses all she knows. Of course we’ll have a scene. She’ll beg us not to send her to prison, and all that; but we must be firm.”

This knotty question settled at length, Harry went to his supper with that look of superior shrewdness which, perhaps, he was warranted in assuming.

Harry lay awake a good part of the night arranging in his mind the plan to be carried out the following morning. Indeed, he seemed far more interested in the matter than Gorham de Lancey, who slept soundly from the moment he got in bed till the prayer bell rung the next morning. The “sweep” made her appearance every morning at eight o’clock. She never went to Gorham’s room before quarter of nine. At nine the students had to go to recitation. So there would only be fifteen minutes for the examination, a very short time indeed. Gorham’s room was to be the scene of action, as Old Judy would suspect if they questioned her elsewhere.

“We must commence as soon as she enters,” said Harry; “for if we cut recitation the Faculty will know all about it, and then there’ll be the deuce to pay.”

Patiently enough Gorham de Lancey and Harry Mason awaited the old woman’s coming, both too much excited to study the morning lesson. How long it seemed since the clock struck eight! Two or three times they thought they heard Judy’s step, but every time they were mistaken.

At length they really did hear her slip-shod tread on the stairs, slow as usual, partly from old age, partly from long habit. Harry and Gorham were both excited, now that the time for the cross-questioning was at hand. A knock at the door. Gorham managed to cry out, “come in.” Old Judy entered, with her pail and duster. They heard her in the bedroom as she cleared up, and made the bed. Neither of them could quite make up his mind to begin the questioning. Neither of them felt

that he was sufficiently calm to do so. Any one entering the room at that moment would have supposed that they were the guilty ones, so flushed and conscious they appeared.

Old Judy left the room for a moment to deposit her slops. Both the inquisitors drew a long breath, and felt infinitely relieved.

“I say, Harry, this [won’t] do. I verily believe we’re afraid of her. You begin to question and I’ll follow you up. Now or never.”

“All right, Gorham. I’ll begin at once. We beat around a little at first, you know. We don’t come to the point at once. Hush! here she is.”

Old Judy entered, totally unconscious of the examination in store for her, and looking like anything but one conscious of having been accessory to a theft. She seemed the very embodiment of stupidity and honesty. Harry Mason felt his coolness and courage leaving him again. He had agreed to open the trial, but he did not know how to begin. He had arranged, during the night, in his mind a series of questions which were to completely bewilder Judy, so that she should contradict herself over and over again. But none of these questions could he think of, and time was passing. Old Judy was dusting. In a few more minutes she would be gone. Gorham was winking at him, and telling him, plainly enough, it was time to begin. He grew desperate.

“Hum! hum! Mrs. Murphy!” his voice was not very firm, but he tried to appear cool. “Have you any children?” This question certainly would not lead Old Judy to suspect what was coming.

“Bless your soul! I’ve eight; all married,” was Judy’s answer.

“You wouldn’t like to bring disgrace on them now, would you?”

“Disgrace! The Lord forbid! What for should I?” said Judy, astonished at the bare supposition.

“No, Mrs. Murphy, I knew you wouldn’t wish to, nor, indeed, is there any need of it.”—(Harry was quite himself now)—“provided you will do what your duty, your conscience tells you to do.” (The speech he had been preparing in the night had come to his recollection now.) “Only confess to my friend, Mr. de Lancey. Tell us who the man was, and what has become of him, and we won’t be hard on you. You need not think that honor compels you to be silent about it. He’s cheated you—yes, he’s a villainous seducer. He’ll never come back again. They never do. So the best thing you can do is to own up the whole story. Come now, do.”

Old Judy did not know what to make of this speech. If any woman ever looked thoroughly at a loss for comprehension, she did. At first, she thought he had been drinking. Then she supposed he was quizzing her, as the students often did, though Judy in the present case could see no point to the joke, and Harry looked perfectly serious. It must be that he was quizzing her, however, and blessing him for laughing at an old woman, she went on with her dusting. Evidently Harry’s shot had not taken effect. Gorham felt it to be a failure, and now took his turn:

“Mrs. Murphy, have you ever seen that desk before?” (Mrs. Murphy was dusting it then.)

“Why, sure, I’ve dusted it ever since you’ve been in the school.”

“I keep very important papers in there, Mrs. Murphy. I sometimes keep”—with sternness—
“money.” Both watched the effect of this shot, which was to the point.

“Well, and wasn’t it made for that, faith?” Not the least bit disconcerted.

Both Harry and Gorham had failed in their attempts. Judy was too much for them. While thinking how to renew the attack, the recitation-bell rang, and they were obliged to leave, feeling that their interview had not been so successful as they had anticipated. A crowd of classmates surrounded them as they went to recitation, anxious to know the result of their cross-questioning. “Has she confessed? Did you corner her?” was asked on all sides.

“Not quite; we were just coming down on her when the bell rang. We’ll settle her yet, however. Never fear.”

After recitation, Harry Mason strolled along the pleasant walks of the green, thinking over the conversation they had held with Old Judy. Investigation and cross-questioning he had called it before it had taken place, but he felt as if the few questions asked had hardly merited such a high-sounding title. Unwilling as he was to acknowledge it, he knew that he had not been successful in his attempt. Instead of only questioning the “sweep,” and confusing her, he had a painful recollection of his own embarrassment, and his difficulty to ask a single question. He had fancied the woman would grow red and look guilty. He would be calm and collected. The “sweep” would fall on her knees and ask them to forgive her first theft, sobbing piteously. They would be moved to pity, and contrary to their better judgment, which would suggest the state prison, they would show mercy, and let her off with a lecture on morality and the wickedness of stealing.

This picture had not been realized; far from it. Judy had not looked guilty, nor appeared, in fact, at all different from usual. “She might be shamming innocence; there’s no knowing; but I would never have supposed she would have been so sharp,” muttered Harry. For want of something better to do, he sauntered leisurely to Gorham’s room. He knocked at the door, and, without waiting to be told to come in, entered. Good Heaven! the sight he saw almost took away his breath. There was a man in the room standing at the table, and—yes, before Gorham’s writing-desk, which he had evidently opened. Harry knew that he was in the presence of the THIEF. There were the bushy brown hair and whiskers—rather stout—medium height—between forty and fifty. There was no mistake. He was the thief. The man turned and nodded as Harry entered. Harry did not know whether to advance or to retreat. Inclination prompted him to run. At any moment the thief might turn round and murder him. Horrible! He had evidently returned for the watch. What was to be done? Harry, by a desperate effort, collected his scattered senses. He was not a coward, and was tolerably shrewd. He quickly proceeded to lay his plans. This man must not escape; but how to prevent him? Harry was strong for his years, but he knew he was no match for the broad-shouldered man before him. Harry might lock the door (the key was always in the lock) but then he would be in the power of the ruffian, who would probably cut his throat,

and then blow the lock to pieces with a revolver which he doubtless had in his overcoat pocket. Such a thought even was enough to send a thrill of horror through Harry's veins.

He had never taken his eyes off the thief from the moment he first saw him. "How devilish cool he is, rummaging over those papers while I am looking at him all the time. No one would suppose he was a thief; he looks quite respectable—like a father of a family. He's got a wig on, that's evident; disguised completely, I suppose. Perhaps he's really quite a young man. He's got up first rate, any way, even to his gaiters and spectacles."

"How soon will Gorham be in?" asked the stranger, turning to Harry, who had not moved from the door, which he held half open, ready to dart out if the thief should pounce upon him.

Harry could not repress a start as he turned toward him, and opened the door a little wider. He could not help it. Harry expected Gorham every minute, but thought if he told the man so, he would be afraid of being detected, and go. So he said, "Not before an hour." How bright it was in the thief to say Gorham! He probably read his name on his card tacked on to the door," thought Harry.

"I'm sorry; I wanted to see him. Are you sure he [won't] be in before?"

"Not the slightest possibility of it," coolly answered Harry. "He's in recitation now, and Professor Sharp always keeps the boys an hour." (Another lie.) "How mighty cool this man is! pretends he wants to see Gorham, and speaks as if he knew him." He could not but feel a sort of admiration for such an accomplished villain. "I suppose he counts me for nothing. Perhaps he'll find himself mistaken."

Meantime, the thief had taken a sheet of paper from the desk, and commenced to write. "By George! this is rich; he's a regular old one at the business. They often do that sort of thing. Take your money, and leave a note, expressing their regrets at being obliged to borrow, but that necessity knows no law, and so on. Paul Clifford used to do that sort of thing, if I remember rightly."

Seeing the thief was thus engaged, and knowing he had no time to lose, Harry walked quickly and quietly to the bedroom. He knew that Gorham always kept a loaded revolver underneath his bureau. "One felt more secure knowing one could defend one's self if need be," Gorham was wont to say. Harry put the revolver in his pocket. How cool he felt now! This was just the sort of an adventure he liked. So exciting, and it needed so much nerve, too. Wouldn't the boys look up to him if he caught the thief all by himself? He would be the most popular fellow in his class. All Smithtown would ring with his prowess. The young ladies would consider him quite a hero. The idea was so pleasing that he was quite elated. The most difficult part of the work yet remained undone; he must lock the door, and let Gorham, or some one else, know how affairs stood, so as to come to his assistance. Coolness equal to the thief's was necessary. " 'Diamond cut diamond,'" thought Harry. "Time will show which is the better man."

With his right hand in his pocket, grasping the revolver, Harry walked slowly and apparently carelessly from the room, never once taking his eye off the thief. He must have a piece of paper,

but it would not do to get it from the table, as the ruffian might suddenly spring upon him. A lucky thought occurred to him. He saw an atlas on a table at the opposite end of the room. If he could get this, he could tear out one of the fly leaves. Just what he wanted. Carefully he walked across the room, his eye fixed on the stranger, before whom he had to pass. The man raised his head and looked at Harry. He saw the earnest gaze fixed upon him, and the start which Harry could not help. What could be the matter with the boy? He looked at him as if he were a maniac.

“Young man, you look at me as if I were a maniac,” he said. “I’m perfectly harmless, I assure you; don’t be afraid.”

“Afraid—you a maniac! O no! you don’t look at all like a maniac—ha, ha! what an idea—that I should fear you because you are a maniac!”

Wasn’t this bright in Harry to allay the thief’s suspicions by laughing, as if it were a good joke? His laugh, however, was rather forced, and he still fixed his eyes on the man, who evidently was at a loss how to account for his conduct. He said no more, however, but resumed his writing.

Harry seized the atlas and tore out a fly leaf. With a pencil he wrote in large letters:

“The bird is caged. I have your revolver, and will keep him till you come. No time to be lost. H.M.”

This note being folded, he directed to Gorham de Lancey in large letters, and added to the direction, “a matter of life and death.”

Now to lock the door and get the key out of the lock without attracting the thief’s notice. “Keep cool, Harry; keep cool,” he muttered to himself; and he felt so very much at ease that he commenced to hum. How could he better disarm suspicion? His hand was on the key. The man must not hear it turn in the lock.

I cannot but stop to admire this young hero myself. Here, within four feet of him, was a thief who might spring upon him any moment and strangle him, and Harry was deliberately locking himself in the same room with him. What now did he do to drown the noise of the key turning in the lock? He sung loud, “I’m a raw recruit from a country town,” and locked the door. The thief looked up, amazement written on every feature. He said nothing, but his look said as plainly as his tongue could have spoken it, “You’re the strangest young man I ever saw.”

But Harry was not to be disconcerted now. As soon as the stranger turned his back again, he took the key from the lock, singing all the time, and wrapped his note round it. Round both he wound his handkerchief, so that it might attract notice.

The stranger had almost finished his writing. “It’s a pretty long letter,” thought Harry. “I guess I’ll read it soon.”

“You’re the strangest young man I’ve ever seen,” said the thief, wiping his pen. “I hope you’ll excuse an old man for saying so.”

“Ha, ha! strange, you think I am? Well, perhaps I am; ha, ha!”

The man evidently thought Harry was more than strange now—was downright mad. He took out his watch and looked at it.

“Quarter of ten; I can’t stay but five minutes more,” he muttered to himself, and proceeded to fold the paper on which he had been writing.

“Perhaps your five minutes will be longer than you think,” said Harry to himself.

He had approached close to the window, which was open, and now dropped his bundle. It fell right in the middle of the path, so that no one passing could fail to notice it. All was done now that he could do, and it only remained for him to wait for Gorham to come with assistance, when they would secure their prey. Meantime, he might as well render his position a little more secure. He entered the bedroom. The stranger had risen, and was buttoning his coat. Harry shut the bedroom door and locked it. Then he pulled the bed up to the door. There was an open space over the door, meant to ventilate the room, and Harry, by standing on the foot-board of the bed, could look through the ventilator into the larger apartment. This he proceeded to do. The thief had put on his hat. As he turned to go, he saw Harry looking at him through the ventilator.

“Well, of all the strange persons I ever saw, you are the strangest. I can’t stop any longer, as I must get on the next train. I leave this letter, which I suppose Gorham will get. It will explain certain things.”

“Very likely,” said Harry; “such notes always do. But hadn’t you better deliver it yourself? I expect him every moment.”

“I can’t wait any longer. I must get the next train, and I thought you said he wouldn’t be in for an hour; and that wasn’t twenty minutes ago.”

“Did I? Well, I suppose I did.”

The man evidently thought this was consistent with his singular actions, and said nothing. He tried to open the door. He could not.

“How this door sticks.” (A vigorous pull. It didn’t open. Another pull.) “Why, it’s locked!”

“Yes, it’s locked. I locked it.”

“Why did you lock it?”

“I guess you know pretty well, or can guess, at any rate.”

“I know? I guess? Come, young man, you’ve been fooling long enough. I’ve no time to put up with your nonsense. Come down and open the door, or give me the key and I’ll open it.”

“I say, you’re a cute one, old man.”

“A what, boy? Where have you been brought up? How dare you play your tricks on a person of my age? How dare you be so impudent? What means this insolence?”

“It means, my very dear sir, that you’re bagged at last, and might as well take things quietly. I’ve locked the door and thrown the key out of the window. I’ve got a revolver, and if you attempt to come near me I’ll shoot you. You can’t jump out of the window, for you would break your neck. You can’t tear up the sheets or blankets to make a ladder with, for they’re all in here. In a few minutes I shall have help. The door may open any moment. I should advise you to take things quietly. You’d better restore the money, and we’ll do what we can to make your sentence as light as possible. You’re a pretty old bird, however, and I don’t suppose you’ll get off with less than twenty years of state prison. In short, your game is up. Rather bad, I know, to be caught by a schoolboy, but that’s not your fault; and I don’t believe there’s another fellow in the school could have done the same thing. So pucker up, old fellow; it might be worse, you see.”

I will not attempt to describe the sensation of the stranger when he heard this speech. Amazement, dismay, utter bewilderment seized him. Was he dreaming? He pinched himself. No; he was wide awake. “Door locked—restore money—ladder—old one—game’s up. No, no;” the stranger had solved the mystery. He shook his head mournfully; he cast a glance of pity at the young man. “So young, too,” he murmured, “and so very mad.” This, then, explained his singular conduct for the last twenty minutes.

“My poor boy,” he said, kindly, “you’re excited. You have been reading some thrilling tale of robbery, and fancy you are engaged in some such scene as you have been reading of. But you mistake. This is Gorham de Lancey’s room. See, here is everything as usual. No, don’t get excited; be calm; lie down and sleep. There, keep cool, cool, cool.”

It was Harry’s turn to be amazed, but he, too, solved the mystery, as he thought.

“I say, old gent, you *are* a sly one. But I am too many for you. It’s very well for you to play off your nonsense, if you wish. But I’m up to snuff. Pray suit yourself. Go ahead if you like. *I* find it infinitely amazing.”

“My son, I don’t know whom you take me for; but if you know Gorham you may have heard him mention me.”

“Of course I have. He gave me a minute description of you. Medium height, rather stout, bushy hair—you haven’t very bushy hair, however—between forty and fifty—I should say fifty or sixty. You see I knew you the moment I saw you.”

“Then is it on account of some enmity to Gorham that you act thus disrespectfully to one so nearly connected to him?”

“So nearly connected? O, this is a joke. I suppose you’re one of the family—his father, perhaps?”

“Yes, young man, I am his father.”

“O Lord! that’s the richest yet. You’re one of them, aint you? As if I couldn’t see through your disguise. Didn’t I see gay hairs underneath your wig? and I don’t know that very likely the gray hair is a wig, too? I know a thing or two, don’t I?”

“Young man, I’m very sorry you have no more respect for the marks of old age.”

“O, come now, the game’s played out. Here comes Gorham himself; he’ll be glad to see his beloved pa. Just you keep quiet. If you move an inch I’ll shoot you; and I’m a pretty fair shot, too.”

“Good heavens! this lunatic is just as likely to shoot me as not,” said the old man, in considerable trepidation.

A key turned in the lock.

“All right, Gorham. Don’t be afraid. I’ve your revolver pointed at him, and I’ll fire if he moves.”

The door opened, and Gorham came in, flushed and excited, and a little bit frightened.

“Halloo, dad; [you’re] here!”

“In the first place, Gorham, just look out for that poor lunatic; he may shoot me any moment.”

“Lunatic? where? What! Harry Mason? O gracious! I shall die.” And Gorham rolled on the floor, he was laughing so heartily.

Harry Mason descended from the bed, and came out from the bedroom. If any one ever looked mortified, he did.

“But, my son, I don’t understand it at all. Here I came considerably out of my way to give you your money which you left at home.” (Gorham suddenly stopped laughing.) “This young man, after acting in the most singular manner, locked me in and threatened to shoot me, besides calling me most insulting names. I’ve lost the train, and been frightened almost to death, expecting every minute to be shot.”

“My poor old pa. Well, I’ll tell you how it was. You see, I thought I’d lost my money, finding the envelop empty, and as a man had been in my room when I was putting the envelop away, I supposed he had stolen it. Harry and I were trying to catch the thief, and you see he thought you answered to the description well enough. It was my fault, after all, you see; but I’m sure I’m sorry. Harry, perhaps we had better say nothing about this among the fellows.”

Mr. de Lancey could appreciate a joke as well as any one. Harry Mason had not yet got over his mortification.

“Don’t let it trouble you, Harry,” said Mr. de Lancey. “You showed a great deal of coolness and courage. To be sure, I don’t feel flattered at being taken for a thief, but that is nothing. So look up, lad, and as I’ve lost the train, why, let us go and get a dinner.” And soon all three were laughing at the joke over a good dinner.

The students wondered why Gorham de Lancey and Harry Mason said no more about the robbery. But they were welcome to wonder all they pleased; they never knew the truth.

The Flag of Our Union, September 7, 1867