

**TOM PLAYFAIR;
OR,
MAKING A START**

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Tom Playfair; or, Making a start by Francis J. Finn

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FRANCIS J. FINN

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"And are you really and truly a fool?" asked Tom.
-Page 56.

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BY

FRANCIS J. FINN, S.J.,

Author of "Percy Wynn," "Harry Dee," etc.

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PREFACE.

THE vicissitudes of the "Tom Playfair" manuscript would alone make a story. How it was written over seven years ago, for the sake of a college class, and with no ulterior thought of publication; how portions of it gradually found their way into print; how the writer hesitated for years whether to consign the remaining parts to the book publisher or to the waste-basket; how the cordial reception of "Percy Wynn," and the kind words concerning "Tom Playfair" from critics and from readers inspired him to take the venerable manuscript—done at all manner of odd times, in lead pencil and ink, upon all sorts and conditions of paper—from his trunk, and subsequently devote no small part of his vacation days (July, August, 1891) to its revisal; how the valued advice and kind words of literary friends served him in the revision—are not all these things indelibly impressed upon the author's memory?

And now he ventures to offer this story to the boys and girls of the land, in the hope that it may afford them healthful pleasure.

Advancing the figure learnedly styled *hysteron-proteron* from sentences to volumes, he has published

"Percy Wynn" first, although Percy's adventures are subsequent to Tom's. The reason for this procedure may be gathered from what has been said of the "Tom Playfair" manuscript.

St. Maure's is a pseudonym for a certain college in the West. Besides inventing incidents, the author, to suit his purpose, has on occasion taken liberties with the local surroundings; but in the main he has adhered to the prototype.

It is almost needless to say that the real college never suffered from the effects of a thunderbolt; in fact, the "cupola," upon which turns a catastrophe recorded in these pages, was erected, not by an architect, but by a few strokes of the pen.

Near this Western college there is a village—a thriving, happy community. This village the author has eliminated from these stories. The village of St. Maure's, which takes its place, is a fiction.

In drawing, with certain necessary reserves, upon his three years' experience at this Western college, the author has, perhaps, made too little of one striking feature—the manly piety of the students. In all his experiences there he could *count upon his fingers* those who, while in attendance, had evidently changed for the worse; and they were marked exceptions.

It is hard upon seven years since the writer last saw "St. Maure's." Then it was just on this side of its pioneer days. Now it is a college with a history of which it may well be proud. The "old church building," the little boys' dormitory and wash-room, the long, low frame structure used as an infirmary, are gone; new and nobler piles have arisen

in their place so that the college of to-day, as Peggotty remarked, I believe, of her nephew, Ham, has "grewed out of knowledge"; and yet the sweet spirit of faith and prayer has abided unchanged amid all changes.

The author has not seen these changes he is blessed in believing. Nor can he doubt, aside from all testimony, that the same spirit pervades them all. *The Dial*, a college paper conducted by the students, reaches him every month; and he can read in the lines and between the lines that the college of to-day and the college of seven years ago are one in that closest and most sacred of moral unions—a true, devout, Catholic spirit.

FRANCIS J. FINN, S. J.

October 19, 1891.

