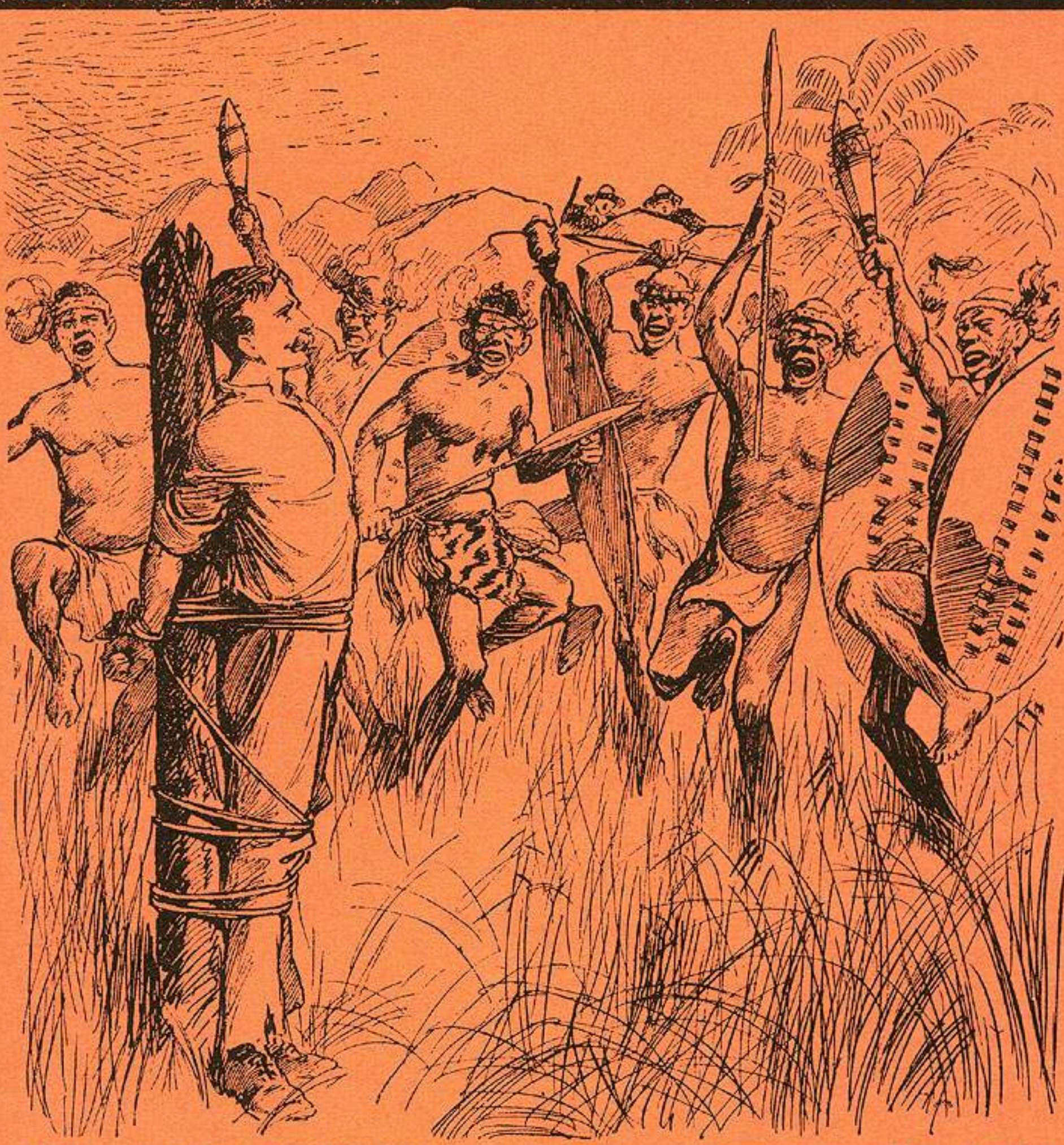
"BOB CHERRY IN SEARCH OF HIS FATHER."

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.

No. 179 | The Complete Story-Book for All | Vol 5.



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THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bad News for Bob.

BOB CHERRY came out of his study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, whistling cheerily.

Bob Cherry's whistle was loud, and it was shrill, and it indicated that Bob was in good spirits; but it could not be said to be in tune. Voices raised in angry protest could be heard from various studies as Bob Cherry passed the doors.

"Stop that row!"

"Chuck it!"

"Cheese it, you shrieking ass!"

Whereat Bob Cherry grinned, and whistled the more. When Bob was in high spirits, he whistled; and he generally was in high spirits. He had perfect health, he was always fit, and he had a happy disposition. And just now he was looking forward to the summer vacation, and a long excursion with Harry Wharton and Nugent and John Bull. No wonder he whistled; but as he had no musical ear whatever, it was not surprising that his tuneless shriek elicited howls of complaint from other fellows.

Harry Wharton opened the door of No. 1 Study, and looked out. He was one of Bob Cherry's best chums, but there are some things that put too great a strain even upon sincere friendship.

"Shut up, you ass!" he shouted.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, breaking off "What's the row?"

"That whistle of yours, you ass!"

"What's the matter with it?"

"What do you mean by whistling the Dead March in 'Saul,' anyway?" Wharton demanded.

Bob Cherry gave a sort of snort.

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"You chump!" he said. "That wasn't the Dead March in 'Saul.' It was 'Love Me and the World is Mine.'"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Blessed if anybody could tell what it was when you were whistling it," he said. "You are always yards out on every note. Chuck it!"

Bob Cherry pursed his lips, and whistled again. Wharton made a rush at him, and Bob dodged past and gained the stairs. Shrill and loud his whistle came back from the staircase.

Frank Nugent rushed into the passage with a cushion in his hand.

"Where is he?" he roared.

Whiz!

The cushion flew down the staircase, and Bob Cherry ducked his head just in time.

There was a yell from a fat junior who was just coming upstairs.

"Yarooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry, as Bunter rolled downstairs. "Out first ball! How's that, umpire?"

And then Bob Cherry went on his way, still whistling. Billy Bunter sat on the rug at the foot of the stairs, and put his big spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and groaned.

"Ow!"

Bob Cherry paused and looked down at him.

"Hurt?" he inquired genially.

Bunter groaned again.

"Ow! I'm dead—I—I mean, I'm fatally injured! I think I've broken the spinal column of my collar-bone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean, I—I've broken my back!" said Bunter. "I—I was just coming to speak to you, Cherry, to tell you there's a letter for you. I thought there might be a postal-order in it, as it's in your mother's handwriting. Ow! Help me up!"

"Bosh!"

"I—I think, perhaps, there's a postal-order in the letter, as it is a very thick one," said Bunter. "Ow! Help me!"

"How do you know anything about my letter, and how do you know my mater's handwriting?" demanded Bob Cherry, in disgust. "You inquisitive fat bounder!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Can't you get up?"

"Ow! No; I'm injured!"

"Then I'll help you."

Bob Cherry proceeded to help Bunter in a somewhat rough-and-ready manner. He applied his boot to Bunter's fat person with vigour and emphasis.

Billy Bunter roared, and leaped to his feet, showing surprising agility for a fellow who was fatally injured.

"Ow, ow! Yarooh!"

Biff, biff!

Bunter rolled away down the passage, and Bob Cherry pursued him for some distance, still helping him.

The fat junior disappeared round a corner, and then Bob Cherry went to the letter-rack for his letter.

There was a letter for him there, and, as he took it down, the marks of a dirty thumb on the envelope showed that Billy Bunter had indeed been handling it, doubtless with the idea of discovering, if possible, what was inside. Bunter was afflicted with an incurable desire to examine into other fellows' correspondence.

Bob Cherry gave a growl. Inquisitiveness and spying were faults that he could never quite forgive; they were so opposed to his own nature.

The letter was in his mother's hand, and Bob Cherry looked at it for a moment or two before opening it. Bob Cherry's father had lately left England to return to India, and Bob had no doubt that the letter contained news of his safe arrival there, or else of his having sent a message from some intermediate port. Bob himself had last heard from his father from Port Said.

Billy Bunter blinked round the corner of the passage. To Billy Bunter, letters were divided into two classes—those which contained remittances, and those which did not. Those which did not were of no importance to anybody, in Billy Bunter's opinion; and those that did were of great interest to Bunter, whomsoever they might belong to. And Bunter knew that Major Cherry sometimes sent his son substantial tips.

"I—I say, Cherry!"

Bob Cherry turned his head.

"Oh, buzz off, you ass!"

"Is there a postal-order in it?"

"I don't know, porpoise."

Bunter grunted.

"Well, why don't you open it and see?" he demanded. "What are you wasting time for? Look here, Cherry, I'm expecting a postal-order this evening; and if you've got a remittance there, you might advance me something."

"Oh, scat!"

Bob Cherry inserted a lead-pencil into the envelope and split it open. He drew out the letter, which was a thick one, unusually long for his mother to write. On the front page, as he unfolded it, was a blotch, as if something wet had dropped upon the page and caused the ink to spread.

Bob Cherry started as he saw it.

"Mother's been crying!" he muttered.

He stood for a moment quite still, without reading the letter.

Was it bad news?

Had anything happened to his father?

Billy Bunter came cautiously along the passage. Bob Cherry's stillness encouraged the fat junior, and he rolled up almost within touch of Bob, standing ready, however, to dodge if necessary.

"I say, Cherry!"

Bob Cherry did not answer; he did not even hear. He stood, with the letter in his hand, quite still.

"Cherry, old man, if you could lend me——"

Bob made a gesture, and the fat junior backed away. Then Bob read the letter. His healthy, ruddy face became paler and paler as he read, and a low sound as of pain came from his lips.

"Oh, father!"

He came to the end of the letter. His face was white as chalk, and there was a glimmer of wet on his eyelashes. He crumpled the letter in his left hand; his right was clasped to his throbbing forehead.

"Oh, father! Oh, dad, dad!"

— — —

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Lost!

HARRY WHARTON started as he came down the stairs. That sharp, agonised exclamation fell suddenly upon his ears; and he looked round, and saw Bob Cherry with the letter in his hand.

He ran towards Bob at once.

"Bob, what's the matter? What is it?"

Bob Cherry groaned.

That seemed to be, for the moment, the only reply he could make.

Harry Wharton, in alarm, grasped him by the arm.

"Bob, what is it? Bad news from home?"

"Yes!" groaned Bob.

"Your mother?"

"The mater's all right."

"Thank goodness for that," said Harry Wharton. "But what's the matter, then?"

"My father!"

"I understood that he was gone back to India."

"Wrecked!" groaned Bob Cherry. "Wrecked in the Red Sea. The steamer went down on a reef, and there's only one survivor—chap who swam for four hours, and was picked up. My pater's gone. Oh!"

And then Bob fairly broke down.

"Poor old Bob!"

Harry led the junior quietly into a window recess, and made him sit down. Billy Bunter blinked after them.

"I—I say, you fellows, wasn't there a postal-order in the letter."

Wharton made so furious a gesture that Bunter jumped back in alarm, and scuttled away. Wharton sat down beside Bob, his arm through Bob's.

"Poor old chap!" he said. "It's awful. But is it certain, Bob? Do you know for certain that your father's gone down."

"Look at that," said Bob.

He pointed out a tear-stained paragraph in the letter.

"So far as is known, there was only one survivor—a sailor who swam for four hours before he was picked up. But your father was a good swimmer, too, and I still hope that he may have succeeded in getting to the shore. He must be searched for, Bob, and found, if he is still living, though yet I do not know how."

"He may be still living, then," said Harry Wharton. "My dear old Bob, you can't give up hope yet."

Bob groaned.

"I remember he was a splendid swimmer," said Harry, "and if one man escaped by swimming another may have. Major Cherry would have as good a chance as anybody. If he succeeded in getting ashore——"

"The shore of the Red Sea," muttered Bob. "Among black savages and dervishes—devils who would murder him as soon as look at him."

Wharton nodded slowly.

He could not help thinking that Major Cherry's chances of escape were very slim, but he wanted to comfort Bob.

"There's a chance yet, Bob," he said steadily. "And as your mater says, the major will have to be looked for."

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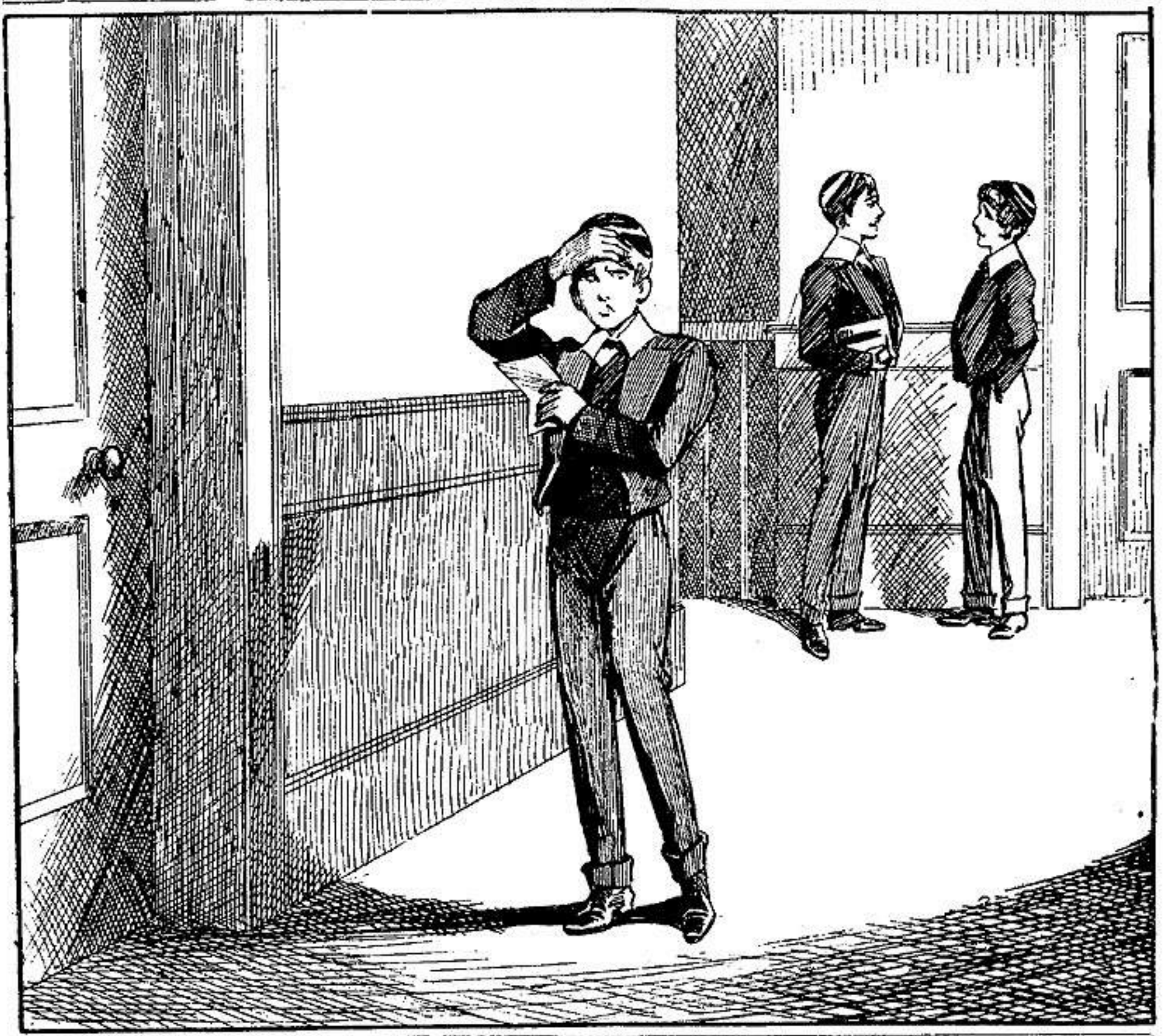

Bob Cherry's face was white as chalk, and there was a glimmer of wet on his eyelashes. He crumpled the letter in his left hand; his right was clasped to his throbbing forehead. "Oh, father! Oh, dad, dad!" he cried. (See page 2.)

"Yes, yes. But how?"

"Somehow. I don't know!"

Bob Cherry's face set firmly.

"I'm going to look for him," he said.

"You, Bob!"

"Yes. There's nobody else to do it. I'm going to do it. I shall have to do it. If my father's still alive, I'm going to find him."

"But you can't get away!"

"I shall get away. I'll make mother ask the Head. I'm going to the Red Sea to search for my father," said Bob determinedly. "Why, old chap, he may be wrecked there on the coast, waiting to be found and taken off—waiting for somebody to come and help him. Do you think I could stick at Greyfriars while I thought that?"

"But——"

"I'm going—if I have to run away from school. But that's all right. I shall get leave all serene. I wish you could come with me, Harry."

Harry Wharton's eyes sparkled.

"By Jove, Bob! Look here, we were planning a long excursion for the summer vac., and it's just on us now. Why shouldn't we have a run abroad instead of the run at home we were planning—say a run down to the Red Sea?"

"Good!"

"My uncle would take me there if I asked him, and our people couldn't have any fear of our going, with Colonel Wharton in charge of us," said Harry. "I know he'd do it, if I begged it of him—and he was a friend of your father's, too. They were in India together."

"Oh, Harry!"

"We'll settle it. Nugent and Bull can write to their people, and Marky, too, and we'll all go together."

Bob Cherry grasped his chum's hand.

"Oh, that would be splendid, Harry—splendid!"

"We'll settle it, then."

Bob Cherry rose to his feet.

"I—I think I'll go to my study for a bit," he said. "I feel quite rocky. I shall have to go home to-day, to see mother. She will want me. When can you see your uncle and ask him."

"I'll see him to-day, too!"

"Jolly good!"

Bob Cherry moved away with slow steps. All the brightness, all the cheery elasticity, seemed to be gone from the lad.

The blow that had fallen upon him had crushed him for the time.

In his study Bob Cherry sat in silence, with his face in his hands, and the tears trickling through his fingers—tears that Bob's eyes were unaccustomed to shed.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Colonel Says "Yes."

THE news of Bob Cherry's misfortune won him a great deal of sympathy among the other fellows at Greyfriars. Bob was a general favourite, as he deserved to be; his open, sunny nature made him liked by all.

And his father, too, was well-known at the old school. It was not so long since Bob Cherry, accused of theft, and

found guilty on false evidence, had been expelled from the school, and at that time Major Cherry had made himself very prominent at Greyfriars.

He had come down in his wrath like an avalanche, and had "ramped," as Frank Nugent called it, in the most terrific manner.

The Greyfriars juniors grinned when they thought of it, but they all liked the fiery major, and they were very sorry indeed when they heard of what had happened.

But most of the fellows tried to encourage Bob to look upon the brighter side of the affair. It was quite possible that his father had got safely ashore, and might have been rescued by now, or possibly was still waiting on the African coast to be taken off.

And Bob, after the first terrible shock was over, made up his mind to hope for the best, in accordance with his sunny, hopeful nature.

The idea of searching for Bob Cherry's father under tropic suns appealed very strongly to the chums of the Remove Form.

They had been planning a caravan trip for the long vacation, but a voyage to the Red Sea in search of a shipwrecked man appealed to them much more strongly, if it could only be managed.

And Harry Wharton had little doubt of being able to persuade his uncle on the subject. Colonel Wharton was devoted to his nephew, as fond as his father could have been, if his father had lived.

Bob went in to see the Head, and left Greyfriars within an hour after receiving the bad news. He was wanted at home now.

Harry Wharton talked the matter over in his study with Frank Nugent and John Bull and Mark Linley.

The three were keen enough upon the proposed expedition, and they had no doubt that their people would agree if Colonel Wharton was in charge of the party.

"It will be ripping," said Nugent enthusiastically. "Simply splendid! And we'll jolly well find Major Cherry, and bring him home in triumph."

"What-ho!" said John Bull.

"But it will be an expensive journey," said Mark Linley hesitatingly. "I—I think you had better leave me out, Wharton."

"Wouldn't you like to come?"

"Yes, of course. I want to stand by old Bob. But—well, you know how poor my people are. It's no good making any bones about the matter," said the scholarship boy frankly. "And so——"

"I'll fix that with my uncle," said Harry. "You needn't mind the Colonel standing treat. He will do the same for all of us if we go. And you've simply got to come. You're Bob's best chum."

"I should like to immensely, of course," said the Lancashire lad, with a sigh.

"Then you shall, if we do."

"And I guess I'm coming, too," said a voice at the door; and Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, looked in with his cool grin. "Excuse me, sirs. I guess I know what you're planning, and what you want to help you through is a chap about my size, with a clear American brain to think things out for you—some."

"We'll be glad, if you can get leave," said Harry Wharton, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, rather, we shall be serious enough; and we want Fish to cheer us up," said Nugent. "He will be able to show us how everything ought not to be done, and——"

"I guess I could give you some pointers, my sons," said Fisher T. Fish, in his airy way. "You bet! I guess I'm coming on this journey, and if the major's found, I guess I shall be the individual who will dig him up."

"Rats!"

"I guess you'll see."

"I'd better go and speak to the Head," said Harry Wharton. "It will be only beginning the summer vac. a week or two in advance, really, and I don't see why he should mind. I'll ask him, anyway."

And Harry Wharton quitted the study, leaving the other fellows eagerly discussing the prospects of the journey.

Harry Wharton was feeling a little doubtful as he tapped at the door of the Head's study. But he was quite calm and cool as he entered in response to the "Come in!" in the deep tones of Dr. Locke.

"If you please, sir, may I have leave to go home and see my uncle," said Harry.

The Head raised his eyesbrows.

"For what reason, Wharton?"

"You know about what's happened to Bob, sir—Bob Cherry, I mean?"

"Yes; I was very sorry to hear it," said the Head gravely. "I sincerely hope that Major Cherry still lives."

"He is going to be searched for, sir."

"That is an excellent thing."

"We—we were thinking of looking for him, sir."

Dr. Locke started, and stared at the junior, as well he might.

"You, Wharton!"

"Yes, sir," said Harry. "I, and Bob, and Nugent and Bull, sir, and Fish. If you would be kind enough to give us leave, sir, to get away from Greyfriars before the vac."

"You cannot be serious, Wharton. Even in the vacation your people would not allow mere boys to undertake such a journey."

"I think my uncle would take us, sir."

"Ah! That would alter the case, of course," said the Head. "But have you any reason to suppose that Colonel Wharton would undertake this journey."

"I want to ask him, sir."

"And that is the reason why you wish to go home to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

The Head wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"Very well, Wharton. You can at least have leave to visit your uncle. If he should consent to take you on this journey, I shall discuss the matter with him."

"Thank you very much, sir."

And Wharton, ten minutes later, was walking down to the gates of Greyfriars, with Nugent and Linley and Bull and Fish to see him off.

"I kinder guess I ought to come with you, Wharton," Fisher T. Fish remarked, as they stood on the platform of the old station of Friardale, waiting for the train to come in.

Wharton stared at the American youth.

"What the dickens for?" he demanded.

"To persuade the old gentleman. I could put it to him in a businesslike way, you know," explained Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I could make him cotton to the idea that he simply must come."

Harry Wharton smiled.

"I think I can do all that's necessary," he said. "Hallo, here's my train!"

The train came rolling in. Nugent opened a carriage door for his chum.

"I guess I had better come," said Fish.

"Rats!"

"I can talk to him like a Dutch uncle, you know. I can give him straight goods on the subject, and make him savvy."

"Bosh!"

"I'll talk to him in a businesslike way; the way we do over there," said Fisher T. Fish. "Over there" was the United States in Fisher T. Fish's peculiar language. "I can make him see it, you see. You may get left."

"Piffle!"

"Stand back there!" shouted the guard.

"Good-bye, Harry!"

"Get off there, Fish!"

Linley and Bull and Nugent made a grasp at the American junior. But the slim and elusive Yankee whipped into the carriage after Wharton. The train was moving. He grinned back at the astonished juniors on the platform.

"Jevver get left?" he inquired.

"You ass——"

"You fathead——"

"You chump——"

"Explain to the doctor that I had to go and take care of Wharton——"

But the rest of Fisher T. Fish's message was lost in the distance as the train rushed out of the station.

Harry Wharton leaned back in his seat and stared at the Yankee schoolboy.

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"Well, of all the check!" he ejaculated.

Fisher T. Fish grinned.

"I guess it's all O.K.," he remarked. "You hear me talk to the old guy, and I'll——"

"The what?"

"The old guy."

"If you are referring to my uncle as an old guy, you'll get a prize thick ear to take back to Greyfriars with you!" said Harry Wharton wrathfully.

"No offence," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I should have said the old gentleman."

"I guess you should, you howling ass."

"But you hear me put it to him, that's all," said Fisher T. Fish confidently. "You'll hear the guy—I mean, you'll hear him say 'Yes.'"

"Rats!"

"I guess——"

"Br r-r-r!"

The train rushed on. Fisher T. Fish put his feet up on the seat opposite him in the true American fashion, and chewed the end of a pencil till the train ran into the station at Wharton Magnus.

A quarter of an hour later the two juniors descended from a hack at the gates of Wharton Lodge. A tall, handsome gentleman with a white moustache was standing by the gate talking to the lodgekeeper.

He swung round with an exclamation as the two juniors approached him.

"Harry!"

"Uncle!"

Colonel Wharton knew all about the story of Bob's expulthen with Fisher T. Fish. He was evidently pleased to see Harry, and at the same time considerably surprised.

"But what are you doing here, Harry?" he asked. "Why are you away from Greyfriars?"

"I've come to ask you a big favour, uncle."

The colonel smiled.

"You know you can ask me anything in reason, Harry," he said, "and I know you too well to think that you would ask me anything out of reason."

"I guess you'll say yes, sir," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess——"

"I hope you will say yes, sir," said Harry.

The colonel laughed.

"Yes," he said.

— — —

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Bunter is Not Wanted!

HARRY WHARTON pressed his uncle's hand.

"Thank you," he said—"thank you so much, uncle! But it's a big thing I'm going to ask, and you're at liberty to take the 'yes' back if you like, after I've told you."

"I guess the colonel won't do that," said Fisher T. Fish.

"It's about Bob Cherry," said Harry.

"Not in trouble again, surely?" asked the colonel.

Colonel Wharton knew all about the story of Bob's expulsion from Greyfriars, and his reinstatement there in triumph.

"Yes, uncle. His father's been wrecked in the Red Sea, on the way to India, and, so far as is known, only one chap survived the wreck. But Bob's mother hopes that the major may have got ashore somehow—he was a splendid swimmer, you know—and the chap who was saved, was saved through being able to swim four hours in the water."

The colonel's brow clouded.

"Poor old Cherry! He was with me in the Khyber;" he exclaimed. "I am very sorry to hear this, Harry!"

"It's rotten for poor old Bob," said Harry. "He's awfully cut up by it. We were thinking, uncle——"

He paused.

"Yes, Harry?"

"We kinder guess that the major may still be flourishing out there somewhere on the African coast," Fisher T. Fish interjected. "We're thinking of going to look for him."

"Ahem!"

"That's it, uncle," said Harry Wharton eagerly. "You see, the major is very likely still alive—wrecked on a coast among savages and Arab dervishes. You were going to take all of us on a caravan trip for the summer vac. Will you take us on a cruise instead?"

"A cruise, Harry?" said the colonel, tugging thoughtfully at his white moustache.

"Yes, uncle; a cruise to the Red Sea."

"By Jove!"

"As for the expense, I shall have a lot of money when I'm twenty-one, you know, and I should like to pay for it," said Harry diffidently. "I know it will cost some money."

The colonel shook his head.

"That would not do, Harry. Besides, the money is not the point. If I could go, I could find the money easily enough. What does your head-master say about it? I suppose you asked him first?"

EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"Yes, uncle; and I think he will give his permission easily enough if he knows that you will take us."

The colonel nodded.

"Very well, Harry. I will think it over, at all events. A matter of this sort cannot be settled in a few minutes. I am sorry for the major, and I should be glad to do anything I could to help him, if he is really cast away on the shores of the Red Sea."

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you he would be an old sport?"

"Thanks for your good opinion," said the colonel, smiling. "I hope I shall always be an old sport. Come into the house now and have some dinner, and we will talk it over."

And over a cosy little dinner they discussed the matter. The more they discussed it, the more the colonel seemed to take to the idea, and it was not long before he decided to carry it out. Fisher T. Fish grinned at Harry Wharton over the table.

"I reckon I told you I should work the riffle," he said.

Harry stared.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Yep!"

"It will be an excellent way of passing the summer vacation, instructive as well as amusing," said the colonel. "But if any good is to be done, we shall have to start immediately, and I shall come down to Greyfriars and ask the Head's consent for you boys to accompany me."

"Thank you so much, uncle!"

The colonel looked at his watch.

"I will come this evening," he said. "I can return with you. There will still be time for me to catch the last train for London, where I shall have to go to arrange about chartering a steamer."

Wharton's eyes glistened.

Even Fisher T. Fish, convinced as he was that nothing ever was done on this side of the Atlantic as it might be done on the other side, was impressed. The colonel certainly did not intend to allow the grass to grow under his feet.

"I guess your uncle's up to snuff, yep," Fisher T. Fish remarked, as they walked back to the station. "I guess he's as hefty as an Amurrican, when it comes to making things hum. What time does that train go?"

"Half-past seven."

"Better hustle, then, or we'll lose it. Sorry to hurry you sir, but we shall lose the train if we don't hustle."

Colonel Wharton looked down at the slim and far from athletic American with a smile.

Fisher T. Fish prided himself upon his powers as a walker, but, as a matter of fact, there were Third Form fags at Greyfriars who could have walked away from him.

"Very well; let us walk faster," said Colonel Wharton.

And he stepped out with his soldier's stride. Harry grinned, and quickened his pace. Fisher T Fish laboured after them, grunting. In about two minutes he dropped hopelessly behind.

"I guess we've got time enough now," he called out breathlessly.

Colonel Wharton and his nephew did not appear to hear. They strode on at the same rapid pace, and Fisher T. Fish broke into a run to keep up.

"I guess it's all right now!" he bawled.

But there was no reply, nor did they slacken their pace.

Fisher T. Fish was kept on the run until the little old station of Wharton Magnus was reached.

He was gasping for breath as he came into the station, and found the colonel and Harry lounging in a leisurely way on the platform.

"Hallo!" said Harry. "Did we leave you behind?"

Fish panted.

"Nope! I—I guess I was taking it easily," he jerked out.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, I'm not tired; I'm not out of b-b-breath. I'm all O.K."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton.

The train came in, and they were soon bowling back to Greyfriars. Colonel Wharton rang at the college gates when they reached the school, and Gosling, the porter, hushed his growl as he saw the tall figure outside. As the three crossed the old Close, a fat figure rolled out of the School House, and the starlight glimmered upon Billy Bunter's big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I only want to know, you know. Are you going on that expedish?"

"Yes."

"I guess we are, Bunty."

NEXT TUESDAY: "A SCHOOLBOY'S CROSS-ROADS," A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Greyfriars School. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Good!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I'll come with you."

"I guess not."

"Oh, really, Fish——"

"That you jolly well won't!" Harry Wharton exclaimed. "You're trouble enough here, Bunter. Buzz off!"

"Look here, Wharton," said Billy Bunter, taking hold of Harry's sleeve, and speaking in his most persuasive tones. "Look here——"

"Rats! Leggo!"

"It's simply imperative for me to come. You see, I shall be so useful. If there is any cooking to be done——"

"Rats!"

"Or eating," grinned Fisher T. Fish. "That's where Bunter could lend valuable assistance."

"Oh, really, you know—— Look here, Wharton, I simply must come. I don't see why I should stick to lessons while you chaps go off on blessed holidays. Look here—— Oh!"

Wharton jerked his arm away from the fat junior, and Fisher T. Fish gave him a gentle bump. Billy Bunter sat down in the Close, and gasped, with a sound like escaping gas.

"Ow! Yow! Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton and Fish went on into the House. Billy Bunter sat and gasped, and his dulcet tones floated in after the two juniors.

"Beasts!"

— —

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Wrong Nose.

THE next few days were busy ones for the chums of Greyfriars.

It had been decided that they should go, and that the party should consist of six juniors—Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, John Bull, Mark Linley, and Fisher T. Fish.

And the half-dozen juniors had plenty of preparations to make.

They were going on a voyage to a tropical clime, and into dangerous regions, and they had to go prepared.

In the matter of clothing, the colonel's experience stood them in good stead.

His advice was very valuable to the juniors, and they did some shopping in London under his guidance, obtaining the maximum of value for the minimum of expenditure.

There was the question of arms to be considered, too, and there the colonel's help came in very useful. Harry Wharton was a good shot, and knew a great deal about guns; but the others did not. But they were greatly pleased with themselves when they saw the case of rifles and revolvers provided for them.

Nugent's eyes sparkled as he looked at the case.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "This looks really like business at last. I wonder if we shall have to use these things?"

"Very likely," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We're going to the African shore of the Red Sea, and the natives there are savage enough—some of them cannibals, I believe. There are certainly cannibals further inland, in the Sudan."

"By Jove!"

"We shall have to land, of course, to search for the major, and we may have fighting to do, perhaps every day," said Harry.

"Ripping!" said John Bull.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We might get the worst of it," he suggested.

"Oh, rats!"

"Yep, rats," said Fisher T. Fish. "Eh? What do you think, Bob, old son?"

Bob Cherry started out of a reverie.

"Eh?" he said. "Why, I think I'll fight all North Africa, if necessary, to find my father."

"Hear, hear!" said Mark Linley.

The colonel had chartered a steamer to take the party to the Red Sea. It was a great day for the Greyfriars juniors when they started.

Mrs. Cherry saw them off in the train for London.

The major's wife—or, perhaps, widow—was very calm and quiet, but the red on her eyelids showed of recent tears.

"Good-bye, ma'am!" said Harry Wharton, as he shook hands with Bob's mother. "Good-bye! And never fear, we'll bring Bob back all right."

"And dad, too, mother," whispered Bob.

"God bless you, my boy," whispered Mrs. Cherry, "and grant, too, that you may find your father. Good-bye, my dear boys!"

And the juniors waved their hats as the train steamed out.

Bob Cherry sat in a corner and coughed. Like many boys of really deep feeling, he felt a curious shame about showing his emotions. The train rushed on towards London, and Bob Cherry coughed in his corner and blinked.

"How the wind blows in!" he grunted, rubbing his eyes. "Makes a fellow's eyes water."

"Yes, doesn't it?" agreed Harry.

"I guess you'd better change with me, and have your back to the engine, sonny," said Fisher T. Fish sympathetically.

"Never mind; I'm all right."

And Bob Cherry plunged his face into a newspaper, and appeared to be reading for the next half-hour; but as he was holding the paper upside down it is highly improbable that he read any of it.

The colonel and his companions alighted from the train in London, and they proceeded at once to the steamer.

It was a little craft, and did not look a very handsome vessel; but it was fast and well built.

The captain, a short, thick-set man, with a red beard, called Captain Coke, was presented to the juniors, and he greeted them in a deep voice that seemed to echo from the depths of his huge beard.

The boys were shown to their quarters on the steamer. They found them confined enough as to space, but clean and comfortable.

"I guess we can manage here," Fisher T. Fish remarked. "Of course, perhaps this isn't exactly as we should do it over there."

"Oh, cheese it, Fishy!"

"I guess——"

"Shut up!" roared the juniors.

And the American grinned and shut up.

The six juniors occupied three state-rooms adjoining one another, each containing two bunks. There was room for the cabin trunks they had brought, and room for them to move. And more than that, as Frank Nugent remarked philosophically, they really could not expect.

Colonel Wharton looked in upon the juniors a little later, with a genial smile upon his bronzed face.

"Are you making yourselves comfortable?" he asked.

"Yes, uncle," said Harry brightly. "I think we shall be all right here."

"I guess it is all O.K., sir. Over there—— Ow!"

Fisher T. Fish ceased as John Bull stamped upon his toe. The colonel smiled and retired, and the American junior turned excitedly upon John Bull.

"What did you do that for?" he roared.

John Bull grinned.

"To shut you up, of course!" he said.

"You ass! You burbling ass!" howled Fisher T. Fish. "I've got a corn on that hoof."

"That's what comes of wearing American boots," said John Bull serenely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish snorted.

"You champion ass——"

"Oh, let's get on with the unpacking," said Harry, laughing.

"I guess that guy wants a record licking," growled Fisher T. Fish. "For two pins I'd show him how we box over there."

John Bull grinned again, and felt along the lapel of his coat, and calmly extracted two pins from the cloth. He handed them to the American.

Fisher T. Fish looked at them in surprise.

"Eh?" he ejaculated.

"There you are!" said John Bull.

"What do you mean?"

"There are your two pins," said John Bull blandly. "Now show us how you box over there."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"I guess——"

"Go ahead!"

"Look here——"

"Pile in!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Fisher T. Fish, pushing back his cuffs. "I guess I could show you guys how we box."

"I'm ready."

"There you are," said Fisher T. Fish, plunging forward at once, and hitting out, with about as much idea of boxing as of algebra. "There you are—that's for your nose! Ow!"

Fish's clumsy drive was knocked up, and John Bull gave him a gentle tap on the nose in return.

It was not a hard knock, by any means, but it was so unexpected that it bowled Fisher T. Fish quite over.

He gave a gasp, and sat down.

There was a yell from Nugent.

"You ass! Get off my collars!"

"Yow!"

Fisher T. Fish had sat down upon a bundle of collars, and the shape of those collars was not improved by his weight. The wrathful Nugent dragged him off. The American youth rose to his feet, looking somewhat bewildered.

"Ow!" he gasped.

John Bull grinned at him.

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"Fire!" shouted Harry Wharton. Crack-crack! Right up to the rocky pile the blacks came, with fiendish yells, their spears brandished in the air. (See page 16.)

"Having any more?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish shook his head.

"Upon the whole, I think I'll leave the lesson till a more favourable opportunity," he said. "We've got no room to box here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was going to dot you on the nose——"

"But I dotted you on the nose instead," grinned John Bull. "It's all right—it was the wrong nose that got dotted, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish grunted, and went on with his unpacking. The American youth was very fond of showing the Greyfriars juniors how things were done "over there," but his demonstrations generally turned out something like this.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
All Alike.

"HERE we are—at sea!"

Harry Wharton uttered the exclamation as he came up on the deck of the steamer. The Thames, with its busy shipping, its thousands of masts and funnels, had been left behind.

Away out of the great estuary of the Thames, the steamer was gliding, leaving behind a black track of smoke against the sunny sky.

The weather was beautiful, the sea softly rippling and gleaming in the rays of the summer sun.

Overhead the sky was blue, and skylarks skimmed to and fro upon the broad expanse. It was a cheerful and inspiriting sight.

It was a great change, too, for the juniors of Greyfriars. Much as they loved the old school, much as they loved the grey old walls and ivied windows, they were glad to be upon the blue sea, to be sailing for new and strange lands.

"I guess this is all right," Fisher T. Fish remarked, leaning gracefully upon the rail, with one foot stretched out behind him. "I guess we shall enjoy this trip—some."

"I guess so," said Frank Nugent, with a smile.

"I hope you chaps ain't seasick."

"I'm not," said Harry.

"I guess you'll all knock under as soon as we get to the Channel," said Fisher T. Fish, with a grin. "You'll be crawling all over the deck, I guess Of course, I shall not feel it a bit. I'm an old sailor."

"Weren't you sick crossing from New York" asked Mark Linley.

The American youth did not appear to hear the question.

"The old tub will begin to roll as soon as we get into the Channel," he said. "I suppose we have to go through the Channel?"

"Yes, rather—and then through the Bay of Biscay," said Harry.

Nugent gave a groan of comic apprehension.

"The Bay of Biscay! My hat! That will give us a twist, unless we've got on our sea-legs by that time."

"I guess I shall be all O. K."

"I guess you will, if swank can do it," said John Bull.

It was a sunny afternoon as the steamer plunged into the chops of the Channel. The weather was not at all rough, but the sea was rolling very much past the cliffs of Dover.

NEXT TUESDAY: "A SCHOOLBOY'S CROSS-ROADS," A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Greyfriars School. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Frank Nugent sat on a seat on the deck, and fell very silent. Bob Cherry appeared to be thinking something out very deeply.

Fisher T. Fish looked at them and grinned.

"I guess I'm getting hungry," he remarked.

John Bull gave a start.

"Hungry!" he exclaimed.

"I guess so!"

"You ass! You won't think of eating anything now!"

"I guess I'm an old sailor, and I can eat when I like," said Fisher T. Fish serenely. "You don't think the forecastle hands miss their meals going to sea, do you?"

"No; but——"

"I guess I'll have some tommy. Shall I bring you some? The cook's keeping open house for us, you know, by the colonel's orders."

"None for me, thanks."

"Shall I bring you something, Nugent?"

Nugent grunted.

"No."

"Not a little bit of fat pork, or—— Oh!"

Nugent plunged forward to the rail, and leaned over it in anguish. The mention of fat pork had been the finishing touch.

"Oh! Groo!" groaned Nugent.

"Poor old chap!" said Fisher T. Fish commiseratingly. "I say, Bob, shall I get you some fat bacon, or some blancmange?"

"Buzz off, you beast!" said Bob Cherry faintly.

"Shall I get you some fried fish, or——"

Bob Cherry made a feeble blow at the American youth, who grinned and dodged, and then Bob joined Frank at the rail.

"I guess I'll go and get my own grub, then," said Fisher T. Fish. "Sure there's nothing I can do for you fellows?"

The fellows made no reply, and the American junior swung below. He came up a few minutes later with a can of hot coffee in one hand, and a shrimp sandwich in the other. He grinned serenely at the Greyfriars juniors, who were all feeling inclined for anything but eating at that moment.

"Have some of this coffee, Wharton?"

"No, thanks."

"Have a bit of my shrimp sandwich, Bull?"

"No, hang you."

Bull's reply was a little less polite than Harry Wharton's. But the junior from New York only grinned.

"I guess a shrimp sandwich is all O. K." he said. "Better have one—it will buck you up. Take my tip."

"Groo!"

"What's the matter with you, Bob?"

"Gerrooh!"

"Anything wrong with you, Franky?"

"Grororooooh!"

"I guess you chaps ought to have stayed ashore. I say, Bull, you're looking rather seedy. Have some bloater-paste to buck you up."

"Gruh!" gasped Johnny Bull, and he rushed to the side.

The American grinned.

"How are you feeling, Linley?"

Mark Linley smiled.

"I am all right," he said.

"I guess you're an old sailor, eh?"

"I spent a lot of time on the Mersey and the Irish Sea once," said the Lancashire lad quietly. "I'm seasoned."

"You all right, Wharton?"

"Don't talk to me."

"Why not?"

"Groo!"

"Poor chap! Have some coffee?"

"Gruh!"

"Have some grub?"

"Oh, shut up!"

The steamer was rolling and pitching now in the chops of the Channel, and Harry Wharton joined his comrades at the rail.

Mark Linley was quite composed, and he fetched glasses of water for his afflicted chums, and ministered to them, while Fisher T. Fish drank his coffee and ate his shrimp sandwich with an air of great serenity.

But, as a matter of fact, Fisher T. Fish's serenity was being undermined.

He did not finish that shrimp sandwich. About half-way through it, he tossed what was left over the rail into the sea, with a careless sort of air.

Then he was observed to place the cup of coffee on the deck, not more than half consumed.

Mark Linley looked at him, and he could not help grinning. A peculiar shade of colour was creeping over the face of the American junior.

"Feeling all right, Fishy?" asked Mark

"Yep."

"Not getting at all rocky?"

"Nope."

"I'm so glad. Shall I fetch you anything to eat?" asked Linley, with a grin.

Fisher T. Fish made a sort of gulp.

"I guess I've had enough for the present," he remarked. "Change of air affects my appetite, you know, and I—I don't feel hungry now."

Bob Cherry turned a colourless face from the rail.

"Won't you have some fat pork?" he groaned.

"Oh, ring off!"

"Or a chunk of fat bacon with plenty of grease?"

"Ow!"

John Bull was sitting down, in a state of intense misery. But a ghostly grin stole over his face as he saw the expression of Fisher T. Fish.

"He's got it, too!" he gasped.

"Oh, good!"

"Rot!" said Fisher T. Fish, in a feeble voice. "I haven't got it. I'm an old sailor, I guess—some."

"I'm jolly glad you've got it," said John Bull, "and to judge by the look of you, you'll have it worse than we do."

"Nope."

"Shrimp sandwiches aren't good for sea-sickness," said John Bull, with fiendish glee. "You'll be rolling on the deck in a minute."

"I guess—— Ow! Oh! Ooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha! Groooooh!"

John Bull's laugh ended in a gurgling groan, and he hurried to the side. Fisher T. Fish sat down on the bench, and moaned.

It had been out of sheer bravado that he had taken the coffee and the shrimp sandwich. He was sorry for it now. His swank had cost him dear. As a matter of fact, he was far worse a sailor than any of the others.

Colonel Wharton came along the deck, and he looked at the juniors with great commiseration. The rolling of the steamer made no difference to the tough old soldier.

"I'm sorry you're feeling bad, my lads," he said.

"I guess I'm all O. K.," groaned Fisher T. Fish.

"You don't feel it?"

"Nope."

"Then your looks are very deceptive," said the colonel drily.

"I guess—— Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, I guess."

"Oh!" moaned Nugent. "Oh! This is terrific, as old Inky used to say! Ow! I'm jolly glad Fishy has got it too, though."

"Nope, I—— Oh!"

Fisher T. Fish stopped short in his denial, and fairly laid down on the deck, and was terribly sick. And for the next two or three hours Fisher T. Fish hardly moved, and made no sound excepting to emit a groan.

— — —

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Left.

BY the time the Hope was through the Channel the Greyfriars juniors had got on their sea-legs, as a sailor would say; and the terrible mal-de-mer no longer assailed them. Fisher T. Fish was the last to recover; and even when the steamer ran past Ushant the American junior was still feeling considerably uneasy inside. The other fellows were very much inclined to chip him on the subject, after the swank he had started with, but he looked so yellow and miserable that they had not the heart to do so. All his swank was gone for the present, which was a great comfort, though it was pretty certain to return as soon as the American junior felt recovered.

Ushant disappeared to port, and the bows of the steamer plunged into the troubled waters of the Bay of Biscay.

The dreaded Bay was smiling to the view, but long ere Cape Finisterre came into sight the sea was rolling under a gale, and the Hope rolled and plunged more terribly than in the chops of the Channel.

Then came the second attack, and the Greyfriars juniors moaned and said things about the Bay of Biscay which were not complimentary.

But all things come to an end, and the steamer ran on into calmer and sunnier waters, and the mountains of Portugal loomed up through sunshine and blue.

"This is ripping!" Frank Nugent remarked, one morning, as he came on deck. "Beats caravanning at home, eh?"

"I guess so," said Fisher T. Fish. "It doesn't beat canoeing on the Hudson, over there, though."

"Oh, blow over there!"

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"I guess——"

"Fishy's recovered," said Mark Linley, with a grin. "We shall have swank without end now that he's got over the sickness."

The American gave a sniff.

"I guess I wasn't really sick," he remarked, with uncommon nerve. "I was feeling a little seedy, that's all, after that shrimp sandwich. My opinion is that the shrimps were high. I'm a jolly good sailor, and——"

"Rats!"

"And I've practically never been sick——"

There was a shout of protest from the juniors.

After the exhibition Fisher T. Fish had made of himself in the Bay of Biscay, rolling on the deck, or moaning in his bunk, for hours together, this was really a little too cool.

"Shut up!"

"Cheese it!"

"Ring off!"

"I guess——" began Fisher T. Fish.

"Of all the cheek!" exclaimed Harry Wharton indignantly. "When you're as yellow as a guinea at the present moment, and you've made more fuss than the lot of us put together!"

"Nope! I——"

"Oh, bump him!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Good egg!"

The juniors made a rush at Fisher T. Fish. The American junior made a rush in his turn for the companion-way, and bolted down the stairs. There was a roar from the cabin ladder, and the sound of a heavy bump.

"My hat!" roared Frank Nugent. "The ass! Who's he knocked down?"

A deep voice answered the question.

"You clumsy swab!"

"Captain Coke! The skipper, by Jove!" gasped Wharton.

The juniors ran to look down after Fisher T. Fish.

Captain Coke was just picking himself up at the bottom of the steps, and Fisher T. Fish still lay gasping on the floor. The expression upon the thickly bearded face of the skipper showed that he was very angry.

"You silly swab!" he exclaimed. "You clumsy lubber!"

"I guess——"

"You fumbling lubber!"

"I guess I'm sorry!"

The skipper growled, and tramped on deck. Fisher T. Fish rose to his feet, looking considerably dazed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish looked up at the grinning faces above.

"Ow!" he grunted. "Ow! I'm hurt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "Jevver get left?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Fisher T. Fish limped away without replying.

The steamer rounded the coast of Portugal, and stopped at the Spanish coast, at Cadiz, for a few hours, and then ran on swiftly through the Straits of Gibraltar.

As the steamer rushed on into the Mediterranean, the juniors had a glimpse of Gibraltar, that wonderful fortress won by British pluck, held by British fortitude, and now the guardian of the entrance of the Mediterranean Sea.

"There's Gib.!" said Harry Wharton. "I'd like to land there, if we had time; but we haven't!"

Bob Cherry nodded.

He, too, would have been glad to explore the famous Rock, but he was anxious to get to the scene of his father's shipwreck, and commence the search for him.

All Bob Cherry's thoughts now were of his father, and somehow, as the steamer ran on into Southern waters, Bob's hopes of finding his father alive rose and grew stronger. In his mind's eye he could see his father on the rocky coast, in tattered attire, looking out to sea, waiting for the vessel that was to rescue him.

"And we jolly well will save him," said Bob Cherry, pursuing his unspoken thought aloud. "I'm not going back without him—or else without proof that it's all over."

"And we'll stick to you, Bob," said John Bull.

"I guess so! But you leave it to me—I'll find him," said Fisher T. Fish. "You rely on the hoss-sense of a fellow from over there."

To which all the juniors replied with remarkable unanimity:

"Rats!"

Colonel Wharton came on deck with a cardboard target in his hand, and a seaman brought up half a dozen rifles. The juniors gathered round the old soldier at once.

"We're going to have some shooting practice sir?" asked Bob.

The colonel nodded.

"That's it, my lad. We may have to use our firearms on the coast, when we get there, and you need practice. I hope, of course, that there will be no fighting; but you can never tell, and the best way to avoid a fight is to be ready for one."

"Yes, rather, sir."

Fisher T. Fish picked up one of the rifles. The way he held it showed that he had handled a gun before; but whether he could use it to any purpose was another question. The American junior had certainly told the fellows that he was a dead shot; but he had told them many other things that they did not quite believe.

"I guess I could account for a good many of the beggars with this gun," Fisher T. Fish remarked, looking round for admiration. "You should have seen the way I have shot buffaloes over there."

"In New York?" grinned John Bull.

"Yep—I mean nope. On the prairies," said Fish vaguely. "I'm a dead shot! I guess I could show you chaps something in shooting!"

"Go it, then."

Colonel Wharton laughed.

"You shall begin, then," he said. "Put up the target, Hanson."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The deck was cleared for a space for the target shooting. All the juniors knew how to load their rifles, but with the exception of Harry Wharton, they were little given to shooting straight. Fisher T. Fish put the rifle to his shoulder, and glanced along the barrel.

"It might be a good idea to put the sights correctly before firing," the colonel suggested quietly.

"I guess so," said Fisher T. Fish unabashed.

Bang!

"I guess that's a bullseye."

The target was large enough, and it was at no great range. But it did not show a sign of having been touched. Even on the outermost rim of it, Fisher T. Fish's bullet had made no mark.

There was a chuckle from the juniors, and from the seamen looking on. Fisher T. Fish's bullet had whizzed away to sea, at least a yard from the rim of the target.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess my hand's out a little," said Fisher T. Fish. "You watch me, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha! We're watching you."

"Go it, Fishy!"

Bang!

No mark on the target!

Bang! Bang!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say!" exclaimed Fisher T Fish. "I guess these ain't blank cartridges, by any mistake, are they?"

The colonel burst into a laugh.

"No, they are not blank," he said.

"Then what's the matter?"

"The matter is that you cannot shoot, I suppose."

"I guess——"

"Oh, shut up, Fishy!" said Harry Wharton. "You can't shoot for toffee! Cheese it, and take a back seat."

"I guess——"

"Rats!"

And Fisher T. Fish was gently pushed aside, and the other juniors joined in the rifle-practice; and ere long the target was spotted over with holes. Harry Wharton succeeded in getting bullseyes twice in three shots, and the rest succeeded in putting their lead somewhere near the mark; but Fisher T. Fish, try as he would, could not hit the target at all.

He threw down his rifle at last.

"I guess I can't get on to the hang of these English rifles," he said. "But you should have seen me at shooting over there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I don't see where the cackle comes in."

"But we do," grinned Nugent. "Hear us grin! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors grinned loudly.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Danger!

SUNNY skies and sunny seas!

The Hope steamed on through the calm waters of the Mediterranean, between coasts famed in song and story. On the right, Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, Tripoli, in quick succession. On the left, Sardinia and Sicily, and then Greece and the Isles of Greece, and Crete. The succession of romantic names was dazzling to the minds of the Greyfriars juniors. Bob Cherry looked away to port one morning towards the distant mountains of Greece, and drew a deep breath.

"And that's where old Homer actually trotted round, when he was alive," he said. "My hat! How I'd like to go there!"

And Mark Linley looked away towards distant Greece with a longing eye. Mark, the scholarship boy, the fellow

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who had worked in a factory before he had won his scholarship to Greyfriars, was the only fellow there who read Homer as if the Greek were English; and to him Greece meant more than it meant to the others.

"We'll go there some day, Bob," he said.

"Yes, rather!"

"I guess we're going to stick to bizney now, though," said Fisher T. Fish. "Achilles and his giddy wrath cut no ice with me, I can tell you. So don't you begin with 'Menin acido Thea,' please, Marky."

Mark Linley laughed.

"I wasn't going to," he said.

"Good! We shall be at Port Said soon," said Fisher T. Fish. "I hope we shall get a run ashore there. People say that it's the wickedest hole on the face of the earth. Worth seeing, I guess."

"Rats!"

Fisher T. Fish was disappointed. The juniors were not allowed ashore at Port Said, which was probably all the better for them. The steamer glided on through the Suez Canal, which the juniors viewed with breathless interest, and then the waters of the Red Sea were round her keel.

The Red Sea!

The mere name of it had a thousand associations. The juniors thought of the ages ago, when Pharoah and his host were overwhelmed in the waters of that sea—that sea upon which their eyes now actually rested.

"Here we are!" said Bob Cherry, in a low voice.

"The Red Sea at last!"

"Yes," said Colonel Wharton quietly; "and here is where our quest begins."

It was blazing with heat. Overhead, in a sky of steely blue, the sun was like a ball of fire, and the vertical rays came down on the deck and blistered it.

The juniors were clad now in their thinnest garments, with broad, shady hats upon their heads, and they panted with the heat and the breathlessness.

"Warm, ain't it?" said Fisher T. Fish, as the steamer glided on through glassy waters.

"My hat! Talk about furnaces!"

"I'm about done all over, I think," Nugent said faintly. "I can feel my skin frizzling."

Colonel Wharton was consulting with Captain Coke now. He wanted to bring the steamer to the exact spot, so near as it was known, where the shipwreck had taken place. The vessel taking Major Cherry out to India had been driven upon a reef in a sudden squall, and Captain Coke was confident that he could find the spot, from the information he had received from the survivor of the wreck.

"It's in the loneliest part of a lonely coast, sir," he said. "I believe I know just where to look for it; but we shall have to be careful of the steamer."

"I leave it in your hands, captain."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Bob Cherry approached the colonel as he came down from the bridge. Bob's face was very eager.

"Are we getting near now, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, my lad.'

Bob Cherry's eyes glistened.

"Then we're really going to begin the search at last?" he asked.

"Yes. We shall be on the exact spot where your father's vessel was wrecked: this afternoon, according to our skipper."

"Oh, good, sir!"

"And from there we shall steam directly to the shore, and our search begins for the major."

"Thank you, sir!"

The steamer glided on through shining waters.

At first, many sails and many funnels had been in sight, but now the steamer was drawing towards the African coast, out of the track of ships.

Only a sail or two of an Arab dhow, going to or from Massowah, broke the blue of the sea.

The juniors were looking out eagerly.

A rocky, barren shore, with dark woods inland, came up from the sea, and they were looking upon Africa.

Here the waters were curling over many a sunken reef, with long white lines of foam, and the pace of the steamer dropped to almost a crawl.

There was a dead calm on the sea; the water was glassy. Had the Hope been a sailing vessel she would have been becalmed, motionless upon motionless waters.

But the engines were throbbing, and the steamer crawled on through dangerous channels, amid grim bristling reefs.

The juniors watched the sea breathlessly.

It needed only a little miscalculation on the part of the navigator for the vessel to run upon some sharp fang of rock, and to go to the bottom—as always in the life of a sailor, in the midst of life they were in death.

Wrecked on that desolate coast, in an open boat under the blazing sun, their lot would not be an enviable one.

But the juniors were not thinking of the danger.

All their thoughts were in the quest; in finding the spot where the major had been wrecked, and then seeking him on the nearest land.

It was with a thrill that the juniors saw firearms served out to the seamen of the steamer.

Piracy in the Red Sea—a very flourishing concern not so very long ago—has been stamped out by the British Navy. But in odd corners of that lawless region, sailormen know that unarmed vessels sometimes pay toll to savage Arabs, half traders and half robbers, who infest the coast in their swift dhows. It was necessary to be careful.

The juniors received their rifles with the rest. Daily practice at the target on deck during the voyage had made them all proficient, with the exception of Fisher T. Fish. It seemed unlikely that the American junior would ever be able to shoot straight, though he was never tired of relating the exploits he had performed "over there" with all kinds of firearms.

The juniors put on their bandoliers, and loaded their rifles, and watched the sea.

John Bull had a pair of binoculars swung over his shoulder, and he raised them several times and scanned the water eastward.

"I guess you're looking in the wrong direction, Johnny," said Fisher T. Fish. "The wreck was towards the African coast, and you're looking towards Arabia, sonny."

"I wasn't looking for the wreck, my son."

"Then what the——"

"I was looking at that vessel," said John Bull quietly. "It's been following us for more than an hour—ever since we slackened down speed among the reefs, in fact."

"My hat!"

The juniors followed John Bull's glance. Eastward on the sea loomed up a large Arab dhow, and in the blazing sunlight they could see the dark faces and the white garments of her crew. For a vessel of her size, the crew seemed very numerous, and in the sun-blaze the juniors were certain they caught a flash and glitter here and there of bright steel.

"By Jove!" said Harry Wharton.

"I believe the beggars mean mischief," said John Bull quietly. "If they don't, what are they following us for?"

"Not to help us, anyway."

"No fear!"

"I'll speak to my uncle."

Harry Wharton crossed over to the colonel, who was standing by the rail, watching the curling sea ahead, and looking away towards dim Africa. Harry touched the old soldier on the arm.

"Uncle!"

The colonel glanced down at him.

"What is it, Harry?"

"Will you look at that craft? Bull says she has been following us for an hour. I didn't notice it before."

Colonel Wharton started.

"By Jove!"

He joined the captain hurriedly on the bridge.

THE NINTH CHAPTER
Arab Pirates.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. looked away anxiously towards the dhow. The craft had been creeping on, on the track of the steamer, like some wild animal cautiously following its prey. But now its speed was increasing, as if it were sure.

Captain Coke knitted his grizzled brows as he looked at the dhow. Colonel Wharton read his expression aright.

"You think they mean mischief?" he asked.

The skipper nodded.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"But a steamer could soon show a clean pair of heels to any sailing vessel, in case of necessity," the colonel remarked.

"Not in this case, sir," said Captain Coke, with a shake of the head. "You see, those scoundrels know this coast better than I do, and they think they've got us into a trap."

"A trap! In what way?"

"We're right among the reefs now, and going at a crawl. We can't put on steam, sir, without stoving in our timbers on the reefs, and they know it well."

The colonel tugged at his grey moustache.

"Then we cannot run."

"Impossible!"

"Then if they mean mischief——"

"They can attack us if they like," said the skipper quietly.

"And you think——"

"I think they will like."

"By Jove!"

The colonel looked towards the Arab dhow again. It was ranging up closer and closer to the steamer.

The Arabs were crowding the deck now. The glimmer of steel was to be plainly seen.

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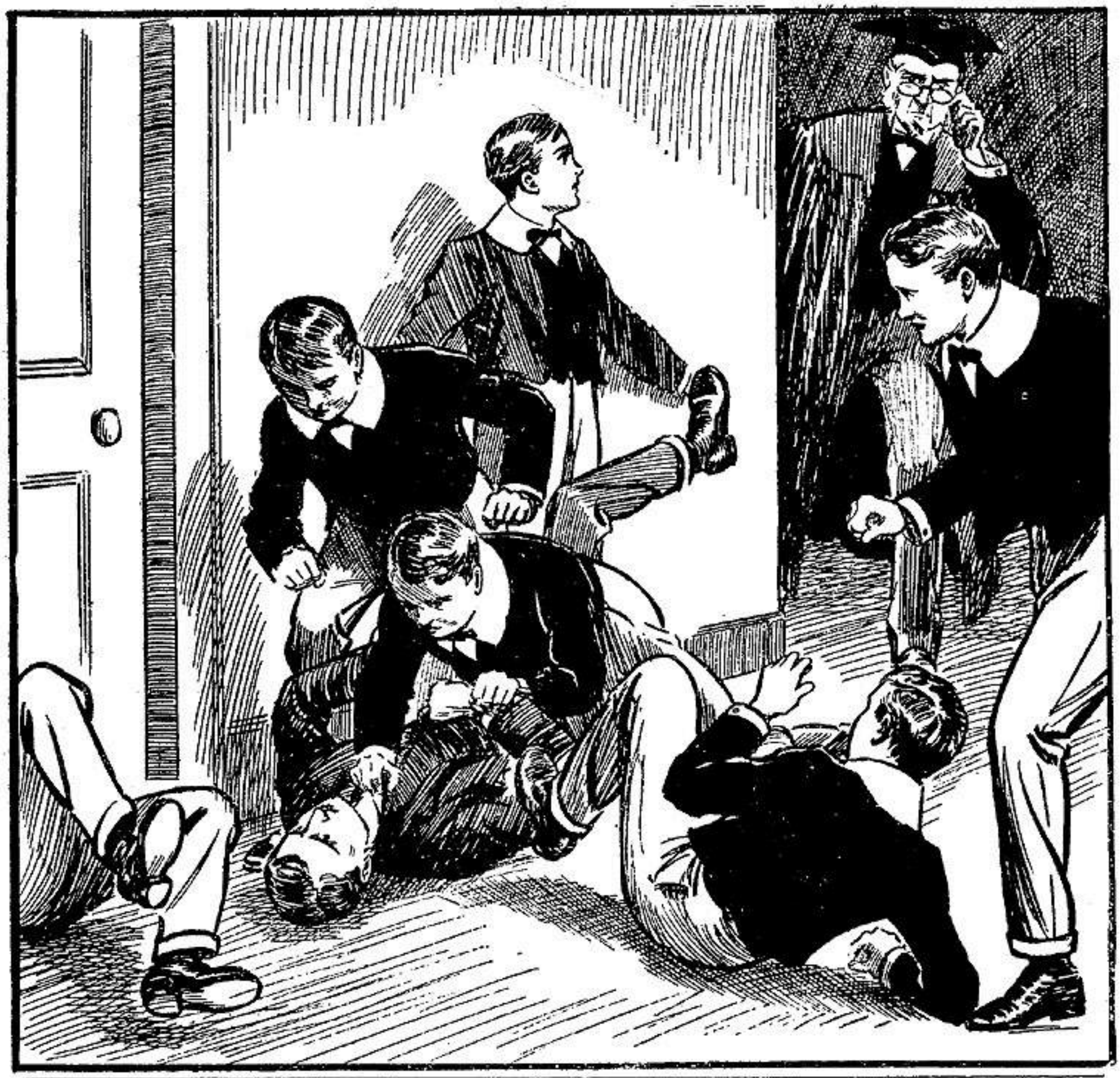

Knox the prefect went to the floor with a crash with juniors sprawling all over him, and the din was fearful. In the midst of it there was a rustle of a gown, and a hurried footstep, and then a startled voice. "Good heavens! What does this mean!" "The Head!" gasped Tom Merry. *(An exciting incident in "The Boy from Nowhere!" the splendid, long, complete school story contained in this week's issue of the "Gem" Library." Now on sale. Price One Penny.)*

Firearms, probably, the brown rascals had few or none; but they had knives or scimitars in abundance. If they should get to close quarters, they would be terribly dangerous foes to tackle.

And that they meant mischief there could be little doubt now. They were near enough for the brown, malignant faces, the drawn lips and shining teeth, to be clearly seen.

They were going to attack!

The juniors could see it, too. Their hearts beat faster as they grasped their rifles.

For the first time, Harry Wharton & Co. seemed likely to have to fight for their lives, and to depend for their safety upon nothing but their own pluck and strength.

The colonel lowered his voice as he spoke again. There was nothing like fear in the heart of the old soldier; he was thinking of the boys whom he had brought from Greyfriars into this terrible peril.

"They are coming for us?" he muttered.

"Ay, ay!"

"And if they board us——"

Captain Coke smiled grimly.

"If they once get aboard, sir, they'll get the better of us by numbers. There are two-score of them at least."

"And if they beat us——"

"They will murder every mother's son on the ship, and then sink her after they've taken away everything valuable. They won't leave anybody alive to bring down a British cruiser upon them."

"The hounds!"

Captain Coke shrugged his shoulders.

"These fellows were slavers and pirates till our cruisers stopped them," he said. "They've changed their ways, but not their natures. They're all ready to break out again at a moment's notice."

"I suppose so."

"But they won't get aboard," said the captain grimly. "We have fifteen hands, including the boys, and most of them know how to shoot. I'll hail the scum yonder through the megaphone, and warn them off."

"Good!"

The captain's hail rang over the rapidly-lessening space between the two vessels.

"Ahoy! Ahoy, there!"

There was no reply from the dhow.

But the vessel crept on steadily, her side lined with dark,

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savage faces, and glittering eyes—faces and eyes of men who looked like wild beasts about to spring.

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

"They're coming for us," he said tensely.

"I guess so."

"Load!" rang out Colonel Wharton's voice.

Again the captain hailed the dhow.

"Ahoy! Keep off, or we shall shoot!"

A jabbering in strange tongues, a sound of mocking, cruel laughter. Savage faces grinned from the dhow, and weapons were openly displayed now. There was no further disguise about the Arabs. Slavers in old time, traders and robbers as chance offered, they were pirates now—prepared for any savage and desperate work.

Captain Coke set his lips.

Once more he bawled through the megaphone.

"Keep off, or we fire!"

A yell from the dhow answered.

The words were incomprehensible, but the meaning was clear—the meaning was robbery, murder! That was clear enough.

The dhow was not fifty yards distant now. The Arabs were standing ready to spring aboard the steamer; some of them had placed their knives in their teeth, to leave their hands free till they should be aboard.

Captain Coke glanced down along the deck.

"Fire!" he said.

Crack! crack! crack!

A blaze of rifle-fire burst from the deck of the steamer.

It crashed into the crowded Arabs on the dhow like hail.

There was a fearful yell from the crowd of brown-faced savages.

Men fell right and left, shrieking and groaning.

Colonel Wharton's eyes gleamed. To the old soldier the crack of a rifle was a sound of music. Like an old war-horse, the sniff of battle was delightful to him.

"Fire!" he shouted. "Give it them well."

Crack-ack-ack-ack!

The magazine-rifles poured out a deadly hail of lead.

It swept through and through the crowd of savage Arabs, bowling them over like ninepins.

Wounded men sprawled over the dhow, shrieking and screaming, and louder yells of rage broke from those who were not hit.

The juniors were firing with the rest.

Which of the shots went home and which did not it was impossible to tell. Many missed, and many found billets in savage breasts.

It was no time to think of squeamish mercy. Life itself was at stake—it was life they were fighting for.

Crack-ack-ack!

And still the dhow glided on.

Bump!

For a moment the vessels touched, and ere they receded apart, a brawny Arab leaped on the deck of the steamer.

The vessels separated, and two or three following Arabs dropped into the sea between. The rifles still blazed away at the dhow.

The single Arab stood on the steamer's deck, panting, a long, gleaming scimitar in his hand. With savage face, he rushed right at the juniors who were nearest to him.

Crack!

It was a revolver in Colonel Wharton's hand that rang out.

The ruffian gave a convulsive leap, and spun round, and crashed down upon the deck.

He did not move again.

Harry Wharton drew a deep, deep breath—the scimitar had been within three feet of him when his uncle shot the ruffian down.

Crack—crack—crack—crack!

The rifles were yet ringing out, but the dhow was not coming on now. The pirates had had enough of it, and they were sheering off.

Like a frightened animal, the Arab craft fled before the wind, a savage yell ringing back from her ferocious crew as she went.

From the British seamen and the Greyfriars juniors a loud hurrah answered. They had won!

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
A Clue at Last.

COLONEL WHARTON stepped towards the fallen Arab on the deck of the steamer. He was the only man who had gained a footing there, and he had fallen to the colonel's revolver. But the man was not dead. As the colonel stopped beside him the dusky ruffian stirred, and his wild, dark eyes opened.

Hate and rage blazed in them as they rested upon the white man.

Colonel Wharton stooped and disarmed the man. He caught up the scimitar and tossed it over the rail into the sea. Then he dragged a knife and a revolver from the ruffian's sash.

The Arab groaned.

The knife the colonel tossed aside, but the revolver he retained in his hand. It excited his interest. It was not, properly speaking, a revolver, but a repeating pistol of the most modern manufacture, and certainly a most surprising weapon to find in the possession of an Arab in the Red Sea.

"That has belonged to some European quite lately, sir," Captain Coke remarked.

Colonel Wharton nodded.

"Yes, I was thinking so—someone whom this scoundrel has robbed, I suppose."

The pirate groaned again.

"Make him tell you, sir," said Bob Cherry eagerly. "Do you mind letting me see the pistol closely, sir?"

"By all means—but why?"

"It's a Browning, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"My father had a pair of Browning pistols with him," said Bob Cherry. "I saw him practising with them a lot of times last vacation, sir. They were exactly that make, and it occurred to me just now——"

He paused.

"My hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, with great interest. "Was there any mark on your dad's pistols, Bob?"

"Yes; his initials cut in the stock."

"We shall soon see as to that," said Colonel Wharton.

He turned the butt of the pistol up to view. A sharp cry escaped from Bob Cherry, and it was echoed from the rest.

There, in the butt, were the engraved initials—"R. C."

"Robert Cherry!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

Bob's eyes blazed with excitement.

"It's one of my father's pistols!" he exclaimed. "Then dad can't have gone down, or it would have gone down with him. That villain must have taken it from my father while he was still living."

"Hurrah!" shouted John Bull.

"Quite right, I think," said the colonel slowly. He did not add the thought that came at once into his mind—the Arab pirate was hardly likely to have robbed the major without doing him further harm. He would not discourage the boy. "We'll get at the truth from this scoundrel, anyway."

"Can he speak English, sir?"

"We shall see."

The wounded pirate was glaring savagely at the Englishmen. His face was covered with blood from his wound, where the bullet had ploughed along his skull and stunned him. He was recovering fast now, but he was unarmed, and at the mercy of the white men.

"Do you speak English?" exclaimed the colonel.

The man shook his head.

"I dare say he could if he liked, sir," said Captain Coke. "But it's no matter; I can talk his lingo, and I'll translate for the swab, if you like."

"Thank you, captain."

Coke turned to the wounded Arab and jabbered to him in a tongue incomprehensible to the juniors. The Arab shook his head savagely.

The captain smiled grimly.

"He refuses to reply, sir," he said, "but we'll soon alter that. Hanson, run a noose round the swab's neck."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The juniors looked quickly at one another, but they did not think of interfering. They left Colonel Wharton to do that if he chose, and the bronzed colonel made no movement.

The seaman ran the noose round the neck of the Arab. The man's dusky face went a chalky white.

He jabbered again in his own tongue.

"He's coming round!" said Captain Coke grimly.

He spoke again in Arabic.

Then a stream of rapid talk fell from the lips of the Arab, the skipper of the steamer listening with a grim face.

"What does he say?" asked Colonel Wharton, when there was a pause.

"He says he took the pistol from a white man on the coast here a week ago."

"An Englishman?"

"Yes," said Captain Coke, after interrogating the Arab again.

"And what became of the man?"

"He says the man was left on the coast."

"Alive?"

"So he says."

"He does not know the man's name?"

"No."

"It was my father!" Bob Cherry exclaimed joyfully. "It must have been my father! It is his pistol, and if it was

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taken from a white man, that white man must have been my father. He did not go down in the wreck."

The colonel nodded.

"That seems to be pretty clear now," he said. "Whatever became of Major Cherry afterwards, he did not go down in the wreck."

"Oh, he lives, sir—I am sure of it—and we shall find him!"

The rope was unlaced from the Arab's neck. He staggered to his feet. In spite of the stains of blood upon his face, he was not much hurt.

"What are you going to do with him, captain?" Colonel Wharton asked.

"Put him in irons, and give him up to the authorities when we touch at some port," replied Captain Coke.

Whether the Arab understood English or not, he cast a sudden startled glance upon the skipper, and made a rush for the side.

"Seize him!" shouted Captain Coke.

Wharton made a clutch at the Arab; but he eluded it, sprang to the rail, and leaped over it into the sea.

Splash!

"He's gone!"

"The madman!" said Captain Coke, with an angry shrug of the shoulders. "He's gone to his death!"

"What do you mean, captain? He may swim to the dhow or to the shore."

Captain Coke raised his brown hand to point to the sea.

"Look there!"

A fin showed above the shining waters. Another and another followed it. The colonel's bronzed face turned a shade paler.

"Sharks!" he muttered.

"Ay, ay!"

"Good heavens!"

The juniors ran to the side, looking after the Arab with white faces and straining eyes. The trail of blood from the pirate's wound had perhaps attracted the sharks. Five or six of them were playing round him in a few seconds.

He did not seem to see them. He swam right on, heading for the shore.

Colonel Wharton turned quickly to the skipper.

"Is it too late to save him? A boat——"

Captain Coke shook his head.

"Too late! We could never reach him in time."

It was evidently too late. There was a gleam of white on the sea as a shark turned over to seize his prey.

A sudden leap of the swimmer in the water, a bubbling cry, and a stain of red on the shining sea—and the Arab pirate disappeared for ever.

The juniors turned back from the sea, sick at heart.

The Arab sea-robber had deserved his doom, no doubt; but it was a terrible one, and it brought home to them the savage realities of the wild, lawless regions they were voyaging in.

"Heaven have mercy on him!" muttered the colonel.

The steamer crawled on among the reefs. In the distance the Arab dhow had faded to a mere speck.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Darkest Africa.

"THIS is the place!" said Captain Coke.

The juniors looked round them from the deck of the steamer.

Low-lying reefs and rocks, with the sea curling between; a low shore, with hills rising further inland, and thick forest—that was the scene. In such a place had Bob Cherry's father been wrecked.

"Are you sure?" the colonel asked.

"As sure as can be, sir. From the description, this is the place. Somewhere within five miles of where we now are the vessel went down."

"The shore is not two miles distant," the colonel remarked, with a glance towards the African shore, now deepening into the dusk of evening.

"Ay, ay, sir! The vessel must have been driven far out of her course by the storm. Probably the engines broke down."

"And now——"

"I should say that we should make for the nearest land—for that's certainly the spot Major Cherry made for if he's alive, sir."

"You are right."

The steamer glided on towards the African shore.

It rose clearer to the view—the moon was creeping above the heavy trees inland, and the soft white light gleamed upon the curling sea and the grim, grey rocks.

The sun had sunk out of sight now; save for a rosy glow in the heavens, it was night. The glow swiftly departed and all was black, save where the moonlight fell.

The juniors stood silently watching the dusky shore.

Was Major Cherry there?

It seemed certainly the case, from the clue that had fallen into their hands, that he had succeeded in landing after the wreck of his vessel.

But what had happened to him since?

Had the Arab pirates spared him? Had the black savages of the coast found him?

So near to the goal now, these uneasy thoughts thronged in Bob Cherry's mind. And yet he was hopeful.

Nearer and nearer to the shore.

The steamer crawled now. And at last she stopped in a little inlet among the high rocks, which hid her almost from sight.

The anchor was dropped.

Bob Cherry strained his eyes into the dusk of the shore.

Was his father there?

That was the thought that was beating in the brain of the Greyfriars junior—was his father there?

He touched the colonel upon the sleeve, and the old soldier looked down kindly upon him.

"Can we go ashore at once, sir?" asked Bob tremulously.

"Of what use, in the dark, lad?" said the colonel. "We shall commence in the morning. There is nothing to be done to-night."

"I—I suppose not. But——"

"Better get a good night's rest, and be up with the sun, lad."

"Yes, I shall be up with the sun," said Bob. "I—I don't feel as if I could sleep to-night though. Could we fire guns, as a signal to anybody who was on the shore, sir?"

The colonel hesitated.

"There are plenty of savage niggers in these parts, and they would hear the firing, sir," said Captain Coke. "It might bring them round us. But, after all, we can't search for the major without giving away our presence here. Suppose we blow the steam syren at intervals through the night? If the major is on the coast he will hear that and he will know that it means a white man's steamer."

"Good!" said the colonel.

A wild and wailing note sounded from the steamer's syren.

It rang and echoed far along the rocky coast and over the moonlit sea and far among the deep, tropical forest inland.

At intervals of five minutes the syren's note rang and echoed over the lonely shore, echoing far into the silent night.

Strange and eerie enough it sounded as it echoed among the rocks.

But no reply came to the signal—no white man's voice hailed the vessel from the gloom of the rocky shore.

Harry Wharton, watching over the rail as the moon climbed higher, thought once or twice that he saw a moving figure on the shore, and called aloud. But there was no answer.

The men of the steamer were on the watch in turns all night, with their rifles ready. They were in dangerous quarters.

It was towards midnight that the excited juniors went to bed; and they had scarcely turned in when a terrific uproar broke the silence of the night.

From the direction of the shore came a howling and snarling and growling, and loud screams of animals in pain, and the juniors turned out of their bunks at once.

"What on earth is it?" Bob Cherry exclaimed.

"We'll see soon," said Harry, and he tore up on deck in his pyjamas.

The moonlight fell in a white flood on sea and shore. Close by the shore two strange figures could be seen, like great cats, fighting.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "What is it? What are they?"

"Lions," said Captain Coke quietly.

"Lions!"

"Yes—fighting."

Loud screams and yells from the maddened animals floated over the calm sea and rang hideously through the night.

The juniors watched the terrible scene in horror.

The savage combat ceased at last, one of the animals tearing himself loose and rushing off into the wood, while the other howled and tore in pursuit.

"Good heavens!" muttered Bob Cherry. "This is Africa—real Africa!"

"I guess it beats the deck," said Fisher T. Fish, between his chattering teeth. "What a ghostly country to be wrecked in! Ugh!"

Bob Cherry went down again, with his face very pale.

It was in this land of horrors that his father had been wrecked—among such perils as these that the major had been cast unarmed.

Bob Cherry did not close his eyes again that night.

Glad enough was Bob when the sun flushed up over the sea once more and dawn came stealing upon the wide waters.

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THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
The Quest.

BOB CHERRY was early on deck.

He had his bandolier slung on and his rifle under his arm, and a sandwich in his hand. He was ready to start. But the others were not quite ready.

Ere long, however, after a hasty breakfast, the colonel and the Greyfriars juniors were rowed ashore.

It was always possible that the defeated dhow or some other lawless craft of the same sort might happen upon the steamer in the inlet, and it had been settled that Captain Coke and his men should guard the vessel while the colonel and the juniors searched the coast for the missing man.

Bob Cherry jumped lightly from the boat to the beach.

He seemed to become a new boy as he felt the sand of the African shore crumbling under his boots.

At last he was treading the shore that his father's feet had trod—perhaps on this very spot Major Cherry had stood and looked towards the sea, whence he had hoped that succour would come!

The shore was blank and desolate—shingly sand and great rocks, and the thick, heavy belt of tropical forest inland.

"We shall strike southward along the coast first, and cover twenty miles," said the colonel. "If we find no clue we will strike northward to-morrow in the same way. If nothing is found we can sail further down the coast in the Hope. But I have some hope that Major Cherry may have left a clue."

"In what way, uncle?" Harry asked.

"A man wrecked here would naturally try to reach one of the trading towns along the coast," said the colonel. "But, in case he was searched for, would he not naturally think of leaving some indication of his intentions near the spot where he had been cast ashore, to guide rescuers?"

"True!"

"It is for something of the sort that we must look."

The idea caught on at once. It was very probable—indeed, Bob Cherry declared at once that it was the very thing his father would have thought of.

The juniors tramped along the shore, with their rifles under their arms. With the exception of Fisher T. Fish, they were all pretty good shots, and the magazine-rifles were deadly weapons in conflict. And the Greyfriars fellows had shown, in the fight with the pirate dhow, that they could be depended upon to remain steady and firm in the time of danger.

The steamer disappeared from sight; the party tramped on, with the hot sand crumbling under their feet and the sun rising higher and higher in the heavens and pouring down rays of intense heat.

Harry Wharton wiped the flowing perspiration from his face.

"My hat, this is getting horrid!" he murmured.

Nugent gasped.

"Like a giddy furnace, ain't it?"

"I've known hotter days than this, I guess, over there," Fisher T. Fish remarked. "You should have been in New York one day when——"

"Oh, rats!"

"I guess I could tell you——"

"Whoppers!" said John Bull. "Do ring off—it's too hot to swank!"

And Fisher T. Fish grinned and "rang off."

Colonel Wharton was keeping his eyes well about him as they tramped southward along the rocky shore, and so were the juniors, for that matter.

The colonel suddenly halted.

"Stop!" he said.

Bob Cherry looked at him eagerly.

"What is it, sir?"

"Danger!"

The colonel raised his rifle. From the belt of tropical forest, where it closely approached the shore, a sinuous form had crept.

The juniors thrilled as they saw the huge body and limbs of a full-grown African lion.

The monster had seen them, it was evident, from the covert of the wood. Whether he was stalking them or not, they could not yet tell

"A lion!" John Bull muttered. "This is getting thick!"

"I guess——"

"You are all loaded?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir."

"Good. If he attacks us, let me have the first shot, with my heavy gun, and then you pile in with the magazine-rifles as fast as you can."

"Very well, sir."

Woof!

The voice of the lion came echoing along the shore. The sinuous body crept on, till the huge animal was directly in the path the juniors had been following.

There the lion halted.

Woof!

"He means business," said the colonel quietly. "Stand ready, lads!"

"We're ready, sir."

Colonel Wharton dropped on one knee and sighted his heavy rifle. The barrel bore upon the lion, as he stood fifty yards distant, lashing his tail.

The great beast was crouching now for a spring, which would have carried him very near to the juniors.

But even as he sprang, the colonel's rifle rang out.

Crack!

There was a fierce roar from the lion, and he dropped short in his spring, falling back with a heavy thud upon the burning sand.

Roar and roar again!

Crack, crack, crack!

The lion staggered up as the bullet struck his thick hide like hail on glass.

He rushed furiously towards the juniors.

"Scatter!" shouted the colonel.

And the juniors scattered fast enough.

There was a sharp cry from Bob Cherry as he stumbled over a loose stone and went with a heavy thud to the ground.

The lion made straight at him.

Harry Wharton turned back.

For a moment his face blanched white as he saw the deadly peril of his chum, and he stood as if rooted to the ground.

Then, with a hoarse exclamation, he rushed to the rescue.

Crack, crack!

He fired twice as he ran on, both bullets hitting the lion in the flank, but not stopping his furious rush towards the fallen junior.

The lion reached Bob Cherry just as Harry dashed up. Wharton clubbed his rifle, and brought down the butt with a crash upon the jaws of the lion.

The animal gave a furious growl, and turned upon him.

Crack, crack!

The colonel's heavy rifle spoke again, and the animal lurched heavily forward, and fell almost at Harry's feet.

There he lay, kicking and tearing up the sand in the last struggle, while Harry grasped Bob Cherry by the shoulder, and dragged him quickly away from the reach of the lashing claws.

Bob staggered up breathlessly.

"Oh!" he muttered. "Oh! I thought he had me!"

Wharton panted for breath.

"A miss is as good as a mile, Bob."

"You saved me!" said Bob.

Crack, crack, crack!

The lion expired under the shower of bullets as the juniors gathered round him and pumped out the lead from the magazine-rifles.

Colonel Wharton drew a deep breath.

"That was a narrow shave," he said. "But all's well that ends well! My heart was in my mouth when the brute turned upon you, Harry!"

Harry smiled.

"But you didn't miss your aim, all the same, uncle," he said. "It was true as a die."

The dead body of the lion lay stretched in the sun on the burning sand. And as the juniors turned to go on their

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FRANK RICHARDS.

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Major Cherry grasped his son's hand. "Bob! You've saved me—you and the others!" "Yes, dad, and thank goodness we found you—thank goodness we came in time!" said Bob. *(See page 21.)*

way, jackals came creeping forth from the wood, and birds of prey descended upon rustling pinions to join in a horrid feast.

From a distance the Greyfriars juniors looked back.

The carcase of the lion was black with birds, and round it a horde of jackals snapped and snarled.

They shuddered, and did not look back again.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Surrounded by Foes.

"EUREKA!"

It was Mark Linley who uttered the exclamation.

The Lancashire lad had stopped upon a rocky slope. He was a little ahead of the others, and he turned and waved his hand to them to come on.

"He's found something!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry's eyes gleamed.

"Quick!" he said.

He dashed on at a run, the others at his heels. The blazing sun was almost vertical now, and the juniors had been looking for a sheltered spot for the noonday halt.

Mark Linley waved his hand excitedly.

"Buck up!" he shouted

"You've found something?"

"Yes."

"Hurray!"

The juniors and the colonel joined Mark Linley on top of the acclivity. Away to the east the sea rolled in a flood of silver. Overhead the tropical sun blazed down mercilessly.

On top of the knoll was a mass of rock, and on the rock, in glaring white letters, a foot or more high, was an inscription.

The letters were put on with a kind of chalk, apparently mixed with some sticky substance to make it last the longer.

On the flat perpendicular surface of the big rock, almost as smooth as a wall, the chalked inscription ran:

"MA—OR CHERR— WRECKED HERE TRYING TO REAC— MASSAWAH! HELP!"

Three letters were missing, having been somehow obliterated.

But the message could be read clearly.

"Major Cherry wrecked here. Trying to reach Massowah! Help!"

It was plain enough.

Bob Cherry's eyes danced.

"I knew he was alive!" he shouted. "Hurrah!"

And the juniors of the Greyfriars Remove echoed his shout heartily.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Colonel Wharton read the inscription over again, his eyes sparkling with satisfaction.

"You were quite right, uncle!" Harry exclaimed. "The major did think of leaving a clue behind, in case he was searched for."

Colonel Wharton nodded.

"Exactly, Harry! And we have found it."

"I shouldn't wonder if he left others."

"But this is enough. Trying to reach Massowah," said the colonel, tugging at his white moustache thoughtfully. Massowah is in the Italian African territory, and he must have followed the coast southward to reach it."

"Then we know the direction in which to strike?"

"Certainly. We are a hundred miles north of Massowah now, or thereabouts. The major would have to pass through some dangerous country to reach Massowah, but——"

"Unarmed, alone, without food," said Bob Cherry heavily.

The colonel laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Cheer up, my lad. Major Cherry was a man of resource—I always knew him as that, in India, when we were in the Khyber together. If any man would survive an adventure of this sort, it's Major Cherry."

Bob's eyes sparkled.

"I'm glad you think so sir. I know the dad was jolly tough, anyway."

"I guess we'll find him," said Fisher T. Fish. "If there were a trail here, like we get on a prairie, I could follow it blindfold; but——"

"But as there isn't, you can't," suggested John Bull.

"Nope! But——"

"We have done nearly twelve miles from the steamer's anchorage," said the colonel. "It would be best to bring the Hope further along the coast. If it were safe to leave you lads here, I could return alone, and bring the steamer on, and rejoin you here, while you are resting. You cannot keep on much further without a good rest."

"We should be all right, sir. But——"

"And I," said the colonel. "But I am not so sure about you lads. Only you could not do the twelve miles back again to-day, and we want to save every minute of time we can."

"We could do it if necessary, sir."

The colonel smiled.

"You could not do it to-day" he said. "You could do it starting again after sundown. But by that time I hope to have the steamer here, and we can take up the march in the right direction instead of back to the steamer.

"But you, sir!"

"I shall be all right. But you lads—the question is, dare I leave you to yourselves for the afternoon?"

"We shall be all right, sir, too."

The colonel looked dubious.

So much time would be saved by his returning alone and bringing the steamer on, that he would not have hesitated for a second, only for his anxiety for the safety of the Greyfriars lads.

Yet if any danger threatened them, they had shown only too well that they were brave enough and steady enough to defend themselves.

"We could rig up a breastwork of rocks round this knoll, and camp here, under the shadow of this big rock," Mark Linley suggested.

"Good ogg, Marky."

The colonel assented.

"Very good!" he exclaimed. "It is an excellent idea. And in case of danger, you will defend yourselves, my lads."

"I guess so, rather. We shall be all O. K. here, sir," said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll look after them."

The colonel did not appear to derive much comfort from this assurance.

"Oh, cheese it, you blessed Yank!" said Bob Cherry unceremoniously. "We shall be all right, sir. You can rely on us."

"Well, it's the best thing to be done," said the colonel musingly. "Even an hour may make a difference of life or death to Major Cherry, if he is in danger."

"Quite so, sir."

"I will help you make a camp, then, and then I will leave you."

It did not take the juniors long to pile up a breastwork of rocks enclosing a space for a camp, under the shadow of the big rock where the chalked inscription blinked at them in the sun.

Then the colonel bade them good-bye, and tramped back along the sandy path the way they had come.

The tall form disappeared along the rocky coast.

In the blazing afternoon, the juniors lay down to rest, the shadow of the big rock sheltering them from the tropic sun.

"My hat!" murmured John Bull. "It's warm!"

"I guess I've known it hotter in——"

"Oh, draw it mild."

"I wish we had some blessed iced lemonade," said Bob Cherry, with a grunt. "What price ginger-pop at Mrs. Mimble's now, you fellows."

There was a general howl.

"Shut up, you tantalising ass!"

"Or ices at Uncle Cleggs'."

"Yow! Shut up!"

"Or a plunge in the pool," said Bob Cherry.

John Bull picked up a stone.

"You utter ass! Any more of your funny remarks, and I'll drop this on your silly head."

"Pax!" said Bob Cherry. "It's too warm to dodge."

Harry Wharton sat up.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Eh?" said Nugent lazily. "What was what? I didn't see anything."

"I heard something, I think."

"I didn't!"

"You've been dreaming, Harry!" said John Bull; and he carelessly tossed the stone he had picked up over the rocky breastwork with which they had circled their camp.

There was a sound of the falling stone, but not the clink of it falling to the ground. It was a soft thud, and it was followed by a most unexpected sound—a savage yell of surprise and pain.

"My hat!" ejaculated Wharton, in astonishment and alarm. "What——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What——"

"Look out!" yelled Mark Linley.

The juniors leaped to their feet, grasping their rifles.

And then, with wildly beating hearts, they saw what they had not seen while they were lazily reposing in the shadow of the rock—a crowd of black savages, with shields on their arms, and spears in their hands, creeping stealthily up the acclivity towards the camp.

The stone carelessly tossed out of the camp by John Bull had fallen upon the head of one of the blacks, eliciting a howl of pain from him, and thus giving the alarm, else——

The juniors did not care to think what would have happened had not the alarm been given.

But they had little time to think of that, or anything else.

As the startled, white faces looked over the barricade of rocks, a yell burst from the savages. They saw that their advance was discovered, and they threw concealment to the winds.

With a ferocious yell, they rushed to the attack, brandishing their spears.

"Fire!" shouted Harry Wharton.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
A Narrow Escape!

"FIRE!"

The word was followed by the sharp crack of the rifles.

Crack-ack-ack!

Crack-crack!

Wild yells rose from the charging savages. Three of them, who had almost reached the breastwork of piled rocks, staggered back, and rolled down the declivity, shrieking madly.

Two of the others reeled away yelling, and were trampled down by the surging throng as they charged onward.

Right up to the rocky pile the blacks came, with fiendish yells, their spears brandished in the air.

Crack-crack-crack!

If the rifles had not been magazines it would have been all over with Harry Wharton & Co.

They had no time to reload, if it had been necessary.

But the steady fire from the rocky breastwork daunted the savages.

They reeled back from it; they yelled and gesticulated, and broke, and fled, many of them carrying terrible wounds from the rapid fire.

The firing ceased.

The juniors would not fire upon a retreating foe, and the terrible work sickened them the moment their own danger was past.

Out on the hot rocks, in the blaze of the sun, wounded wretches were crawling away. Wharton set his lips hard.

"It was to save our own lives!" he muttered.

"You bet!" said Fisher T. Fish tersely. "It's all O. K. They would have killed us as soon as have looked at us."

"Yes, rather."

"But it's horrible!"

Bob Cherry's brows were darkly contracted.

"My poor dad!" he muttered. "He must have passed among these villains. He must have been among them for days, even if he ever got through. Poor old dad!"

The thought that his father might have fallen by the hands of the savages quite banished any feeling of pity from Bob Cherry's breast.

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What had become of the major, if he had fallen into the hands of these brutal, savage barbarians? What had been his fate? Death—perhaps by torture!

The juniors knew that it was only too likely, and they shuddered at the thought.

The last wounded wretch had crawled away, and the sound of the groaning was silent. Still as death was the blaze of the tropic afternoon, the rocks blistering under the sun's rays, only lizards venturing to crawl abroad in the terrible heat.

Under the shadow of the rocks and their broad hats, the juniors gasped for breath, and prayed for sundown.

At the same time they kept a sharp look-out for the savages.

Probably their reception had thoroughly daunted the blacks, for they did not return. From the little fort on the knoll the Union Jack waved, stuck to a branch upright in a heap of stones. When a breath of air came from the sea it stirred the old flag on the branch, and it fluttered proudly.

But there was little wind, and what there was was hot as the breath of a furnace. The juniors baked and gasped for air.

Slowly, slowly the flaming sun sank to rest behind the wide, grim woods of the African mainland.

The blazing heat passed away, and a cooler air came from the sea to revive the juniors, exhausted by the tropic blaze.

Bob Cherry fanned himself with his Panama hat.

"By Jove, that's better now!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my only hat—for just one mouthful of ice-cream. Oh!"

"It's getting cooler," said Harry Wharton. "I shall be jolly glad when it's night. The colonel will be back here with the steamer before then."

"I guess so. I can see the steamer now," said Fisher T. Fish.

The juniors sprang up, forgetting the heat and their fatigue as the American youth pointed out to sea.

In the red sunset the steamer came into view, leaving a black trail of smoke along the blue sky behind.

The syren sent forth a long, unmusical hoot, and the juniors shouted and waved their hats in reply.

The steamer dropped her anchor at some distance from the rocky shore, and a boat plumped into the water.

The juniors ran down to the beach to meet it.

John Bull took the Union Jack with him. He waved it on the beach to the boat's crew as they pulled in to the shore. Colonel Wharton stood up in the boat.

"Welcome back, sir," said John Bull. "We've pulled through all right."

The colonel looked quickly at the juniors.

"Have you been in any danger since I left you?"

"We have been attacked by blacks, sir."

"Ah! And you——"

"We beat them off, uncle," said Harry. "It was a fight, too. A good many of them were hurt, but they didn't get too close to us. We're all right."

"Thank Heaven!" said the colonel.

"Are we going on now?" asked Bob Cherry anxiously.

"I thought of spending the night on the steamer, and starting at dawn," said the colonel.

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"It's cool travelling at night, and we've had a good rest, as far as we're concerned," he remarked.

"I guess so."

The colonel smiled.

"I see you are keen to get forward," he said. "Quite right, too. We will get on for some distance, at all events."

"Thank you, sir."

"So long as there is moonlight we can search the coast almost as well as in the daytime," the colonel remarked. "And I have no doubt that Major Cherry covered some distance, at least, in the direction he started out in. I have arranged with Captain Coke to follow us along the coast, keeping as near to us as the nature of the shore will allow. Then, in case of being hard pressed, we can always retreat to the steamer."

"Good idea, sir."

And in a short time the party were on the march again.

In the cool of the evening marching was a pleasure, and when the bright round moon came up over the Red Sea it was almost as light as by day.

The juniors marched on, chatting cheerfully, their rifles on their shoulders, ready for instant use in case of alarm.

The tall, soldierly figure of the colonel strode on a little ahead. The colonel seemed tireless. After the exertions of the day, he seemed prepared to march on for ever if necessary.

High over the forests and the sandy shore the moon soared, sending down a flood of silver light. From the forest, in the still hours, came strange cries of wild animals, and the deep "woof-woof" of the prowling lion.

The juniors kept a sharp look-out, but they were not attacked. At last, well after midnight, they halted for a rest. The night, as often in equatorial regions, had gone quite cold, in startling contrast to the blazing heat of the day.

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"We'll have a camp-fire," said the colonel.

"Good! I guess I can build a camp-fire, slick," said Fisher T. Fish.

"Gather fuel, my lads."

The juniors gathered fuel on the edge of the forest.

Fisher T. Fish stooped to pick up what he took to be a withered branch, and he gave a sudden cry as the supposed branch curled round his arm, and then round his legs, and held him as in a bond of iron.

"Ow! Help! Yarooh! Great snakes!"

"What's the matter, Fishy?" called out Harry Wharton.

"Ow! Help!"

The juniors ran up.

The American junior was in the coils of a snake at least eight feet long, with a muscular, sinuous body that was winding and winding round him, enclosing his limbs in a crushing grip.

"Help!" moaned Fish.

Harry Wharton rushed to the rescue instantly. Whether the snake was poisonous or not he did not know, and did not stop to think.

He grasped the neck of the monster with both hands, and by main force prevented the tongue from striking in the direction of Fisher T. Fish.

"Quick!" gasped Harry. "A knife—quick!"

John Bull drew his knife, but Mark Linley was first. The Lancashire lad's hand darted forward, the long knife in it. A fierce, swift slash, and the head of the snake rolled, still hissing, in the grass.

The coils wriggled and twisted convulsively round the limbs of the American junior, the life still strong in them.

They rolled and twisted to the ground, and Fisher T. Fish stood free, shaking in every limb, and white as death.

"Oh, thunder!" he muttered. "I reckoned I was a gone coon then! Gee!"

"A miss is as good as a mile," said Harry comfortingly.

Colonel Wharton was running up. Too late—the snake was dead, and the danger was over. The veteran looked at the dead monster with a serious face.

"You have had a narrow escape, Fish," he said. "If that snake had struck you, you would have been dead in two minutes, and nothing could have saved you. For goodness' sake, be more careful, and keep a sharper look-out."

"I guessed the blessed thing was a branch, and I was going to pick it up, sir," said Fisher T. Fish.

"That's the way they do things over there," murmured Frank Nugent.

And Fisher T. Fish found nothing to reply for the moment.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
On a Terrible Track.

THE camp-fire blazed out into the blackness of the night.

Round the fire the juniors lay sleeping, with their feet towards the glowing embers.

Two of them kept watch at a time. There was danger lurking in every shadow of the wild African shore.

But there was no alarm, and at last the sun flushed up over the sea and the rocks, and the explorers rose for the new march.

Far out from the rocky coast they could see the smoke of the steamer, picking her way cautiously along to the southward.

After breakfast, the juniors set their faces to the southward again, and marched on, with eyes and ears well open.

On the lonely shore there was no trace of inhabitants—even the blacks who had attacked them the previous day gave no sign of their presence.

The way grew wilder and more hilly, and the explorers were forced to leave the shore, and the sea vanished from their view.

Harry Wharton glanced more than once at the bronzed face of the colonel, wondering what his uncle thought of the prospects of the search.

They were tramping over the same ground that Major Cherry must have covered in his efforts to reach the seaport of Massowah, in the Italian African territory.

But many things might have happened since then, and it seemed too much to hope that an unarmed man, alone, had passed through so many perils unscathed.

If the major had succeeded, they would find him or hear of him at Massowah.

And they refused to give up hope.

It had evidently been in the major's mind that he might be searched for—perhaps he had hoped that many others had escaped from the wreck, and that there would be a search made for all the missing. It was probable that he might leave some further clue to his journey, and the explorers kept a sharp look-out for it.

NEXT TUESDAY: "A SCHOOLBOY'S CROSS-ROADS," A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Greyfriars School. By FRANK RICHARDS.

The way ran through a dense wood now, and sea and shore had disappeared. That is was the route followed by the wrecked man was most probable, for it was the only practicable route open to the explorers. Huge trees rose on either side of them; the path they were following was marked by the feet of wild animals, and snakes curled among the branches as they tramped on, and black-faced monkeys chattered and grinned down at them.

There was a sound in the thickets—the sound of a savage growling and snarling. Colonel Wharton halted.

The juniors grasped their rifles at once.

"What is it, sir?" exclaimed John Bull. "Lions again?"

The colonel shook his head.

"No. Jackals, I think."

"They will not attack us?"

"No; but——"

The colonel paused.

"Go ahead and watch the path, Cherry," he exclaimed. "You others remain here. Come with me, Harry."

The juniors did as they were bidden. Harry Wharton, wondering a little, followed his uncle into the thickets.

"What is it, uncle?" he asked breathlessly.

The colonel's bronzed face was very grim.

"Those brutes are quarrelling over some carrion," he said, in a low and tense voice.

"You fear——"

"It may be a dead antelope, but——"

"I understand."

Wharton knew then why Bob Cherry had been sent ahead. The thought had come into the colonel's mind that the prey of the jackal might be a man—the man, perhaps, whom they were seeking.

They burst through the thickets, and a shout from the colonel startled the obscene beasts away from their prey.

In a deep glade of the forest lay what the jackals had been tearing—a mass of bones, picked almost clean.

Bones, gnawed clean and white, glistened in the rays of the sun that fell in golden sheen through the foliage overhead.

Wharton shuddered.

It was again one of the grim realities of the African forest. To whom had those picked bones belonged? The Greyfriars junior dared not look, but the steady eye of the old soldier missed nothing.

"What is it, uncle?" said Harry, in an almost inaudible voice. "The bones of an animal, or——"

He could not finish.

"Of a man," said the colonel tersely.

"Then a man——"

"A dead man!"

"Oh, heavens!"

"But not a white man," said the colonel, after a grim, searching look at the prey of the jackals. "That skull never belonged to a white man."

Harry drew a deep, almost sobbing, breath of relief.

"Then—then it cannot be——"

"Major Cherry? No."

"Thank Heaven!"

"But there has been trouble here, and not so long ago," said Colonel Wharton quietly. "That man has not been dead long, or the jackals would have finished their work."

"I suppose so."

"He has not been shot, so far as I can see," the colonel remarked, "but we know that the major had lost his firearms—the Arab thieves saw to that. This man had been killed by a blow on the head."

"Poor fellow!"

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know that he deserves our pity. He was killed in fight—perhaps in attacking a castaway."

"But then——"

"It is quite possible that we are on the track now, Harry."

"I hope so, uncle."

They returned to the forest path. The juniors met them with eager, inquiring glances.

"Keep on," said the colonel.

"Is it a clue, sir?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I am not sure."

They marched on. From the forest came snarling and yapping, as the jackals returned to their prey, and from a fresh direction came a repetition of the same sounds. Colonel Wharton plunged into the wood again.

He returned in a few minutes.

"Another nigger," he said.

"There has been fighting here, I suppose?" Bob Cherry said.

"Yes, and not long ago."

"I wonder——"

Bob broke off, and marched on in silence. It was useless to wonder; the explorers could only search, and hope for the best.

Suddenly John Bull gave a start. He held up his hand.

"Hark!"

From the deep magnolias came a low sound—the groan of a wounded man. The explorers dragged the heavy leaves aside, and looked down upon a negro lying on the sward, with blood thick upon his bare chest.

He turned a wild and rolling eye upon them.

The man was dying—that was clear. He had received a terrible spear-thrust in his broad, brawny chest.

He looked wildly at the explorers, evidently expecting a blow.

The colonel bent over him.

"Can you ask him anything, sir?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I am going to try. I can speak some of the patter of the Red Sea coast."

In strange, uncouth syllables, curious enough to the ears of the juniors, the colonel spoke to the dying savage.

The man stared at him with glassy eyes, and did not answer.

"He doesn't understand," muttered Bob Cherry. "He can tell us nothing."

"He understands. He wants water."

Bob Cherry placed his water-bottle to the lips of the savage. The man drank deeply and greedily, and gasped for breath.

The colonel spoke again in the same uncouth tongue, and the man answered him in low muttered words that were difficult to hear.

Colonel Wharton had to bend low to catch the words. The juniors listened with breathless interest, but understanding not a word.

Colonel Wharton rose erect at last.

"What does he say?" exclaimed Bob Cherry anxiously.

"There has been a fight here," said the colonel slowly. "This man and his fellows found a white man tramping in the forest——"

"A white man?"

"Yes. They attacked him——"

"Oh, my father!"

"We do not know that it was your father, Bob. They attacked him, and he resisted, and it seems that he snatched a spear from one of them and made a good fight. He killed two of the niggers and wounded this one, and then he was captured."

"Captured, not killed?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"They have taken him away with them."

"Couldn't the man give you a description of him—something we might be able to recognise him by?" Bob Cherry exclaimed eagerly.

"He can say no more."

It was only too true. The savage was sinking back upon the earth, and even as Bob Cherry spoke the glaze of death came over his wild eyes.

The juniors turned away with pale faces.

Sudden and violent death, the commonplace of the African forests, was still new to them, fresh from the quiet Form-rooms of Greyfriars.

A dead man lay at their feet, and from the deep gloom of the forest the jackals were already creeping towards their prey.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
Near!

COLONEL WHARTON turned from the dead man; and gave the signal to advance. In grim silence the explorers tramped on their way.

"They went in this direction, sir?" Bob Cherry asked.

"Southward—yes."

There was a troubled look on Bob's face. A white man was in the hands of the African savages, and his fate would be beyond question, unless he were rescued. Death—most probably death by torture—perhaps to be followed by some horrible cannibal repast.

It was the duty of the explorers to do their best to rescue him; and perhaps, too, the white man was the man they sought.

But if not, they were losing time—time of which every minute was precious—for the sake of a stranger.

"We must find him," said the colonel.

Bob bowed his head.

"Yes. Whether it's my father or not, we must save him, if we can, sir."

"That's right!"

The explorers were all agreed upon that point. It was the plain course of duty, even if the man were not the man they sought; even if they were losing time necessary to the safety of the major.

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They kept their eyes and ears well on the alert as they advanced. At any moment they might come upon some desperate gang of savages.

Bob Cherry paused suddenly on the forest path. Something lying among the thick creepers there had caught his eyes.

He stopped and picked it up, with a sharp exclamation.

The colonel swung round.

"What is it, Bob?"

"Look, sir!"

Bob held up a tobacco-pouch. It was empty; but it still smelled of the tobacco it had contained.

Upon the silver clasp were two initials.

"R. C."

"Robert Cherry!" said the colonel.

Bob nodded, with tears blinding his eyes

"It was my father's," he said. "He never left it anywhere; he always had this with him. You chaps may remember it when he was at Greyfriars."

"I remember," said Frank Nugent.

"It's my father who's been taken by the blacks, sir," said Bob. "He must have dropped this as they dragged him along."

"That's pretty clear, Bob. We are nearer to Major Cherry than we thought," said the colonel quietly.

The juniors looked at the tobacco-pouch, marked with the initials of Major Cherry, with breathless interest.

It was proof enough that the shipwrecked man had passed that way, and the only conclusion they could come to was that he was the white man who had been captured by savages, perhaps not more than an hour ago.

His attempt to reach Massowah had evidently not been a success; perhaps he had been turned back from the path by danger ahead. The route might have been closed by savages, or he might have met with some accident that had delayed him.

It was pretty clear, and past all reasonable doubt, that Major Cherry was the man who was now in the hands of the blacks.

"We're going to rescue him?" said Harry Wharton.

The colonel nodded.

"You are all ready?" he asked. "Mind, we shall take our lives in our hands at every step now."

"We're ready, sir."

There was not the slightest hesitation in the reply of the Greyfriars juniors. They were ready.

"I guess we're keen on this lay-out," Fisher T. Fish remarked. "If you like, I'll pick up the trail for you."

"Rats!" said Nugent.

"I guess I could do it, and it would save time, too, to follow the trail, instead of blundering on like this," said the American junior.

"Bosh! You can't!"

"Yep! I guess I'll show you."

Fisher T. Fish bent down, and examined the trampled ground with an air of great attention and keenness.

The juniors watched him.

Colonel Wharton was also examining the ground further along the forest path. Fisher T. Fish moved along the path, his head bent down, and muttering to himself as he examined the dim signs in the soil.

"Well," said John Bull sarcastically, "have you discovered anything yet, Fishy?"

The American looked up.

"Yep."

"Which way did they go?"

"Right on."

"How do you know?" asked Mark Linley.

Fisher T. Fish grinned knowingly. He was evidently quite satisfied with his powers as a picker up of trails.

"Look at these footmarks," he said. "You see, they're all bunched together, and it shows that there were a gang of them. They all go in the same direction, right on from here."

"Yes, but——"

"And this footprint," said Fisher T. Fish, "is smaller than the others, and looks as if the foot had a boot on. That's Major Cherry's."

The juniors examined the footprint attentively.

"That isn't a boot mark," said Frank Nugent.

"What is it, then?"

"Looks to me like a mark where a cocoanut or something has fallen off a tree."

"Gee-whiz! I guess I know a footprint when I see one."

"Rats!"

The colonel came back towards the juniors.

"We strike off from the path here," he said. "The savages have gone through the forest towards the east."

Fisher T. Fish jumped, and the juniors could not help grinning. After the information the Yankee schoolboy had given them, the colonel's words seemed peculiar.

"I guess you've got it wrong, sir," said Fisher T. Fish.

"What?" said the colonel, looking at him. "What do you mean, Fish?"

"They went right on from here, sir."

"Why do you think so?"

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"Look at the tracks."

"What tracks?"

"The tracks in the ground, sir," said Fisher T. Fish, pointing at them. "Look there! You can see that a crowd of people, with jolly big feet, passed this way."

The colonel smiled.

"Quite so!" he replied.

The American junior grinned triumphantly at the other fellows.

"I reckoned I had it down fine," he remarked. "This is the way we do things over there, you know."

"I don't think you have it quite right, however," said the colonel. "Certainly a crowd of big feet passed this way, but they did not belong to human beings."

"Eh?"

"My dear lad, a herd of animals has passed down this path, and left those tracks," said the colonel. "Surely you did not mistake those footmarks for human prints."

"Oh!"

"The savages left the path here, and went through the forest. The indications are clear enough," said the colonel. "Follow me!"

"B-b-but——"

"Come, follow me!"

The juniors grinned as they followed the colonel. They could not help it. Fisher T. Fish's face was a study.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.
In Deadliest Peril.

THE indications were, as the colonel had said, clear enough. The savages had had no motive for disguising their trail, and it was plain enough for anybody to see.

Trampled bushes and creepers and torn branches showed where the mob of blacks had left the path and plunged through the underwoods to the east.

Fisher T. Fish followed the rest in silence. He did not offer his services to find the trail again.

The trail, indeed, hardly needed finding. It would really have been difficult to miss it.

The savages were probably taking a short cut through the forest to reach their village, or else some camping-ground.

If the former were the case, the task before the rescuers was not an easy one. In some savage town they might find hundreds of foes, and the rescue of the prisoner would be a difficult problem.

But they never thought of hesitating.

If the others had thought of pausing, Bob Cherry would never have turned back. He was there to save his father, or to die for him, and the brave lad would have faced all the black savages in Darkest Africa rather than have failed his father in the hour of need.

The way was difficult for the explorers—among huge irregular trees, laced with creepers and twining vines. But later they came out into a beaten track in the forest, marked by the innumerable tracks of wild animals.

The colonel paused, and looked about him keenly.

The ground was more open here, and the juniors could see to some distance among the trees.

"Look out!" said the colonel quietly.

"What is it, sir?"

"Danger!"

From a flowering magnolia thicket a black face looked out, with two savage eyes, and a hand was raised with a spear in it.

The explorers were evidently close upon the track of the savages now.

The colonel's hand went up with a revolver to a level, and the sharp crack rang with a thousand echoes through the forest.

A yell of anguish answered the report of the revolver. There was a crash, and the burly savage disappeared into the bush he had risen from.

"Stand ready to fire!"

"We're ready, sir."

In answer to the shot and the yell, the forest seemed to become alive with yells and shouting.

Five or six blacks appeared in view from different directions, and at the sight of the whites they rushed to the attack with brandished spears, without a pause.

The juniors fired.

Four or five brawny forms went reeling to right and left, and the rush was stopped. But from the forest came loud and louder yells.

"Come," shouted the colonel. "Follow me!"

He led the way into the wood.

Loud yells from behind showed that the savages were following them.

Bob Cherry grasped the colonel's sleeve as they ran on.

"Are we going to retreat, sir?"

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"Do you want to be killed?" said the colonel roughly. "Obey my orders, Bob, and leave it to me to do what is for the best."

Bob was silent.

"Run for your lives!" muttered the colonel.

The juniors ran hard.

It was evidently time to run, for a crowd of black savages were swarming on their track, and even with their firearms the explorers would have had little chance in a combat with such odds.

The yells of the savages died away at last in the distance of the echoing forest.

The colonel halted, panting.

"That was a close shave!" he exclaimed.

"By Jove, yes!"

Bob Cherry gritted his teeth.

"Yes, sir. We're safe, but——"

The colonel looked at him sternly.

"Can you not trust me, Cherry?" he exclaimed.

Bob hung his head.

"But my father, sir?"

"Do you think I have forgotten your father?"

"No, sir. But——"

"Chuck it, Bob!" said Harry. "We know how anxious you feel; but we've got to trust our leader, old man. The colonel knows best."

"Yes, but——"

"We have tracked the savages down," said the colonel. "When we fell in with them we must have been close upon their village—or, at all events, upon a large camp. We could not save Major Cherry by getting ourselves killed at once. That would make matters worse instead of better."

"Yes, sir. But——"

"You have a plan, uncle?"

"Certainly! Now that we know where the major is, we know what we have to do. We are not far from the coast, there is only a thin belt of forest now between us and the shore, we have turned so far eastward. If we could get through to the sea we should probably see the steamer. We want every hand to the work for rescuing the major—and we must have the help of Captain Coke and his crew."

"Good!"

"I know how you feel anything like delay at the present moment, Bob, my lad," said the colonel, dropping his hand kindly on Bob's shoulder. "But I assure you I am acting for the best. It would not help Major Cherry in any way if I allowed you all to be massacred by his captors."

"I know, sir. I do trust your judgment. But I feel so horribly anxious," said Bob repentantly. "They may murder him while we delay."

"It cannot be helped. It is useless rushing to our death and leaving him still to be murdered," said the colonel quietly.

"I know, sir—I know."

"Even with the crew of the steamer to help us we may not be strong enough to succeed," said the colonel. "But we shall try. I do not think any of the seamen will hesitate to land and aid us in rescuing a white man from these horrible savages. I must try and reach the steamer and get help; you must remain here, quiet, until I return. I know it is terribly hard, Bob, but it is the only thing to be done."

"Oh, sir!"

"There is another point. They have taken him prisoner, instead of killing him at once, and there is no reason to suppose that they intend to put him to death now. They must have captured him alive for some reason."

Bob looked a little relieved.

"I suppose you're right, sir. You know best."

"I can get to the coast in an hour from here if I get through the blacks safely," said the colonel. "Listen! If I am not back here in three hours, I leave you with permission to do as you think best."

"Three hours, sir?"

"Yes. If I cannot bring help—if I do not get through—I should prefer you to abandon the expedition and save yourselves. But I know you will not do that, and I leave you free to do as you like. But for three hours I ask you to obey me, my lads. I am acting for the best."

Bob Cherry seemed to gulp something down.

"Yes, sir. I'll do as you say—I know you know best."

"Keep close here in the thickets," said the colonel. "Keep by this big tree. I can see it at a distance over the forest, and shall easily find you again—if I return."

And the colonel disappeared into the forest, leaving the juniors alone in the shade of the heavy foliage.

Bob Cherry gave a groan.

"Oh, father! And I can't help you!"

"Patience, Bob!" said Harry quietly. "Think of the colonel—think of the danger he has gone into to save your father! He said 'if he returned.' And if he does not return it will be because——"

Wharton's voice broke.

"I—I'm a selfish beast, Harry!" said Bob, with a break in his own voice. "I ought to have thought of that; but—but I can't think of anything but my father in the hands of those black demons!"

"I understand, Bob. But patience!"

The juniors waited.

There was no further alarm of the savages; from the forest came the busy hum of tropical life, and that was all.

The sun climbed higher over the trees. Through the thick foliage came down the vertical rays, hot and blinding—the forest was swimming with heat.

Wharton looked at his watch from time to time.

One hour passed—two—and the third hour dragged slowly by.

Was the colonel returning?

Had he found the steamer? Was he coming back with help for the rescue of the prisoner in the hands of the savages?

Bob Cherry could not rest.

He moved about aimlessly, shifting from one position to another—restless, unquiet, almost feverish.

"Harry, how long now?" he exclaimed at last.

Wharton's face was sombre.

"Five minutes," he said.

"Oh!"

The juniors listened with straining ears.

There was a sound in the forest, and Wharton sprang to his feet. An antelope brushed through the underwoods and disappeared.

Wharton's face fell again. He was sick with anxiety for what might have happened to the colonel.

Where was he?

"Time's up," said John Bull, in a low voice.

Bob Cherry grasped his rifle and examined it. Harry Wharton gave him an appealing look.

"I'm ready," said Bob.

"Give him five minutes more, Bob."

Bob Cherry nodded without speaking.

Five minutes ticked slowly away.

But there was no sign, no sound, of the colonel.

Harry Wharton put his watch back into his pocket, with a sigh that sounded almost like a groan.

"He is not coming!"

"I'm sorry, Harry," said Bob, in a broken voice. "I—I'm horribly sorry! But he may have got through all right, and may not have found the steamer. There's no reason to think he's come to harm. But my father—we know he's in the hands of those demons. The colonel said we could go if he did not return."

Wharton nodded.

"Let us go," he said.

He scribbled a few words upon a leaf from his pocket-book, and pinned the note to the tree with a long thorn. It was for the colonel if he should return.

Then the juniors, rifles in hand, left the spot.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bob's Father.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were very silent as they threaded their way through the forest. They had a rough idea of the direction in which to go, and they were not long left without a clue. In the midst of the thick green of the tropical wood they came suddenly upon a heap of bones—fresh picked by jackal and vulture—and they knew that it indicated where one of the blacks had fallen before their fire.

They shuddered, and passed on.

Exactly what was before them they did not know. They only knew that there was danger—terrible danger! That was all.

A shimmer of blue between the thinning trees caught their eyes, and Frank Nugent uttered an exclamation.

"The sea!"

They were coming out upon the coast again. From the distance, in the direction of the shore, came a blare of noise.

The juniors listened, with beating hearts.

The crash of tom-toms, the shouts of savage, uncouth voices, and the shrieks of strange, barbaric musical instruments mingled in a terrible din.

The juniors exchanged glances. They understood well enough what it meant.

"Some giddy celebration among those savage brutes," John Bull muttered.

"A feast—or something of the sort," said Mark Linley. "Perhaps——"

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He paused.

Bob Cherry's face was white.

"Perhaps a sacrifice," he said.

"Yes, Bob. We're in time though."

"Heaven grant it!"

The juniors pressed on.

Louder and louder sounded the wild uproar of the savages; but as yet they could not see any of the blacks.

They were not in the forest, and the wood was left behind, and still the savages were not in sight. The uproar proceeded from beyond a ridge of rock, which shut out the view of the sea and the beach.

"They're on the shore," said Bob.

"Yes. This way. Caution!"

"You bet!"

The juniors trod on cautiously over the rocks.

Fisher T. Fish nudged Harry, and the junior looked round inquiringly.

"What do you want?"

"I guess I'd better go ahead and see how the land lies," said Fisher T. Fish. "I did a lot of scouting over there, and——"

"Oh, cheese it! Keep behind!"

"I guess——"

"Shut up!"

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry led the way. They crept up over the ridge of rocks and looked at the scene beyond.

Bob Cherry caught his breath.

"Oh, the demons!"

It was a terrible scene that burst upon the view of the juniors as they looked over the rocks.

A stake had been planted in the ground, and a white man was tied to it with thick cords of vegetable fibre.

Round him a horde of black savages were circling in a wild, barbaric dance. They were waving spears and shields, and others standing round were beating tom-toms, making a fearful din.

It was evidently some savage rite, and it was clear enough that the finale was to be a human sacrifice.

For there was fuel close to the bound man, and it was placed there for lighting. The prisoner was to be burned at the stake!

Wharton set his teeth hard. The odds were heavy against the rescuers; but Harry did not think of retreating. Better death than abandoning an Englishman to that terrible doom.

Bob Cherry caught his arm in a convulsive grasp.

"Harry, it's my father!"

Wharton nodded. He had recognised the major.

Major Cherry's face, darkly burnt by the sun and lined now with haggard lines, could be clearly seen by the juniors.

Harry Wharton knew him at once—he was changed; he looked worn and older, but he was the same stout, burly man who had come down to Greyfriars, ages ago, as it seemed to Harry now, though in reality only a few weeks.

The major did not see them.

His eyes were fixed upon the savages, and his haggard look showed that he had given up all hope of life.

But he was facing his doom with cool, steady courage—the courage of a British soldier who had looked death too often in the face to fear him now.

There was not a tremor in the strong, sturdy form—not a quiver in the bronzed face, haggard as it was.

Steady courage looked out of the major's unwavering eyes as he watched the antics of the dancing savages.

Little did he dream, at that moment, how near his son was to him.

Perhaps, in the hour of doom, he thought of his boy; but he thought of him as far away at Greyfriars, pursuing his lessons in the quiet old Form-room, or strolling under the elms in the old quad.

Bob Cherry gritted his teeth.

"The demons! Buck up, you chaps! We chip in here!"

"You bet!"

"Shoot straight, and pile it in thick," said Harry Wharton. "There are a crowd of the brutes, and we shall have a fight for it."

John Bull unrolled the Union Jack, and then grasped his rifle. The six juniors crept further forward, till over the rough rocks they were as close to the savage scene as they could get without betraying themselves.

"Stop here," said Harry.

"I guess——"

"Take aim, and let them have it when I give the word."

"Right-ho!"

Bang, bang from the tom-toms, yell and shriek and savage howl! The dance continued madly, and suddenly ceased.

A brawny savage, brandishing his spear, made a sudden rush towards the bound man. Whether he intended to drive the spear into his breast, as it appeared from his action, or whether he intended simply to rack his nerves with the apprehension, was not clear, for the savage never reached the major.

Bob Cherry's rifle rang out.

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The savage gave a fearful yell, and staggered forward, with a bullet in his right leg, and lay writhing and howling on the ground.

The major gave a sudden, convulsive start, and turned his haggard eyes in the direction whence the shot had come.

He seemed dazed as he saw his son leap into view upon the rocks, his rifle to his shoulder, pumping out bullets from the magazine as fast as he could pull the trigger.

Crack, crack, crack!

There was a wild howl from the savages, and they ran, leaving five or six of their number stretched upon the ground.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Hurrah!

BOB CHERRY dashed forward as the blacks broke and fled.

He threw down his rifle, and drew his knife, and slashed fiercely at the thick rope that held the major to the stake.

Major Cherry seemed like a man in a dream.

He was an old soldier, and accustomed to the surprises of a soldier's life, but this surprise was a little too much for him.

"Bob!" he gasped. "Bob!"

"Yes, dad!"

"Bob! You here!"

"Oh, dad!"

"My boy! Oh, my brave lad! But here—here!" stammered the major. "I can't understand it! It's like a dream! Bob!"

The knife slashed swiftly through the ropes, and they fell in fragments round the major.

Two or three of the blacks on the ground stirred and groaned.

Major Cherry stretched his cramped limbs, and drew in a deep, deep breath. John Bull waved the Union Jack frantically.

"Hurrah!" he shouted.

And the Greyfriars juniors joined heartily in the cheer.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Major Cherry grasped his son's hand.

"Bob! You've saved me—you and the others!"

"Yes, dad; and thank goodness we found you—thank goodness we came in time!"

"I guess——"

"But how did you come here?" the major gasped. "How did you? You—you ought to be at Greyfriars. I supposed you to be still at school. How——"

"We came to search for you, sir, as soon as we knew you had been wrecked," Harry Wharton explained.

"You—you lads did!"

"My uncle was with us."

"Oh, I see! Where is Colonel Wharton now?"

Harry's face clouded.

"He left us to get help, to rescue you, sir," he said. "He has not joined us yet. I only hope nothing has happened to him."

"I guess he's all O. K.," said Fisher T. Fish. "But we'd better get back to the place where we were waiting for him."

"Yes, rather."

The major cast a quick, anxious look round.

"We must get away," he said. "The blacks are rallying—they can see now that they have only a handful to deal with."

"You bet."

"Let's get off," said Mark Linley.

"Come on, dad! Look here, you can take my rifle—you'll handle it better than I should," said Bob.

The major grasped the rifle. It seemed to make a new man of him to feel a weapon in his grasp once more.

"Come on," he said. "You lead the way."

The juniors and the major retreated to the ridge of rocks. In the distance the blacks were gathering again, and their savage howls could be heard.

The sudden attack had taken them by surprise, and they had fled; but they had seen from a distance how few their foes were, and their courage was reviving.

As the juniors retreated towards the ridge, the blacks swarmed in pursuit. There were fifty or more of them, and if they had once got to close quarters there would have been little chance for the Greyfriars party.

The rescuers retreated over the ridge, and as they disappeared behind the rocks, the savages broke into a rapid run in pursuit.

The major halted.

His eyes were blazing; he was evidently keen to return to the savages something of what he had suffered at their hands.

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"We can stop them here!" he exclaimed. "Line the ridge."

"Good!"

"You bet!"

The juniors turned back at the ridge, and levelled their rifles over the rocks. The blacks were coming on in a bunch, yelling and brandishing their spears

"Fire!"

Major Cherry rapped out the word as if he were in his old place, giving orders. The juniors pulled trigger at once.

The rifles rang out together, and the lead poured into the midst of the savage mob, and fearful howls answered the volley.

"Now come on!"

With their rifles under their arms, they ran for the wood.

For a time nothing but wild howls and yells came from beyond the ridge; but at last the blacks took up the pursuit again.

As the juniors reached the forest, they looked back, and saw the ridge crowned with the yelling savages.

"They're after us," said Harry Wharton.

"I guess so."

"Run for it!"

They dashed into the wood.

Loud and louder rang the savage howls of the blacks as they pursued the explorers into the shadows of the tropical forest.

The juniors ran on, Major Cherry easily keeping pace with the swiftest of them. Harry Wharton was heading for the big tree which was the rendezvous with the colonel. Before entering the wood, he had seen it clearly from the distance, but in the mazes of the forest he quickly grew uncertain of the direction.

He paused in a deep glade, panting, and looking about him anxiously.

"Is this the way, Bob?" he exclaimed.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know," he said.

"I guess we ought to keep to the right.'

"I was just thinking it would be better to bear to the left," said Frank Nugent.

"Right on," said John Bull. "That's my idea. Keep right on."

Harry laughed breathlessly. Two heads might be better than one on some occasions, but this was evidently not one of the occasions.

The juniors were well ahead of their pursuers, but the loud yells from the distance, echoing through the forest, showed that the savages were still on the track.

"Well," said the major, "you don't know the way?"

"It's such a puzzle in the forest, sir."

"You've lost it?'

"Yes," confessed Harry.

The major chuckled grimly.

"It would have been a wonder if you had kept it," he said. "I doubt if I could, in a tangled forest like this. But we'd better keep on."

"Yes, I suppose so, sir—they'll be up to us soon."

They tramped on through the forest as fast as they could. The blaze of the sun was over now, and it was cooler, for which they were thankful. Suddenly Bob Cherry paused, with an exclamation.

"Look! I know where we are now."

From the thick green of the earth a shattered skeleton grinned up at them. From its position and surroundings they knew that it was the one they had passed an hour earlier.

Harry Wharton's eyes sparkled.

"It's all right now!" he exclaimed. "I know the direction from here—we're not ten minutes away from the tree where the colonel left us."

"Good!"

"I guess we'd better hustle—they're coming on fast."

"This way, then."

Harry Wharton led the way, swerving off to the west, and they plunged on through the thick, tropical forest.

The yells were ringing behind, mingled with trampling and the crashing of branches. It was clear that the savages would not easily be shaken off.

"Here we are!"

Harry Wharton, panting, came out under the branches of the great tree. He looked quickly round. There was no sign of the colonel, or of the men of the steamer. On the trunk of the tree was his note, pinned to the bark with a thorn, just as he had left it.

Harry groaned.

That meant that his uncle had not returned. Would he ever see the kind old soldier again? Had one life been lost in saving another?

But there was little time for such reflections. The enemy were at hand.

"Nobody here!" exclaimed John Bull.

"Nobody!"

"We'd better get off, then——"

"I guess it's too late," said Fisher T. Fish coolly. "They're here!"

"Shoulder to shoulder!" shouted the major.

The savages were bursting from the trees. On all sides came savage, black faces, and brandished spears and shields. The juniors faced the enemy fearlessly, with their rifles to their shoulders, and the sharp crack-crack of rifle-fire mingled with the ferocious yells of the savages.

But the horde of black wretches came savagely on, and it looked as if the Greyfriars party would be overwhelmed by the rush, but just as the stabbing spears were close upon them there came a sudden burst of rifle-fire from the wood, and a loud, ringing sailors' cheer.

Crack-ack-aok-ack!

"Hurrah!"

From the thick underwood came Colonel Wharton and Captain Coke and the seamen of the steamer at a rush.

Under that fresh attack the savages broke away and retreated into the forest. The bullets followed them fast.

"Just in time, Harry!" exclaimed the colonel, grasping his nephew's hand. "I was delayed on the shore—the steamer had not come up—but——"

"It's all right, uncle——"

"And now for the major."

"The major's here," said Major Cherry, with a laugh. And the colonel turned towards him in blank amazement.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"Don't you know me?"

"Cherry, old man!"

The two old soldiers grasped hands, but the colonel's face was still full of astonishment.

"How on earth did you get here?" he exclaimed

"These brave lads saved me——"

"Oh, Harry!"

"We waited the three hours, sir," said Harry, "then we looked for the major. We found him."

"I guess we did."

"Ay, ay, and I'm glad to see you safe and sound, sir,' said Captain Coke; "and if I may say so, sir, the sooner we get to the steamer the better, for there's hordes of these black fiends in these forests, and they may come in swarms at any minute."

"Quite right," said the colonel. "We are all here, so let us be gone."

"I guess that's O.K."

And the party turned through the forest in the direction of the shore. As they tramped through the wood they were well on the alert, but nothing more was seen of the savages. Doubtless they had had enough, and by the time they recovered their courage and rallied. the explorers intended to be gone.

The party came out upon the shore at a considerable distance from the spot where the major had been rescued. In a small bay the steamer was floating at anchor, with only one man on board. Captain Coke had been compelled to take that risk, in order to take his men ashore, but he was glad and relieved enough to see the steamer still safe. Ten minutes later the boat had taken them out to the steamer, and the anchor was up and the engines were throbbing

The juniors and the rescued major stood on the deck looking back at the savage shore they were so glad to leave.

"And now," said Major Cherry, turning to his son—"now explain to me, you young rascal, what you mean by wandering about in African forests with a rifle under your arm instead of sticking to your lessons at Greyfriars."

And Bob Cherry grinned, and explained.

The major listened to his story from beginning to end, and then he clapped the junior on the shoulder.

"I'm proud of you, Bob!" he said. "My dear lad, any man might be proud of such a son! And these lads, too—I don't know how to thank them."

"That's all right, sir," said Harry Wharton, smiling. "It's been a ripping adventure for us, and it will be something to talk about when we get back to Greyfriars."

They were a happy party on board the steamer during the run back to England.

And Mrs. Cherry's joy on their arrival we need not describe. From Port Said the telegraph had apprised her of the rescue of her husband and the safety of her son, and she was at Southampton to meet the steamer.

Harry Wharton & Co. returned to Greyfriars, and, needless to say, they had to relate in nearly every study in the school the full story of the adventures of Bob Cherry in Search of his Father.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled "A Schoolboy's Cross-roads!" By Frank Richards. Order your copy of The MAGNET Library in advance. Price 1d.)

DON'T MISS the special new story of the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled: "THE BOY FROM NOWHERE," in this week's "GEM" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

A NEW ADVENTURE TALE OF ABSORBING INTEREST!

LION AGAINST BEAR.

A Thrilling Story of the Further Amazing Adventures of

FERRERS LORD, MILLIONAIRE.

By SIDNEY DREW.

READ THIS FIRST.

Rupert Thurston, friend of Ferrers Lord, the millionaire, and commander of the latter's wonderful submarine, the Lord of the Deep, receives mysterious orders to sail for the Chinese seas. He reaches his destination, Shanghai, and at the time arranged goes ashore to meet Ferrers Lord. Here, to his surprise, he learns that Ching-Lung is Prince Tu-Li-Hoan, and owns a vast territory in Northern China. Ferrers Lord, Ching-Lung, Thurston, Maddock and Prout, two of the crew, and the Norwegian boy journey northward on the outbreak of the war between Russia and that part of China owned by Ching-Lung. After many adventures they reach Kwai-Hai, the prince's capital. The prince offers to show Rupert the treasures of the palace, but while passing through a secret passage he is startled by a message written on the wall, stating that any, except those of the royal blood, who pass shall die. Rupert ignores the warning, and Ching-Lung runs after him imploring him to stop.

(Now go on with the story.)

Ankle Deep in Treasure!

"Hallo!" said Rupert Thurston, pausing suddenly. "What's that?"

Ching-Lung seized the lamp.

"Stand back!" he said hoarsely.

He picked up a heavy stone and advanced cautiously, holding the light above his head. A monstrous sitting figure barred the way. Its huge eyes flashed fire, the light glistened upon its teeth. Rupert stood still, chilled and repulsed. The idol—for an idol he guessed it was—was at least thirty feet in height. One monstrous hand held a brazen sword above its grinning head.

"De debil who guards de treasure!" whispered Ching-Lung.

He raised the stone and advanced a few paces. The pressure of his weight seemed to set some mechanism in motion, for the great eyes rolled and the sharp teeth gnashed together. Ching-Lung flung the stone, which fell with a crash at the idol's feet.

The brazen sword fell like a flash, cutting the empty air, rose, and fell again, a dozen times. Then it rose and hung motionless.

"Now we pass," said Ching-Lung.

Thurston shrugged his shoulders.

"You were about right when you mentioned traps and pits, Ching," he said, squeezing himself under the figure's knee. "Your uncle must have had some queer ideas when he invented that thing. Why, if an elephant stumbled up against it, one blow from that sword would have hacked it in two!"

"Even the weightee of a mouse setee it going," said Ching-Lung. "Now we safe. Look!"

A faint speck of light shone through the darkness. Again their weight set some mechanical agency in motion, for suddenly a great forked tongue of flame shot up, making the gloomy underground chamber as bright as day.

The light came from an urn standing on an altar of bronze. Below the altar was an iron-studded door. Ching-Lung wedged the key into the lock, and they passed in. From the altar the light poured down through five or six circular gratings.

Rupert stared round him.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "And is all this stuff yours, Ching?"

"Every bitee," answered Ching-Lung. "It not muchee."

Rupert was standing ankle-deep in coins, mostly bronze or copper. The whole floor was covered with money, which was piled in some of the corners as if flung there by shovel. But the coins were of little value, for in China most small purchases are paid for in what is known as "cash," and a good donkey can hardly carry a sovereign's-worth.

"It looks like a small Bank of England," said Rupert.

"Oh, dese t'ings no goodee. Ole Tu-Li-Hoan suchee a misel, he colletee anyt'ing. You come into here."

He clutched a thick, mildewed curtain of leather and raised it. The second room was smaller, and piled with chests.

"Look!" said Ching-Lung.

He raised the lid of one of the chests. Then he started, and listened.

"I thoughtee I heard somet'ing," he whispered.

"A rat, perhaps."

Ching-Lung shaded the lamp with his hand, and softly closing the lid of the trunk, stole like a cat towards the entrance. All was silent.

"What's the matter with you to-day?" asked Rupert. "You're not like yourself."

Ching-Lung turned, his hands shaking. Then he laughed.

"I tinking of de cluse. P'laps I'm not velly well. See, dis allee silvel!"

The box was filled to the brim with quaint silver coins and strange ornaments. Thurston counted eleven trunks of silver. Eight more contained gold—mostly in the shape of dishes, cups, bangles, and chains, but with a good many coins. One bag was filled with English guineas, and the coinage of almost every nation was represented, though very little of it was modern.

"Why, you're a little Crœsus, Ching!" said Rupert. "How long did it take to collect all this?"

"Hundleds and hundleds of yeals."

"And what are you going to do with it all?"

Ching-Lung sat down on one of the old chests and placed the lamp beside him. Rupert was examining a curiously-engraved vase.

"I not thought yet," answered the Chinese boy. "I makee allee my fliends velly lish. I wantee to give Tom Plout a plesent. I tink I getee his mothel-in-law ovel to do de washing in de palace."

"A pretty smart idea, that! By the way, hadn't we better be getting back? Lord told us not to be long."

Ching-Lung lighted another cigar.

"What would you likee most in de world?" he asked.

"Well, just at present, a whisky-and-soda. I feel pretty thirsty."

"No jokee," said Ching-Lung. "I mean seliously!"

Rupert tossed back the cup into the chest.

"I really don't know," he said. "The sight of all this wealth hasn't made me at all covetous. I—— Jove, are you mad to-day, Ching?"

The Chinese boy bounded to his feet. Again he fancied he heard a faint, metallic sound.

"It's only a rat," said Rupert. "You ought to see a doctor, Ching. Your nerves are out of order."

Ching-Lung caught at his throat, and a cry of horror froze there.

A human hand lifted the curtain. There was a flash, a report, a groan, and Rupert Thurston fell with a thud at his feet. From Ching-Lung's ashen lips came a gasping cry.

"The curse!"

The End of Nathan Trethvick—Yes-Kiang is Badly Wounded—The Delayed March—The Attack is Renewed.

Ferrers Lord and Yes-Kiang talked earnestly together. Sitting cross-legged on a heap of cushions, smoking a little opium-pipe of silver, Yes-Kiang looked as grave as a judge and as crafty as a fox. Ching-Lung and Thurston had been absent nearly half an hour.

"We must do something with this treasure," said the millionaire. "We dare not leave it behind."

Yes-Kiang laughed softly, and shook his head.

"It is safe. No one will touch it!"

NEXT TUESDAY: "A SCHOOLBOY'S CROSS-ROADS," A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Greyfriars School. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Ferrers Lord stared pointedly at the Chinaman; but Yes-Kiang's yellow face was Sphinx-like.

"You mean to tell me——"

"Patience!" said Yes-Kiang, fanning himself lazily. "You do not understand me. The treasure is guarded by a curse of terrible potency, written by Ning, the magician. The curse brings death to all except members of the Royal house if they dare to lay a finger on the treasures. Only Ching-Lung or Chan-So can do it and live. Every Chinaman knows the story of the curse. They would sooner face a thousand of your thunderbolt guns (Maxims) than go near the treasure-chamber. Men have tried before now, but only to die a horrible death."

A quiet smile crossed Ferrers Lord's lips.

"It would be ungentlemanly of me to try and make light of what you believe," he said, "for different nations have different customs. It is strange that you, who have lived in England so long, should think that a thousand curses could do a man any harm."

Yes-Kiang took the pipe from his lips and blew out a cloud of acrid opium-smoke.

"Pardon me," he said, "I do not believe in anything of the kind; but others do."

"Not Ching-Lung, anyhow," answered the millionaire, "for he has taken Mr. Thurston with him to view the store of wealth. What can we do with this money? Curse or no curse, I would not care to leave it behind at the mercy of the rebels."

"It is a difficult question. None of my men will handle it, and therefore we cannot take it with us."

"Why let them know? We could put the gold in empty ammunition-boxes and call it cartridges. They will be none the wiser."

"A good idea. The five of us can do that, and we will rely on the curse to protect the rest."

At that moment the door was dashed violently open, and Tom Prout rushed in.

"The blackguard's gone, sir!" he roared.

"What, Trethvick?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Prout. "He's stabbed the poor Chinee through the back!"

Ferrers Lord turned white, and then, leaping to the gong, sent its shrill summons booming through the palace. Armed Chinamen came running in—members of Ching-Lung's body-guard. The orders came quickly and clearly:

"The white prisoner has escaped. Search every nook and cranny of the palace and grounds. Take him dead or alive!"

The orders were shouted from the verandah to the men outside. Soldiers rushed into the shrubberies yelling with excitement. There is no hunt like a man-hunt. Ferrers Lord snatched up a second revolver and clicked it open, to see how many cartridges it held. The little weapon he always carried fastened to his waist would be useless after he had fired its contents, for its calibre was so small that he could find none to fit it in Kwai-hai.

Suddenly there was a shout, and Yes-Kiang, who had sat quietly through the uproar, threw down his pipe.

"Do you hear?" he asked. "The treasure-chamber!"

Ferrers Lord waited to hear no more. With Prout and Maddock close at his heels, he dashed along the verandah. Yes-Kiang was far too dignified to run. He summoned his litter-bearers, and was carried after them.

Guided by the shrill chorus of cries, the millionaire reached the room. The soldiers were gathered round a gaping hole in the floor, jabbering and gesticulating, but none of them evinced any intention of descending. Lying beside the hole was something that made Ferrers Lord's fingers tighten upon the revolver-butt—a bloodstained knife.

"The ruffian's gone down!" roared Prout. "That's the knife he killed the poor Chinee with!"

"By Joseph," growled the bo'sun, clenching his huge fist, "I wish I'd got hold of his windpipe!"

The millionaire sprang down the steps, but a dozen hands clutched him and dragged him back.

"Let me go, you mad fools!" he shouted in Chinese.

"What do you mean?"

"The curse!" gasped the soldier in command. "You are going to your death, most illustrious one!"

Ferrers Lord gnashed his teeth, and struggled to free himself. Neither Prout nor Maddock understood what was happening, but they saw their chief being roughly handled, and rushed upon the Chinese. Something ugly might have happened, except for the opportune arrival of Yes-Kiang.

"Stand back," he shouted, jumping from the litter, "and let the white men do as they wish! They have spells and witchcraft to protect them even more powerful than the spells and witchcraft of Ning, the magician, who made the curse. Bring lamps!"

The soldiers stood aside, looking in awe at the three men who dared to face the curse of Ning, the magician. Lamps were produced and lighted.

"Are you coming?" asked Ferrers Lord.

"Certainly," answered Yes-Kiang. "I am afraid you would be in a sorry plight without me. Though I have never seen the treasure-chamber, I found a plan of it after Tu-Li-Hoan's death. Go first; I will follow you."

Spurred on by anxiety, Ferrers Lord went down the steps in three bounds, and hurried along the gloomy passage. He heard the Chinaman calling him warningly to go more slowly, and he paused to read the curse of Ning while he waited. He could make little of it, for it was written in an old-fashioned style of Chinese, almost as difficult to translate as black-letter English is to an Englishman.

The others came up like ghosts, their felt-soled slippers making no sound.

"How far does this passage extend?"

"About two hundred yards," said Yes-Kiang.

"Then if we shouted they would hear us?"

"Yes."

Ferrers Lord uttered a sonorous cry that the echoes hurled back at him. They listened, but no reply came.

"Mend your pace," said the millionaire impatiently. "Something must have happened, or they would have answered. Can that fiend have murdered them both!"

"He'd have to get up pretty early to murder Ching-Lung!" muttered Prout. The steersman was just as uneasy as his master, but he tried not to show it. Suddenly he paused, and sniffed the damp air. "Burnt powder, by gad!" he said.

They all caught the acrid smell, tainted with the scorched grease of the cartridge. In their horrible anxiety not a thought of their own peril crossed their minds. Nathan Trethvick might be lurking in the darkness, or hidden in some hole in the wall. The passage was suitable for any man in shelter, and armed with a revolver, to hold it against heavy odds.

Yes-Kiang stretched out his hand.

"The devil of the treasure," he said, "which only those who possess the secret can pass and live!"

Prout shivered as he saw the hideous idol towering above them, with its smouldering eyeballs and grinning jaws. The great sword was poised ready to strike.

"The old trick, I suppose," said the millionaire. "I saw just such another in the sacred temple of Yaralla, in Thibet. If any weight passes below it the sword falls. Find something heavy, Maddock."

"There's no need," said Yes-Kiang. "Tu-Li-Hoan kept a pile of stones for the purpose."

He caught up a stone and poised it over his head. A cry broke from Maddock's lips:

"Look there! A man!"

A stunted, almost shapeless form was standing high above them on the shoulder of the image, steadying himself by clutching the hilt of the great bronze sword. It was Nathan Trethvick.

"He, he, he!" he shrieked. "Take me if you can! I've killed one of you, hang you all, and I'll take a few more of you with me to kingdom come, if I have to go! I can see you better than you can see me! I've got you covered, Ferrers Lord! He, he, he! I used to be a good shot. That'll pay off a few old scores!"

Crash!

The two revolvers cracked almost at once, and Ferrers Lord flung himself forward upon his face. The sudden appearance of Trethvick seemed to have paralysed Yes-Kiang. He stood, with the stone raised above his head, staring at the dim figure of the renegade. Then his ankle seemed seared by a red-hot iron, and, with a groan, he pitched forward, the stone crashing from his hand.

It struck the knee of the image, and bounded to the floor.

The falling stone had done its work. Down came the sword, with the wretched dwarf clinging desperately to the hilt. He was flung groundwards, and then whirled up again, shrieking madly. Speechless with dread, breathless, they watched the sight.

They saw him slip. The great arm shot down, and clanged against the idol's brazen side. But it was a muffled clang. Something battered, shapeless, and lifeless thudded down—the mangled form of Nathan Trethvick! He had slipped between the body and arm of the idol, and was crushed to death.

The terrible sword became motionless, the great eyes gleamed more brightly, the vicious teeth snapped. In the gloom the horrible image seemed to be gloating over what it had done. Then the flames burst from the jar upon the altar, and lighted up the scene with their ghostly beams.

"Help—help!"

DON'T MISS the special new story of the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled: "THE BOY FROM NOWHERE," in this week's "GEM" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"Ching-Lung!" shouted Ferrers Lord joyously.

He ordered Maddock sharply to attend to Yes-Kiang, for he guessed that the Chinaman had been struck by the last shot Michael Scaroff's hireling would ever fire on earth. And he had guessed rightly. Yes-Kiang, though in agonies of pain, had that wonderful power of concealing physical suffering which is born in the Chinaman. He sat up without wincing, calmly lighted his little opium-pipe, and pointed ahead.

"Find his highness first," he said. "I can wait."

Ferrers Lord was already at the door of the treasure-chamber. The key was missing.

"Are you all right?" he shouted anxiously.

Ching-Lung was sitting in the darkness holding Rupert's limp hand.

"Pletty well," he answered weakly. "Mr. Thulston hult himselfee a bit, dat's all. You justee dig us outee."

"Then get away from the door. I'm going to fire through the lock."

"Allee lightee!"

There were five quick reports that sounded like crashing thunder. Still the door did not yield.

"Your revolver, Maddock!"

Another half dozen bullets plunged through the bronze lock, and the room grew thick with smoke.

"Now," said Ferrers Lord, "your shoulder, too, Prout."

The stout door gave way beneath the strain, and, seizing a lamp, the millionaire entered. His thin lips compressed as he raised the leather curtain and saw the white face of Rupert Thurston.

"Is he dead?" Ferrers Lord asked, in a tense whisper.

Ching-Lung turned his head away.

"Me not know," he answered huskily. "Me t'ink not quitee. You justee comee in timee."

Ferrers Lord knelt beside his friend, and Prout wiped his eyes. There was a moment of terrible silence, and then the millionaire stood up.

"Fetch a litter," he said quietly. "This will put an end to all hopes of marching for a time."

The words acted like magic on Ching-Lung.

"Then he's going to live?" he cried.

"I do not know. I hope so. It's an ugly wound."

Prout and Maddock seemed treading on air instead of money as they rushed to the door. But the sight of the idol brought them to a sudden stop. They dared not pass it.

Yes-Kiang, who was smoking placidly, turned his head.

"The news?"

"Ching-Lung is all right, sir," said Maddock, who liked the Chinaman; "but Mr. Thurston is wounded. We've been sent back for a litter. You couldn't reach me that stone there, sir, could you?"

"There is no danger," said Yes-Kiang. "It is only when entering that the mechanism is set in action."

Both men glanced up at the poised sword, and then, with a shudder, at the mangled form of Nathan Trethvick. In spite of Yes-Kiang's assurance, it needed a strong nerve to cross that terrible boundary. They hesitated.

"It's life or death for Mr. Rupert!" muttered Prout to himself. "Here, Ben, I'll chance it first!"

"I'm hanged if you do!" said the bo'sun, gripping his arm. "You're married, Tom, ain't yer? I'll go!"

"I'll see you——"

"And I'll see you blowed!" said Maddock fiercely. "We'll go together. Take a running jump!"

Neither Prout nor his comrade had ever made such a jump in their lives as they made then—eighteen feet, if it was an inch. The idol's eyes glowed after them as if in anger as they raced up the corridor.

The soldiers were still collected at the top of the steps. They uttered murmurs of amazement at the sight of the two foreign devils who had laughed the curse to scorn. Prout tried hard by means of signs to persuade some of them to accompany him with a second litter for Yes-Kiang. All attempts were useless. They would as readily have entered the bottomless pit as face the terrors of the treasure-chamber of Kwai-hal.

"Well, of orl the yaller-faced, cowardly imps!" growled Ben Maddock in disgust. "Come on, Tom, and collar the 'andles of this 'ere portable bedstead! 'Old on a minute! I seed a bottle of brandy in the council-chamber. We might want that!"

EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"Yer might borrow a bottle of rum, if you spot one, too," suggested the steersman. "That blessed idol looked thirsty."

Maddock speedily returned, and, carrying the litter, they went down the dark corridor at a run. A third stone was flung, and while the hideous figure wielded its sword a puzzled look crossed Prout's face.

"It beats me," he said, "how Trethvick got across without being mauled to sausage-meat."

Maddock scratched his head.

"Very likely he was close behind 'em all the time," he suggested. "I reckon the old thing must stop working for five minutes or so after it's gone off. It wouldn't be safe to stand under it for long if it didn't. He'd crept up as soon as they'd passed, I reckon."

Maddock had hit upon the true solution of the mystery. They waited until the sword had come to rest, and then hurried forward with the litter. Tender hands placed Thurston upon it and carried him away.

"Now, sir," said Maddock, pausing before the grave Chinaman, "it's your turn."

"I can wait," said Yes-Kiang placidly.

"But I'll see as you don't, sir," said the bo'sun. "Beggin' your pardon, sir, if you'll forgive me."

And, in spite of the Chinaman's protestations, Ben Maddock picked him up in his strong arms and hurried after the litter.

Rifles were cracking and spitting from the foot of the hill. The attack was being renewed.

Hard Pressed—Ferrers Lord Sets His Wits to Work—The Great Kite—Ching-Lung Silences the Rebels' Big Gun.

With Rupert Thurston hovering between life and death, the perilous advance had to be delayed. It was a serious thing for British interests in China, and no one knew it better than Ferrers Lord. General Yang, Ching-Lung's champion, was hemmed in between the Russian Army and the rebel hordes of Chan-So. Unless he could cut his way through the rebel forces, or hold his own, the combined army of Cossacks and Chinese would sweep down on Kwai-hal, and Kwai-hal was the key to Pekin.

But Ferrers Lord, the man of iron, was not dismayed. With his wounded friend he was as gentle as a woman. No surgeon could have extracted the bullet or bound up the ugly wound more skilfully and tenderly. Darkness was creeping over the hill before he left Thurston, and the rifle-fire was one incessant fusillade.

The moment Yes-Kiang's wounded ankle was bandaged, he had ordered litter-bearers to carry him into the main fort. There Ferrers Lord found him. He was still smoking his pipe and directing his men in soft, guttural tones to mount an old smooth-bore seven-pounder cannon that would have been called a miserable weapon, even at the battle of Waterloo.

Ferrers Lord looked at the gun doubtfully, and stroked his chin.

"My dear Yes-Kiang," he said, "what do you intend to do with that piece of old iron?"

"Shoot!" said the Chinaman.

"But you have no ammunition to fit, and it would burst after three rounds."

"We have stones in plenty. Let it burst if it will."

It was a bright, starlight night, and a half-gale was blowing towards the belt of trees. The rebels were firing steadily from their ambush, their rifles flashing luridly through the darkness. The defenders held their fire, for ammunition was scarce. The floors of the fort were strewn with empty cartridges, and they were too precious to waste.

In the magazine there was plenty of out-of-date black gunpowder and percussion-caps, and the verandah was roofed with sheathed lead. Soft lead inflicts an ugly wound, but in

Next Tuesday:

"A Schoolboy's Cross-Roads."

By FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT TUESDAY: "A SCHOOLBOY'S CROSS-ROADS," A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Greyfriars School. By FRANK RICHARDS.

fighting the Chinese it is either kill or be killed, and Ferrers Lord had no compunction. In ten minutes several hundredweights of lead were in the melting-pot, and, stripped to the waist, Tom Prout was moulding bullets, and, stripped to the Chinamen filed the bullets smooth, and Maddock and Baby Mike recapped and loaded the empty cartridge-cases which Eric Hagensen collected.

Ching-Lung was still with Rupert.

Little by little, as the darkness grew deeper, the rifle-fire slackened. Three men only had been wounded, for they were careful not to expose themselves. Then the firing died completely away, and silence came.

"That looks threatening," said Ferrers Lord, peering into the gloom. "They are almost as crafty as Red Indians This sudden quiet makes me uneasy. That you, Ching-Lung?"

There was a soft touch on his arm. Ching-Lung had stolen quietly forward.

"I'm going down there," he said, "to see what they are up to. A train has just come in from the north."

"How do you know? Have you cat's eyes?"

Ching-Lung laughed.

"I heard it," he answered, "though the noise of rifle-fire prevented you from hearing it."

Before the millionaire could stay him, he had glided through the embrasure, and was lost in the darkness of the hill. Ferrers Lord lighted his pipe, and sat down on the rail of the old cannon. Had Prout or Maddock attempted the perilous task of creeping into the enemy's lines he would have felt uneasy. But Ching-Lung was like an eel, and a born scout. No dog had better ears, no hawk keener sight.

"Who spoke to you just now?" asked Yes-Kiang.

"The prince. He has gone to look what this silence means."

The Chinaman made a guttural sound in his throat.

"Brave as a lioness robbed of her cubs!" he growled; "cunning as the snake lurking for its prey! I remember when Ning, the magician, read his fortune in the stars. It was for that that Tu-Li-Hoan made him commit harikari."*

"Indeed!" said Ferrers Lord. "Ching-Lung's prospects could not have suited Tu-Li-Hoan?"

"No. Ning read in the stars that a new flag should wave above Ching-Lung's flag on the palace of Kwai-hai, that another empire should arise whose ruler would live far across the seas."

Ferrers Lord knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Then let us hope Ning's prophecy will come true," said the millionaire. "If it did, it would knock the last nail in Russia's coffin, for, unless you take the round trip, it's a land journey to St. Petersburg all the way. But I don't happen to believe in —— Great Scott!"

He sprang from the gun with a cry. A red burst of flame, followed by a deafening roar, leapt from the wood, and a heavy shell shrieked over the forts. It fell into the shrubbery of the garden, and the terrified soldiers flung themselves flat upon the ground.

With a terrible crash the deadly thing exploded, tearing up the earth, and shattering the glass of the verandah. Clouds of dust and smoke filled the air, and a shower of splinters and stones fell around.

Then Ching-Lung slipped back through the embrasure.

"A twelve-pounder," he said calmly. "It's all over now."

Ferrers Lord bit his lips. Against shell-fire they were helpless. The rebels had brought the gun down from the north, and the defenders could hear their exultant yells. The forts were strong, but not strong enough to withstand a bombardment, and the risk of fire was great.

"We must stop that," said the millionaire grimly. "A couple of hundred men must concentrate their fire upon that gun while the rest dig out shelters. Send for Prout to work this seven-pounder. Nails, scrap-iron—anything will do. How is the gun mounted?"

"On a truck," answered the Chinese boy. "They have cut down the trees in front of it and got the range. Look out!"

A second shell came screeching over them, and crashed through the palace roof. A terrible fusillade was poured in the direction of the flash, but the exploding shell tore a gaping hole in the palace roof.

"We must move Thurston," said Ferrers Lord, with a groan. "He is safer here than in there. The place would burn like tinder."

"Leave that to me, sir," said the gruff voice of Mike Kennedy. "Here, Prout, you're wanted!"

"It's a bit out o' date!" he roared, above the crack of rifles. "The kind o' thing Nelson used, I reckon; but I'll soon make it talk! Here, give me a hand to run her back! Now, Ben, the swab!"

The gun was drawn back and tilted, and, lifting a keg of powder, he poured in the charge by guesswork. An old rag soaked in oil formed a wad, and Prout hammered the powder down. A bag of copper nails was rammed into the muzzle, and, with a cry of "Stand aside!" the old-fashioned weapon was shouldered back and trained.

Prout shook the glowing ashes from his pipe into the touch-hole.

Boom!

It was the first and last shot. The gun recoiled, the rotten wheels gave way, and it fell over on its side—useless. Then came a third shell, and the soldiers crouched low under the ramparts. Those who were digging as if for their lives, flung down their spades and fled for shelter, but many were too late. It exploded in the air, and rained down death. Eight men were killed outright.

"This is awful!" said the millionaire. "We must silence that gun. Could we rally the men enough to charge, Yes-Kiang?"

"It would be madness," answered the Chinaman, "and a useless sacrifice of life. We must abandon the palace, that is all."

"And what of Thurston and yourself?"

Yes-Kiang shrugged his shoulders.

"I am nothing; but the prince must be saved."

Ferrers Lord knitted his brows. They might hold out for hours unless the shells fired the place. If they escaped, carrying Rupert and Yes-Kiang in litters, their retreat would be terribly slow. If he could silence the gun, it would be a simple matter to hold the rebels at bay for any length of time.

The firing had slackened. It seemed that something had happened to the rebels' twelve-pounder. Smoke was rising from the palace roof, and the millionaire sent Maddock with a dozen men to put out the fire. The wind had increased. Suddenly the millionaire tossed aside his rifle.

"I have it!" he cried. "Prout, I want you! Find the dynamite we brought with us!"

He ran towards the palace. Ching-Lung and Mike Kennedy, carrying Rupert in Yes-Kiang's litter, were just emerging. Ferrers Lord whispered something to the Chinese boy.

"Good!" said Ching-Lung. "I'll be with you in a moment."

Ten minutes later a dozen men loaded with tarpaulin, spars, and cordage climbed to the palace roof. The rebels' gun was still silent, but bullets were pattering thickly round the forts. Screened by one of the towers, the men worked. A great octangular framework of bamboo was made and firmly lashed together, and a sheet of thin tarpaulin spread over it. By the light of a solitary lantern, Ferrers Lord made his calculations on a scrap of paper.

"In a six-knot breeze," he said, "it will lift nearly one thousand pounds, and this is an eleven-knot breeze at least. It will carry all we want."

Ching-Lung laughed, and Eric Hagensen's eyes rounded. He had discovered at last what the strange monster was.

"Why, it's a kite!" he said, in wonder. "What you do with dot?"

No one answered. Prout and Maddock were busy with their sailors' needles, and Ching-Lung himself was sewing pieces of stiff canvas together in the shape of cones to form the tail of the monster. A windlass was brought and clamped fast to the roof with iron rivets.

Boom!

The rebels had got their vicious twelve-pounder to work again. The Maxim answered it, and the shell failed to explode.

"That's better," said Ferrers Lord. "Hold the lantern nearer, prince. If I make an error in the calculation, we are lost!"

Ching-Lung pushed the lantern over with his foot, and proceeded with his work. The tail was to be composed of inverted cones of canvas attached to a wire cord. Such a tail will steady a kite in any wind, for the greater the pressure, the greater the resistance of the hollow cones.

"Finished," said Ching-Lung, wrapping the long tail round his waist. "You needn't worry about calculations."

"Why not?" asked the millionaire, glancing up.

"Because," answered Ching-Lung calmly, "I've booked my passage on the kite."

Ferrers Lord lifted the lantern, and held it so that the light fell full on Ching-Lung's face.

"No, Ching," he said, "don't think of such a thing; it's too risky."

"Why not? All your figures may come to grief. You know that half of it is mere guesswork, for you have no instruments to measure the force of the wind, and you don't

* Harikari.—A kind of compulsory suicide. In China, when a minister or prominent man is in disgrace, he is given a polite hint that he had better kill himself. If he declines, he is promptly executed.—ED.

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know the distance to fifty yards. Besides, the time-fuses might not act. If I went on the kite I could settle all that. I'm light enough, surely?"

The millionaire shook his head.

"Your life is too valuable. Suppose a stray bullet cut the cord?"

"Then I guess I should fall with a bump. But putting joking aside, Lord, I have made up my mind to go. I got you into this mess, and I must get you out of it before they pound the palace to pieces. I feel certain I can silence that gun, and the kite is big enough to lift a house. Besides, I'm master here, and I do what I like!"

Ferrers Lord held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "You're a—— By gad, they're going it now!"

The dark wood at the foot of the hill seemed to burst into flame, and a shell from the twelve-pounder passed through the embrasure of the lower fort. From the roof they saw the men dashing out of the doomed palace. Then the wall seemed to sink back, and a great gush of fire, capped with smoke, shot skywards. The roar almost deafened them.

"It is time to act," said Ferrers Lord between his teeth, "if we are to act at all!"

Bullets were pattering around like hail, but there was ample shelter from rifle-fire. It was the hideous twelve-pounder that was most to be dreaded. Ferrers Lord's plan to silence it was simple. He had intended to attach dynamite cartridges with slow-burning time-fuses to the kite, and then float the kite, as nearly as he could judge, over the gun.

But it was a doubtful plan, almost a forlorn hope at the best, until Ching-Lung had volunteered. Prout quickly rigged a trapeze to the kite, while Maddock worked at the windlass. To the trapeze the dynamite cartridges were fastened. Ferrers Lord tested every knot.

"I'm ready," said Ching-Lung, throwing away the end of his cigar. "Good-bye, Thomas! Good-bye, Ben!"

He shook hands all round.

"Now!" he said.

The men raised the kite. They involuntarily ducked their heads, however, as a couple of bullets came hissing through the tarpaulin.

The monster struggled to get away, and it took all their weight to hold it down. Over the main string a second cord was thrown, its end tied to the trapeze. This was to enable the Chinese boy to signal his directions.

"Are you ready?" asked Ferrers Lord.

"Ready and waiting."

"Then go!"

The defenders raised a faint cheer that was drowned by the noise of firing. Like some dark ghost, the monster kite rose. The windlass creaked as the line ran out. Then the black mass grew smaller and smaller, and vanished.

"Slower, Maddock," said Ferrers Lord. "Wait for a signal now."

The starlight had vanished behind a sea of clouds, and the darkness favoured Ching-Lung. As the kite soared away, he swung head downwards from the trapeze, and scanned the sight below him. The rebels were burning powder at a tremendous rate, and raining bullets at the forts. Evidently they were not wasting so many cartridges and making so much noise for nothing. There was something behind it all.

"Let's see if I can discover their little game," thought Ching-Lung.

Just then the advance of the kite slackened, and Ching-Lung jerked impatiently for more line. Maddock understood the signal. The kite passed over the wood, and Ching-Lung saw the metals of the railway in the light of a string of fires built beside the line. And he saw more than that.

A hundred or more mounted men were gathered under the shelter of the embankment.

"An assault from the east," thought the Chinese boy. "They mean to keep us busy on this side, and then make the assault on the rear. All right. We'll see about that. There they go!"

There was a sharp word of command, and the mounted men galloped out of the ring of light thrown by the watch-fires. Again Ching-Lung jerked the cord, and Maddock wound in the line. Ching-Lung looked in vain for the flash of the twelve-pounder, and listened in vain for its echoing boom.

"Waiting till the cavalry get round!" he muttered. "No, they're not!"

The big gun barked almost exactly below where he hung. He glanced quickly towards the palace to watch the effect of the bursting shell. He winced as he saw the flash of the explosion.

"A bit too near the windlass to be pleasant for me. Now to stop their little game."

The kite hung at right angles to the gun, and some eighty or ninety feet to the left of it. In order to let fall his dynamite cartridges with any chance of success, Ching-Lung understood that he must gain a position vertically above the cannon. But how could he control the movements of the kite, and bring it into the position required?

He was sitting on the trapeze, staring downwards. Sud-

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denly he caught the bar with his hands and began to swing sideways.

Maddock uttered a cry as the line began to shake and jerk.

"What is it?" asked the millionaire.

"Something wrong, sir. Just feel how the line's jumping!"

Ferrers Lord was not alarmed. He knew that the wind, though almost in the right direction, would not bring the kite exactly into position.

And that was exactly what the Chinese boy was striving to do. To his delight, every swing jerked the kite a few feet to the left, and that meant a few feet nearer the gun.

"I wish they'd fire again!" he murmured. "It's as black as the pit!"

He swung his leg upwards, and hooked it over the bar. He judged he was well over the gun by this time, and he drew his knife to cut free the dynamite bomb. The wind was droning through the cords, and the long kite-tail swayed below him.

"I'd better be sure," he thought, "and not make a mull of things. Hallo!"

Four rockets shot up like serpents of fire. One hissed so close to him that he fancied he could feel the scorching heat of the sparks that gushed from it. One by one the rockets burst with dull reports, and great clusters of stars threw their light around.

He was seen. Mad yells rose from the rebel ranks. Rifles were raised and snapped at the kite. Bullets cut through the tarpaulin. And Ching-Lung set his teeth.

Below him lay the twelve-pounder, surrounded by the gunners. It was time to act. He slid the knife along the rope, and, relieved by the weight of the bomb, the kite gave a wild plunge that nearly hurled him from his hold.

The light from the rocket faded out, and Ching-Lung held his breath.

A moment passed that seemed like an age to Ching-Lung. They had seen his terrible peril from the forts, and the defenders, urged on by Ferrers Lord, were concentrating their fire upon the gun. The rebels were firing blindly and wildly; but at any time a chance bullet might sever the kite-string, and dash Ching-Lung to the ground.

"Ah!"

The bomb struck the ground. There was a stunning roar and a gush of flame. The heavy railway-truck on which the gun was mounted turned completely over, with its sides blown out. Then came a second explosion, that seemed to shake the very earth.

"There goes their ammunition!" muttered Ching-Lung.

Ferrers Lord dashed up the ladder and sprang upon the palace roof.

"Wind in," he shouted, "and work for your lives!"

The great kite came in swiftly, as Maddock's muscular arms set the windlass revolving. A silence like the silence of death hung over the wood, for the terrible explosion which had wrecked their gun and annihilated their gunners seemed to have stunned the rebels.

As the huge monster moved slowly into view, wild yells of "Ching-Lung—Ching-Lung!" burst from the defenders. Even Ferrers Lord, the man of iron, forgot himself, and, flinging up his cap, cheered as lustily as the rest. The plucky Chinese boy had gained a double victory. He had not only destroyed the deadly twelve-pounder, but he had given the wavering garrison new heart.

A dozen men rushed forward to seize the kite, which was riddled with bullets. Ching-Lung leapt from his perch on the trapeze, and made a wild rush to escape from the enthusiastic defenders. Unfortunately, in the darkness, he ran into the arms of the Irish giant Baby Mike, and Baby Mike promptly hoisted him shoulder-high. In a moment his yellow-clad soldiers were round him, waving their rifles, and making the very building tremble with mad cries of "Ching-Lung—Ching-Lung!"

The rebels heard the uproar, and the name of the prince Chan-So had told them was dead. Many of them flung down their weapons and stole back to their homes. They had had their fill of fighting for a time.

Ching-Lung waited patiently and good-humouredly until the clamour had subsided. Then he said gravely:

"You makee a lubly donkey to lide on, Mr. Baby Mike!"

"Faith, an' it's glad Oi am ye think so!" said Baby Mike.

"Then gee-up!"

ANSWERS

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NEXT TUESDAY: "A SCHOOLBOY'S CROSS-ROADS," A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Greyfriars School. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Ching-Lung wrapped his legs round the Irishman's neck, half choking him.

"Here," gasped Baby Mike, "Oi don't want throttlin' at all, at all! Be aisy now!"

He descended the ladder to the garden, entered the council-chamber amid cheers, and Ching-Lung descended from his perch. All the soldiers, except the bodyguard, remained outside. Yes-Kiang was carried in by Prout, and Maddock and Ferrers Lord followed them.

"I think those fellows will be quiet for a bit," said the millionaire. "You did your share of the business very smartly, Ching-Lung. We must get that old smooth-bore rigged up again somehow."

Ching-Lung yawned.

"I'm going to bed," he said. "I'm beastly tired. Come along, Eric, and I'll find you a bunk. Good-night, you gentlemen!"

"Good-night!"

Ching-Lung bowed, and left the room with little Hagensen beside him.

Ching-Lung Captures a Despatch-Bearer.

Ferrers Lord, with his iron will and wiry muscles, seemed to scorn fatigue. All through the night he sat by Rupert's bedside, bathing the burning forehead of the wounded man, soothing him with a few whispered words, or holding a cooling drink to the fevered lips.

The millionaire's forehead was knitted, his chin squared. He knew that Trethvick's last shot had almost done its fatal work, and that Rupert was hovering between life and death. He had lost much blood, although the wound itself was clean and not dangerous. But there was little nourishing food in the place, except rice, and no meat. He opened the door at last, and went to Ching-Lung's room. To his surprise there was a light there.

"Ching-Lung!" he called softly.

The door opened at once, revealing the Chinese boy. He laid his finger on his lips.

"Don't waken poor little Eric," he said. "He's tired out, poor little chap! Do you want me? How pale you are!"

"Thurston's in a bad way. We must get some nourishing food—beef-tea or mutton-broth. If we don't, he'll go."

"I thought you said the wound was not dangerous?"

"Not in itself; but the poor chap has nearly bled to death. He'll slip his cable for certain if we don't get some proper food."

Ching-Lung turned his head away to hide the trembling of his lips. He loved Rupert Thurston.

The prince pulled a revolver from his sash, examined the barrels, and then replaced it.

"You are tired," he said, looking the millionaire squarely in the face.

Ferrers Lord looked haggard and wan, but he shook his head.

"I'm good for another twelve hours at least. Why do you ask?"

"Because I am going into Kwai-hal."

"What for?"

Ching-Lung's feet were bare. He took a cigarette from a little heap with his toes, and held it in the flame of the candle.

"It's no use trying to fool ourselves," he said. "We're in a nasty corner. Even if Mr. Thurston lives, we dare not move him for a week. We have tinned meat and plenty of rice; but white men can't live on rice like Chinamen. We want ammunition, and we want fresh meat for Thurston. I am going into Kwai-hal to get some."

"But the risk?"

"Hang the risk!" said Ching-Lung. "Will you go with me?"

Ferrers Lord nodded, but said nothing. For all that, he thought a great deal as he looked at the youthful prince. To obtain food for his wounded friend, though almost dead with lack of sleep, he was ready to enter the hornets'-nest.

The millionaire examined his revolvers. Then he said:

"Do you know where we shall find any cattle?"

"No; but we must find fresh meat. I am ready."

Ching-Lung shrugged his shoulders.

"I was compelled to go into Kwai-hal," he said. "Yes-Kiang's brother is there. He has much influence and many followers, but he is as pig-headed as a mule. He has taken neither side during the rebellion, and refuses to believe that I am alive. Chan-So ordered him to be left unmolested until he could bring some conclusive proof of my death."

"What is his name?"

"Yes-Fo. He ought to help us."

The hill grew steeper and darker, but their eyes were growing accustomed to the faint light. Suddenly Ching-Lung caught the millionaire's wrist and dragged him aside. There was a crackling among the bushes, and the noise of footsteps. Then a human figure hove faintly into view. Ching-Lung crouched for a spring.

"A match," he said.

It had happened in a trice. The man was down on his back, with the Chinese boy clutching at his throat. The match threw its flickering light on a yellow, frightened face and two protruding, terrified eyes.

"A messenger," said Ching-Lung. "I see his green badge. Search him, Lord, while I hold him."

There was little need to search, for the man carried his despatch in a leather pouch attached to his belt. They had no time to read it then.

"What do you intend to do with him?" asked Ferrers Lord.

"Oh, tie him to a tree! His belt and sash will do for that."

"But if he howls?"

"Let him howl! If he yells his throat out, not a Chinaman will come near him to-night. They'll think it's the ghost of some of the fellows we knocked over to-day." He thrust his revolver into the man's face, and said roughly, in Chinese: "Get up, if you want to live, and make no noise!"

The messenger staggered to his feet, and Ching-Lung promptly placed the muzzle of the revolver in the nape of his neck, as a gentle reminder of what might occur unless he behaved himself properly.

A convenient tree was found at the foot of the hill, and, while Ferrers Lord held the revolver, Ching-Lung tied his prisoner securely.

"You come from Chan-So?" he said sharply, in Chinese.

"Yes; I come from the illustrious prince."

"What news do you bring? Answer, unless you wish to join your fathers in the grave!"

"Yang has evaded our troops," answered the messenger, "and is hurrying south, with Chan-So in hot pursuit."

Ferrers Lord was listening intently. He laughed his quiet laugh.

"I would have given half my fortune to hear that news, prince," he said. "Ask the man when General Yang will reach Kwai-hal."

Ching-Lung put the question.

"He is close behind," answered the messenger. "I am late, for he evaded us craftily, and my horse fell lame. He has abandoned his waggons and wounded, for we pressed him hard. He is driving his sheep and cattle before him. Listen! Even now I can hear their bleating and bellowing."

They listened. A faint lowing of cattle was borne on the night breeze.

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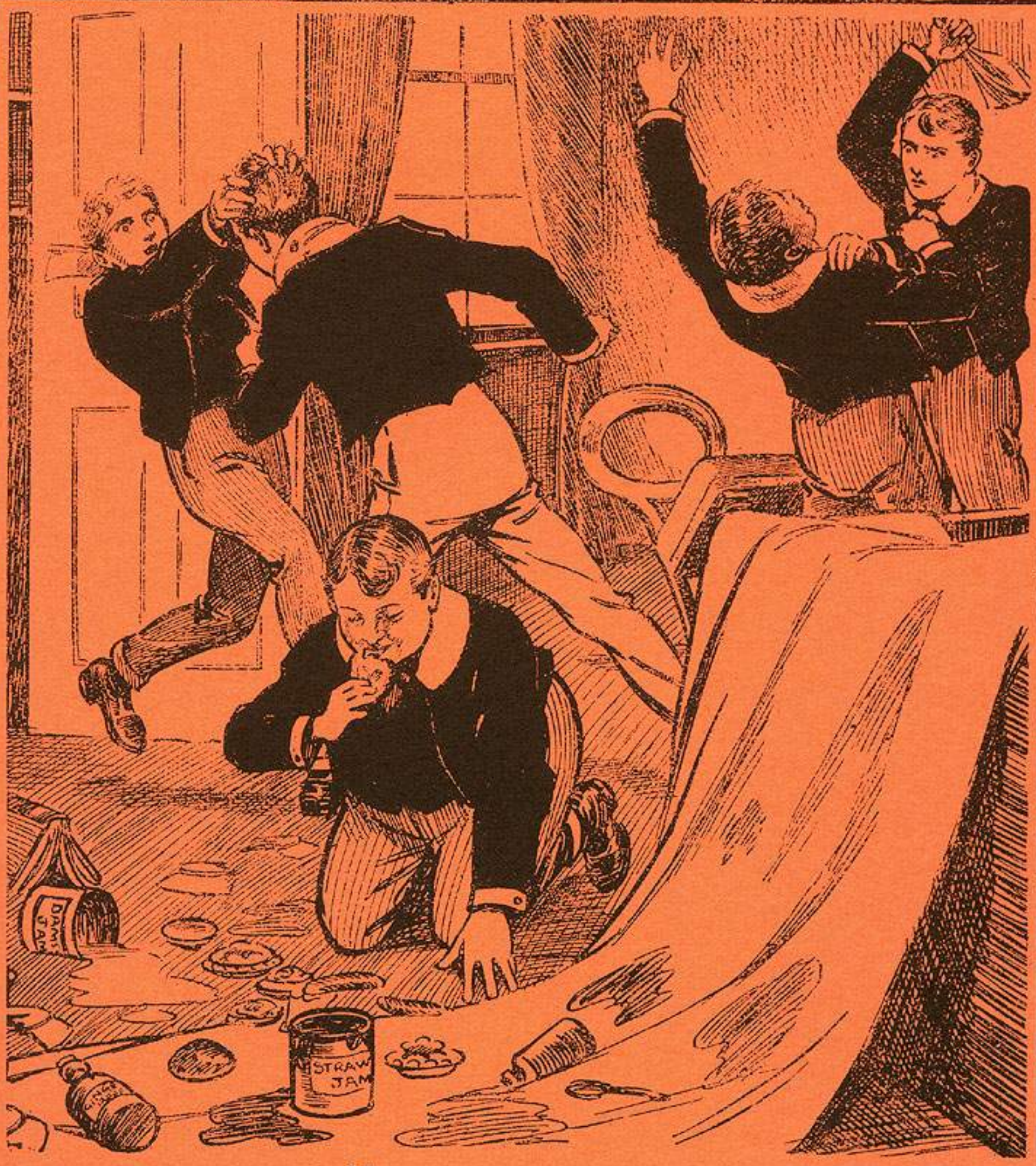

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