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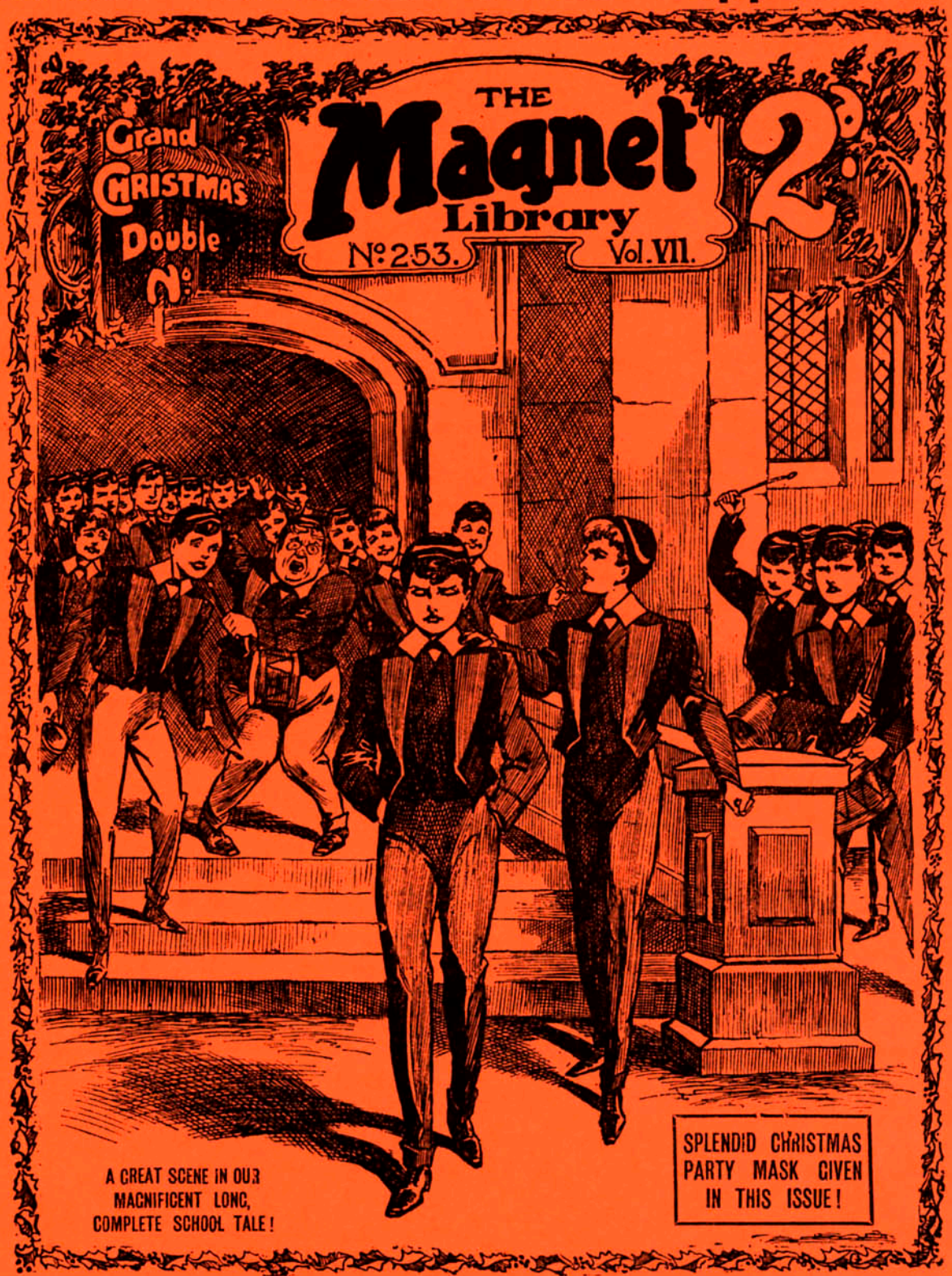

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Drummed Out of Greyfriars

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—: BY :—

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Who's that?"

The December mist had rolled up from the sea, and it was thick in the old Close of Greyfriars. Evening had set in, and the grey mist shut out the light of the stars. Through the mist, the lighted windows of the School House gleamed into the Close. Two juniors were crossing the Close towards the School House—Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry of the Remove—the Lower Fourth-Form at Greyfriars. It was Bob Cherry who suddenly halted, with a sharp exclamation.

Harry Wharton paused, too. Bob was peering round into the mist, and he had his head cocked a little on one side to listen.

"What is it, Bob? I didn't see anybody," said Wharton.

"Well, I did," said Bob Cherry, "and heard him, too. I had an idea that somebody slipped in after us when the gate was opened."

"Phew!"

The two juniors looked and listened. There was no sound from the grey mist that filled the Close. Wharton and Bob Cherry had been down to Friardale, and Gosling the porter had just let them in. Bob Cherry had a parcel under his arm, containing good things from Uncle Clegg's shop in the village.

"Might be one of the fellows japing us," Harry Wharton said.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Listen!" he muttered.

There was a sound of a boot grinding on the gravel path. Bob Cherry made a sudden rush, and there was a gasping cry.

Then a shout from Bob Cherry.

"Got him! Lend a hand here!"

"Let me go!"

"No fear," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "You've got to explain what you are doing here first, my pippin!"

Harry Wharton dashed towards his chum. A man of slim and lithe form, with a swarthy face half hidden under a thick muffler, was struggling in Bob Cherry's grasp. The man was a stranger in Greyfriars, and it was clear that he had taken advantage of the mist to get in when the gate was opened. He returned grasp for grasp, and Bob Cherry, sturdy junior as he was, reeled back in his hands, and shouted for help.

"Buck up, Harry! He's too strong for me!"

Wharton was grasping the fellow the next moment. He dragged him off Bob Cherry, and they went to the ground together. Bob Cherry piled on him the next moment, and the

stranger was extended on his back, with the two juniors sitting on him, and pinning him down by their weight. There was a clatter as a thick cudgel dropped from his hand.

"Got him!" said Bob Cherry calmly. "Now, my friend, will you kindly explain what you are doing here?"

The man gasped for breath. The juniors could only see him dimly, but they made out a dark foreign face, and two glittering black eyes and a black moustache. The man was not English, that was clear, though the words he had spoken were good enough English.

"It's some giddy tramp, and he sneaked in for what he could lay hands on in the fog," said Bob Cherry. "Jolly lucky we spotted him."

"Yes, rather!"

"Let me go!" panted the man.

"Rats!"

"I am doing no harm here. I am not a thief. I—I came to see someone—someone who is at this school."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"I'm afraid that's rather too thin, my son," he said, taking a more comfortable position on the stranger's chest. "Visitors to Greyfriars don't generally sneak in in the fog, and try to keep out of sight."

"I—I had a reason!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I dare say you had. Sit on his head if he wriggles, Wharton. We've got you, my infant, and you may as well give in."

There was a shout from the direction of the School House, where the lighted windows glimmered dimly in view. The noise of the struggle and the voices had been heard.

"What is the row there?"

It was the voice of Coker of the Fifth.

"Giddy burglar!" shouted back Bob Cherry. "But we've caught him."

"My hat!"

"Come and lend a hand, Coker."

"Is this one of your rotten japes, you young sweeps?" asked the Fifth-Former suspiciously, as he came through the mist. "What have you got there?"

"Look at him!"

"My aunt! Some foreign chap," said Coker. "What do you want here, you rascal? We'll hold him, and telephone for the police."

"I am not a thief!" cried the fallen man excitedly. "Carambo! My name is Diaz. I am an honest man! I came here to see a boy."

"Which boy?" grinned Coker.

"Senor Vernon-Smith."

"Phew!" said Coker. "Smithy of the Remove! You came to see him?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then why didn't you ring at the bell in the usual way, if you've only come to visit one of the chaps?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Because I was afraid I should not be admitted. I think perhaps Vernon-Smith would not care to see me."

"Sounds jolly fishy," said Coker, with a shake of the head. "More likely a sneak-thief who was going to pick up things in the fog."

"Yes, rather!"

"Take me in to see Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed the stranger. "He will recognise me. He has seen me at his father's office in London."

"By Jove! He sounds as if he's telling the truth," said Harry Wharton, with a puzzled look. "May as well let him see Smithy."

"Oh, good! Bring him in, but don't let go of him."

"Righto!"

The man was allowed to rise to his feet, Wharton and Bob Cherry keeping a grasp upon his arms. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, had all sorts of acquaintances outside the school—the kind of acquaintances schoolboys are by no means supposed to have. It was quite possible that this was one of them. The foreigner was evidently labouring under an intense excitement, and it struck the juniors that he was speaking the truth. But what his business might be with Vernon-Smith was a mystery.

"Bring him along," said Coker of the Fifth, taking the direction of affairs into his own hands—a little way he had. "Mind he doesn't bolt."

"Right you are!"

And the man was marched into the School House. A score of fellows gathered round to look at him as he came in. Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, came up to ask what was the matter. Harry Wharton explained.

"Well, no harm in Vernon-Smith seeing him, at all events," said the Greyfriars captain. "It sounds fishy enough. One of you fetch Smith."

"Faith, and I'll have him here in a jiffy," said Micky Desmond.

And he rushed into the junior common-room. He returned in a few moments with Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. The Bounder was looking very puzzled.

"What's wanted?" he exclaimed.

"Senorito!"

The Bounder stared at the stranger, and gave a start.

"Hallo! What do you want here?" he exclaimed.

"You know him?" asked Wingate.

"I've seen him," said the Bounder carelessly. "Blessed if I know what he wants at Greyfriars, though. I've no business with him. He's got something to do with a mine in South America that my father is interested in."

"Oh, if he's not a giddy burglar, it's all right," said Bob Cherry, releasing the South American. "From the way he sneaked in, I thought he was."

The Bounder laughed.

"Oh, he's not a burglar," he said.

The South American, as he was released, made a hurried step towards the Bounder. Vernon-Smith looked at him coolly.

"Senorito, I wish to speak to you."

"Well, here I am," said the Bounder.

"You are Vernon-Smith, the son of the millionaire?"

"Yes."

"I must speak to you—not here—it will be better in private," panted the South American.

Vernon-Smith looked at him sharply.

"Come up to my study," he said. "I suppose he can come up, Wingate?"

"It's all right if you know him," said the prefect.

"Good! This way, Diaz."

The South American followed Vernon-Smith upstairs to his study in the Remove passage, leaving the juniors in a buzz of surprise.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Combine.

HARRY WHARTON and Bob Cherry gave no further attention to the man. He was a decidedly peculiar visitor for a Greyfriars fellow, but that was no business of theirs. They followed Vernon-Smith and his visitor upstairs, and passed the Bounder's study on their way to No. 13, Bob Cherry's quarters. Wharton's study was No. 1, but he usually had his tea in No. 13 since Frank Nugent had left Greyfriars. He did not like solitude. Things had changed of late in the Remove Form at Greyfriars, misfortunes had happened to the famous Co., and their numbers had been sadly thinned.

Frank Nugent had gone, Johnny Bull was gone, and Mark Linley was gone. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry missed their old chums sorely, and they were not without hope that the trio might be able to return to Greyfriars. It was owing to Vernon-Smith's machinations that they had gone, the Bounder had done them that injury. And the contest between the Bounder and the Co. was not over yet.

Huree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, and little Wun Lung the Chinee, were in the study as Bob Cherry and Wharton came in. Bob Cherry pitched off his overcoat and muffler.

"Tea ready?" he demanded.

"The readyfulness is terrific," said Huree Jamset Ram Singh in his peculiar English, which he had not learned at Greyfriars. "The kettle is boiling, and the honourable toast is made. We have been waiting for our august chums."

"Hear, hear!"

Bob Cherry deposited his parcel on the table. He uttered an exclamation as he cut the string and opened it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

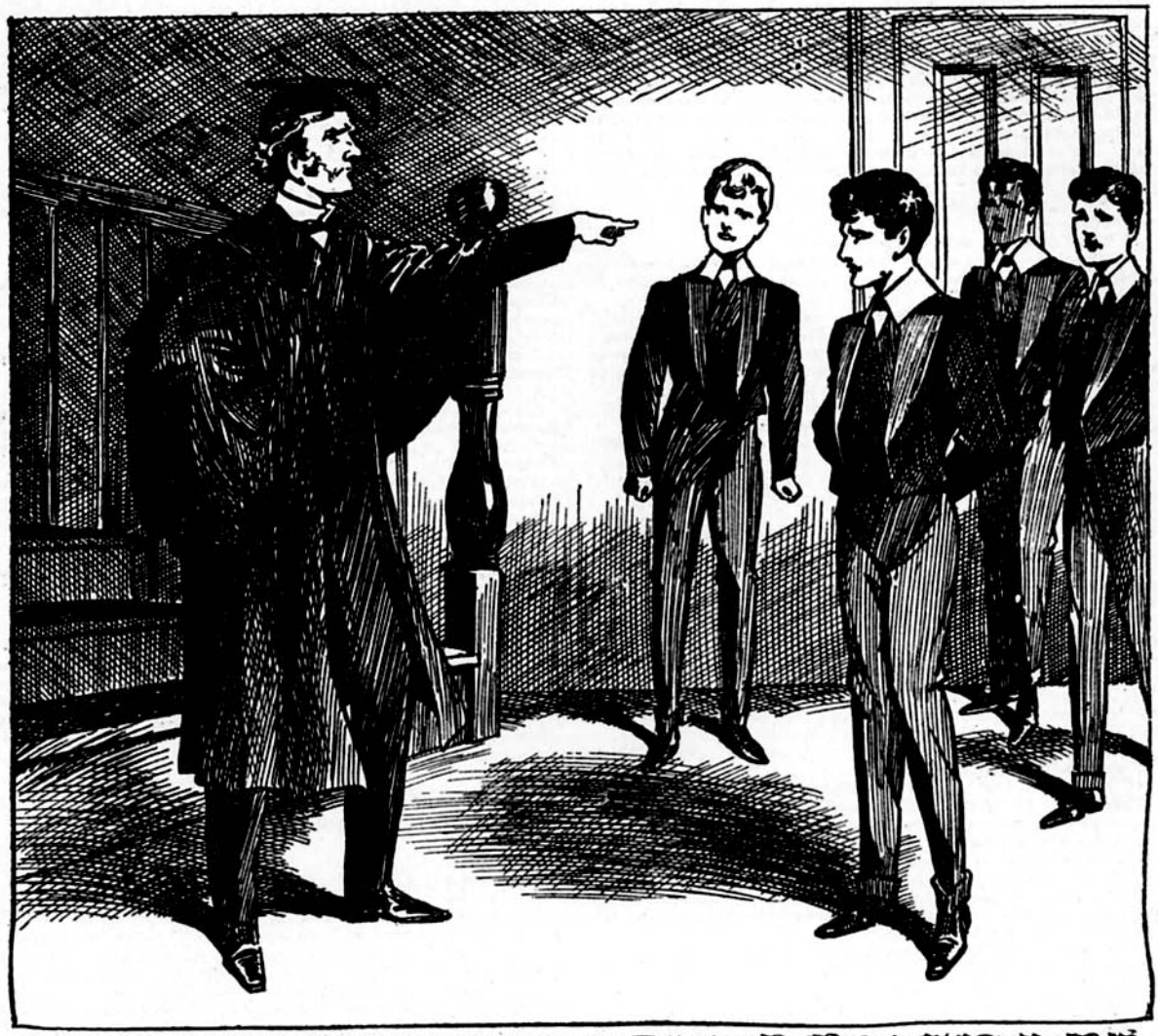
"What's the matter?"

"The jam!" yelled Bob Cherry. "Look at it! This is what comes of wasting time upon Vernon-Smith's rotten visitor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The jamfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The jar of jam in the parcel had evidently been smashed in



Dr. Locke raised his hand. "You have acted like a ruffian—like a criminal!" he said. "Harry Wharton, you are expelled from the school. In half-an-hour I shall expect you to be gone! You shall not soil this old school with your presence any longer. You are expelled!" Harry Wharton stood silent, stunned! *(See chapter 21.)*

the tussle. The contents had spread over the rest of the good things, and the sausages were jammy, the cake was jammy, the apples and ham were jammy—in fact, the jamfulness, as the nabob remarked, was truly terrific.

Bob Cherry's face was a study as he glared at the jammy parcel.

"M-m-my hat!" he gasped.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Never mind, Bob. A little jam won't hurt the cake, and we can wash the ham."

"All through the Bounder," growled Bob Cherry. "When he's not making trouble himself, he has rotten visitors who make trouble. Blow!"

And Bob Cherry began scraping off the jam. There was a tap at the door, and it opened, and a fat face, adorned with a very large pair of spectacles, looked in.

"I say, you fellows——"

Bob Cherry turned a wrathful glare upon Billy Bunter. He was not in a humour to be bothered by the Owl of the Remove just then.

"Clear out!" he roared.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Buzz off!"

"I looked in to see if I could make some toast or anything for you," said Bunter, with an injured expression. "I really think you might be decent, Bob Cherry. It's Christmas-time, you know, and I've made up my mind to—to play up, you know."

"What are you talking about, you silly ass?" growled Bob Cherry.

Bunter blinked at him.

"It's Christmas time——"

"You've said that before, ass, and it isn't Christmas time yet, either."

"Well, it's jolly close," said Bunter. "I've been thinking about it, and I've decided that it's only the proper caper to start forgiving one's enemies, and refusing to take offence, and that kind of thing—that's why I'm going to overlook all the rotten things you fellows have done to me, and have tea with you."

"You're going to—what?"

"Have tea with you," said Billy Bunter cheerfully, rolling into the study. "Can I help you with that stuff, Cherry? You've got it rather jammy. I don't mind jammy cake—in fact, I rather like it."

Bob Cherry burst into a laugh.

"Oh, stay if you like, you bounder!" he exclaimed. "There's enough for a dozen, and as we've only four, there will be just enough for the lot of us, with you."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You can make the tea, as you're here," growled Bob Cherry. "If you jaw, I'll shove this jam on you. It's no good for anything else."

Billy Bunter made the tea. Wun Lung had been cooking chips over the fire in a frying-pan, and the smell of his cookery was most appetising. The jam was scraped off the ham, and the ham was washed, and then, if a faint flavour of jam remained upon it, it could not be helped, and it did not bother the hungry juniors very much. Harry Wharton & Co. settled down to tea. Billy Bunter's jaws were too busy on the ham and chips to leave him leisure for talking, at first, but presently he made a remark.

"You chaps seen the Combine?"

"The what?"

"The Combine," said Billy Bunter.

"What on earth's that?" demanded Bob Cherry, puzzled. "Sounds like an American word. Is it some new dodge of Fisher T. Fish's?"

"Well, it's the name that was suggested by Fish," said Bunter, blinking over the ham and chips. "But the idea's Vernon-Smith's. As you fellows have pressed me to stay to tea, I don't mind putting you on your guard. It will give Wharton a chance to climb down in time."

"What?" exclaimed Harry, frowning.

"Chance to climb down in time," repeated Bunter.

"Do you want to go out of this study on your neck?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Nunno! No!"

"Then shut up."

"But I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry. And he looked so dangerous that the Owl of the Remove shut up, and went on sulkily with his chips and jammy ham.

There was a knock at the door, and it opened. Fisher T. Fish, the American junior in the Remove, came in. He nodded coolly to the chums of the Lower Fourth.

"I guess you've heard?" he said.

"I've heard a silly ass come into this study, and begin to jaw," said Bob Cherry crossly.

"About the Combine, I mean."

"Oh, great Scott! Have you got it, too?"

"It's a combine—what you call combination in your queer lingo," Fisher T. Fish explained. "It was my idea. We're all in it—all but two or three."

"And what are you combining for?" demanded Harry Wharton. "It seems to me that a combine in the Remove has something to do with the Form-captain. I haven't been told anything about it, so far."

Fisher T. Fish chuckled.

"You're out of it," he explained.

Wharton's eyes gleamed. His position as captain of the Form had become somewhat shaky of late, and he knew it, but he did not like to hear the fact stated.

"You see, the fellows are combining against you," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I put them up to it. They're fed up with too much Wharton."

"You cheeky ass——"

"It's a question of the footer eleven," said Fish. "You've steadily refused to play Vernon-Smith and Bolsover major. Now that Nugent and Bull and Linley are gone, there are three vacancies in the team, and you've filled them with poor hands. You've left out Vernon-Smith and Bolsover because they're on bad terms with you. You've left me out——"

"You?" ejaculated Wharton.

"Yep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see where the cackle comes in," said Fisher T. Fish, "I can tell you I've played ripping footer over there." "Over there" was the United States, the land that was honoured with the citizenship of Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I've wanted for a long time to show you Greyfriars chaps how footer should be played."

"I guess you'll have to go on wanting," said Harry Wharton laughing. "You ass, you can't play footer for toffee. Smithy can play, though he's too unreliable to put into a team. Bolsover major can play, though I wouldn't have him swanking in my eleven at any price. But you can only swank."

"I guess——"

"You've guessed wrong if you guess you can play footer," said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I'm going to have a place in the team when Smithy's captain of the Form!" said Fisher T. Fish defiantly. "It's as good as promised."

"I expect it's as good as promised to a good many other fellows, too," said Harry Wharton disdainfully. "Promises don't cost Smithy much."

"Well, I guess we're all standing together to stop this family arrangement in the Form eleven," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you're going to be roped in, my son. You hear me. The Combine will bring you round."

"Oh, rats!"

"I guess——"

"Do you see that door, Fishy?" asked Bob Cherry politely.

"Yep!"

"Well, shut it after you."

"I guess I'm not gone yet."

"I guess you'll go out on your neck if you don't go out on your feet," said Bob Cherry, rising from the table. "We don't want Fish with our tea. It isn't a high tea."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess——"

"Travel!"

"Nope! I——yarooooh! You can't put me out!" yelled Fisher T. Fish, as Bob Cherry laid his powerful grasp on him. "I guess I'll show you how we wrestle over there."

"Go it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Whis! Bump!

Fisher T. Fish flew through the open doorway, and landed in the passage with a terrific concussion. A yell ran along the passage.

"Ow! Ow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Is that how you wrestle over there, Fishy?"

"Ow! Ow!"

"We can do it better over here," grinned Wharton. And the Nabob of Bhanipur declared that the betterfulness was terrific.

"Ow! Yow! I—I guess I wasn't quite ready!" groaned Fisher T. Fish. "I——"

Fisher T. Fish was interrupted. There was a sudden uproar down the Remove passage. It came from Vernon-Smith's study. There was a crashing, as of furniture being knocked violently over, and then the Bounder's voice was heard, shrieking:

"Help! Help!"

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "The Bounder's having trouble with his visitor. The Dago has gone for him."

"Help! Help!"

"Come on!" cried Wharton.

Wharton forgot at that moment that the Bounder was his enemy. The shrieking voice showed that Vernon-Smith was badly in need of help. Wharton dashed down the passage towards Vernon-Smith's study, with Bob Cherry at his heels. Fisher T. Fish picked himself up, and walked in the opposite direction. Fisher T. Fish was not of the stuff of which heroes are made.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Good for Bunter!

"HELP!"

"Help!"

Crash! Crash!

"Help!"

Harry Wharton flung open the door of the Bounder's study. The Bounder's cries had been heard up and down the passage, and there were fellows running up from all quarters, but Harry Wharton was there first. Wharton dashed into the study.

Two figures were struggling violently upon the floor. The Bounder was on his back, and the South American was kneeling on him, clutching at his throat. The man's dark face was convulsed with fury, and his black eyes gleamed and glittered. Harry Wharton caught him by the shoulders with both hands, and dragged him by main force away from his victim. The Bounder was gasping for breath.

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Let me go!" shrieked Diaz. "Let me go! The rascal—the ladrone! The son of a ladrone! Let me get at him!"

"Lend a hand, Bob!"

"What-ho!"

"The what-ho-fulness is terrific!"

The South American was struggling to get at the panting Bounder. Vernon-Smith was sitting up dazedly on the carpet, too dizzy to rise. He blinked stupidly at the frantic South American and his rescuers.

"Hold him!" he gasped. "Hold the murderous villain!"

Wharton and Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh were grasping the foreigner. Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, dashed into the study, followed by Micky Desmond. They laid their grasp upon the South American, and his struggling ceased.

"I think you must be potty, my man," said Bob Cherry. "What did you go for Smithy for? You might have throttled him."

"Oh!" gasped Vernon-Smith. "Throw the villain out! I believe he meant to kill me!"

"Oh, rot!" said Wharton. "He seems an excitable beggar though. What have you been doing to him?"

"I? Nothing!" growled the Bounder.

"Then why did he go for you?"

"Some idea he's got in his silly head, I suppose. He's got the worst of some business deal with my father, I think, and he wants to take it out of me," grunted the Bounder. "Throw him out! He's not safe!"

"I have been robbed," panted Diaz. "That boy's father—and he—he is just as bad! They are two villains!"

"Oh, cheese it," said the Bounder, rising to his feet and dusting his clothes with his handkerchief. Vernon-Smith had recovered all his coolness now that his strange visitor was in safe hands. "You're off your rocker, I think. I have nothing to do with my father's business matters, and I couldn't interfere if I wanted to. You must have been mad to come here, I think. Smith's Consolidated isn't run from a junior study in Greyfriars School, you fool. Now, you can either get out of the place, or I'll telephone for the police, and give you in charge for assault and battery. I think I could get you three months, with these fellows as witnesses."

"We should want to know what he tackled you for first, Smithy."

"Oh, rats! Shift him out."

"You'd better get out, my man," said Harry Wharton, not unkindly. Now that the fit of rage had passed, the foreigner seemed white and weak, and he was like an infant in the hands of the sturdy juniors. "Whatever Mr. Vernon-Smith has done to you, you can't come here and go for his son. That's not in the game."

"I am a ruined man!" said the foreigner huskily. "I have been swindled."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Bob Cherry. "We had a chance once of seeing something of the respected Vernon-Smith methods of business. But you'd better go, my man; you can't do anything by staying here, and if the masters found what you'd been up to, you'd be given in charge of the police."

The man nodded wretchedly.

"Thank you, senorito. You—you are a gentleman—different from that ladrone."

"Thank you," said Bob Cherry. "What on earth's a ladrone?"

"It is as you say—thief."

"Oh, it's a thief, is it! Then I dare say a ladrone is a very suitable name for Vernon-Smith senior."

"You cad!" yelled the Bounder. "If you call my father a thief——"

"I haven't forgotten the time he had the Head under his thumb, over moneylending bizney," said Bob Cherry scornfully. "If extracting interest from a borrower till he's paid three times the loan isn't thieving, I don't know English. But it's no business of mine, and you had better get out, my hot-headed friend."

"Si, si, senorito, I will go!"

"We'll see you off the premises, I think," said Harry Wharton, with a glance at his chums. "I would rather see the gates locked on him."

"Yes, rather."

"Ah! I shall not return," said the South American. "It was my last hope, coming here—a fool's hope! The son is as greedy and merciless as the father! Let me go."

"And think yourself lucky to go without the handcuffs on and a bobby's paw on your shoulder," sneered the Bounder.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry led the South American away. They kept hold of his arms, in case he should break out into violence again. The man had acted with almost murderous violence towards Vernon-Smith, yet they could not help feeling a tinge of sympathy for him. He acted, and looked, like a man who had been wronged, and they could easily believe that the poor wretch had been ruined by Samuel Vernon-Smith, millionaire and moneylender; and that he conceived the idea of appealing to the son, to use his influence with his father, to obtain mercy. They smiled grimly at the thought of such an appeal being made to the Bounder of Greyfriars. If anything, Vernon-Smith was harder and colder than his father, the millionaire.

The South American's violence all seemed gone. He walked between the two juniors with his head bowed, heedless of the curious glances cast upon him from all sides. They crossed the Close in the mist, and Bob Cherry kicked at the door of Gosling's lodge. The school porter blinked out into the mist.

"Wot's wanted?" demanded Gosling. "Wot I says is this 'ere——"

"Let this chap out, Gossy!" said Wharton.

Gosling stared at the South American in amazement.

"'Ow did he get in?" he demanded. "I didn't let that man in!"

"Through the bars of the gate," Bob Cherry explained gravely. "But he's taken a deep breath since then, and he can't get out again. So you will have to toddle out and unlock the gates, Gossy."

Gosling snorted, and came out with his keys. The South American looked at the two juniors as the gate swung open.

"I am sorry to have alarmed you, senores," he said in his soft voice. "I have been wronged, more than you can understand. But it was folly to come here. Carambo! The son is as great a reptile as the father! Adios, senores."

"Good-night," said Harry Wharton. "I say, if you are hard up——" He put his hand into his pocket.

The South American shook his head.

"I am penniless," he said; "but I am not a beggar! Adios!"

He disappeared into the mist on the road towards Friardale.

The juniors went back towards the School House with thoughtful brows. The strange visit of the South American had given them food for thought.

They remembered their unfinished tea in No. 13 Study, and returned there. But the tea was finished now. They had left Billy Bunter there, and Billy Bunter had not lost time.

Little Wun Lung was curled up in the armchair, and Billy Bunter was at the table—just finishing. He rose to his feet as the chums of the Remove came in.

"Thanks awfully for that feed, you fellows," he said.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Have you scoffed the lot?"

"Oh, really——"

"You haven't left a giddy sardine for us!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Well, you see——"

Billy Bunter dodged round the table as Bob Cherry rushed at him, and bolted for the door. Bob Cherry dashed after him, and his boot reached Bunter just as Bunter reached the doorway.

The fat junior rose gracefully on the end of the boot, and landed in the passage.

Bump!

"Oh!"

Then the door slammed.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Up Against Wharton!

THE next day it was easy for Harry Wharton to see that there was something "on" in the Remove. Some of the fellows looked very mysterious, and there was a great deal of whispering, in the Form-room and out of it. The "combine" was evidently going strong.

Wharton waited for the storm to burst, and after lessons that day, it burst. The captain of the Remove went up to his study after school, to write out an imposition for Mr. Quelch, and he was in the middle of it when Bob Cherry came into No. 1 Study looking very serious.

"It's coming," said Bob Cherry.

"What is?" asked Wharton, looking up from his impot.

"Trouble."

"That rot that Fish was talking last night, do you mean?" asked Wharton, frowning.

"It isn't rot," said Bob, with a shake of the head. "Of course, the Bounder's at the bottom of it—and it's serious trouble, Harry."

"Well, I don't care, for one."

"It's about the Redclyffe match to-morrow," said Bob Cherry, regarding his chum in rather a peculiar way. "It's the old question of putting Vernon-Smith into the eleven."

"I'm fed up with it," said Harry.

"You haven't changed your mind?"

"No."

"Since Nugent and Johnny Bull and Marky have left the team has been weakened a lot, Harry. It wants bucking up."

"That's no reason for putting in the cads who plotted against Nugent and Johnny Bull and Mark Linley," said Wharton. "They're not going to play for the Form so long as I'm skipper. I said that at the start, and I stick to it."

"I dare say you're right," said Bob, drumming uneasily on the table. "But—the whole Form is wild about it. Unless you put in the best men we shall be beaten by Redclyffe, same as we were last week by Courtfield, and the week before by the Fifth Form."

"Possibly."

"Well, Harry, that isn't footer, you know," urged Bob Cherry. "We want to win. We don't want to pile up a record of lickings for the Remove this season. I agree with all you think about Smithy. I know he worked it so that our pals had to leave. I know he'd do as much for us if he could. And I know everything will come right in the end and we shall all be in a better position than ever. All the same, Smithy is one of the best wingers we have, and Bolsover major is one of the

best backs. If you put them in, we shall have a good chance of licking Redclyffe. If you don't, we may as well scratch the match, because we're booked for a licking."

"There's a good chance, if the team plays up," said Harry. "We've got some good men—you and Tom Brown, and myself, and Inky, and Newland. Morgan is a good back, too, and Micky Desmond can play half."

"Yes, yes. But the members of the team don't want to be licked, and they all want Smithy to play."

"They'll be disappointed, then."

"The fact is, Harry, they won't play unless Smithy does. That's the meaning of their precious combine. They're coming here to tell you so."

Wharton looked very grave.

"So it's come to that?" he said.

"Yes. If you refuse their demand, they're going to appeal to Wingate, as Head of the Games, to order you to play Smithy and Bolsover major."

Wharton set his teeth.

"They tried that before, and Wingate didn't interfere," he said.

"He will interfere this time."

"Let him!" said Harry.

"Then you won't give way—even to Wingate, the skipper of Greyfriars?"

"No!"

"Oh, my Aunt Polly Ann!" murmured Bob Cherry, in perplexity.

He took two or three turns up and down the study, his brows wrinkled. Harry Wharton went on steadily writing our Virgil. Wharton's brow was black and moody, and there was no sign of surrender in his face.

It was difficult to say whether Harry Wharton was in the right or the wrong.

Vernon-Smith had plotted against his chums with such success that they had to go. Wharton knew that. Vernon-Smith & Co. wanted to fill the vacant places in the Form eleven, and on their merits they should have done so. But Wharton had a very natural objection to giving Nugent and Johnny Bull's places to Vernon-Smith and Bolsover, who had schemed against them and driven them out of the school. So long as he was football captain in the Form he was determined that Vernon-Smith should not have his way.

But the rest of the Remove were far from looking at it in that light. For the personal quarrel between the Bounder and Harry Wharton & Co they cared not two straws. They wanted the Form to put a winning eleven into the field, and outside the footer ground the rivals of the Remove could rag one another as much as they liked. And it was difficult to say that the Removites were wrong in the view they took.

Three successive defeats had been the result of Wharton's policy, partly owing to the exclusion of Vernon-Smith and Bolsover from the team, and partly owing to the fact that Bulstrode and Russell and Ogilvy stood out of the eleven in sympathy with them.

Wharton was left to make up the best team he could, when three of the best footballers had left, and three more were standing out and two were excluded. It was not easy to make up a winning eleven under such circumstances. And it was not surprising that even the fellows he had chosen to play were dissatisfied. They wanted to play for the Form, but they did not want to play in a losing team. There was not much fun in playing in a match which was booked in advance for defeat.

Harry Wharton was captain of the Remove, but his position was very shaky now. The Removites still hesitated to turn him out of the position; they all knew that he was the best footer captain they could get. But unless he came round to their way of thinking, his fall was pretty certain.

But he was not likely to come round. He believed that he was in the right; but right or wrong, he was too grimly determined by nature to yield an inch to the enemy.

Wharton's pen travelled steadily over the paper, while Bob Cherry moved uneasily about the study, trying to think of some plan for convincing Wharton that it would be advisable to give way. The dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked into the study, and it was unusually grave.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Are they coming?"

The dusky junior nodded.

"The comefulness is terrific," he said.

"Look out, Wharton!"

"Let them come!" said Wharton.

There was a tramp of footsteps in the passage. Bolsover major, the bully of the Remove, came into the study with his heavy tread, and a crowd of fellows followed him. Snoop and Stott and Hazeldene and Bulstrode, all firm backers of Vernon-Smith, marched in, and after them came a crowd of the Remove. Harry Wharton did not even look up from his paper. He had a dozen more lines to write, and he went on writing them. The Removites crowded into the study, and crowded in the doorway, and there were still more behind in the passage.

Bolsover grunted.

"We've come to speak to you, Wharton!" he said gruffly.

"I guess we're here," remarked Fisher T. Fish.

Wharton glanced up.

"I am busy," he said.

"So are we," said Bolsover major. "We've got something to say to you."

"You will have to wait till I've finished, then."

And Wharton continued to write.

The juniors exchanged exasperated glances. Bolsover thumped the table.

"Look here, Wharton——"

"I guess that's cheek, you know——"

"Wharton, you ass——"

"Wharton, do you hear?"

Wharton's pen travelled on steadily. Bolsover clenched his hand. He was strongly inclined to knock the inkpot over on that imposition; but Bob Cherry was watching him, quite ready to hit out. There was nothing for the Combine to do but to wait.

Wharton wrote his last line with perfect calmness while the juniors fumed and muttered, and then laid down his pen. He rose to his feet.

"Now, what do you want?" he asked.

Bolsover scowled.

"We've come to talk to you about the footer," he said. "The Remove aren't going to put up with your cheek any longer. We're all fed up with it. Unless you put Vernon-Smith and Bustrode and me into the team for the Redclyffe match to-morrow, there's going to be trouble."

"Hear, hear!"

"Then there will be trouble," said Wharton calmly. "For I'm certainly going to do nothing of the kind."

"You prefer the Remove to be licked?" demanded Bulstrode.

"I've explained the position before, but I don't mind doing it over again," said Wharton wearily. "I won't play Vernon-Smith in Nugent's place, because he got Nugent sacked from the school by a rotten trick. I know you fellows don't believe it, but it's the fact; and he's not going to have Nugent's place. Besides that, he's a rotter, and not to be depended upon. I won't play Bolsover major, because he's a bullying cad, and can't learn his proper place in the team. I won't play Bulstrode, because he resigned from the eleven just before a match, and left us in the lurch, and he might do it again. That's all quite clear, I think. So that's settled."

There was a roar.

"It's not settled!"

"Rats!"

"Members of the team, trot in!" called out Bolsover major. "Come and talk to the rotter, and let him see that we mean business. We've combined over this matter, Wharton; and if you stick out against the whole Form, you'll have the team against you, as well as the rest of the Remove. Come in, you fellows!"

Newland, the goalkeeper, Morgan and Treluce, the backs, Leigh and Vane and Micky Desmond, the halves, and Tom Brown, the inside left, came in. They were seven members of the eleven, the other four being Wharton, Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Penfold. Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh were sticking to their captain, and Penfold was not to be seen.

Wharton started a little as he saw Micky Desmond and Tom Brown, the New Zealander, among the enemy. They had backed him up through thick and thin so far, and he had not expected them to join the other side. Both of them looked very sheepish as they caught his glance, but quite resolved.

"Well?" said Wharton coldly.

"I'm sorry this has happened, Wharton," said Tom Brown, in his frank way. "We think you're in the wrong, and we don't want to count a licking against the Remove in every footer match this season, simply because of your personal differences with Vernon-Smith."

"That's how it is," said Micky Desmond. "Sure and you can't say we haven't backed you up, Wharton darling. But there's a limit."

"And we've got to the limit," said Newland, the goalie. "Three lickings, one after another, are quite enough."

"Faith, and ye're right."

"We're all sorry about Nugent and Bull and Linley leaving," continued Tom Brown. "But we think their places ought to be filled with the best men. We want to win matches."

"Hear, hear!"

"And we think you ought to give in, Wharton."

Wharton compressed his lips.

"I shall not give in," he said.

"Then we're going to appeal to Wingate, as Head of the Games," said Bolsover major.

"Go ahead!"

"Well, Wingate will order you to play Smithy," said Tom Brown, "and you can't disobey an order from the captain of the school."

"That's true. But I can resign, and stand out of the match—and I shall do that."

Tom Brown looked troubled

"I hope you won't do that!" he said. "You know you're the best centre-forward in the Form, and we can't spare you."

"You can choose between Smithy and me."

"Smithy, then," said Bolsover major. "We can spare you all right. Go and eat coke."

"I wish you'd think over it, Wharton," urged Tom Brown.

"I have thought over it, and I've decided."

"Then you can look out for squalls," said the New Zealand junior, losing patience. "I'm fed up with lickings at footer, and it's time we had a change."

"Hear, hear!"

"We give you till to-morrow afternoon to think it over, look you," said Morgan. "Then we're going in a body to Wingate."

"You can go!"

"'Nuff said," said Bolsover major. "March!"

And the juniors, in a decidedly angry and exasperated frame of mind, marched out of the study. Tom Brown lingered for a moment behind the others. He had always been Wharton's chum, and one of his firmest supporters, and it was only a strong sense of duty to the team that had caused him to stand out against his old skipper.

"Won't you think over it, Harry?" he said. "Whatever your private troubles are with Smithy, you can put them out of your mind on the footer-field, can't you?"

"No!" said Harry.

"Well, I don't call that playing the game," said Tom Brown sharply, "and it seems to me that the sooner the Remove gets a new skipper the better."

And he swung angrily out of the study.

Bob Cherry gave a comical groan

"Now all the fat's in the fire!" he said. "They mean business, Harry."

"I know they do!"

"And it doesn't make any difference to you?"

"No!"

"Well, firmness is a good quality," Bob Cherry remarked, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "but there's such a thing as being pigheaded."

"Bob!"

"All serene," said Bob. "I'm backing you up. But—well, it can't be helped, I suppose. The Remove footer is going to the giddy dogs, that's all!"

And Bob Cherry left No. 1 Study with a very glum brow.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Soda-Water for Bunter!

VERNON-SMITH was in high good humour that evening. His study looked very bright and cheery. The approach of Christmas was making itself felt at Greyfriars. Fellows were talking about the vacation, and longing for a snow-fall. Some of them had put up holly in their studies, and among these was the Bounder. Vernon-Smith's study was decorated with holly and mistletoe, and in the glimmer of the fire, and the gleam of the shaded gaslight, it looked very bright and cheerful. So Bolsover and Bulstrode thought, as they came in to tea; and so Billy Bunter thought, as he sidled in after them. There was a fresh heap of holly on the floor, in the corner, and the red berries gleamed round the walls, and the table was bright with a spotless tablecloth and china and silver. Vernon-Smith's study was very luxurious for a junior schoolboy; his respected parent, Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire, wished his son to cut a good figure at Greyfriars, and his allowance was unstinted. The Bounder was not lavish to others, but for his own comfort he spent money like water.

"Well, this looks jolly, and no mistake," said Bolsover major.

"Cheery," said Bulstrode.

"I say, you fellows, it's ripping," said Billy Bunter, blinking rather nervously at the Bounder, in momentary expectation of the order of the boot. "Would you like me to help you finish the decorations, Smithy?"

"They're finished," said Smithy.

"You've got a fresh lot of holly——"

"That's for to-morrow."

"I'll put some of it up now, if you like."

"No, you won't," said the Bounder calmly.

Billy Bunter coughed. Bunter counted himself among Vernon-Smith's party in the Remove; but the Bounder did not seem to place much value upon him. Bunter's friendship could always be obtained at the price of a feed; and so he was not worth cultivating when he was not wanted. And the fat, greedy, conceited Owl of the Remove was not popular. His ventriloquism, which was really very clever, made him less popular, as he generally used his gift to play unpleasant tricks on the other fellows. And if Bunter was coming to a feed, it was necessary to lay in unlimited supplies of tuck.

"I—I say, if there's anything I can do for you, Smithy, you've only to say so," said the Owl of the Remove.

"There is," said Smithy.

"What is it?"

"Get on the other side of that door."

"Eh?"

"And shut it after you."

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover major and Bulstrode.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Get out," said the Bounder. "Don't you understand. When I want a porpoise to feed in my study, I'll ask you. Buzz off!"

"But I say——"

"Clear!"

"Ahem!"

"Shove him outside, you chaps," said the Bounder.

"I say, Smithy!" called out Bunter through the key-hole, "I've always been jolly pally with you, you know, and I must say—goooooch!" (*See chapter* 5).

"Certainly," said Bolsover major, never averse to bullying a smaller fellow. "Now, then, Bunter, out you go."

Bunter backed away as the bully of the Remove advanced upon him.

"Oh, really, Bolsover, you know——"

"Outside!"

Bunter backed further away. He stumbled over the holly behind him, and sat down heavily. Then there was a terrific roar.

"Ow! Ow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover. "He's squashing your holly, Smithy."

"Yarooh!" roared Bunter.

He leaped to his feet, with chunks of holly sticking to his tight trousers. He was roaring with pain, and the three Removites roared with laughter.

"Ow! Help! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover aimed a kick at Billy Bunter's plump person, and the Owl of the Remove dodged through the doorway. He rolled out into the passage with several sprigs of holly still clinging to his trousers.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he roared. "I'm hurt! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover shut the door after the Owl of the Remove, and Bunter's melodious voice died away down the passage.

"Sit down, you chaps!" said Vernon-Smith. "I've got rather a decent spread to-night."

"Looks like it!" said Bolsover major, with a glance of appreciation at the well-spread table. "What are you going to drink, though? Shall I make the tea?"

"Not having tea."

"Ginger-pop?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"That's for the fags," he said. "I've got something better than that. Lock the door."

"Oh!" said Bolsover. And he rose to his feet, and turned the key in the lock.

Vernon-Smith unlocked a cabinet, and took out a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda-water. Bulstrode and Bolsover stared at it.

"Whisky, by gum!" said Bolsover.

"Yes, rather!"

"Blessed if I'm going to drink any of that stuff!" said Bulstrode.

"Oh, be a man!" said the Bounder.

"Well, if being a man means going back to my study squiffy, and running the risk of being sacked from the school, I prefer not to be a man!" said Bulstrode calmly.

"Just as you like," said the Bounder carelessly. "There's

ginger-pop here if you like it better! You'll have a dash of this in it, Bolsover?"

"Ye-es," said Bolsover dubiously. "I—I say, Smithy, suppose one of the prefects found that bottle in your study?"

"I keep it locked up. I'm friendly with some of the prefects, too. Loder and Carne make it a point not to notice anything that I do."

"But Wingate, or Courtney——"

"They never come here. Ah!"

There was a tap at the door.

"Who's there?" called out the Bounder.

"Me!" came back the voice of Billy Bunter promptly and ungrammatically. "I—I knew you were only joking when you told me to get out, Smithy."

"You know more than I do, then," said the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows," came Bunter's fat voice through the keyhole. "Remember, it's Christmas-time, you know! I don't bear any malice for being turned out, and I'm quite willing to come in and be friendly!"

"Go hon!"

"I—I say, you fellows——'

"Buzz off!" roared Vernon-Smith.

"I know you're only joking, Smithy!"

"Get away from that keyhole!" shouted the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

Vernon-Smith rose to his feet, with a gleam in his eyes, and picked up the soda syphon. He crossed towards the door on tiptoe. Bolsover and Bulstrode watched him, grinning. The Bounder silently placed the nozzle of the syphon to the keyhole. Bunter's voice was still coming through.

"I say, Smithy, you might ask a chap in, you know. I've always been jolly pally with you, you know, and I must say—groooooooch!"

Sizzzzz!

"Groooooch!"

Sizzzzz!

There was a terrific roar in the passage and a bump, as Bunter sat down. The stream of sudden soda-water had caught him fairly in the mouth as he was speaking through the keyhole, and he was choking and spluttering frantically. His roaring sounded the length of the Remove passage, and fellows opened their doors on all sides to see what was the matter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he came dashing out of No. 13, and almost fell over the fat junior sprawling on the linoleum. "What on earth's the matter?"

"Groo-ooch!"

"What's happened?" demanded Bob.

"Groooooch!"

"My hat! He's wet all over the chivvy!" said Tom Brown. "What is it, Bunter? Have you been blubbing?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooch! It's s-s-soda-water!" shrieked Bunter.

"The soda-waterfulness is terrific!" ejaculated the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "He's been listening at a keyhole again, and got it in the neck! Serve him right! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I wasn't—I didn't—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cads have got whisky and soda in there!" spluttered Bunter. "I've a jolly good mind to go and tell a prefect—yow!"

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry sharply. "Don't be a sneak! It's no business of yours what they've got!"

"Groo! I've a good mind to go to Wingate, and say—ow—oh! Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't suppose he'd understand what you meant if you did!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—ow——"

Bob Cherry retreated to his study, laughing. Billy Bunter was left alone in the passage, mopping his face with his handkerchief. The Removites had evidently no sympathy to waste upon him. Bunter wiped his spectacles, and replaced them on his fat little nose, and his little round eyes gleamed with vengeance behind the spectacles. He was quite in a mood to betray the Bounder's forbidden feast to the prefects; but he did not venture to play the sneak. All the Remove would have been down upon that, whether they approved of the Bounder's rascally ways or not. But Billy Bunter had another scheme in his mind. He remembered his ventriloquism, and he prepared for business.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Called to Account!

THE Bounder and his two comrades were laughing loudly in the study, as they heard the spluttering in the passage. The spluttering died away at last, and the three juniors went on with their tea, satisfied that Billy Bunter would not return. The talk of the trio ran upon football, and the match with Redclyffe Juniors that was to be played on the morrow. It was the Bounder's belief that Harry Wharton had been brought to bay at last, and he did not trouble to conceal his satisfaction.

"Either Wharton will have to put us in the team, or Wingate will order him to," the Bounder declared, as he mixed a glass of whisky-and-water. "If Wingate does that, Wharton will resign, and we shall be rid of him altogether from the Form footer club. That's where we come in."

"Hear, hear!" said Bolsover major.

"Then I can take my old place as skipper," said Bulstrode, with a rather dubious glance at the Bounder.

Bulstrode had never forgotten that he had once been captain of the Remove, and the hope of regaining that position was the chief bait the Bounder had held out to him.

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"Exactly," he said.

"That's what you want?" asked Bulstrode.

"Certainly."

"Good enough! Then I hope Wharton will resign.'

Bolsover major concealed a grin in a jam-tart. He knew perfectly well that the Bounder was only using Bulstrode as a catspaw. Once Wharton was got rid of, Bulstrode's captaincy would not last long. He would fall a far easier victim to the Bounder's wiles than Harry Wharton.

"Oh, he's sure to resign," said Vernon-Smith. "He says he will, and he can't go back on his word without looking ridiculous. The team will be done with him to-morrow. I only wish I were as sure that Greyfriars would be done with him, too." He stirred the concoction in his glass. "Sure you won't have some of this, Bulstrode?"

"Quite sure, thanks!"

"It sets you up, you know."

"More likely to set you down, I think."

"Oh, rot!" said Vernon-Smith. "A little more in your ginger-pop, Bolsover? It will give it a flavour."

"Ye-es," said Bolsover doubtfully.

"It's giving the giddy atmosphere a flavour, too," said Bulstrode, sniffing. "You would look pretty blue if a prefect dropped in now! So should we, for that matter."

"The door's locked."

"You'd have to unlock it if Wingate knocked!"

"Mislaid the key!"

"Good egg!" said Bolsover. "Not that Wingate's likely to come. But if he did, you'd have to get this stuff out of sight. Yes, I'll have a fag, thank you!"

Vernon-Smith and Bolsover major lighted their cigarettes. Bulstrode declined one. He was with the Bounder & Co., but not of them.

Knock!

Bolsover started, and his match burnt his finger, and he uttered a sharp exclamation. The Bounder took his cigarette from his lips.

"Who the dickens is that?" he muttered. "That ass Bunter again?"

Knock!

"Who's there?" called out the Bounder.

The handle was tried, and then there was another knock.

"Open this door at once!"

The three Removites started to their feet. Well they knew that sharp, metallic voice—the voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Bulstrode. "Old Quelchy!"

Knock, knock!

"Open this door!"

"Ye-e-es, sir; all right!" exclaimed the Bounder. "I—didn't know it was locked, sir!"

"Open it at once!"

"Yes, sir! One minute, till I find the key, sir!"

"The key? Is not the key in the lock?"

"No, sir! I've dropped it!"

"Vernon-Smith, I have reason to believe that you are having a disgusting orgy in this study! Open the door at once!"

"Oh, sir!"

In desperate haste, Vernon-Smith jammed the whisky bottle and the glasses into the cabinet, and locked it.

The cigarettes were jammed into the fire, and Bulstrode stirred them into the embers. Bolsover major threw open the window, and waved a newspaper to and fro to rid the atmosphere of the odour of mingled whisky and tobacco. The three juniors were looking scared out of their wits. Even the Bounder had lost his nerve. If Mr. Quelch discovered what had been going on in his study, the Bounder knew that his days at Greyfriars would be numbered.

"Oh, what rotten luck!" muttered the Bounder savagely.

"Bunter must have sneaked——"

"I shouldn't wonder——"

Knock!

"Are you going to open this door, Vernon-Smith?"

"Excuse me, sir! I—I can't find the key!"

"I shall not wait here for you, Vernon-Smith! Come to my study immediately—you, and your companions! Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a sound of receding footsteps.

"Thank goodness for that!" gasped Bulstrode. "He won't be able to smell the whisky if he doesn't come in. Jolly glad I didn't have it! Your breath will have a niff, and he'll spot it, as safe as houses."

"I've got some bullseyes here," said Vernon-Smith. "They'll kill it."

"Gimme one—quick!" said Bolsover.

"Come on," said Bulstrode. "Better be quick, or he may come back."

"Righto!"

Vernon-Smith unlocked the study door. There was no one in the passage. The unhappy trio went towards the stairs, and as soon as they had vanished Billy Bunter came rolling round the corner, and rolled into Vernon-Smith's study. The trio had "done themselves" very well, but there remained many good things on the table. Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles as he saw them. He did not stop to eat; he jammed a tart into his capacious mouth to go on with, and gathered the rest of the eatables up and dashed out of the study with them. He scuttled into his own study with the plunder and locked the door, and then, with a beatific smile of enjoyment, settled down to feed.

Meanwhile, Vernon-Smith and Co. made their way with unwilling steps to Mr. Quelch's study in the lower passage. They reached the Remove-master's door, and hesitated. Vernon-Smith knocked at last, and Mr. Quelch's voice bade them enter.

Vernon-Smith opened the door, and the trio went sheepishly in.

The Remove-master was seated at his writing-table, and he had a pen in his hand. He had been busy writing, and he paused as the three juniors came in, and regarded them in some astonishment.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

The three delinquents exchanged glances. Certainly this was a very curious greeting after Mr. Quelch had himself ordered them to come to his study.

"We—we've come, sir," stammered Bolsover major.

"I can see you have come," said Mr. Quelch testily. "There is nothing wrong with my eyesight, Bolsover, and you are big enough to be seen. What do you want?"

"You—you told us to come, sir."

"I told you?"

"Yes, sir," said Bulstrode.

"What do you mean? It is possible that I have given you some impositions to-day, and have forgotten," said Mr. Quelch. "So far as I remember, I have given impositions only to Wharton and Russell. When did I tell you to come here?"

"A—a few minutes ago, sir," said Vernon-Smith, wondering whether the Remove-master, too, kept whisky in his study and had been indulging in it, or whether he was "off his rocker."

"You—you knocked at my door, sir, and told us to come."

Mr. Quelch looked at him steadily.

"I knocked at your door, and told you to come here a few minutes ago?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet, and took up a cane.

"Hold out your hand, Smith!" he said.

The Bounder made a grimace, and held it out.

Swish!

"Groo!" murmured the Bounder.

"There," said Mr. Quelch, "that will be a lesson to you not to play foolish jokes upon your Form-master! I have not been outside my own study for the last half-hour, and I cannot understand your impudence in coming here and making this statement."

Vernon-Smith jumped.

"You—you haven't been outside this study, sir?" he ejaculated.

"I have not."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But you knocked at the door, and told us to come here, sir," exclaimed Bolsover major.

"Hold out your hand, Bolsover!"

"If you please, sir——"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Swish!

"Now, Bulstrode, do you make the same absurd statement as Bolsover and Vernon-Smith?" asked Mr. Quelch grimly.

"N-n-no, sir," stammered Bulstrode, with a wary eye upon the cane. "I—I fancied I heard your voice, sir, but it must have been a mistake."

"Very good. You may go."

And the three juniors went.

In the passage outside, when the door was closed, Bolsover and Vernon-Smith squeezed their hands under their arms, and the Bounder said things between his teeth which it was just as well for him that his Form-master did not hear.

"Mad as a hatter!" muttered Bulstrode. "We all three heard his voice quite plainly, and he says he wasn't there! Must be potty!"

Vernon-Smith groaned.

"You fathead——"

"Eh?"

"You silly ass, you ought to have guessed!"

"Ought to have guessed what?" asked Bulstrode, in astonishment.

"It was Bunter!" growled the Bounder. "Some more of his rotten ventriloquism. You know he can imitate anybody's voice, the fat rotter! He's imitated Quelch's rasp lots of times before. It was Bunter."

"Oh, great Scott!"

"My sainted aunt," yelled Bolsover, "what asses we were not to think of it! Of course it was Bunter. And we let him make us walk right into the trap like this. You silly pair of asses, why didn't you think of it?"

"Why didn't you think of it, if you come to that?" demanded Bulstrode.

"Oh, rats! Let's look for Bunter, and squash him!"

They looked for Bunter, but they did not succeed in squashing him. They found him in his study, but the study door was locked, and Billy Bunter declined to open it. Threats and cajolings were equally in vain. William George Bunter declined to listen to the voice of the charmer. The trio retired baffled.

"Never mind, we'll get at the fat bounder in the dorm. to-night," said Bolsover major.

And that was the only consolation left to the Bounder and Co.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Chess Problem.

BOB CHERRY was in the junior common-room, before bedtime, playing chess with Micky Desmond, when Bunter came in. Billy Bunter blinked cautiously round the common-room before he stepped inside, and ascertained that Vernon-Smith and Bolsover and Bulstrode were not there; then he came in, and sat down beside Bob Cherry. He blinked at the chessboard through his big spectacles. Billy Bunter knew as much about chess as he did about Chinese, but that did not prevent him from offering advice on the game.

"Move the bish, Cherry, old man," he said.

Bob Cherry snorted. As he could not move his bishop without leaving his king in check Billy Bunter's advice was not very valuable.

"Shove the bish along, Bob," said Bunter encouragingiy.

"You ass!"

"Eh?"

"Cheese it; and don't call me Bob, either. I don't like it," growled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Bob——"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Sure, and I'm waiting for ye to move," said Micky Desmond. "Me king's in check, and I want to get him out."

Micky Desmond was not a great chess-player. Neither was Bob Cherry, for that matter. Harry Wharton was watching the game, and he had observed that both kings were in check oftener than not, but as it did not seem to worry the players he did not proffer unasked information.

"I say, you fellows!" said Bunter.

Bob Cherry glared at him.

"How can a chap play chess with a silly ass buzzing in his ear all the time?" he exclaimed indignantly. "Shut up, Bunter!"

"But I want to speak to you, Bob."

"If you call me Bob again, I'll biff you!"

"Oh, really, Bob——"

Bump!

Bob Cherry kept his word, and the Owl of the Remove rolled off his chair. He landed on the floor with a concussion which Hurree Singh would have truly described as terrific.

"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Bunter.

"Now be quiet!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Oh! Ow! Ow! Yow!"

"I'm going to move the rook," said Bob Cherry, turning back to the chessboard. "There, you bounder, get out of that if you can!"

And Bob Cherry triumphantly planted his rook, in peril of being captured by Micky's bishop. But as neither of them saw that detail it did not matter. Micky Desmond rubbed his nose thoughtfully over the board.

Billy Bunter rose to his feet. One of his legs came into contact with the leg of the chess-table, and the table rocked. Bob Cherry gave a roar as the pieces and pawns began to slide. He made a wild clutch at the table to save it, and knocked it completely over. There was a yell from Bunter

as the table fell upon him, and he received a shower of pawns and pieces.

"Yarooop!"

"You—you ass!" yelled Bob Cherry. "You've mucked up the game."

"Ow!"

"Faith, and I had you mate in three, too," said Micky Desmond regretfully.

Bob Cherry, who had been about to kick Bunter, paused, and turned round to the Irish junior.

"You had me what?" he demanded.

"Mate in three," said Micky Desmond innocently.

"Well, of all the silly asses!" said Bob Cherry, in measured tones, "I think you take the cake, Micky Desmond. A badger with half an eye could see that I had you mate in four."

"Sure, and I——"

"Fathead!"

"It's a silly gossoon ye are!" said Micky. "You were mate in three."

"Four!"

"Three!"

"You ass!"

"You chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "You'll never settle it now. Call it honours divided."

"But I had him mate in three!"

"I had him mate in four!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"It's all Bunter's fault," growled Bob Cherry. "Let's bump him. If he hadn't upset the table I should have mated that fathead in four!"

"Faith, and if Bunter hadn't upset the table I should have mated ye in three intirely!"

"In four!"

"In three!"

Wingate of the Sixth put his head in at the common-room door.

"Bedtime, you fags," he said.

"I say, Wingate," called out Bob Cherry, "you play chess, don't you?"

"Yes, a little," said Wingate. "What is it—a problem?"

"Yes. Bunter upset the table, and we can't settle whether I was mate in three or Micky in four. Of course, he was mate in four really——"

"Sure, you were mate in three!"

"You ass!"

"You gossoon!"

"I'll tell you how the pieces were," roared Bob Cherry. "Micky had his king on the queen's square, and his bish. on bish's. fourth, and some pawns somewhere, and his rooks somewhere else, and—his knight was—was somewhere——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then I moved my rook——"

"I'm afraid it's too big a problem for me to decide," said Wingate laughing. "Of course, there's no mistaking where the pieces were from the lucid way you describe it. But I think I shall have to give it up. Buzz off to bed!"

And Wingate walked away grinning.

Bob Cherry snorted.

"I thought Wingate was a chess-player," he said. "But he can't decide even a simple point like that. It's all Bunter's fault. If he hadn't bumped the table, I should have mated the silly ass——"

"Sure, and I should have mated the silly chump——"

"Look here, Desmond——"

"Look here, Cherry——"

"I'll jolly well——"

"And so will I, intirely——"

Harry Wharton pushed between the two excited chess-players. Their argument was on the point of becoming fistical.

"Hold on," he said soothingly. "You'll never settle it now; but it's all Bunter's fault. Bump Bunter!"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bob Cherry heartily. "I never thought of that."

"Faith, and it's a good idea intirely."

Billy Bunter made a rush for the door. Bob Cherry and Micky Desmond collared him as he fled, and he descended upon the floor with a mighty bump.

"Ow!"

"There!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Next time you won't upset the table just when I've got a chap mate in four——"

"Faith, you mean when I've got a chap mate in three——"

"Why, you duffer——"

"Why, you ass——"

"My hat! They're beginning again!" exclaimed Wharton. "Here, come on!"

And he grasped Bob Cherry by the arm and dragged him out of the common-room. Bob turned in the doorway to deliver a Parthian shot in a final yell at the Irish junior.

"Mate in four!" he shouted.

Then he walked away with Wharton. From behind came a yell.

"Arrah! Mate in three, intirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Does Not Mention Names.

BILLY BUNTER sidled up to Wharton and Bob Cherry as they went up to the Remove dormitory. Bob Cherry glared at the fat junior, and Bunter was careful to keep on the other side of Wharton. Billy was simply bursting with friendliness.

"I say, Harry——" he began affectionately.

Wharton stared at him.

"I'm not Harry to you," he said curtly.

"Oh, I say, Harry, old fellow——"

"Cheese it, you ass."

"But really, Harry——"

"He's potty!" said Bob Cherry. "He's been doing that at me—calling me Bob. It's a kind of hallucination, I suppose, makes him call fellows by their Christian names. I dare say he could be bumped out of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Bob——"

"Look here, you chump, if you're not potty, what are you getting at?" demanded Bob Cherry wrathfully.

"I only want to be friendly, you know," said Billy Bunter pathetically. "It's getting near Christmas-time, you know the time of peace and good will and things, and——"

"There he is!" exclaimed the voice of Bolsover major, behind in the passage.

Billy Bunter jumped.

"Wait till lights-out!" said Vernon-Smith. "Then we'll rag him."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, beginning to understand the reason of Bunter's extraordinary friendliness. "They're going to rag you? What have you been doing?"

"N-n-nothing," stammered Bunter. "I—I haven't done anything, you know. Only a little ventriloquism."

"He made us think Quelchy was outside the study door, and we went to Quelchy, and he licked us," growled Bolsover major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," growled the bully of the Remove. "I know I'm going to make Bunter cackle the other way."

"Oh, really, Bolsover——"

"You wait till lights-out, you fat rotter!"

"I'm under Wharton's protection," said Billy Bunter. "My old pal Harry——"

"Your what?" demanded Wharton.

"My old pal——"

"Great Scott! This is the first I've heard of it."

"And my chum Bob——"

"You haven't any chum Bob, you fat beast!" roared Bob Cherry. "And if you call me Bob again, I'll lend Bolsover a hand in ragging you."

"Oh, really, Bob——"

Bob Cherry made a rush at him, and the Owl of the Remove fled into the dormitory. Bolsover major and Vernon-Smith eyed him grimly as they undressed. Bulstrode, who had not been caned by the Remove-master, was inclined to take the whole matter as a joke, but not so the other two. They intended to make Bunter smart for his ventriloquial joke.

"I say, Inky, old man," murmured Billy Bunter, nudging the Nabob of Bahuipur in the ribs. "I say, Inky, you'll stand by me——"

The nabob jerked himself away.

"I shall not stand anywhere near you, my esteemed Bunter, if you poke me with your objectionable knuckles," he replied.

"Oh, really, Inky——"

"Now, then, tumble in!" said Wingate, looking into the dormitory.

Billy Bunter blinked at the captain of Greyfriars. He did not intend to be ragged by the bully of the Remove after lights-out, if he could help it.

"I say, Wingate," he began, "I don't want to sneak——"

"Don't you?" said Wingate, eyeing the Owl of the Remove with great disfavour. "Rather a new state of mind for you, isn't it?"

And the juniors chuckled.

"Oh, really, Wingate. I don't want to mention any names——"

"Well, I don't want you to, either, for that matter," said the Greyfriars captain. "In fact, I don't want to listen to your jaw at all. Go to bed."

"But—but I feel bound to tell you that a chap is going to be ragged in this dorm. to-night," stammered Bunter.

"Oh, you rotten sneak!" murmured a dozen voices.

Billy Bunter blinked round him indignantly.

"Oh, really, you fellows! I'm not sneaking! I'm not going to

mention any names. But I think Wingate ought to know that the most decent chap in the Form is going to be ragged by a set of bullies."

"A friend of yours, eh?" said Wingate.

"Yes, Wingate.

"Then he's not the most decent chap in the Form."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who is it?" demanded Wingate.

"I can't mention any names, Wingate, as that would be sneaking," said Bunter with dignity. "I trust I shall never be guilty of anything dishonourable. But if Bolsover goes for me——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that what you call not mentioning names?" asked Wingate, with a grin. "So you are going for Bunter, are you, Bolsover?"

Bolsover scowled at the Owl of the Remove.

"Well, you see——" he began haltingly.

"Yes, I see that you are up to your bullying games," said the Greyfriars captain crisply. "You're not to touch Bunter! Do you hear?"

"Ye-es!"

"Or anybody else?" said Bunter eagerly. "I don't want to mention any names, but Bulstrode and Vernon-Smith both——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If there's any ragging in this dorm. to-night, the raggers will hear from me," said Wingate. "Any chap who gets out of bed will be detained to-morrow afternoon in the Form-room. So remember! Now, good-night!"

And Wingate put out the lights and retired. As soon as the door closed upon the captain of Greyfriars there was a howl. The fellows knew that Wingate would keep his word, and they did not venture to get out of bed. But they had the use of their voices, and they used them.

"Sneak!"

"Rotter!"

"Cad!"

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Sneak!"

"I say, you fellows, I didn't mention any names——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz! Bolsover could not get out of bed, after Wingate's threat, but he hurled his pillow. There was a yell from Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove, who caught the pillow with his head. It missed Bunter's bed, and landed upon his lordship.

"Ow! Begad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wrong wicket!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Try again!"

Whiz! Bolsover's bolster followed, and Bob Cherry roared as it caught him. He sat up in bed, and grasped the bolster, and sent it whizzing back. Then it was Bolsover's turn to roar. He had not expected that rapid return, and the bolster caught him round the neck, and curled there, and knocked his head against the bedstead.

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, you might stop that row!" murmured Billy Bunter drowsily. "I want to go to sleep."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Bunter went to sleep, and he was not disturbed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
The Day of the Match.

THERE was a great deal of suppressed excitement in the Greyfriars Remove on the following morning. The Redclyffe match was to take place in the afternoon, and there was much curiosity as to the course Harry Wharton would take. Most of the fellows believed that the action of the "combine" would bring him to his senses, as they regarded it. Wharton had said no word upon the subject. He had not changed his mind, and he had nothing to say. When he met the Bounder, he carefully avoided looking at him or speaking to him. Vernon-Smith was at the bottom of all the trouble, and Wharton knew it, and it was hard for him to keep his hands off his old enemy. But he knew that a fight with the Bounder would do his cause no good. The Bounder would pose as the injured party, and he would make capital out of it, as he seemed to succeed in making it out of everything. But Harry Wharton's patience was very nearly at breaking point. If the football match that afternoon was "mucked up" there would be trouble with the Bounder, and very serious trouble. It would be time for Vernon-Smith to reap a little of what he had sown.

Harry Wharton was very thoughtful during morning lessons, though it was not the lessons that made him so thoughtful.

After morning lessons the captain of the Remove pinned up the list of the team on the notice-board, and the Remove gathered round to read it.

Bob Cherry joined Wharton as he walked away.

"Not much good putting the list up, is it, Harry?" he asked.

Wharton looked at him.

"Why not?"

"The fellows say they won't play."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"That's their business," he said.

"But when the Redclyffe fellows come, we shall look a precious set of asses," said Bob Cherry dismally. "What will they think of us?"

"They must think what they like. It isn't my fault."

"It's rotten."

"I know it is."

And the subject dropped. At the Remove table at dinner very grim looks were cast upon Harry Wharton by his Form-fellows. The Removites were all angry, and all looking forward with uneasiness to the afternoon's match.

After dinner, Wharton left the School House, and strolled in the Cloisters till it was time to get ready for the footer match. He tramped up and down in the Cloisters by himself, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He was in an unpleasant mood. A step in the Cloisters made him look round, and he saw Vernon-Smith. His eyes gleamed under his knitted brows. The Bounder came towards him with a cool nod.

"I've been looking for you," he said.

"Well, now you've found me."

"Yes. The fellows want to know what you've decided."

"They know what I've decided."

"Are you playing me this afternoon?"

"No."

"Then the team are going to appeal to Wingate, as Head of the Games."

"Let them!"

"Very well!" said the Bounder. "Play me or not, as you like; in either case, I've got you under my thumb. And I'll bring you down off your perch, Harry Wharton. You and your precious Co. set yourselves up against me, and what's the result? Nugent and Bull and Linley are gone—kicked out of the school. I should think you'd know by this time that it would be safer to make peace."

"You cad!"

"That's enough. Look out for squalls."

The Bounder swung away; but Wharton's hand dropped on his shoulder, and he was swung back. He wrenched himself away, panting.

"Hands off!" he said savagely.

"You've warned me to look out for squalls," said Wharton grimly. "Well, I warn you to do the same. I give you a chance now to stop making trouble, but I tell you plainly that if there's trouble this afternoon over the footer I shall know whom I owe it to, and I'll make you smart for it."

The Bounder sneered.

"I don't see how you'll do that," he remarked.

"I shall lick you till you can't crawl!" said Wharton, between his teeth. "That's how I shall do it. I'm no match for you in cunning and trickery. But I can lick you, and I will!"

"We shall see. Anyway, look out for trouble. The Remove are fed up with you; and you'll be downed to-day in a way you won't recover from in a hurry, you rotter!"

Smack!

Vernon-Smith reeled back as Wharton's open hand caught him across the cheek. Harry Wharton's hard-held temper had broken out at last.

The Bounder uttered a sharp cry.

"Now, if you want trouble, come on!" said the captain of the Remove, pushing back his cuffs. "I'm fed up with your trickery. Come out into the open for once."

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands, but he did not come on. He regarded Wharton with a glare of deadly hatred.

"You want to make me unfit for the match this afternoon!" he said tauntingly. "Well, you won't have your way. I'll fight you after the match."

Wharton started.

"I never thought of such a thing, and you know it!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"I don't believe you," said the Bounder coldly. "But I'll fight you after the match. And I'll see that all the fellows know that you've tried to drag me into a fight just before the match, too."

He strode away.

Harry Wharton remained alone in the Cloisters, his brow darker than ever. By yielding to his temper he had placed one more weapon in the hands of the Bounder. It was amazing how Vernon-Smith contrived to turn every happening to the advantage of his plans.

Bob Cherry's voice was heard calling.

"Wharton! Come on!"

Harry joined his chum in the Close.

"The fellows are ready," said Bob anxiously. "The Redclyffe lot will be here in less than half an hour, Harry. And the chaps want to talk to you."

Wharton did not reply, but he walked with Bob Cherry down to the junior football ground.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
The Last Appeal.

"SENORITO!"

Vernon-Smith started. He was standing at the school gates, with Bolsover major, when the man who had visited him in his study came up the road. Vernon-Smith and Bolsover were looking for the brake that was to bear the Redclyffe team to Greyfriars, and the Bounder had been thinking of anything but the South American. The man looked strangely pale and worn, and his shabby clothes showed up more shabbily in the light of day. He halted before the two juniors, and Vernon-Smith drew back a pace.

Diaz made a gesture.

"I shall not harm you, señorito. I am sorry that I lost my temper before; but you taunted me, and we Spanish are hot blooded."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. Bolsover major looked curiously at the South American. There were many signs of trouble in the man's face. Bolsover major had heard the juniors speaking of him, and what he had said in the Bounder's study; and he could easily guess that, if the man had had dealings with Vernon-Smith senior, he had been worsted in the transactions, and not by the most scrupulous methods. Bolsover major had seen Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, and formed his own opinion of him.

"What do you want here?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a sneering look at the South American. "I told you I should give you in charge if you came back."

"Señorito——"

"Oh, get away!"

The man did not move.

"I shall be civil to you, senorito," he said, in his soft voice, with its musical Spanish accent. "Señorito, I have been greatly wronged."

"Nonsense!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Bolsover major curiously.

The South American turned to him.

"Ah, you are a friend of the señorito, and you will speak for me!" he exclaimed. "I will tell you——"

"Oh, shut up!" said the Bounder irritably.

"Rot!" said Bolsover. "Let him run on. I want to know what he wants."

"It's all rot."

"Never mind; let's hear it. Go on, darky."

The Bounder made a gesture of angry impatience. But the South American did not heed him; he seemed only to want to find a listener to his tale of wrong. He hurried on with his explanation—brokenly, breathlessly.

"Señorito, I am a South American—a miner by profession. I discovered a silver mine in the sierra in Peru, and I came to London to negotiate with a syndicate about its development. Believe me, señor, I have been kept waiting, and hoping, and in anxiety for a year by the Señor Smith, who promised to take it up. I discover that Señor Smith is the syndicate. He asks me to sign papers—I speak your English, but I do not read him—he tell me that I sign these papers, to give him power to form the company. Then I see him no more; he is never at home when I call—he never see me. I ring him on the telephone, and he tell me in reply that I am nobody—he not know me. I learn from my friend in Peru that the mine is taken up—it appear that the papers I sign have given him power to rob me—I lose the mine, and I get nothing—nothing!

"My hat!" said Bolsover major. "That sounds very like your pater, Smithy."

"It's all rot!" said Vernon-Smith. "If the man's sold the pater his rotten mine, he's been paid for it."

"Nothing, nothing! exclaimed Diaz eagerly.

"And he tried to knife the pater; he admitted it himself!" said the Bounder.

"Phew!"

"I lose my temper, my reason!" said Diaz. "I find him—I make him to speak to me—he say I am impostor, he give me in charge to police—I draw knife—then policeman he take me and I am lock up."

"Well, you shouldn't try that kind of game in England," said Bolsover major. "It's rather too thick, you know."

"I am lock up," said Diaz, "and when I come out there is nothing for me, no money—nothing. And my mine is gone. I know that the Señor Smith have a son here at school. I think to myself, I speak to him—he is a generous English boy, and he will ask that the señor his father do me justice."

The Bounder laughed sneeringly.

"That's likely!" he remarked.

"I don't think!" said Bolsover major.

"He taunt me—he talk of the police when I speak to him," said Diaz. "He is like his father. I go!"

"And you'd better go again!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'm sick of you! I've got nothing to do with my father's business concerns, you fool. If he's skinned you, it's your own bizney; you shouldn't sign papers you can't read. Clear out!"

"I come back to say once more you speak to the señor for me?" said the South American. "It is not much to ask. I ask only a little money—not the thousands that the señor take from me—a few hundreds——"

"Oh, rats!"

"You refuse, señorito?"

"Yes; of course. Go and eat coke!"

"Carambo!"

The man ground his teeth. Vernon-Smith drew back a pace.

"Here, hold on, darky!" exclaimed Bolsover major, in alarm. "Don't you break out again here. I'm sorry for you. I've got no doubt at all that Smith senior has welshed you. But you can't come round this school with your tales of woe, you know. You'll be locked up again if you give trouble."

"But I shall give trouble!" says the South American, his black eyes blazing. "The senorito will not listen to me——"

"No fear!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Then you shall suffer for it!"

The Bounder yawned.

"Give him a quid, and let him clear, Smithy," said Bolsover major.

"I've got no quids to waste, thanks."

The South American shook his fist in the face of the Bounder.

"Thief, and son of a thief!" he cried.

The Bounder gave him a deadly look. Vernon-Smith was a chip of the old block, and, if anything, more unfeeling and unscrupulous than his father. He could think of this man, robbed, with ruined hopes, without the slightest pity or remorse. But he did not want to have Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith's methods of business too well known at Greyfrairs. The Bounder was not sensitive to shame, but he was sensitive to public opinion.

A portly form had come in sight down the road from the direction of Friardale village. It was that of Police-constable Tozer. The Bounder's eyes gleamed at the sight of the village policeman. He made a sign to the constable.

"Tozer!" he called out.

"Yes, Master Smith?" said the policeman, hurrying up. Mr. Tozer showed a great deal of respect to the son of the millionaire.

The Bounder pointed to the South American.

"I give that man in charge!" he exclaimed. "He came here and assaulted me, and now he is threatening me with violence!"

"Ho!" said Mr. Tozer, extending a fat hand towards the South American. "You'll come with me, my lad. This 'ere kind of game won't do for this country, you furrin scum!"

The South American sprang back.

"Hands off, you fat fool!" he exclaimed.

The village policeman turned purple with rage.

"My heye!" he exclaimed. "I'll show yer!"

And he rushed at Diaz.

The South American dodged his rush, and took to his heels, and disappeared down the road at a pace the fat policeman could not equal.

Mr. Tozer disappeared after him; but it was pretty clear that he had not much chance of catching Diaz.

"Well, he's gone, anyway," said Bolsover.

The Bounder nodded.

"Yes; and I fancy he won't come back again," he said. "If he does, I'll get him three months, the rotter!"

Bolsover grinned.

"I suppose your pater has done him brown?" he suggested.

Vernon-Smith scowled.

"That's not your business!" he said. "If the fool can't look out for himself, let him take the consequences!"

"Poor beast!" said Bolsover, with a shrug of the shoulders. "It will be better for you, Smithy, if he's locked up. He looks a regular desperado when he grinds his teeth like a villain in the play. Looks to me as if his troubles have made him go a little bit off his rocker!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said the Bounder carelessly.

There was a sound of wheels on the road, and the two juniors glanced in the direction of Courtfield. A brake had appeared in the distance.

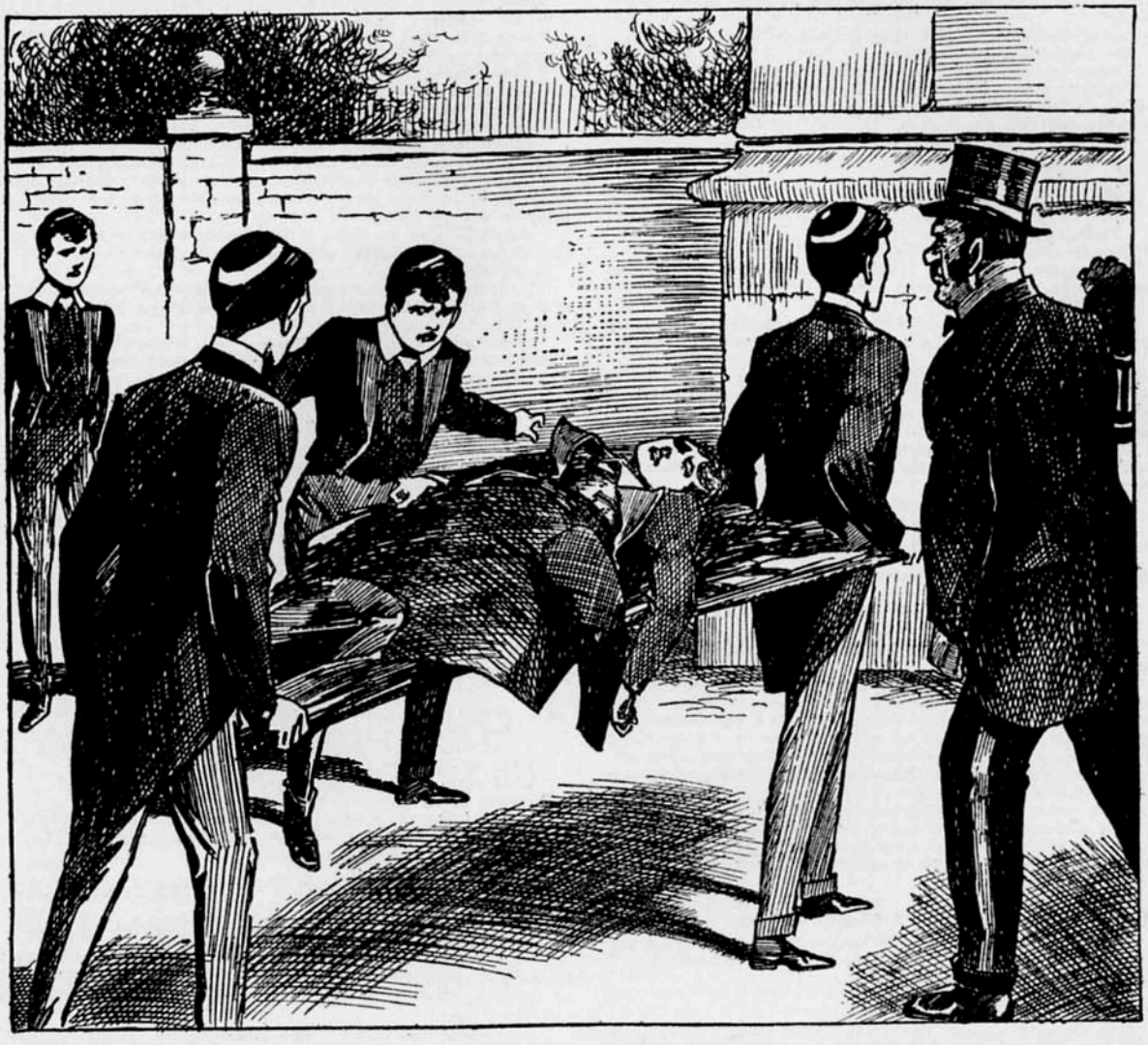
"There they are!" exclaimed Bolsover major. "That's the Redclyffe lot!"

"Good. They're coming. Come on!"

And Vernon-Smith and his companion hurried in to tell that the Redclyffe team were in sight. They found an exciting scene in progress on the footer ground.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Harry Wharton Resigns.

WINGATE, of the Sixth, was there, surrounded by the excited Removites. The captain of Greyfriars had been called in to settle the dispute. As Head of the Games, Wingate's word was law. The Greyfriars captain was looking very grim. Harry Wharton was looking very grim too. Most of the Remove expected him to give way under the pressure of authority, but he did not look like it.



Forms loomed up in the mist lighted by the porter's lantern. The Greyfriars fellows gathered round with bated breath. "Wingate—what is it?" "It's Smith," said Wingate. "Quiet, all of you!"
(See chapter 18.)

But in all the Remove there were only two fellows who were inclined to back him up to the end, Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Fellows who had stood by him till now were falling away from his side. What seemed like firmness to Harry Wharton seemed like obstinacy to the rest of the Remove. And they had all agreed that they were fed up with it.

All the team were talking at once, trying to explain to Wingate. Harry Wharton stood silent, only a scornful smile upon his face.

"Shut up, all of you!" exclaimed Wingate. "Now, I want one chap to explain, and the others can hold their tongues."

"Faith, and I——"

"You see, Wingate——"

"It's like this——"

"We all think——"

"We appeal——"

"Shut up!" roared Wingate. "Now you pile in, Brown. I think you're the most sensible chap of the lot. The others shut up!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom Brown. "This is how the matter stands, Wingate. Wharton is convinced that Smithy got Nugent and Bull and Linley out of Greyfriars. I rather agree with him there, as a matter of fact; but I hold that it's got nothing to do with footer matches. Wharton won't give the vacant places to Smithy and his friends; we claim that they ought to be given to the best players. I think that's stated fairly, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's quite right," he said.

"We want you to order Wharton to play the chaps he knows to be best," said Morgan. "He ought to put in Smithy, and Bolsover major, and Bulstrode, at least."

"And some of you chaps are willing to stand out and make room for them?" asked the captain of Greyfriars.

"We'll take our chance."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're playing duffers like Leigh and Vane, instead of Smithy and Bulstrode," said Tom Brown. "Nothing against those two chaps, you know; but they'll admit themselves that they're not up to the top form for the game. Speak up, you fellows! Do you think you're as fit to play as Bulstrode and Smithy?"

"Well, no," said Leigh, turning rather red. "We'll do our best if we play; but, of course, we can't play like Smithy."

"Just so!" said Vane. "We don't want to shove ourselves into the team and play a losing match."

"Well, that's quite right," said Wingate, with a nod.

"Then there's Treluce," said Tom Brown. "He's right-back,

He's a good man, but he's nothing like Bolsover major in the place."

"Don't rub it in," said Treluce grinning. "I know that."

Wingate turned to Wharton.

"What have you got to say about it, Wharton?" he asked.

"Only that I'm captain of the Remove eleven, and that I'm willing to resign, but not to be dictated to about the selection of the team!"

"Not even by me?" said Wingate, frowning.

"No!" said Wharton.

There was a murmur.

"Listen to the cheeky sweep!"

"Don't stand it, Wingate!"

"Faith, and I think——"

Wingate compressed his lips.

"I suppose you admit, Wharton, that you're leaving out good players, to put in inferior ones?" he said.

"Yes."

"And what's your reason? If you're not too high and mighty to explain to the Head of the Games!" said Wingate sarcastically.

Wharton flushed.

"I've explained enough, I think," he said. "Vernon-Smith is a cad, and he can't be let into the eleven without making trouble. And so long as I'm skipper he sha'n't have the place he turned Frank Nugent out of!"

"That's got nothing to do with footer," said Wingate brusquely. "A footer captain's business is to play the best men he can find."

"Vernon-Smith is the worst man I could find."

"Not in footer?"

"No, not in footer, but in everything else."

It was at this moment that the Bounder and Bolsover major arrived upon the ground. There was a shout.

"Here's Smithy!"

"The Redclyffe fellows are coming!" said Vernon-Smith. "We've just sighted their brake on the road."

"Faith, and we shall have to settle something pretty quick," said Micky Desmond.

"I think you've taken up an entirely wrong position in this matter, Wharton," said the Greyfriars captain. "If you think that Smithy helped to get Nugent sacked, I can understand your feelings. But there's no evidence that he did anything of the kind; in fact, the evidence is all the other way. You are, in fact, bringing a rotten accusation against Smith, without a particle of evidence in support of it!"

"Yes, rather!" said Trevor emphatically.

"We all know it's rot, Wingate!" said Bulstrode.

"But whether that's rot or not, it's nothing to do with the footer," said the captain of Greyfriars. "You ought to understand that, Wharton."

Harry Wharton was silent. Every eye was fixed upon him. But no sign of yielding could be read in his face.

"Well, what do you say now, Wharton?" asked Wingate, in a more conciliatory tone. "You have heard my opinion. Don't you think you can trust to my judgment?"

"Not in this matter!" said Harry.

"Wharton!" said Wingate, frowning.

"I'm sorry, Wingate. But I can't alter what I've said. I can't play in the same team with that scoundrel Smith!"

"Thank you!" said Vernon-Smith suavely. "I feel the same towards you; but I'm willing to play in the same team to help the Form win."

"Hear, hear!"

"There, you hear what Smith says," exclaimed Wingate, who was looking very perplexed. "If he's willing to bury private and personal troubles, surely you can do the same, Wharton, for the good of the team."

"I can't play in the same team with Smith!"

"I think you are unreasonable."

"I'm sorry!"

Wingate's eyes flashed.

"But you won't change your mind?" he exclaimed.

"I can't!"

"Not even if I advise you to?"

"No!"

"And suppose I order you?"

"Then I shall resign from the team. I dare say that's what the fellows want me to do. I'm ready to do it!"

"That's not what we want at all," said Tom Brown. "We haven't another centre-forward like you, Wharton. We want you to play up, as well as Smithy."

"Smithy's willing to play under your orders, Wharton," said Bulstrode. "So am I. So is Bolsover. We'll agree to toe the line, and give no trouble!"

"That's square as a die, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish. "And if you want a really first-class forward, I guess I'm your man!"

"Oh, cheese that!" said Tom Brown testily. "This isn't a time for fooling, Fishy."

"Who's fooling?" exclaimed Fish indignantly. "I guess——"

"Shut up!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"I guess——"

Three or four fellows pushed the American junior away, and what he "guessed" was never known.

"You hear what the fellows say, Wharton?" said Wingate patiently.

"Yes, I hear."

"And what's your answer?"

"I can't trust them, and can't play them."

"Is that all?"

"I'll concede a point: I'll put in Bulstrode if you think I ought to, Wingate," said Harry Wharton unwillingly.

"I certainly think you ought to. You know perfectly well that he's better form than Treluce; and Redclyffe are a strong team."

"Bulstrode goes in, then, if he'll promise not to leave us in the lurch at the beginning of a match, as he did before."

Bulstrode turned red.

"I did that before as a protest against leaving good men out, and putting bad men in!" he exclaimed hotly. "You know that, Wharton."

"Never mind that," said Wingate, with a wave of the hand. "Bulstrode goes in, that's settled. What about Vernon-Smith, and Bolsover major?"

"I can't play them!"

"You must!"

Wharton compressed his lips.

"You hear me?" said Wingate sternly. "I think you're utterly in the wrong, and as you won't listen to reason, I order you to play Bolsover and Smith, or else resign the captaincy of the Remove eleven."

"Very well, said Harry Wharton quietly. "I resign—from the captaincy, and from the team!" And he turned away, and walked towards the School House.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Declines

THERE was a momentary silence.

Few of the fellows had believed that Harry Wharton would really carry out his threat; but he had done it, and the Remove eleven was without a captain, and without a centre-forward! And the Redclyffe team had arrived!

"Well, of all the rotters——" began Bolsover major.

"Hold your tongue!" said Bob Cherry roughly.

Bolsover major glared at him.

"Are you defending what Wharton's done," he demanded—"resigning from the team, with the visiting team here? That's what he slanged Bulstrode for doing."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"What are we to do, Wingate?" asked Tom Brown, looking very much worried.

"You want a new skipper," said the captain of Greyfriars. "The team had better select one on the spot."

"I suggest Bulstrode," said Vernon-Smith smoothly. "Bulstrode was captain before Harry Wharton, and we didn't have all these troubles under him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bulstrode's the man!" said Hazeldene. "Hands up for Bulstrode!"

A crowd of hands went up.

"That settles it," said Wingate. "Bulstrode's your skipper. You'd better buck up with your team, Bulstrode. Here come the Redclyffe lot."

And Wingate walked away. His business there was done.

The Remove team were in considerable confusion. It was not known who was playing, and who was not. The Redclyffians had descended from their brake, and they had arrived on the footer ground now. They could see that some trouble was a-foot, though, with elaborate politeness, they were pretending to see nothing. Bulstrode advanced to meet Yorke, the Redclyffe skipper, with a flushed face.

"Glad to see you," he exclaimed. "We'll be ready by the time you've changed. We're in rather a pickle for a minute or two."

"Where's Wharton?" asked Yorke.

"He's resigned from the team, and we're making some changes. This way!"

"Right-o!" said Yorke politely.

But the Redclyffe juniors were grinning as they went into their dressing-room. They had come to Greyfriars expecting a hard tussle, but they did not expect now to find it very hard. With the skipper resigning just before the match, and the team making changes a few minutes before kick-off, the Remove were not likely to give them very much trouble, the Redclyffians thought.

The Remove footballers gathered in an anxious group to settle matters. Some changes were made at once. Vernon-Smith was to play in the front line instead of Fenfold, and Bolsover major at right-back instead of Treluce, and Hazeldene was put into goal in the place of Newland. Bulstrode looked dubiously at Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I suppose you fellows are playing, all the same?" he asked.

"I am," said Bob Cherry shortly.

"The playfulness of my honourable self will be terrific," said the nabob, with a bow.

"Good!" said Bulstrode, greatly relieved. "Now, about Wharton's place——"

"That's for you," said Vernon-Smith.

"I'd rather take Leigh's place at right-half," said Bulstrode. "I think Wharton ought to play. If he doesn't, I think I'll put Russell in; but——"

"We don't want Wharton!" said the Bounder quickly.

But Bulstrode looked determined. His object was to make up a winning team, not to gratify the feelings of the Bounder. He had followed the Bounder's lead so far, but the plotter was making the discovery now that Bulstrode had a will of his own, too.

"We want Wharton if we can get him," said Bulstrode.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"He's said he won't play," he said sullenly.

"I think he ought to be asked again."

"The Redclyffe chaps are waiting. Put in Russell."

"Can't be helped; they must wait! I'm not going to put in Russell if I can get Wharton," said the new skipper.

"I think you're an ass!" muttered the Bounder fiercely. "We've got rid of him! What do you want to get him in again for?"

"To beat Redclyffe."

"Oh, rot! Hang Redclyffe!"

Bulstrode gave him a dark look.

"I don't believe you care whether we win or lose so long as you score over Wharton!" he muttered angrily.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. It was quite true, and to the Bounder it was a matter of course.

Bulstrode turned to Bob Cherry.

"Will you ask Wharton?" he said. "Tell him I ask him to play, for the sake of the side."

"Well, I'll ask him," said Bob doubtfully.

"You don't think he'll play?"

"No."

"Shame!" growled Hazeldene.

The Bounder's eyes gleamed. If Harry Wharton refused to play when he was asked, for the sake of his side, it would add to the odium he had already incurred. And that reflection was enough to make the Bounder change his tactics.

"Oh, ask him!" he exclaimed. "I'll go and ask him myself, if you like. I really think that Wharton won't be such a rotter as to refuse when it's put to him plainly."

"You won't go and ask him!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "You'd word it so that he would be sure to refuse."

"Look here, Bob Cherry——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Go and speak to him, Cherry!" said Bulstrode.

"Right-o!"

Bob Cherry strode away towards the School House. His face was very gloomy as he went. He did not believe that Harry Wharton would go back on his word.

He made his way to No. 1 Study, and found the captain of the Remove there. Harry Wharton was standing by the fire, his hands deep in his pockets, and a dark frown upon his face. He started and looked round as Bob Cherry came in.

"What is it, Bob?"

"Bob Cherry coughed.

"Harry, old man——"

"Are you standing out of the team, too?"

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"No fear," he said.

"I don't want you to, Bob," said Wharton quietly. "You and Inky had better play up, and do the best you can for the side. I think very likely it will be a winning team if you play up. Bulstrode isn't a bad skipper. I suppose he will be skipper?"

"Yes."

"The Bounder can play when he chooses; and he will choose now, if only to prove that he ought to have been played all along!" said Harry bitterly.

"Wharton, old man——"

Bob Cherry paused. The expression upon his chum's face was not encouraging.

"Well?" said Harry.

"We want you to play!"

"Impossible."

"Bulstrode's sent to ask you."

"Bulstrode?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can't play. I've said that I won't play in the same team with the Bounder, and I shall keep my word!"

"We shall be licked, Harry."

"I'm sorry."

"You don't want to see the Remove beaten, old fellow?"

"They've got themselves to thank for it if they are."

"For the sake of the team, Harry——"

Wharton looked squarely at his friend.

"Do you think I ought to play, Bob?" he asked.

"Yes, I do."

"I can't agree with you. Vernon-Smith has shifted out Frank Nugent, and Johnny Bull, and Mark Linley. He's got into Nugent's place, and got his friends in the other places. The Remove have let him do it. They've no right to ask anything of me now."

"But they do ask, Harry."

'Then they can go and eat coke!" growled Wharton.

"The fellows will be frightfully wild if we lose the match through your standing out," said Bob.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't care?"

"Not twopence."

"I think you're wrong, Harry."

"I'm sorry."

"And that's all?"

"That's all."

Bob Cherry sighed.

"Well, if that's all, I may as well be getting back," he said. "I suppose Bulstrode will put Russell in as centre-forward! It's giving goals to Redclyffe."

"I know it's rotten."

"Play, then," said Bob Cherry eagerly.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I can't."

"Well, that settles it."

Bob Cherry left the study without another word. Harry Wharton remained alone, with a gloomy shade upon his brow.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Winning Goal!

BULSTRODE gave Bob Cherry an eager look as he returned to the football ground.

"Well?" he asked.

"It's no go."

"He won't play?"

"No."

"Well, I think it's rotten," said Bulstrode.

"You can thank Smithy & Co. for it," said Bob Cherry. "That makes four good men Smithy has got out of the team."

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here——"

"No time for jaw! Get into your things, Russell!" said the new skipper.

"What-ho!" said Russell promptly.

"I guess I'm willing to make you a jolly good centre-forward," remarked Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I could——"

"Oh, ring off!" said Bulstrode crossly.

"I guess——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

The Redclyffe fellows were in the field, punting about a footer to keep themselves warm. It was already a quarter of an hour past the time fixed for kick-off, but the Redclyffians were patient and polite.

Bulstrode's team was ready at last.

It was a very good team, too, though far from being up to the form the Remove had usually shown in football matches.

Wharton and Nugent and Johnny Bull and Mark Linley had been among the best players in the Remove, and all four of them were out of the ranks now.

But the Bounder was first-class, and the Bounder was on his mettle now. It was "up" to him to prove, as Wharton had remarked, that he ought to have played for the Form before. Vernon-Smith could be relied upon, this time, at least, to do his best.

The Remove team came into the field at last, and the two skippers tossed for goals. Bulstrode won, and gave the Redclyffians the wind to kick against. The ball started rolling, and the game began.

All the Removites who were not playing were gathered round the field, with the exception of Harry Wharton. A crowd of fellows of other Forms, too, interested in the Remove dispute, had turned up to watch the match. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth Form and Coker of the Fifth were there, looking on with superior smiles.

The Redclyffians pressed the attack from the beginning.

Yorke and the other forwards came through the Removites, and in a few minutes there was a sharp attack on goal.

Hazeldene was between the posts, and he did his best to defend. But Hazeldene was not in good form.

Harry Wharton & Co. had trained Hazeldene and made a goalie of him; but since he had broken with No. 1 Study, Hazel had done little practice, and he was quite off colour. Newland would have done better, as Bulstrode realised when he saw how Hazel was acting. The Remove goalie was not at all up to the attack. The ball whizzed in from Yorke's foot, and lodged in the net; and there was a chirrup of glee from the Redclyffians, and a sort of groan from the Greyfriars fellows.

"Goal!"

Bulstrode gave the unhappy goalkeeper a glare.

"Why didn't you stop that?" he bawled.

"I did my best," said Hazeldene sulkily.

"Rotten best, then."

"Oh, rats!"

The Redclyffians grinned.

"Jolly good order this team is in, I don't think," Yorke murmured to his inside-right as they walked back to the centre of the field. And the inside-right grinned.

"Play up better than that," said Bulstrode, as he turned away from the goalie.

Hazeldene grunted.

The teams lined up again, the Removites looking decidedly glum.

Redclyffe were grinning.

"Play up, for goodness' sake!" muttered Bulstrode. "The whole rotten crowd's sniggering at us already."

"Let Smithy show what he can do," growled Bob Cherry. "He hasn't done much so far."

"Oh, don't start ragging now."

"Play up!" shouted the Greyfriers crowd.

The ball was kicked off again.

This time the Redclyffians did not find it so easy.

Vernon-Smith captured the ball, and then the Bounder, as if following Bob Cherry's sarcastic advice, showed what he could do.

He dashed away, leaving the other forwards almost standing, and dribbled the ball down to goal, beating the halves, and dodging the backs in masterly style. There was a shout round the field.

"Go it, Bounder!"

"Buck up, Smithy!"

"On the ball!"

The one-man game was not popular at Greyfriars, but it suited the style of the Bounder. He was always a selfish player. Harry Wharton & Co. had always done well with skilful combination and short passing; but the one-man style of play was just what the Bounder liked. On the present occasion it served his turn well, for there was no other Remove forward who had a chance to bag a pass.

Vernon-Smith dribbled the ball fairly round the feet of the backs, and amid a roar of cheering, growing in volume every moment, he ran on to goal.

There was only the goalie to beat; and the crowd roared.

"Kick!"

"Shoot, you beggar, shoot!"

"Put her through!"

Whizz!

The goalie was all eyes and hands, seemingly; but the shot from the Bounder beat him. The ball passed a foot from his outstretched fingers, and lodged in the net; and the goalie grunted discontentedly.

Then the crowd yelled!

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Bravo, Smithy!"

"Hurray!"

Bulstrode slapped the Bounder of Greyfriars on the back, his face glowing.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "That's the style!"

The Bounder grinned.

"Nearly as good as Wharton, perhaps?" he suggested.

"Quite!" said Bulstrode.

The score was one to one. But just before half-time it was altered again. In spite of a strenuous defence, the Redclyffe forwards rained shots on the home goal, and Hazeldene was beaten again. Then the whistle went, with Redclyffe two to one, and jubilant.

"Not so bad, though," said Bob Cherry, as he dabbed his perspiring face with a towel. "Better than I expected."

The Bounder sneered.

"We may win, even without the great and only Wharton," he remarked. "We're not quite so badly off as the Greeks when Achilles was sulking in his tent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That goal of Smithy's was first-rate," said Tom Brown.

Bob Cherry grunted.

"I don't say it wasn't—but that's not the game. Smithy would have kept the ball just the same, if there had been a chap ready for a pass. That's his style."

"Suppose you get ready for a pass next time," suggested the Bounder. "If you were where you were wanted, instead of strolling round the touch-line, you might be able to take a pass when one was ready."

"Why, you rotter——" began Bob angrily.

"Oh, shut up," growled Bulstrode. "This isn't a time for ragging one another. Leave that till after the match, for goodness' sake."

"Yes, but——"

"Time!" said Bulstrode.

The teams went out into the field again.

There was a yell of encouragement from the crowd as they lined up.

"Go it, Smithy!"

"On the ball, Bounder!"

It was evident that the Bounder's brilliant goal had made him popular.

Harry Wharton heard the shouts in his study in the School House, and he looked out of his window towards the playing-fields.

He could see the junior ground, through the leafless elms, and the figures that ran and dodged in the rapid movements of the game.

The Remove captain's feelings were bitter.

Perhaps, now that it was too late, he felt that he had been too hard; that he would have done better to play when he was asked.

It was too late to think of that now.

In standing out of the match he had played the game of his enemy; he had taken tricks for the Bounder.

He realised it now.

Now that Wharton was out of the team, Vernon-Smith was the best forward in it—the best player altogether, with the exception of Tom Brown, the New Zealander, the centre-half.

Wharton did not grudge Vernon-Smith his success; and he was glad to see that he was helping the side to win. But it was very bitter to him to stand idle, out of the match, forgotten by the players he had always led..

A louder roar came ringing from the playing-fields.

"Goal!"

"Good old Smithy!"

It was the Bounder again—he had scored.

The ball was in the net, and the Greyfriars Remove had equalised.

The cheering was deafening as the teams went back to the centre; and the Bounder might be excused for a little inclination to strut.

Kick-off again, and a desperate attack from Redclyffe. Again Hazeldene was found wanting, and the ball went in. Three to two for Redclyffe. But within five minutes more Bob Cherry scored for the Remove.

There were five minutes more to play, and both sides made great efforts.

Three minutes—two minutes!

Then a roar.

"Go it, Smithy!"

The Bounder was away again.

It was the dribbling game once more, and Vernon-Smith went through the field like a knife through cheese.

Before the goalie knew where the ball was coming from, it had whizzed past him into the net. It was not to be a draw after all!

The crowd yelled.

"Goal! Goal! Hurray!"

Phip!

It was the whistle; the game had finished. Remove were four goals to three, and the Bounder of Greyfriars had kicked the winning goal!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Hero of the Hour.

"HURRAY!"

"Hurray!"

"Bravo!"

There was a roar of voices, a rush of fellows upon the footer-field.

The Bounder of Greyfriars was seized by many hands and hoisted shoulder high.

On the shoulders of Trevor and Bolsover major, he was borne off the ground amid deafening cheers.

"Bravo, Smithy!"

"Hurray!"

"Smithy wins! Where's Wharton now?"

And there was a groan for Wharton.

"Bravo, Bounder!"

"Ripping!"

"Hip, pip, hurray!"

The Bounder was set down at last, flushed and breathless. His eyes were very bright.

"Thanks!" he said. "Gentlemen——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, I'm jolly glad to have been of use. That's all I've got to say."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurray!"

"You saved the match," said Bulstrode.

"Saved it at the finish," said Tom Brown, heartily. "And we've beaten Redclyffe! I'm jolly glad we formed the combine now."

"Yes, rather."

"Faith, and ye're right."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, it was a jolly good match," said Yorke, the Redclyffe skipper, as he came out with his coat and muffler on. "We'll beat you next time."

"Righto!" said Bulstrode, good-humouredly. Bulstrode was in great spirits at having won the first footer match played under his command.

And the Redclyffe fellows said good-bye, and rolled away in their brake.

Vernon-Smith disappeared after the match, leaving the Removites singing his praises. A crowd of fellows went round to Harry Wharton's study to tell him about it. It was pretty certain that he knew, but they meant to tell him all the same.

Bolsover major thundered at the door of No. 1 Study, and kicked it open.

A dozen fellows crowded in at the doorway.

Harry Wharton looked at them grimly.

"Well, what do you want?" said Wharton coldly.

"Only come to tell you the news," said Bolsover major insolently. "We've beaten Redclyffe—which your team wouldn't have done in a dog's age."

"Hear, hear!"

"Beaten them hollow!" said Hazeldene. "Put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"And beaten them without you, too!" said Bulstrode.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurray!"

"You're not wanted," said Bolsover major. "The Remove are fed up with you, my son. We're going to make Bulstrode permanent captain!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You can do as you like, except stand in my study and jaw to me," said Harry Wharton calmly. "Get out!"

"Oh, rats!"

"There are enough of us to teach you manners, you know," Snoop remarked.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Are you going out?" he asked.

"I'm not, for one!" said Bolsover. "Not till I'm finished."

"Same here!" said Bulstrode.

"We've come to talk to you," said Snoop, feeling unusually courageous with so many supporters. "We want to give you a piece of our minds."

"Yes, rather!"

Wharton strode towards them.

"Outside!"

"Rats!" said Bolsover major.

Wharton wasted no more time in words.

He grasped the bully of the Remove and swung him round.

Bolsover struck out savagely, but Wharton did not heed the blow. He swung the heavy Removite off his feet, and fairly hurled him at the crowd in the doorway.

Crash!

Bump!

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

"Yarooh!"

Bolsover rolled in the doorway, and three or four fellows sprawled in the passage. Harry Wharton glared at them angrily.

"Now come in again, if you like," he said between his teeth.

"Ow!" groaned Bolsover.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came pushing through the crowd in the passage. They shoved the juniors aside without the slightest ceremony, and entered the study, and ranged themselves beside Harry Wharton.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Is it a ragging? Then you can rag us too!"

"The ragfulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Get out of this, Bob Cherry!" yelled a voice in the passage.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Go and eat coke, my son!" he said. "If you want me out, come and put me out!"

"Look here——" stuttered Bolsover.

"Well, you look a pretty picture!" said Bob Cherry, regarding the bully of the Remove as he staggered to his feet, dishevelled and dusty. "You'd better go and get a wash, I think."

"I'll—I'll——"

"You'll get out!" said Bob Cherry.

The raggers glared at the trio; but Harry Wharton & Co. looked a little too troublesome to tackle. Bolsover & Co. contented themselves with a chorus of cat-calls and hisses, and retired.

"Thank you for coming, you fellows," said Wharton quietly.

"Don't mench," said Bob Cherry. "We pulled the match off, old fellow!"

"The pullfulness was terrific."

"I'm glad of that."

"Yes; I know you are," said Bob Cherry, clapping his chum on the back. "But I'm not glad that you kept out of the match. If you had played, it would have been a dead cert. for us, instead of touch and go."

"Yes, ratherfully!"

Wharton smiled rather painfully.

"I think I did right," he said. "But it's not much good discussing that now. I'm out of the team after this."

"Not for good!" said Bob Cherry anxiously.

"I'm afraid so."

"What rot!" said Bob uneasily. "The Remove are very ratty with you now, I know, but they will come round, never fear!"

"I don't know that I want them to come round," said Wharton.

"Yes, I suppose you feel a bit rotten now," said Bob sympathetically. "But that will wear off, you know. The Bounder's not going to win all along the line like this."

Wharton was silent. His chums could see that he wanted to be alone, and they left him. The captain of the Remove, once the hero of the Form, but now certainly the most unpopular fellow in it, remained with a gloomy brow. Wharton had kept his temper well in this long struggle against the cunning of the Bounder; but he was defeated now, and he had to admit it. The Bounder had won all along the line, and he had won because he did not scruple to use methods Wharton would have disdained to resort to. Harry Wharton had not been defeated in fair fight; he had fallen a victim to treachery and cunning. It was no wonder that, as he paced his solitary study—whence his best chum was gone, thanks to the Bounder—that Wharton's feelings grew more and more bitter, his brow darker and darker.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"WHERE is Vernon-Smith?"

Harry Wharton asked that question in the common-room.

It was dusk now, and the light was on in the School House; outside, in the Close, the mist from the sea was creeping over Greyfriars.

Two or three fellows stared insolently at the fallen captain of the Remove as he asked the question.

"Want to ask him how to kick goals?" asked Snoop.

And there was a laugh.

"I want to see him," said Wharton.

"He's gone out!" said Russell.

"Do you know where?"

"Down to Friardale, I think. There's going to be a celebration over the giddy victory," the new centre-forward explained. "Smithy is doing the thing in style. There's going to be whole consignments from Uncle Clegg's."

"Yes, rather!" said Billy Bunter, his little round eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "My old chum Smithy is going to ask me——"

"Your old chum rats!" said Bulstrode. "If he's going to ask you, perhaps that's why he's laying in such a giddy lot."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"When do you expect him back?" asked Wharton.

"Might be any minute," said Russell. "What the dickens do you want him for?"

Wharton did not reply to the question.

He turned on his heel, and quitted the common-room, leaving the group of juniors in a buzz.

"Sure there's going to be trouble," said Micky Desmond, with a sage shake of the head. "I know that look in Wharton's eye."

"He's seeing red!" said Hazeldene.

"Faith, and ye're right!"

"I don't know that I should care to be in Smithy's shoes when he meets Wharton in that temper," said Hazeldene uneasily.

"No fear!"

"Oh, Smithy can take care of himself!" said Bulstrode carelessly.

"I don't know. Wharton's a giddy Tartar when his dander is riz, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish, with a shake of his head.

"It's pretty rotten if he forces Smithy into a fight because Smithy kicked goals for the Remove," exclaimed Russell hotly.

"Yes, rather!"

"That's what he's jolly well going to do," said Bolsover major.

"Then I think it's rotten!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And if he does it, I think he ought to be ragged by the Form, to teach him manners," said Russell, looking round.

"Hear, hear!"

About a quarter of an hour later Bob Cherry came into the room and looked round. The juniors grinned at him.

"Looking for Wharton?" asked Bulstrode.

"Yes."

"Isn't he in his study?"

"No."

"I guess he's gone out!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Oh, all right!" said Bob Cherry.

"Gone to look for the Bounder," Hazeldene explained. "There's going to be a row, I think."

Bob Cherry compressed his lips.

"Well, Smithy's only got himself to thank for it, if there is," he said.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 253.

"Oh, rats!"

"Rot!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Bob Cherry grunted, and went out of the room. He went to the doorway and looked out into the misty Close.

He was feeling very uneasy.

He wished that Harry would come in, and he wondered what had happened out there on the misty road in the dusk.

Had Wharton met his enemy?

If he had met him——

Bob Cherry wrinkled his brow in a troubled way. He did not wholly understand his chum, deep as their attachment was. Wharton's temper was peculiar; and the open, hearty Bob Cherry had often realised that there were depths in his chum's nature which he had never sounded. Was Wharton likely to do anything rash? He was burning with resentment against the Bounder—he had been goaded past the limit of endurance, and if his temper had broken out at last——

But, after all, what could happen but a fight—a fight more bitter and savage, perhaps, than most schoolboy combats—but nothing worse than that.

Yet Bob felt uneasy.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh joined him in the doorway. The nabob's dusky face was as grave as Bob Cherry's.

"The esteemed Wharton has not come in," he remarked.

"Not yet, Inky."

"I wish he would come!"

Bob Cherry sighed.

"So do I. We might go and look for him, only we should most likely miss him in the fog. It's pretty thick on the road."

The nabob nodded.

"I hope they will not meetfully encounter," he muttered. "I am afraid of what the esteemed Wharton may do, now that he has got his honourable rag out."

"That's what I'm thinking."

They waited in grim silence, looking into the misty Close. Micky Desmond's voice called out from the passage.

"Call-over, you chaps."

Bob Cherry started.

"Wharton's missing call-over, then," he muttered.

"It is rottenful!"

"And I don't suppose he thought of asking for a pass, either," said Bob Cherry dismally. "More trouble in the family! Oh dear!"

The juniors went in to calling-over. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was taking the roll-call. He paused on Wharton's name, as there was no reply.

"Wharton!"

Silence.

"Is not Wharton here?" asked the Remove-master.

"He—he's been delayed, sir," said Bob Cherry. "The—the fog, you know."

"Very good," said Mr. Quelch, marking down Wharton as absent, and he went on with the list till he came to the name of the Bounder.

"Vernon-Smith."

No reply.

"Vernon-Smith!"

Still silence. The Bounder was not there.

"Another Remove boy lost in the fog, apparently," said Mr. Quelch sarcastically. "Can you tell me whether they had passes, Wingate?"

"They did not, sir," said the captain of Greyfriars.

"Vernon-Smith meant to be back long ago, sir," said Bolsover major. "Something has happened to stop him."

"He will be required to explain it when he does come in," said Mr. Quelch.

And he finished the roll-call.

The Greyfriars fellows dispersed.

Wingate stopped Bob Cherry in the passage outside, tapping him on the shoulder. Bob looked at the Greyfriars captain dismally.

"What is this?" Wingate asked abruptly. "Is there any trouble between Wharton and Smith, on account of what happened on the footer-ground to-day?"

"I don't know, Wingate."

"Did one of them go out after the other—to find him?"

"I—I believe so."

"Which one was it?"

"Wharton went out to look for Smithy," put in Bolsover major. "He asked us all in the common-room where Smithy was, and then went to look for him."

The Greyfriars captain compressed his lips.

"I shall have something to say to Wharton about that when he comes in," he said. And he walked away.

Bob Cherry and Inky went to the door to look for Wharton. There was no sign of him yet in the misty Quad. A good many more fellows joined them there. A strange feeling of anxiety was growing up among the fellows. Where was Wharton? Where was the Bounder?

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Struck Down!

HARRY WHARTON had met the Bounder.

In the dim, misty road, not far from the gates of Greyfriars, Wharton had waited, pacing to and fro.

The Bounder, returning from the village, must pass him there on his way home.

And then there would come a reckoning.

A long reckoning, for all the harm the Bounder had done—a reckoning that should pay off the old score in full.

Wharton was not of a revengeful nature. His temper was not unforgiving. But the Bounder had piled injuries upon him; and all the time, with subtle cunning, had made it appear that Wharton was in the wrong.

Wharton had lost his chums, he had lost his position, he had lost the good opinion of the Form he was in: and he owed it all to the Bounder.

It was time there was a reckoning.

Wharton clenched and unclenched his hands as he waited; the Bounder was a long time coming!

Footsteps on the misty road at last.

Wharton stopped, and peered through the mist, and drew a sharp, quick breath.

It was the Bounder.

Wharton stepped into his path.

Vernon-Smith stopped.

"Who's that?" he asked. "Hallo! Wharton!"

"Yes," said Harry, between his teeth.

"What do you want?"

"I want to settle with you."

Wharton's tone of menace warned the Bounder what to expect. He made a step backward.

"Have you come out to look for me?" he asked coolly.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To thrash you, or else to take a licking from you!" said Wharton, his voice trembling with anger and resentment. "It's better out here, where there's no one to interfere. I can't equal you at cunning and trickery; but face to face I can stand up to you, and let the best man win. Are you ready?"

"No!"

"I shall not wait!"

"I prefer it quietly, in the gym., with the gloves on," said Vernon-Smith, with an irritating drawl in his voice.

"You will have it quietly enough—but here, without the gloves on," said Harry Wharton.

"I tell you——"

"Put your hands up!"

"I won't!"

"Then take that!"

Vernon-Smith reeled back from the blow. He did not speak again, but with a snarl he sprang at Wharton.

The next moment they were fighting.

The Bounder was no coward. Cowardice could not be reckoned among his many faults. He preferred slyer and safer methods than fighting; but he was not afraid.

And his temper was up now. Wharton's blow had called up all the evil in his nature.

Tramp! tramp! tramp!

Their footsteps rang upon the frosty road as they tramped to and fro in fierce conflict. Heavy blows were given and received; but the fighting juniors seemed hardly to notice them.

Crash!

Vernon-Smith went down at last, on his back, on the hard road. He lay gasping and panting, his eyes gleaming up in the dusk.

"Are you done?" panted Wharton. "You cur! Get up and finish!"

"Yes, I'll finish!" muttered the Bounder. "Either I sha'n't be able to walk away from here, or you won't, Harry Wharton."

"That's what I want."

The Bounder leaped up. His face was stained with a red stream from his nose, and it flowed over his collar and tie. His left eye was closed; his right was blinking painfully. But he seemed to be scarcely conscious of pain.

He attacked Wharton with savage fury; and Wharton met him more than half-way.

With gleaming eyes, and gritted teeth, and panting breath, they renewed the conflict.

It was five minutes before the Bounder went down again.

But he did go down!

And then Wharton, standing over him, reeled as he stood, with lights dancing before his eyes, and a buzzing in his head. His punishment had been almost as terrible as the Bounder's.

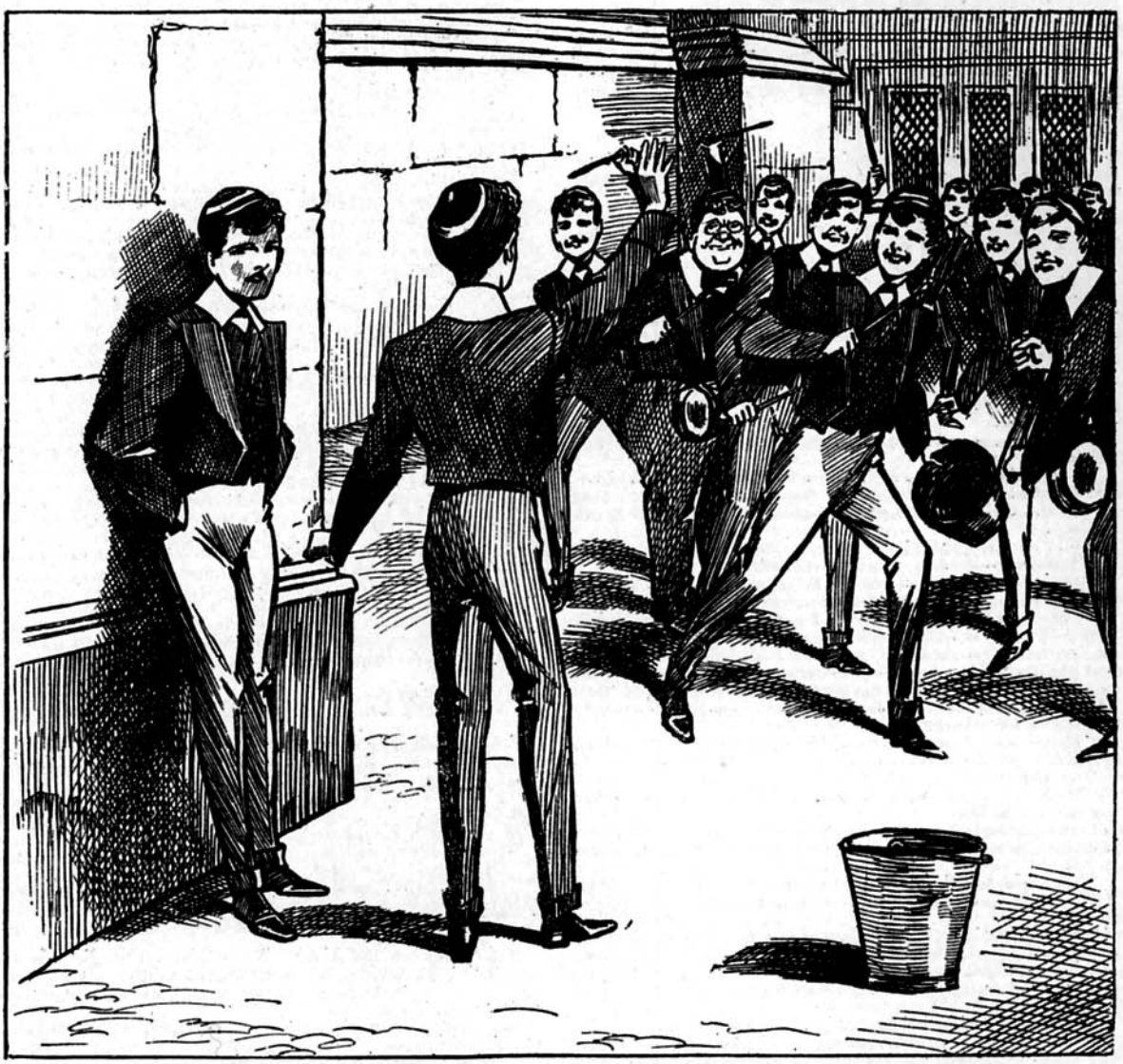
"Have you had enough?" said Wharton thickly.

The Bounder groaned.

"Are you done?"

"Yes," muttered the Bounder thickly. "Hang you! Yes! Leave me alone."

Wharton reeled against a tree beside the lane. He drew in thick gasping breaths of the misty air.



Bob Cherry panted for breath, and there was a sob in his throat! "You fools! fools! fools!" he gasped. "I tell you he is innocent——" "Shut up!" shouted the juniors, and the roar drowned Bob Cherry's voice. (*See chapter* 21).

He was nearly done himself.

The Bounder lay groaning. Wharton leaned against the tree for full five minutes, waiting for his strength to return.

The Bounder did not rise.

Wharton staggered towards him at last. Vernon-Smith put out a feeble hand.

"Let me alone! I'm done, I tell you! I give you best! Let me alone!"

"I'm not going to touch you," said Harry quietly. "Only to help you! Smithy, I—I'm sorry I hit so hard!"

The Bounder snarled.

"Don't begin any of that rot with me!" he said. "Get away, and let me alone!"

"Can't you get up?"

"Yes—when you're gone."

"Let me help you."

"Get away!"

"Let me help you back to Greyfriars, Smithy."

"If you touch me I'll hit out."

"Very well!"

Wharton turned and left him. There was nothing else that he could do.

The groan of the Bounder rang in his ears as he went.

Wharton walked unsteadily back towards Greyfriars.

He was aching from the conflict, aching in every bone, in every nerve. And repentance had already come to him. He had been blind with passion; but the fight seemed to have driven the mists from his brain, and he knew that he had done wrong.

He paused at the wayside brook to wash the blood from his face, and make himself as tidy as he could. He did not want to excite general remark when he went into the school. Not that his state was likely to escape notice.

He walked slowly and unsteadily.

Back in the misty lane, under the shadow of the trees, the Bounder lay.

His strength was spent.

Every ounce of strength had been put into the fight, and it

was gone now. He was weak as a baby—too weak to rise. His head was swimming, and he groaned as he lay. At last he dragged himself to a sitting posture.

Footsteps in the lane!

He set his teeth; if it was Wharton returning to help him, he would refuse his help. But it was not Wharton; the footsteps came from the direction of the village. It was a man's form that loomed up in the mist.

"Help!" muttered the Bounder.

The man stopped.

He had heard the faint voice, he had seen the dim form by the roadside. He stopped, and peered through the mist towards Vernon-Smith.

"Who is it?"

The Bounder shivered. He knew that soft, foreign voice, with its lisping Spanish accent. It was the South American!

Diaz came closer, and peered at him.

"Ha! It is you, senorito!"

Vernon-Smith groaned.

"I saw you in the village," said the South American, with a ring of savage satisfaction now in his voice. "I followed you—you had the great kindness to stop for me, senorito."

"Don't you touch me, you villain!" muttered the Bounder in fear. "Can't you see I've been through it? Help me to the school, and I'll give you five pounds."

Diaz laughed.

"Five pounds—and your father has robbed me of five thousand!"

"I can't help what my father does!" muttered the Bounder.

"Carambo! And you told me that in his place you would do the same, and that I could go and starve!" said the South American.

"I—I did not mean it."

"You spoke as if you meant it, senorito."

"Let me alone!" muttered the Bounder faintly. "Villain! You can see how I am—I cannot help myself!"

"I could not help myself when I was ruined by your villain father—I could not help myself when you called to the policeman to take me in charge," said Diaz. His black eyes rolled and glittered, and a terrible fear came upon the Bounder. It was only too evident that the man's wrongs had preyed upon him until he had lost his balance of mind—that he was scarcely responsible for what he did.

"Keep—keep away!" panted the Bounder. "I'll speak to my father—you shall have your rights! I—I swear!"

Diaz laughed.

"How long would that oath bind you, senorito, if you escape me now?" he said.

Vernon-Smith groaned. The promise would not bind him after he was once in safety; he knew it, and his enemy knew it.

"Let me alone!" he muttered again.

The South American laughed—a laugh that was full of fearful menace.

"Si, senorito, si; I shall show you as much mercy as your father showed me," he said. "He rob me, and he give me in charge to police—you say the same! You are your father's son! I fly from England—but before I go——" He gripped his cudgel.

"Keep off!" shrieked the Bounder, mad with terror.

But blows were already raining upon him. The wretched boy struggled feebly, till the light of consciousness died from his eyes, and he lay still and inert under the rain of blows from the heavy cudgel.

Suddenly the South American started—and held his hand.

It was as if reason had returned for a moment to his maddened brain, and he realised what he was doing.

"Senorito!"

It was a husky whisper.

The South American bent over the insensible boy with a scared look.

"Dios! What have I done? Senorito! Senorito!"

But no answer came from the still form on the ground. The South American sprang to his feet, and with a frightened look round, fled into the mist.

His footsteps died away.

The Bounder remained alone—still—silent—with blood upon his face—blood upon his clothes—silent—still!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Return.

"HERE he is!"

The exclamation burst from the group of juniors in the doorway of the School House. Across the misty Close, they had heard the ring of the bell at the gate; Gosling had opened the gate to admit the returning juniors—or junior. It was only Harry Wharton who came through the mist towards the lighted doorway.

Bob Cherry gave a gasp of relief. His uneasiness had been growing keener and keener, he hardly knew why.

"Harry! Thank goodness you've come back!"

"The thankfulness is terrific!" muttered the nabob.

"Where's Smithy?" demanded Bolsover major.

"What have you done with Smithy?" shouted Snoop.

"What has Smithy done with him, you mean?" chuckled Bolsover. "Look at his chivvy!"

"My hat!"

"He's been pasted!"

"Faith, if Smithy's worse than that, he must be a sight!"

"Well, Smithy is worse," said Wharton, with a bitter smile. "If you want Smithy, you can go and look for him in the lane."

"What have you done to him?"

"I've licked him."

"Why doesn't he come in?" asked Bulstrode.

"He can't—yet!"

Wharton passed into the house. Wingate met him in the hall. He eyed Wharton's darkened eyes and bruised face sternly.

"Where have you been, Wharton?" he said, abruptly.

"Out!" said Harry.

"Have you been fighting with Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes."

"Who began it?"

"I did!"

"Have you hurt him?"

"Yes."

Wingate's eyes gleamed.

"Then you'll have to answer for it," he said. "No, I don't want you to come to my study; I shall leave this to your Form-master when Smith comes in."

"Very well!" said Wharton.

And he passed on upstairs, and went to his study. Bob Cherry followed him there. Bob was looking perplexed and worried.

"It must have been an awful mill, to leave your chivvy like that, Harry," he said, uneasily.

"It was!" said Harry briefly.

"Smithy got the worst of it?"

"Yes. Not much—but he gave in."

"Good! But—but why doesn't he come in?"

"I left him on the ground."

"Harry!"

Wharton flushed.

"I offered to help him," he said. "But he wouldn't have it!"

"Just like Smithy!" said Bob, with a nod. "But—I—I say, I wish he'd come in. You must have given him an awful pasting!"

"I did."

"I—I say——" Bob Cherry hesitated. "You fought with your fists, I suppose?"

Wharton stared at him.

"Of course!" he said. "What on earth——"

"Oh, all right," said Bob. "All serene. Smithy can't be so very much hurt, if you fought with fists."

"He will be in in ten minutes, I expect."

"I hope he will."

Bob Cherry left the study. Wharton threw himself into the arm-chair. He was feeling too exhausted by that terrible fight, and too sick with the reaction after it, to think of attempting to do his perparation.

Bob Cherry rejoined the crowd of fellows at the door of the School-House.

"Smithy come in yet?" he asked.

"No!"

"Why doesn't he come?" growled Bob Cherry uneasily. "He can't be so much hurt as all that. I wish he'd come in! He's hanging it out to make us alarmed, very likely."

"The likefulness is great, my chum," said Hurree Singh.

Bolsover grunted.

"More likely he's badly hurt," he said. "You know what Wharton's temper is like, when he's got his hair off!"

"Faith, and that's so, too. But——"

"Why doesn't he come!" growled Bob, miserably.

But the Bounder did not come

The minutes crawled by.

Half-an-hour—an hour! Wingate of the Sixth joined the juniors. His face was anxious, and a little pale.

"Hasn't Smith come in?" he asked.

"No!"

"That's jolly queer!"

"He must have been badly hurt!" said Snoop. "Perhaps some of us ought to go and look for him, Wingate?"

"He can't be disabled by a fight with Wharton!" said the Greyfriars captain, staring. "He can come in by himself when he chooses."

"Then it's jolly queer he doesn't come."

Wingate compressed his lips. He stared gloomily out into the misty Close. Where was Vernon-Smith? What did the delay mean?

Nine o'clock sounded from the clock-tower of Greyfriars.

"Nine!" said Bob Cherry, with a shiver. "Where's Smithy?"

Wingate and Courtney of the Sixth, and Coker of the Fifth, came out with their coats and caps on.

"Going to look for Smithy?" asked Bolsover major.

"Yes," said Wingate shortly.

"Can we come?"

"No!"

And the three seniors disappeared in the mist.

The juniors waited.

Half the school seemed to be crowded in the passage and round the doorway now. The masters were as anxious as the boys. Unless Vernon-Smith was playing a trick, something serious must be the matter. It might be some trick of the Bounder—and yet it was hardly likely. But what could be the matter? Had Wharton, in his temper, struck too hard—had the Bounder been seriously hurt? Such things had happened—an unlucky blow might have done damage that the assailant never intended, never dreamed of. Was that the explanation of the Bounder's strange absence?

The gates were open—Gosling was there with his lantern, waiting, too. Footsteps in the Close at last—and there was a cry from the waiting boys.

"Here they come!"

Forms loomed up in the mist, lighted by the glimmer of the porter's lantern. But—but what was that the seniors were carrying—why did they come with slow and heavy steps? A hurdle, with a coat spread over it, and upon the coat a still form—and over that another coat! What was that still, silent figure upon the hurdle?

The Greyfriars fellows gathered round with bated breath.

"Wingate—what is it?"

"What's happened?"

"Is it—is it——"

"It's Smith!" said Wingate, as the hurdle was carried in. "Quiet, all of you."

Bob Cherry gave a cry.

"But he's not—he's not——"

"No, you young ass! But he's badly hurt—he's been beaten insensible with a stick—and the young villain who did it will have to pay for it!"

And the seniors passed in with their burden.

The juniors remained silent—horror-stricken!

"Oh, good heavens!" muttered Bob Cherry, pale to the lips.

"It's Wharton's doing!" said Bolsover major. "Who'd have thought he was such a murderous villain?"

Bob Cherry turned upon him fiercely.

"Hold your tongue, you cad! Wharton fought him with his fists—you know he did."

Bolsover sneered.

"How did Smithy come into that state, then?"

Bob Cherry was silent. What could he say?

"We shall know when Smithy speaks," said Russell.

"But when will he speak?"

That was a question there was no answering. Dr. Short arrived from Friardale to take charge of the patient, and he shook his head over him very seriously. The Bounder was insensible, and he remained insensible. The juniors went to bed on tiptoe, and when they spoke, they spoke in hushed voices. It was as if the dark wing of Azrael, the Angel of Death, had passed over the old school in the misty winter night.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.
Guilty—or Not Guilty!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, Wingate?"

"You're wanted," said Wingate abruptly, "in the Head's study."

"Yes."

Wharton left the Removites, as they were going up to the dormitory, and followed the captain of Greyfriars.

Wingate's face was very hard and grim.

Dr. Short had examined Vernon-Smith, and left; the Bounder was lying in bed, insensible, with the House-dame watching by his bedside.

Harry Wharton did not yet know what had happened. He knew that the Bounder had been carried in by the prefects upon a hurdle, and he marvelled. He could not understand how Vernon-Smith was so injured as all that. He could not help thinking that it might be one of the endless tricks of the Bounder, to make capital out of the affair.

He tapped Wingate on the arm, and the Greyfriars captain jerked his arm away.

"Don't touch me!" he said

Wharton flushed.

"Wingate! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I don't want to be touched by a murderous young scoundrel," said Wingate deliberately. "That's what I mean."

"Wingate!"

"Oh, hold your tongue!"

"But—but what has happened?" cried Wharton, in bewilderment. "Why are you speaking to me like that, Wingate? What have I done?"

"You know what you have done."

"Is Smithy much hurt?"

"You know he is."

"He was hurt a little more than I was," said Wharton. "I offered to help him to Greyfriars, and he refused my help. But it was a fair fight—he would have done as much to me, if he could have done it."

"A fair fight?" said Wingate bitterly.

"Yes," said Wharton fiercely. "Do you think I fought him unfairly?"

"I know you did."

"Wingate! Are you mad?"

"Here we are," said the Greyfriars captain. "Tell your yarns to the doctor, not to me."

He tapped at the door of the Head's study and opened it.

Dr. Locke was there, with Mr. Quelch, the Remove-master Both of them were looking very grave.

Their glances fell accusingly upon Harry Wharton as he entered the study with Wingate. Wharton drew a deep, hard breath. He could understand that something serious was the matter now—something more than a fist-fight—and he wondered, in bewilderment, what it was! Had anything happened to the Bounder after he had left him out on the misty road?

"Here is Wharton, sir," said Wingate.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Have you anything to say?"

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Am I accused of anything, sir?"

Dr. Locke bent his eyes searchingly upon the boy.

"You know that Vernon-Smith was found on the road, and brought in by the prefects, Wharton?" he said.

"I know he was brought in, sir."

"And that he is still insensible," said the Head.

"I heard the fellows saying so, sir; but I did not believe it."

"You did not believe it?" said the Head, raising his eyebrows.

"No, sir. I think it must be some trick; the Bounder—I mean Vernon-Smith is deep enough for anything. He was not insensible when I left him, and he was only fagged out. He was not much more hurt in the scrap than I was. He could have walked home if he had chosen."

"Wharton, do you know what you are saying?"

"I think so, sir."

"You went out specially to find Vernon-Smith, and force a fight on him, I understand?"

"I did, sir. He has injured me, and I wanted to be done with his cunning tricks; I wanted to have the row out and done with."

"You know it was wrong."

"I—I'm afraid I lost my temper, sir; but I told Smithy I was sorry I had hit so hard, before I left him. But he had hit me hard too. You can see that I didn't come through the fight without being hurt."

"I can see that," said the Head.

"I suppose it was carried too far, sir," said Wharton. "I'm sorry for that. But you don't know how that fellow has driven me to it. It's impossible to keep level with him; he's deep—too deep for any of us. That's why I went for him. But I'm sorry I hit so hard, now."

The Head's gaze was still intent upon the face of the captain of the Remove. He seemed perplexed and puzzled.

"If this had been merely a fist fight, Wharton, I should not take a very serious view of it," he said. "Even if carried to a savage excess, there might be excuses. But I fail to see what excuse there can be for your infamous treatment of your Form-fellow."

Wharton started.

"But it was a fist fight, sir," he said.

"Do you mean to say that you used no weapon?"

"Weapon, sir?"

"Yes."

"Of course I didn't!" cried Wharton. "Does Smith say I did? The lying cad——"

"Silence!" said the Head sternly.

"But if Smith says——"

"Vernon-Smith has not spoken a word; he was insensible when he was found in the road, and he is insensible still; and Dr. Short says he will probably not recover consciousness before the morning."

Wharton staggered.

"I—I can't understand it, sir," he said. "He spoke to me just before I left him; he refused my help to get back to the school."

"Are you telling the truth, Wharton?"

"Dr. Locke!"

"Either there is some horrible mistake, or you are the most unmitigated young scoundrel and liar I have ever met," the Head exclaimed.

"Dr. Locke!"

"Are you unaware, Wharton—do you pretend to be unaware—that Vernon-Smith was not injured by fist blows, but by a cruel attack with some heavy weapon—a bludgeon of some sort?"

Wharton's jaw dropped.

"A—a—a bludgeon!" he stammered.

"Yes."

"It's not true!"

"Vernon-Smith is covered with black bruises—his head and shoulders and arms," said the Head quietly. "He has been beaten into insensibility. The doctor even fears that concussion of the brain may follow."

"Impossible!"

"Do you dare to question a medical man's report, and the evidence of our eyes, sir?" the Head exclaimed angrily.

"But—but—but I can't understand it, sir!" gasped Wharton, feeling as if his head were spinning round in his bewilderment. "I never touched Vernon-Smith, excepting with my knuckles, and he was conscious when I left him, and did not look at all likely to faint."

"And you expect me to believe that statement?"

"Yes, sir," said Wharton, with spirit, "I do!"

The Head glanced at Mr. Quelch.

"What is your opinion of this?" he asked.

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"I cannot understand it, sir. I know Wharton has a very hot temper, and I can understand the fight, certainly. It was wrong of him, but I can understand it. But a cowardly assault—I cannot understand that of Wharton. It is not like him—not like the character he has always borne. Wingate will say so too."

"Quite true, sir," said Wingate.

"Thank you, Mr. Quelch," said Wharton, gratefully. "It's a horrible mystery. If Smith has been injured in that way, I didn't do it. Somebody else must have done it after I left him. That's the only thing I can think of."

"That is barely possible, of course," said the Head drily. "You say that you left Vernon-Smith in possession of his senses?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then if he was attacked by another person, he will be quite aware of it?"

"Of course."

"Then I shall leave the whole matter over till the morning," said the Head. "It shall remain in abeyance until Vernon-Smith can speak. By what he says you stand or fall! You may go to your dormitory."

And Harry Wharton went, his brain in a whirl!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.
In Doubt!

HARRY WHARTON went into the Remove dormitory. The Remove were all in bed, and the light was out. Wharton did not turn it on; he undressed in the dark, and went to bed. There was a buss of talk in the dormitory, but no one addressed Wharton. Even Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were silent. They did not know what to say. Wharton went to bed without a word. But Bob Cherry broke the silence at last.

"Harry!"

"Yes, Bob?"

"You've seen the Head?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"He says that Smithy is insensible, and has been beaten by somebody with a bludgeon," said Wharton quietly. "I think he must have been deceived. At any rate, I shan't believe it till I've seen Smithy."

"I've seen him, Harry."

"You have, Bob?"

"Yes; three of us were allowed to go into his room and look," said Bob. "Bolsover and Russell and I."

"Well, I can trust you and Russell," said Wharton. "What was he like?"

"It's true about the bludgeon, Harry."

"Quite true," said Russell.

"True!" muttered Wharton.

"Yes; he's simply a mass of bandages, and quite insensible. There's no trickery about it, Harry. It's genuine enough."

"Then I can't understand it."

"Do you mean to say that you didn't do it, Wharton?" asked Tom Brown.

"Of course I didn't do it," said Wharton fiercely. "Do you think I'm likely to be such a coward and a brute?"

"Well, no; but——"

"But it's been done, Wharton darling," said Micky Desmond. "Sure I'd never thought it of yez; but if you didn't do it——"

"Who did?" said Snoop, with his sneering laugh.

"Yes, who did?" growled Bolsover major. "Answer that, Wharton?"

"I don't know."

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"You did!"

It was a howl of accusation from nearly the whole dormitory.

"Very well," said Wharton quietly, "if you believe I did it, and you think me capable of such a thing, there's no more to be said."

"You did it!" said Stott.

"It was you!"

"We all know you did it!"

"Who else could have done it?"

"Don't tell us rotten yarns!"

"I guess it's too steep, Wharton."

"Very well," said Wharton again. "Think as you like, and I hope you'll have the decency to say you're sorry to-morrow when Smithy is able to speak."

"When Smith's able to speak he will denounce you," said Bolsover major.

"We shall see!"

"Do you really expect Smithy to clear you, Wharton?" asked Tom Brown quietly.

"Yes."

"And you never touched him excepting with your fists?"

"Only with my fists."

"Well, I believe you, for one," said the New Zealand junior, after a pause. "It's a rotten mystery now, but Smithy will be able to clear it up to-morrow."

"And you know I believe you, Harry," said Bob Cherry quickly; "and so does Inky."

"The believefulness is terrific, my worthy chum."

"Yaas, begad," said Lord Mauleverer, "I believe you, Wharton. I know you wouldn't do such a caddish thing, don't you know."

"Thank you," said Wharton quietly. "The other fellows will have to own up to-morrow. Till then, the less said about it the better."

"Well, if you didn't do it, I'll say I'm sorry," grunted Bolsover major. "But if you did do it, you ought to be drummed out of the school!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If I did it I should be expelled, and I should deserve it," said Harry Wharton. "But I did not do it, and I shall be cleared as soon as Smithy can speak."

And Harry laid his head upon the pillow and closed his eyes, and made no further reply to any of the remarks that passed up and down the dormitory. It was some time before the Removites slept. The strange happening had excited them, and they talked about it long before they fell into slumber. There was no doubt in most of the Remove minds that Wharton had done what he was accused of, and he was condemned on all sides. If Vernon-Smith cleared him on the morrow, well and good; but if the Bounder did not clear him, then there were storms ahead for Harry Wharton.

Wharton's sleep was broken and uneasy that night.

He was feeling the effects of the fight with the Bounder, physically, and the mystery of the strange state Vernon-Smith had been found in weighed upon his mind.

He awoke before rising-bell, and lay awake, and in a miserable mood, until the bell clanged out.

He rose with the others, and paid no heed to the expressive looks that were cast at him by the rest of the Remove.

A gloom seemed to hang over Greyfriars that morning.

The doctor from Friardale had not yet come, but the Housedame, who had been watching by Vernon-Smith all night, had given the information that he had not yet opened his eyes.

Wharton went out into the Close, and he found that the other fellows carefully avoided him.

Bob Cherry and Huree Jamset Ram Singh joined him, however, and remained with him to show that they at least were standing by their chum.

Wharton's face was gloomy at breakfast.

His thoughts were black enough.

Overnight, he had deemed that, as soon as the Bounder could speak, he would be cleared. Vernon-Smith would explain what had happened to him, and all would be well.

But in the morning, as he reflected upon the matter, a fearful doubt had crossed his mind. Would the Bounder speak the truth?

Would he?

It depended upon Vernon-Smith whether Wharton's honour was cleared, or whether he was expelled in disgrace from Greyfriars.

Would he let such an opportunity slip?

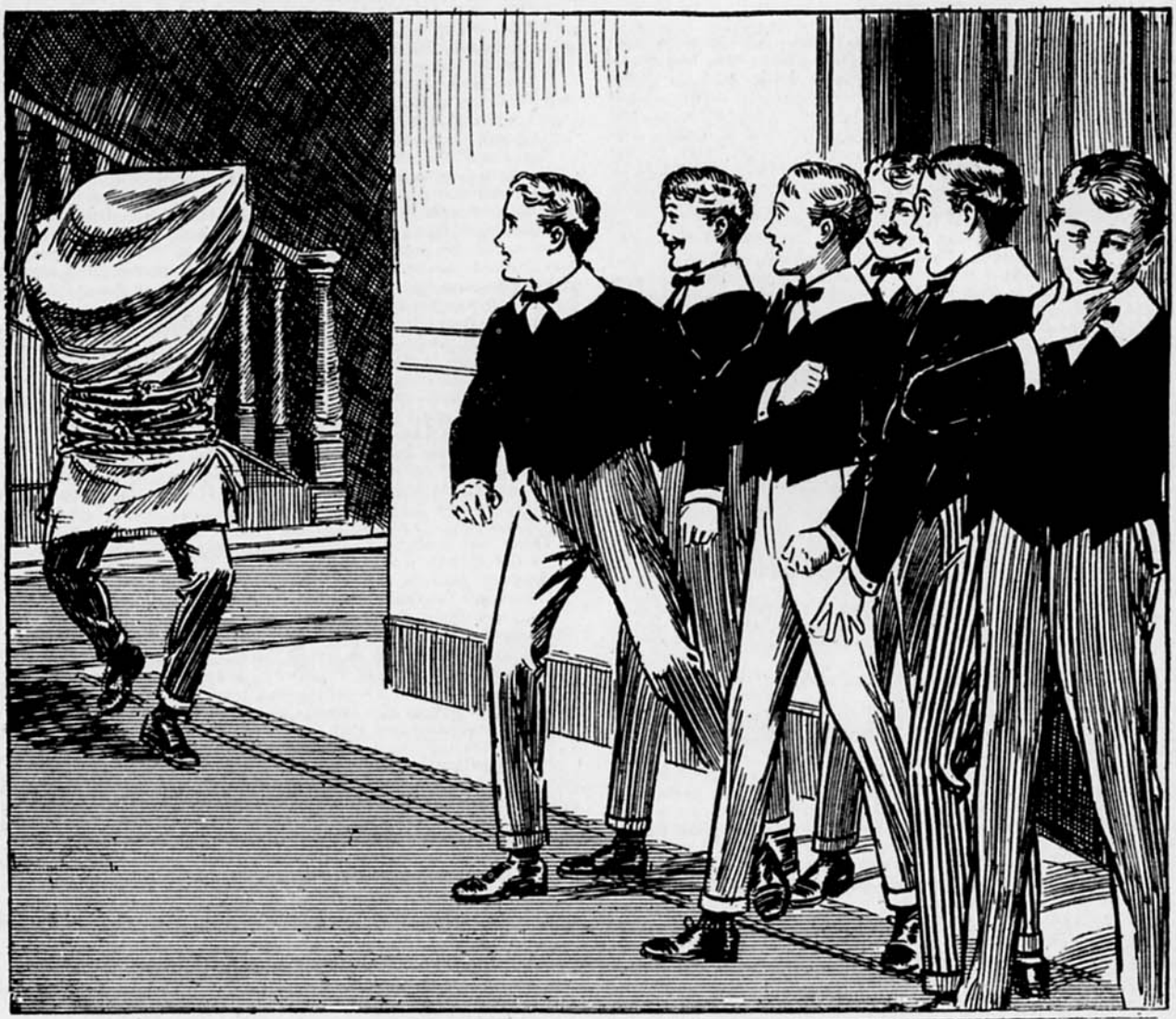
He had but to say a word, and Wharton was ruined. And, after all his plotting, after the punishment his plotting had brought upon him, would he speak the truth? True, in the state he was in now, the truth would be expected of him; but if the Bounder's cunning came back with his consciousness, if he thought in time of the benefit a lie would be to him—what then?

Bob Cherry clapped his chum on the shoulder as they came out after breakfast. Wharton had hardly tasted his meal.

"Buck up, Harry," said Bob. "It can't be long now."

Wharton looked at him.

"Before the Bounder speaks, do you mean, Bob?"



"Lemme out! Lemme out!" came a muffled voice from the sack. "I'm Monteith! Ow! I've been tied up like this by a gang of young ruffians—yow—ow!" The discovery that the person in the sack was a prefect did not seem to make the School House fellows very eager to help him. *The above amusing incident is taken from the splendid, long story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "THE CAPTAIN'S RIVAL," which is published in this week's Grand Number of "The Gem" Library. Out on Wednesday. Price* 1d.)

"Yes."

"I know. But——"

"Then it will all be all right, Harry, won't it?" said Bob anxiously. "I believe what you've told me, so does Inky, so will all the chaps as soon as the Bounder gives the name of the rotter who used him like that."

"Bob!" Wharton's look was haggard. "Do you think he'll tell the truth?"

Bob Cherry started.

"Surely," he muttered, "a fellow in that state—he must tell the truth. Even the Bounder couldn't lie at such a time."

"I wish I could think so."

Bob Cherry groaned.

"Whatever he says will be believed by the whole school," he said.

"I know."

"Harry! It—it's impossible that he could lie! Why, if—if somebody else did this, and he put it on you, he would have to let the real rotter escape."

"He wouldn't mind that—if he could get me kicked out of Greyfriars."

"I—I can't think so, Harry."

Wharton smiled bitterly.

"You mean that you are beginning to doubt me already, Bob?"

Bob Cherry flushed.

"No," he said. "No, not that, Harry. But—but, Harry old fellow, you know you have a queer temper, and the Bounder was enough to drive any fellow wild. You—you are sure you didn't—didn't——"

"Bob!"

"No, no! I know you didn't," said Bob Cherry hastily. "I know you didn't, Harry! But—if the Bounder says you did."

"It will be the finish for me here."

"I'm afraid so."

There was a sound of wheels on the gravel, and the doctor's trap drove up to the School House. Little plump Dr. Short alighted, and passed into the house. He gave Wharton a frowning glance in passing; it was evident that he had heard the whole story, and that he believed the same as all Greyfriars on the subject. The doctor was taken in to see his patient. Harry Wharton went into the Remove Form-room with the rest of the Remove, but he sat silent, distraught, with no thought for his lessons; and Mr. Quelch left him undisturbed. Innocent or guilty, Harry Wharton was in no state for Form work then, and the Form-master judiciously passed him over. Wharton was waiting in agony of mind for news from the sick-room. What would the Bounder say—the truth—or a lie which would drive Harry Wharton in shame and disgrace from his old school?

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.
The Sentence.

DR LOCKE was waiting in his study. The medical man from Friardale had been and gone, and had come again. The morning was wearing away, and the Head of Greyfriars was waiting anxiously for news. Until the Bounder was able to speak, the Head was helpless to deal with the matter. What to think the Head hardly knew. For Wharton's sake, and for the sake of the good name of the school, he would have been glad to learn that Harry was innocent, that it was by another hand that the cowardly assault had been perpetrated. But it seemed too much to believe. Wharton had gone out specially to find Vernon-Smith, he had attacked him; he admitted leaving him lying in the road, too spent to return to the school. That another person, unknown, had found him in such a state, and attacked him again, seemed incredible. But as soon as the Bounder could speak the point would be cleared up.

There was a tap at the door, and Dr. Short entered. The little medico came into the study with a grave face.

"The patient has recovered consciousness," he said.

"Thank goodness," said the Head, in great relief. "Has he spoken?"

"Yes."

"And he has said——"

"That he wishes to speak to you."

"I will go to him at once."

"I have sent you a nurse," said the doctor. "The boy will need great care for some days. He has had a most terrible beating—indeed, if he had not a constitution of iron, the results would have been very serious indeed. Whoever attacked him in that manner was a scoundrel lost to every sense of humanity!"

The Head sighed.

"I fear that it was a boy belonging to my school," he said.

"Then the sooner you send him away, sir, the better it will be for your school and for the other boys," said Dr. Short.

"You are right."

Dr. Locke made his way to the sick-room.

The Bounder was awake.

He lay in bed, bandaged, so that only his eyes were showing. But his eyes were very bright, and they gleamed as the Head came in.

Vernon-Smith was in full possession of his senses now, and he had been thinking. Dr. Locke advanced to the bedside.

"My poor boy!" he said. "I am very sorry to see you in this state. Dr. Short tells me that you wish to speak to me, Vernon-Smith."

"Yes, sir."

"You can tell me who has used you in this way?"

"I do not wish to do so, sir."

"It is known that you and Wharton were fighting last night on the Friardale road," said the Head gently. "Wharton has admitted it. It is impossible to conceal that, Smith."

"I did not want to mention his name, sir," said the Bounder, "I don't want to get him into trouble. He was very wild about the football affair yesterday, and getting put out of the eleven. He put all the blame on me, though it was Wingate who did it all, as Wingate will tell you. I never meant to do him wrong."

"I am sure of it, my boy," said the Head, deeply affected.

"I—I wanted to ask you to overlook what he has done, sir," said Vernon-Smith, in weak tones.

The Head compressed his lips.

"Do you mean the fight, Vernon-Smith?"

"All that he did, sir."

The Head's heart sank.

"You mean that Wharton did this, Smith, that he left you in this state?"

"Hasn't he owned up, sir? I thought you said he had."

"He has admitted fighting with you, Smith. But nothing else. He says that somebody else must have done this to you after he had left you."

A sneering smile—quite his old smile—crossed the Bounder's lips.

"Is his statement false, Smith?"

"I hardly like to say anything about him, sir. I know he was furious, and I do not bear malice. Goodness knows I'm not in a state now to bear malice against anybody," said the Bounder, with a groan.

"Smith! It is your duty to tell me the truth."

"Yes, sir, but I don't want to get a chap expelled from the school."

"If Wharton did this, Smith, he deserves to be expelled—indeed, he deserves to be sent to prison," said the Head warmly.

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Vernon-Smith, I must ask you to put all other considerations aside, and tell me the plain truth," said the Head, gently but firmly. "Did Wharton do this?"

"Yes, sir."

"He beat you in this way, with a bludgeon?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is enough."

"But—but I don't want you to be hard on him, sir——"

"That is for me to decide," said Dr. Locke gently. "Such a boy cannot be allowed to remain at Greyfriars. He is a disgrace to the school."

"Very well, sir. I suppose you know best. But—but you'll tell Wharton that I didn't want him to be punished."

"I will tell him, certainly."

"Thank you, sir."

And the Head left the bedside.

His face was very grim and stern when he went. Not for a second did the slightest doubt cross his mind. Wharton's tale had been improbability itself; and now the victim of the outrage had utterly denied it. Could anything have been more clear? How could the good old doctor suspect that chance had played so strange a part in the affair, and that the Bounder, with almost demoniac cunning, had taken advantage of it, to fix a disgraceful charge upon his rival?

Morning lessons were just over, and the Forms were coming out.

Dr. Locke, as he returned towards his study, came upon the crowd of boys in the passage, and he paused.

The boys were suddenly silent.

The expression upon Dr. Locke's face was hard, cold, and stern as he turned his eyes upon Harry Wharton.

"Wharton!" he said, and his voice was like ice.

Wharton faced him steadily.

"Yes, sir!" he said.

"I have just seen Vernon-Smith! He has recovered sufficiently to speak," said the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

There was a slight buzz, and then silence. The boys hung upon the Head's words. All the Forms were crowding round, seniors and juniors, eager to hear.

Wharton's face was as pale as chalk.

He knew from the doctor's look what had happened. The Bounder had lied!

But he stood as firm as a rock, facing his fate like a brave lad as he was, and the son of a soldier! He knew what was coming, and he faced it—as his father had faced the foe when he had found his death in the far-off Afghan passes.

"Vernon-Smith has told me all!" said the Head.

"If he has told you the truth, sir, I am not afraid!" said Harry.

"This effrontery will not serve you, Wharton! Vernon-Smith first tried to conceal the fact that it was you who had attacked him, from a sense—a mistaken sense—of honour. When he found that I knew the truth he asked me to pardon you. That is impossible."

"And he knew it," said Harry bitterly. "He knew it, or he would not have asked."

"Boy!"

"Has he told you that I attacked him—and injured him in that way—with a weapon?"

"Yes."

"Then he has lied, sir!"

There was a shout from all the fellows, unrestrained even by the doctor's presence.

"Shame!"

Dr. Locke's calm old face flushed with anger.

"I do not wonder that your school fellows cry shame upon you, Wharton!" he said, his voice trembling. "I am ashamed—ashamed that such a boy has ever entered my school! You are a disgrace to Greyfriars."

Wharton stood silent.

Dr. Locke raised his hand.

"You have acted like a ruffian—like a criminal," he said. "Harry Wharton, you are expelled from Greyfriars! Go immediately and pack your box; in half an hour, at the most, I shall expect you to be gone. I shall send a telegram to Colonel Wharton, warning him to expect you. You shall not soil this old school with your presence an hour longer. You have brought disgrace upon your school, disgrace upon all of us, and disgrace upon the honourable name you bear! You are expelled! Do not let me see you again!"

The Head passed on; the rustle of his gown died away!

Wharton stood silent—stunned!

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.
Drummed Out!

GREYFRIARS was in a turmoil.

Harry Wharton had been expelled.

Before the whole school the sentence had been passed, and Wharton, the captain of the Remove, was to go.

Bob Cherry and Inky, faithful to the last, had gone to the dormitory with him to help him pack.

Meanwhile the other fellows had gathered in the Close.

Wharton had been expelled—but that was not enough! That his departure from the school should not lose any element of shame and humiliation, that was what his enemies desired; and all the other fellows, who were not his enemies, fully concurred with them in that.

Almost the whole of the Remove, and the Fourth, and the Shell, and many of the Fifth and the Sixth, had gathered in a crowd, and there was a swarm of fags of the Second and Third. They were all ready for him when he appeared, and among all that crowd there was not one to raise his voice for the condemned junior.

"He's going!" said Bolsover major, "and he's going to be drummed out! That's the way to give him a send-off! Drum him out!"

"Yes, rather."

"Faith, and ye're right."

"Oh, let him alone," said Tom Brown miserably. "He's going—and he's disgraced! No need to rub it in much deeper, I think."

But a howl drowned the voice of the New Zealand junior.

"Shut up!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"He's going to be drummed out—drummed out by the whole school!"

The juinors had made their preparations.

The idea of a drumming-out had caught on like wildfire; it was an unmistakable way of showing the expelled juinor what the school thought of him.

Dr. Locke had feared that the unfortunate junior might be attacked as he left, so strong was the feeling against him, and he had given the prefects instructions to see that nothing of the kind took place.

But any shame and humiliation that did not take the form of actual violence was not likely to be interfered with. Wharton was condemned as much by the seniors as by the juniors. The whole school was against him.

Tin cans and pails, toy drums and sticks and cricket-stumps were in the hands of the drummers-out, all ready for the moment when Harry Wharton should appear—and the crowd watched the doorway with almost wolfish eyes.

There was a sudden roar!

"Here he is!"

"Here's the cad!"

"Here's the rotter!"

Harry Wharton appeared in the doorway of the School House.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, their faces pale and wretched, were with him. They could not help their chum now, but they stuck to him to the last.

The roar from the crowd made Wharton start. In that sea of faces he read only enmity, scorn, hatred! His face went paler.

"Here he is!"

"Have him out!"

Wharton pulled himself together. A bitter smile came upon his lips as he looked over the surging crowd. With a firm step he descended into the Close.

Crash! crash! crash!

It was the first blare of the savage music! The drumming-out had begun!

"You cads—you rotters!" howled Bob Cherry, springing to his chum's side. "Let him alone! He's going—isn't that enough!"

"Stand back, Cherry!"

"I won't!"

"Then we'll jolly soon make you," growled Coker of the Fifth.

"Hands off!"

"Rats!"

Five or six pairs of hands were laid upon Bob Cherry. He struggled desperately, but he was hurled away. Hurree Singh dashed to his aid, and was pitched aside. Wharton clenched his fists; the crowd closed round him, and he was hurried on. Back towards the School House Bob Cherry and Inky were hustled, still struggling in vain. Harry Wharton, surrounded by a crowd hissing and groaning, was hurried towards the gates.

"Hands off the cad!" shouted Bolsover major. "He's not fit to touch! And we don't want the prefects interfering!"

And the juniors gave Wharton room.

He walked on steadily towards the gates.

Round him the crowd surged, and the drumming-out had begun in earnest now.

Bang! bang! bang!

Crash! crash!

"Cad!"

"Rotter!"

"Get out!"

Crash! crash! Bang! Blare!

Wharton strode on steadily, his face pale as death, his brows contracted, his lips set in a tight line. He looked neither to the right nor to the left.

But that march to the school gates was agony to him.

The gates were reached at last; they were open, and Gosling stood there—and even the crusty old face of the school porter was scornful, contemptuous like all the rest.

Crash! crash! crash!

Wharton strode through the gateway!

The gates clanged shut behind him.

Back in the Close, Bob Cherry struggled free from his assailants; but he was not fighting now. The nabob leaned exhausted against the wall. Bob Cherry panted for breath, and there was a sob in his throat.

"You fools! fools! fools!" he panted. "I tell you he's innocent!"

"Shut up!"

"Ring off!"

"I tell you——"

But the roar drowned Bob Cherry's husky voice.

From the gates came a blare of noise. It died away; the drumming-out was over!

Harry Wharton was gone!

. . . . . .

Out in the road, pale, worn, with shame in his face, despair in his heart, the deserted junior tramped on wearily to the railway station, guiltless but condemned—and Drummed Out of Greyfriars!

THE END.

(Next Monday's grand long complete story of Greyfriars School, is entitled "BOB CHERRY'S BARRING-OUT; or, "Vernon-Smith & Co.'s Downfall" and the return of the chums of the Remove Form, by Frank Richards. Order your copy of "The Magnet" Library in advance. Usual price, 1d.)

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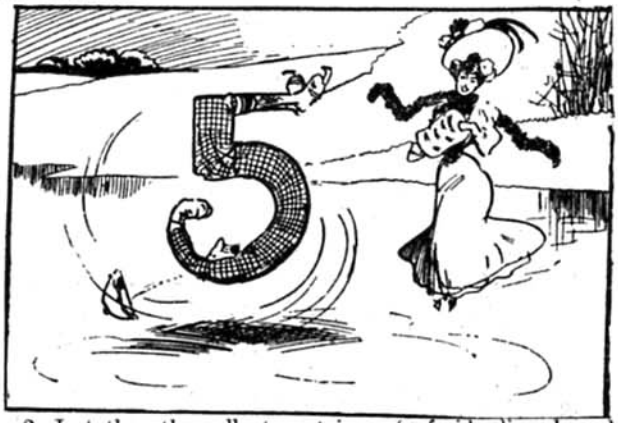
THE MAGNET LIBRARY'S SPECIAL CHRISTMAS HUMOROUS SUPPLEMENT.

HE CUT A FUNNY FIGURE

1. "Oh, yaas!" said Captain Chasemeigh to Miss Prettylips. "Awfully simple to make the figure five, doncherknow! I'll just show you how to do it!"



2. Just then the gallant captain sort of side-slipped, and went over something like this. "That *is* clever," said Miss Prettylips. "It's just like a figure five!"

TWAS MEAT HE LOST

1. "Oh, he can't catch me with a coin on a bit of string. I'll make a dash for it before he guesses I've seen it."

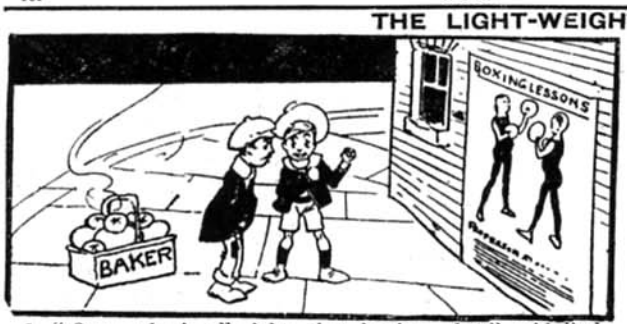
2. But the fellow on the other side of the fence *didn't* pull it away—no. He just caught that meat as it sailed aloft.

THE ONLY HEIR-APPARENT

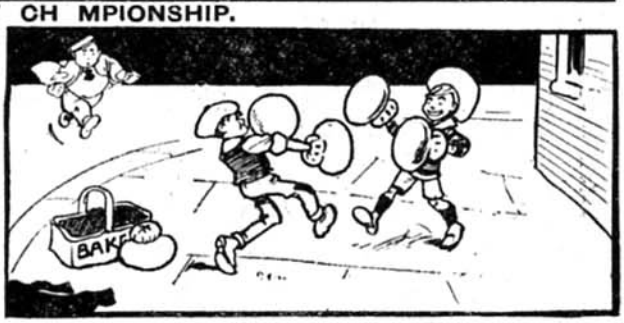
Peggy: "Your pa is entirely bald, isn't he?"

Millionaire's Son: "Yes, I'm the only heir he has left."

THE LIGHT-WEIGHT CH MPIONSHIP.



1. "Oo-er, that's all right, that boxing, eh?" said little Bill the baker's boy. "Yes," said his nice little friend. "I wish we had a pair of gloves, don't you?" "Wait a jiff," answered Bill.

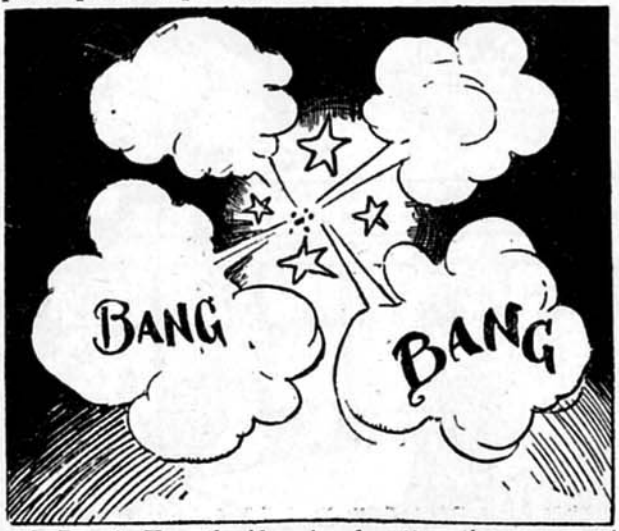


2. "I've got an idea!" And in two ticks they were well at it, using their new loaves as boxing-gloves. But—when the baker came and found them—oh, dear!

THE FATAL KISS!

1. "Odds boddikins! just look at that Arabella! To think we've sailed these corridors for three hundred years, and never tried that," quoth the family ghost to the family ghostess, as they came upon the squire kissing the belle of the ball under the mistletoe.

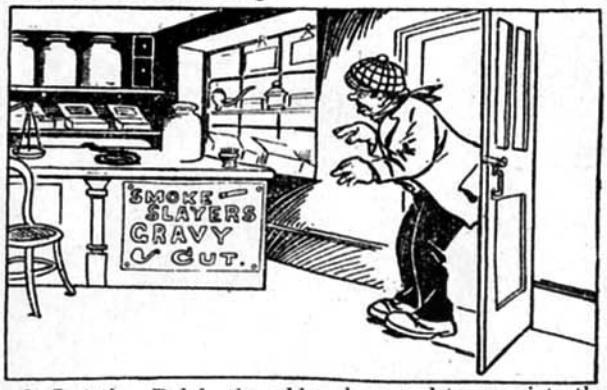
2. "How does it go? Something like this—advance two paces—pout the lips—and then——"



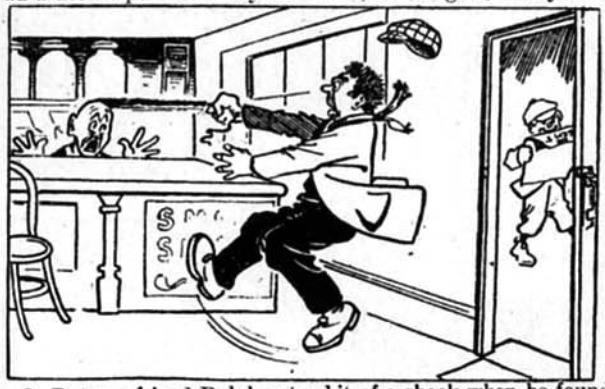
3. Bang! Yes, they'd quite forgotten they were not ordinary mortals, and that kiss ended in an explosion, and they've not walked the north-east wing of Mistletoe Manor since.

A "POPULAR" TALE!

1. "Me likee paper 'Popular' vely muchee; it makee me laughee-laughee orl over my facee!" chortled Sing-Song, the celestial, one slack morning.



2. Just then Ralph, the robber, happened to peep into the tobacconist's. "Hallo, there's a nice plug of thick twist, and the ole chap's a-gorne to 'is sorsidge and mash! I ain't 'ad a decent puff for a day and a 'alf, so 'ere goes, matey!"



3. But our friend Ralph got a bit of a shock when he found he'd got a bunch of fives round Sing-Song's pigtail instead of a nice plug of baccy. What a sell!

NOT A WEIGHT LIFTER.

"Is the baby strong?"

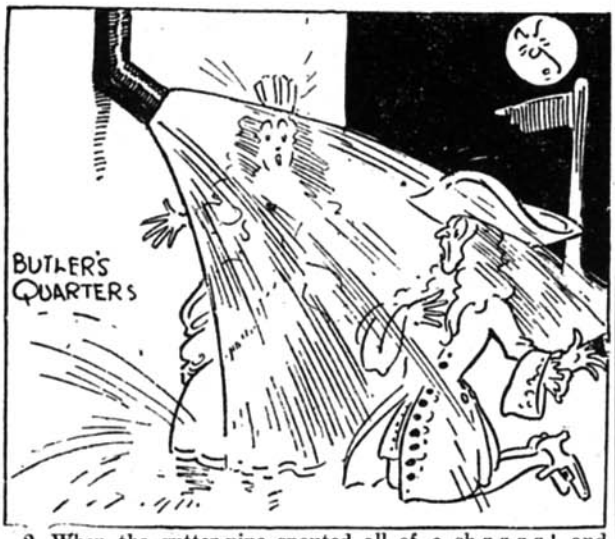
"Well, rather. You know what a tremendous voice he has?"

"Yes."

"Well, he lifts that five or six times every hour!"

AN ICY STORY OF GHOST LIFE.

1. The ghost and ghostess were repeating the old love scene which they had been going through every night since 1750 H.

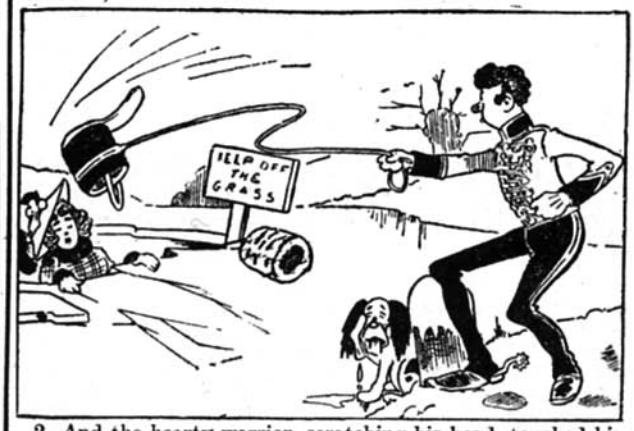


2. When the gutter-pipe spouted all of a sh-z-z-z-z! and put a severe damper on the love-making of the spectral pair.

3. And the worst of it was the wetness froze, and they were both caught in a block of ice. Wilkins, the butler, made quite a fortune over it, showing the strange sight to visitors at a penny (upwards) per peep.

SAVED BY THE BEAR SKIN OF HIS HEAD.

1. "Oh, do save me! The ice is cracking!" cried the dear little girly-girl, as she went into the nasty cold wet water. "Oh, save me, sir!"



2. And the hearty warrior, scratching his head, touched his busby. So he threw it (the busby, not his head) to the dear little damsel, who—

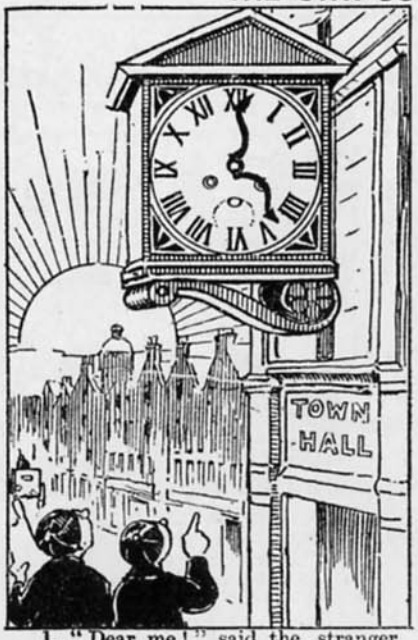
3. Caught hold of it, and was pulled ashore. Yes, the soldier boy's headpiece came in very handy, and no mistake.

TO FIT ANY CASE.

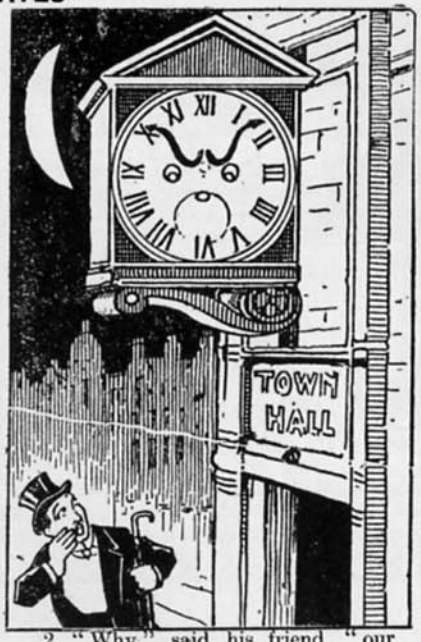
"Do you wish to have the lady's name engraved on this engagement-ring?"

"Not the name, simply—'To my sweetheart.'"

THE STAY-OUT-LATES!



1. "Dear me!" said the stranger to the place. "What extraordinary hands that clock's got! What's the idea of making them curly like that?"



2. "Why," said his friend, "our worthy mayor specially designed those to scowl at the stay-out-lates. It's worked wonders in the town, I tell you!"

YOUR EDITOR'S LITTLE JOKE!

Your Editor received from a reader an imitation chicken, which was so natural that when he threw it into the waste-paper basket, it *laid* there!

POOR HENRY!

Mrs. Henpeckhem: "I mustn't forget to purchase a pair of ten-pound dumb-bells for our boy; then, I think, Henry, we may stroll homewards."

MADE HIM SING SMALL

1. "Get thee hence, thou saucy scullion!" roared the old man, when he discovered the swain saying pretty things. "Hop it! ere I smite thee!"

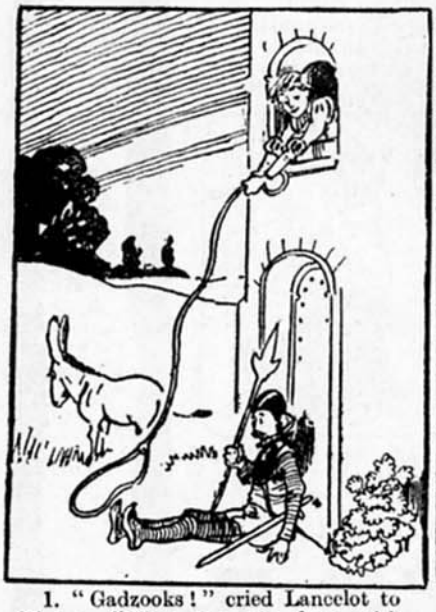
2. Then the swain got up on the toes of his boots, and the old man sang. "OOOHHOO!" he croaked. "Be my son-in-law, laddie, will you?"

UNCLE DICK'S SURPRISE!

1. The boys were very disappointed when Uncle Dick turned up with a large Christmas pudding, for he had promised them each a football.

2. But it wasn't a pudding after all! It was a painted balloon arrangement containing three new footballs. The hot end of Uncle's cigar exploded the artful wheeze

AN ELOPEMENT IN THE OLD DAYS.



1. "Gadzooks!" cried Lancelot to Elaine. "How can we elope with this knave slumbering at the portal, forsooth? But, stay, lend me your rope!"

2. Then did the merry lad lasso the guard's feet, and forthwith attached a carrot to the other end of the rope.

3. Whereupon the donkey grabbed the succulent vegetable, and in this fashion removed the guard. "Hooray!"

COMFORTING!

Doctor: "Most—er—fortunate you consulted me. I'm just the very man to—er—cure you."

Patient: "Ah, that's lucky. You are quite familiar with my complaint then?"

Doctor: "Familiar? My dear sir, I've had it myself—er—this twenty years!"

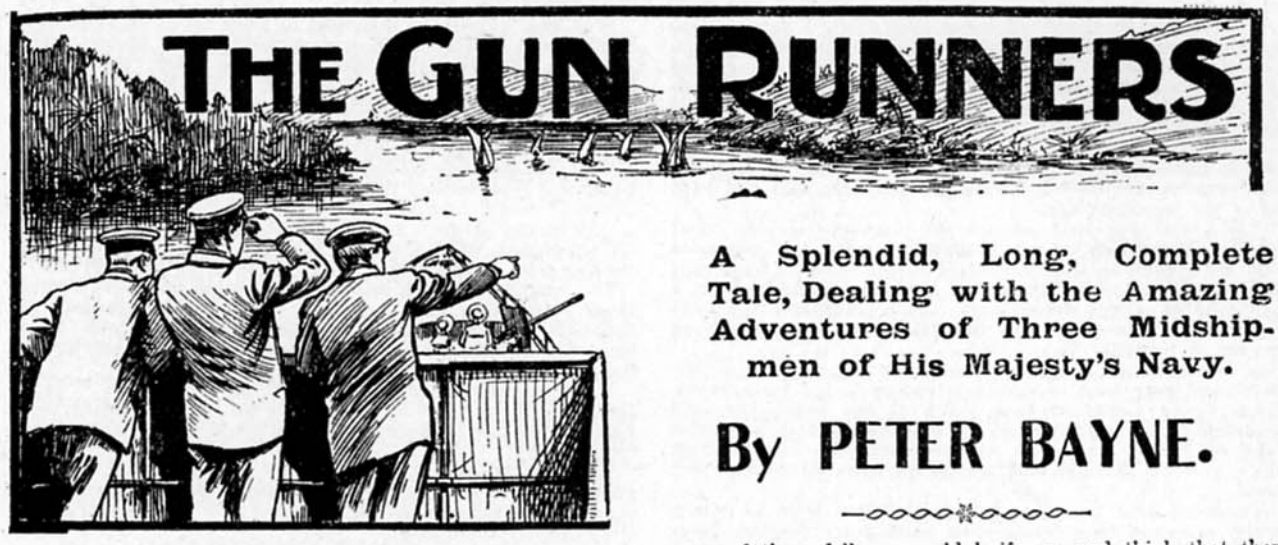
THROUGH HER SPECTACLES.

Freddy (to aunt cutting the Christmas pudding): "Auntie, auntie! Do your glasses magnify?"

Auntie: "Yes, a little."

Freddy: "Then would you please take them off when you cut my piece of pudding?"

OUR SECOND SPLENDID COMPLETE TALE!



A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale, Dealing with the Amazing Adventures of Three Midshipmen of His Majesty's Navy.

By PETER BAYNE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Three Midshipmen—Startling News—The Fight in the Grove—On the Trail.

"I'VE made up my mind," said Dick Daleham, "that we're on a false scent. There's no gun-running done in these parts."

"Don't you be too cocksure!" remarked Frank Langford, dexterously slaying the mosquito that had alighted on the tip of his nose. "Carewe wouldn't have stayed in a beastly hole like this for close on a fortnight unless he was sure of the information he picked up down at Aden. The fact is, that the gun-running gents are lying low, afraid to move so long as we're here, but directly the coast is clear again they'll start in at their old game."

"I'm glad you say when the coast is clear again!" said Rodney Grant, with a laugh. "If Carewe is of your opinion, Langford, we're booked here for no end of a time. It's a bit rotten, of course, sweltering away in an Arab village on the coast of Africa, but we might be stuck in the ice somewhere near the North Pole, and that would be a jolly sight worse."

The three comrades were senior midshipmen, who were qualifying for promotion on the British gunboat Flame, which had been despatched from Gibraltar some weeks before to suppress the secret traffic in weapons of war that was taking place in the Red Sea and along the African Coast. At Aden, the commander of the gunboat, Lieutenant Carewe, had received detailed intelligence to the effect that Pemba, a native port, about two hundred miles north of Suakin, was an important centre for the trade.

So to Pemba the Flame made its way. The place stood on the fringe of a green oasis bordering on the Sahara desert, and was a straggling collection of native huts, inhabited by Arab traders and fishermen, who showed a sullen hostility to their white visitors. Nothing was heard or seen of the gun-runners, and the men of the Flame, becoming impatient at their enforced inactivity, were ardently hoping that Carewe would speedily make up his mind to depart for some place where there was a greater possibility of meeting with the enemy.

The three middies had come ashore for a saunter through the town, in the cool of the evening. The sun had set, but the moon and stars made it as light as day. There were crowds of natives in the streets, which resounded with a babble of talk in all the dialects of Northern Africa. Now and again a long string of camels, laden with bales of merchandise, passed by on the first stage of their journey across the desert.

"Let's have a squat, you chaps," suggested Rodney Grant, leading the way to the palm-shaded court of a native hotel. "We can get some sherbet here, too. I'm as dry as a limekiln."

He ordered the sherbet, which was brought to the bamboo table at which he and his chums were seated by an Arab waiter, whose merry, good-humoured face was in striking contrast to the sullen, scowling looks cast at the middies by the other occupants of the courtyard.

"We don't seem to be very popular here," said Frank Langford, laughingly. "I reckon that if they dared to some of these fellows would knife us, and think that they were doing quite the proper thing. It's some time since I saw a more scoundrelly-looking lot. Wonder who they are? Travellers by the look of them."

"Traders, I expect," answered Grant. "There's a lot of them here just now, loading up for the journey across the desert. Some of 'em go mighty long distances, too, journeying on for three or four months at a time."

"I say," whispered Dick Daleham, putting down his glass, "do you see the chap who's just come in? If he's not a white man then I've never seen one."

The individual referred to, who had ridden up to the steps of the courtyard on a splendid Arab horse, paused a few moments before going on into the hotel to look round at those sitting outside. He was a tall, gaunt man, dressed in a white linen riding-suit, and with a big solar topee on his head.

His face was tanned a dark walnut brown by sun and wind. It was thin, scarred deeply across the right cheek, and lit up by a pair of dark eyes, whose expression was one of gloomy sternness and cruelty. A pointed beard and carefully-trimmed moustache gave him somewhat the appearance of a Frenchman. A couple of holstered revolvers hung from his waist-belt, in which there was also placed a hunting-knife.

"Hang it!" said Langford impulsively. "What a brute the man looks, to be sure—worse than an Arab slave-dealer!"

The remark, uttered aloud, must have been overheard by the new-comer, for he darted a savage glance at the speaker and dropped his hand to the hilt of the knife in his waist-belt. Thinking better of it, however, he moved on across the courtyard into the building, with a cold and sneering smile on his lips.

"Langford, my lad," said Rodney Grant, "you'll never do to handle a delicate situation. The gent heard what you had to say about him, and if ever he meets you alone, in some nice, quiet spot, then look out for trouble!"

"Fudge!" exclaimed Langford. "I'll know how to deal with him if he tries to play me any tricks. Who the dickins can he be, though? No ordinary trader, that's a certainty. Shall I go into the hotel and find out?"

Rodney Grant shook his head.

"No use," he said. "You'd discover nothing. I've thought of a better plan," he added, rapping the table with his empty glass. "We'll see what can be done by a little bribery."

As the waiter who had served him before came up, Grant took a silver coin from his pocket, and showed it to the other.

"That's for you," he said, "if you'll tell me the name of the white man who's just entered the hotel."

The eyes of the Arab glittered greedily, but at the same time a look of fear showed in his face, and he shook his head.

"No can do," he said. "That man very powerful. Suppose I tell you his name, he find out, and I lose my place here."

"Don't let that trouble you," Grant replied, taking another coin from his pocket. "If you lost your place here

on that account, we'd find you another one. Here are a couple of rupees for you."

"Very well," said the waiter, as he took the money. "I will tell you, but not here, for no safe to be seen speaking to you. Meet me in half an hour at the end of the road, near the big palm grove, and you shall know what you wish to."

"We're on the track of something good, I fancy!" remarked Rodney Grant, as the waiter hurried away. "A powerful chap—eh? That must mean that he's engaged in some illegal undertaking or other, in which the Arab traders are interested. What if he should be taking a hand in this gun-running business?"

"In that case," said Langford, his eyes sparkling, "we should have cause to rejoice. But do you think that the chap you've just bribed can be trusted? He may not turn up at the meeting-place."

"We must risk that, of course," answered Grant; "but I believe the fellow intends to keep his word. At the same time it's as well to be on our guard against possible treachery, and one of us had better skip off back to the gunboat for a boat-load of armed bluejackets. They can land near the grove without being seen by the Arabs, and stand by to act in case of necessity."

A few minutes later the three comrades left the courtyard, and were soon in the road leading to the palm grove. Here Frank Langford took leave of the other two and returned to the gunboat, which was anchored in a narrow inlet of Pemba Bay, that, sheltered on each side by high cliffs, commanded the only navigable entrance to the port itself.

The road that Grant and Dick Daleham were in was a lonely one, and they reached the palm grove without meeting a single soul. After waiting for some time they caught sight of the Arab from the hotel hastening towards them. Upon seeing them he hurriedly waved his arm.

"Wants us to keep out of sight," said Grant, stepping back amongst the palms. "He's evidently afraid of being followed and spied upon. So you've got here?" he added, as the Arab came up. "Well, you shall have a few more rupees if the news you bring is worth the money."

"It is worth it," the man replied eagerly, in broken English. "You ever heard of Fernand Lefarge? He the same you saw just now."

Rodney Grant and his chum shot a quick glance of excited interest at each other. Fernand Lefarge! They had heard of him often enough, the amazingly clever and daring adventurer, who was the chief organiser of the traffic in firearms, that the British were incessantly waging war against.

A Belgian by birth, Lefarge had loomed largely for many years in the dark pages of African history. After making a huge fortune as a slave-dealer, he had turned his attention to gun-running, buying vast quantities of firearms through secret agents in all parts of the world, and then disposing of them to the wild tribesmen of the mountain and the desert at an immense profit.

"Fernand Lefarge!" muttered Dick Daleham, his lips twitching with excitement. "It sounds too good to be true."

"Are you sure of what you tell us?" asked Grant. "How do you know that the man is Lefarge?"

"I've seen him often before," answered the Arab. "He was here two months ago, when a fleet of junks, loaded with guns, came into port. The junks came much sooner than they were expected to. They stayed here for weeks, and Lefarge went away, for what purpose I cannot tell you. Early one morning, two weeks ago, the junks sailed out to sea. The same day your gunboat came here."

"The beggars had got wind of our coming!" exclaimed Grant, who had listened to what was told him with the greatest eagerness and attention. "That's why they went off in such a hurry. But why should Lefarge be here now? He must have known days ago that the Flame was in port."

The Arab, looking cautiously round, sank his voice to a whisper.

"He come here to meet those men you saw in the courtyard," he said. "They belong chiefs and traders, who have come a long, long way to buy guns. No guns here, but somewhere else. They start on the journey there with Lefarge before the morning."

"Do you know where this place is?"

The Arab shook his head.

"That is known only to Lefarge," he said, "but I believe that it is at Dembea, where the lake——"

His utterance ended in a gurgling cry as a broad-bladed spear, hurled by an invisible hand, pierced his broad chest. Throwing up his arms he pitched backwards to the ground. Before the chums could move a step a crowd of white-robed Arabs dashed out from amongst the palm-trees and surrounded them.

"This way, lads!" shouted Rodney Grant, hoping desperately that Dick Daleham and the bluejackets had landed and would hear his cry for help. "Make straight for the palms."

A crushing blow over the mouth sent him reeling. Seized by each arm, he was dragged away, fighting like a lion, while a shower of blows rained down upon his body. More fortunate than his comrade, Langford had knocked down the first Arab to attack him and snatched a long spear out of the grasp of the fallen foeman.

With this weapon he managed to keep his enemies at bay. Exasperated by the unexpected opposition, the leader of the Arabs, a gigantic fellow armed to the teeth, snatched a revolver from his belt and levelled it at the lad. Before his finger pulled the trigger a loud report rang out, and he fell to the ground, a bullet through his brain.

The next moment, with a rousing cheer, a party of bluejackets, led by Dick Daleham, rushed at the Arabs with fixed bayonets. The sons of the desert broke and fled in wild confusion in every direction.

"Hold on, there!" roared Grant, as the bluejackets set off in pursuit of the enemy. "We can deal with them another time. It's a quick run to the town we must do now."

The men instantly fell into line, and set off down the Pemba Road at a smart trot. On the way, Grant explained the situation to Dick Daleham, who gave vent to a shout of delighted glee when he heard that Fernand Lefarge was at the hotel.

"We must nab him at any cost!" he exclaimed. "How Carewe will open his eyes when we go back on board with Lefarge prisoner! We ought to get promotion straight away for the job!"

"We've not caught Lefarge yet," said Langford. "It's going to be no easy capture. Pity we've not enough men to surround the hotel. As it is, we must rush it back and front. We're nearly there now."

As they came into the lighted streets of the town progress was difficult owing to the crowds of natives, who, yelling and screaming with fright and excitement, ran to and fro in a disorderly mob. The bluejackets forced a way through the swarming mass with admirable patience and self-restraint, but when they reached the hotel there was a deserted look about the place that told them they had arrived a few minutes too late.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Rodney Grant. "The birds have flown!"

He darted across the courtyard into the building, half a dozen eager bluejackets at his heels, to be met by the landlord, a rascally half-caste white, named Fornam, who had been regarded with suspicion by the British authorities for a long time past.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" blusteringly demanded the landlord. "You've no right to bring an armed force into this house."

Grant pushed the man aside.

"Take five men and search every room in the place, Daleham," he said. "You, Langford, see that no one leaves by the back way while I question this fellow. Now, then," he added sharply, turning to Fornam, "where is Fernand Lefarge and the men who came here to meet him?"

The half-caste started, and the colour of his face turned to a sickly hue, while his hands shook and trembled as though smitten with an ague. Little had he dreamed that the midshipman knew of Lefarge being there.

"You must be mistaken," he said cringingly. "I know no one of that name."

A stern look flashed in Rodney Grant's eyes.

"I've no time to waste with you," he said. "Unless you tell me the truth immediately, I shall have you placed under arrest and taken on board the Flame as a prisoner of war. Now, then, smart with your answer, or——"

Promptly responsive to his signal, two sturdy bluejackets stepped up to Fornam and gripped him on either shoulder. The half-caste, whining for mercy, fell on his knees at the midshipman's feet.

"Fernand Lefarge, curses on his head, has gone!" he said. "He came here to meet some Arab traders, men from the interior, and I could not refuse to have him, or he'd have burnt the place over my head. He saw you talking to the Arab waiter, suspected something, and sent some spies after you. Directly the firing started he and his friends rode off. By now they must be a mile or two away."

"Which way did they go?"

"To the south," was the answer. "They were mounted on fleet horses. It will be impossible for you to overtake them."

As he spoke a gleam of vindictive malice shone in Fornam's shifty eyes.

"That's enough for the present," said Grant, knowing it was useless to question the crafty half-caste further, "but until the commanding-officer of the Flame has come to a decision on the facts of the case, you'll remain here in custody. You take charge, Langford, while I go on board and make a report."

Twenty minutes later, Lieutenant Carewe heard the amazing news that Fernand Lefarge, to capture whom he would have willingly sacrificed a year of his life, had been to Pemba that evening. His ebullition of angry disappointment was pardonable in the circumstances, for the Flame was his first command, and he was as ambitious as he was dashing and brave.

He went ashore at once with Grant, and proceeded to the hotel, where he had a short but completely satisfactory interview with the half-caste landlord. Under the threat of being put in irons and sent to Aden, the fellow told all he knew concerning Lefarge. His story was identically the same as the one the midshipmen had heard from the Arab waiter.

Forced by the arrival of the Flame to give up Pemba as a base of operations, Lefarge had gone south to Lake Dembea, from which far distant part of the interior he had arrived that day to meet several Arab chiefs and traders with whom he was negotiating for the sale of several hundred thousand rifles.

These rifles were on board the sailing vessels which had so narrowly escaped being taken by the Flame a fortnight before, a fact that made Carewe rage and lament afresh when he heard of it.

"What cursed luck!" he exclaimed irritably. "To have such a cargo as that under our very noses almost, and then to let it go. I'd like to kick myself for a mile!"

He strode up and down in gloomy silence for a few moments. Then he laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"We've been done brown," he said, "but the game's only just starting, and our chance will come to turn the tables on Lefarge sooner or later. We know at least where to look for him, and we ought to be at Lake Dembea in time to capture that big cargo of rifles, at any rate."

"Shall we leave port to-night, then?" asked Rodney Grant.

"Yes," Carewe answered, "we shall leave to-night."

The three midshipmen exchanged glances expressive of profound satisfaction and delight, while the listening bluejackets could scarcely refrain from giving vent to a lusty cheer. An hour later the Flame was steaming out of port southward bound.

"I'm jolly thankful to see the last of that place!" said Frank Langford, as he and Grant watched the lights of Pemba from the deck of the gunboat. "What a lucky thing it was for us that you thought of tipping that Arab waiter! Poor beggar! It cost him his life, though."

"Not a bit of it!" answered Grant. "He was picked up and brought aboard, where he is now, and old Doc. Polson told me a few minutes ago that he'll be up and about again in a day or two. The blade of that spear gave him a frightful gash, but it was a clean wound, and no bone was broken. He'll be put ashore at Suakin, and Carewe has promised to see that he's given employment there. Taking things all round," he added, "I'm not sorry that Lefarge gave us the slip."

"Same here," said Langford. "If we'd nabbed him at Pemba we should have been done out of this run south most likely. You turning in now? Think I'll do the same."

They went below to the cabin, which they shared with Dick Daleham, who was already curled up in his bunk fast asleep. A few minutes later the snoring of the three midshipmen mingled in a sonorous melody. Had they possessed the power of looking into the future, however, it is questionable if their repose would have been of so unbroken a nature.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The River of Death.

"WHAT'S the depth now?"

"It varies a lot," said Rodney Grant. "But at the last sounding it was close on ten fathoms, and in that a shallow-draught gunboat like the Flame is as safe as she would be in the open ocean. The mischief of it is, though, that this stream has never been properly charted. It's something like feeling your way along a strange road on a dark night. For all we know to the contrary there may be a lovely sandbank waiting for us round the next bend."

"Pleasant prospect!" remarked Dick Daleham, with a cheery grin. "No wonder Barham looks as though he was leading some forlorn hope or other. Now, if I was navigating officer, I should give the order to go full speed ahead, I fancy, and chance my luck."

"Then you'd wreck the ship," said Grant, "be tried by court-martial, and dismissed the Service."

"I don't know so much about it," Daleham replied, as, leaving the ward-room, he went up on deck with the other. "The Flame can do twenty knots when she's pushed to it, and going at that rate she'd shear a way through any sandbank to be met with in the river. As it is, she isn't making enough speed to do it."

There was a good deal of truth in the last statement, for the gunboat was nosing her way through the water at no more than four knots an hour, a speed that Lieutenant Barham, the cautious navigating officer on the bridge, deemed it too risky to exceed in the circumstances.

Over a week had elapsed since the hurried departure of the Flame from Pemba, and she was now steaming up one of the many rivers that flow into the Indian Ocean from the immense tract of country known as the Upper Nile Valley. The stream was marked on the chart as the Hiwash, but little was known of it, and the Flame was the first ship of her class to attempt the voyage.

Nothing had been seen of the gun-runners, and Carewe concluded that they were making the journey to Lake Dembea by some river whose shallow waters would prevent the gunboat from following in pursuit. He confidently hoped to reach the lake before them, and make preparations for giving them an unwelcome surprise upon their arrival.

The sanguine spirit of their commanding officer was shared by his subordinates, and the slow progress that the Flame was making caused a deal of good-natured grumbling amongst the men. But Barham knew his business, few better, and upon him chiefly rested the responsibility of bringing the gunboat safely to her destination.

"It's getting shallower again," said Daleham, as the leadsman sounded a depth of nine fathoms. "That's a drop of a fathom in something less than three minutes. That doesn't promise well for more speed."

Grant looked at the gorgeous blaze of light in the western sky.

"We shall slow down some more soon," he said, "in any case. It'll be dark in twenty minutes. Hallo!" he added, as Langford stepped out of the chart-room. "What's the run to-day, so far?"

"A measly forty miles since noon!" Langford replied. "At this rate we sha'n't be at Dembea before next week."

"It's no use worrying," said Grant lightly. "Better late than never, you know, Langford. Come and join us in a promenade."

The three chums set out for a brisk walk up and down the deck. They were unable to see beyond the riverside owing to the density of the forest growth that came right down to the edge of the water on either bank. The river was completely shut in as far as the eye could see. In places the outgrowing branches of the trees almost met overhead in a canopy of foliage whose various tints rivalled the colours of the rainbow.

"See that crocodile yonder?" exclaimed Daleham, pointing to a long, black object moving sluggishly through the oily water. "What a monster! There's another, and another still, by George! We seem to have struck a regular colony of the brutes."

Running to the taff rail, he and his chums watched the movements of the crocodiles, which were moving to and fro in a wide inlet of the stream. They were of enormous size, and were evidently hungry, for their huge jaws kept on opening and shutting with a wicked display of teeth.

"Wouldn't I just like to train a Maxim on them!" said Langford, as the gunboat steamed on past the inlet. "Such brutes ought to be shot on sight!"

"The worst of it is you can't shoot 'em," remarked Grant, "that is——"

A strange, muffled cry rang out, followed immediately by the sound of a heavy fall on the bridge.

"It's Barham," said Grant quickly.

Followed by Daleham and Langford, he darted across the deck and sprang up the bridge steps. A terrible sight met his horrified gaze. There on the bridge lay Barham, his hands clenched tightly in the agonies of death, an arrow driven clean through his throat.

"Great Heaven!" whispered Grant, as he bent down and looked at the fallen man. "He's dead! Fetch Polson at once!"

The doctor had already been called by Langford, and he came running to the scene of the tragedy. Kneeling down, he placed his hand over Barham's heart. It had ceased to beat. With a pale, shocked face, he examined the iron head of the weapon.

"It's as I thought," he exclaimed. "The head of the arrow was dipped in deadly poison. A mere scratch from it would prove fatal."

"Then there's no hope?" asked Carewe.

Polson sadly shook his head.

"None whatever," he answered. "The poor fellow died at once."

The commanding-officer turned his head, his lips quivering with emotion, and for a moment he was silent. Then, his eyes flashing fire, he signalled down to the engine-room. The Flame lost headway, boats were lowered, and in a marvellously short space of time thirty armed bluejackets, burning to avenge the death of the murdered officer, were on shore.

The arrow had been shot from the right bank of the river, where the tropical growth was thickest, and the men, divided into three parties, commenced a feverishly active search for the assassin. The searchlight of the Flame guided them in their work, for night had fallen, and the forest was shrouded in darkness.

Hatchet and cutlass cleared a way through the otherwise unimpenetrable wall of verdure, and the swift trampling of feet sounded in every direction. Now and again some wild animal would scuttle away amongst the bushes, to draw the quick fire of half a dozen rifles, but sign or sound of human foe there was none.

Working back down the bank of the stream, the men came to the inlet that the gunboat had passed a few minutes before Barham was struck down. The glare of the searchlight showed that it shallowed down to a swamp near the shore. Clumps of reeds and water grass grew in the black mud, and fringed the slippery banks round which the bluejackets made their way.

"What's this?" cried Dalcham eagerly, bending his head to peer at the ground. "Footmarks, as I live, and those not long made!"

The prints, clearly defined in the slime, had been made by the bare foot. They led in a winding direction along the edge of the bank towards the bushes. It was evident that the person leaving them had kept up with the gunboat until he had reached a spot from which he could shoot the poisoned arrow without any fear of being seen by those on board the vessel.

Quick and active as a pack of bloodhounds, the bluejackets followed the trail, with Dalcham leading them on. Suddenly the midshipman sank in the mud up to his knees. By a desperate effort he floundered out of the quagmire, only to sink into one deeper still a moment later. The water oozed up in an oily stream round his waist.

Seven or eight bluejackets rushed forward to rescue him, but the bog, now quaking hideously, opened to drag them down in a score of places.

"Keep back!" shouted Dalcham, cool and observant in spite of the peril that threatened him. "Hold out a rifle, one of you, and I can hang on to it."

Lying flat on his chest, a tall, long-armed marine thrust out his rifle, but Dalcham, try how he would, was unable to reach it. The mud was now almost up to his armpits, and every movement that he made caused him to sink deeper into the slime.

"Hold on!" cried Grant, snatching a hatchet from one of the men near him, and running to a slender young palm growing close by. "We'll soon have you out on firm ground, old chap. All you need do is to keep your head above the water."

Three or four lusty blows of the hatchet brought the palm crashing to the ground. Lifting it up, Grant and a couple of his men ran to the edge of the bog. As they did so, a shout of horrified warning burst from a dozen throats.

Converging from different points of the inlet, moving through the mud and water with amazing rapidity, were five enormous crocodiles. Their objective was the midshipman struggling for his life in the treacherous morass that held him a helpless prisoner. He saw the brutes swarming towards him, jaws agape, eyes shining fiendishly, and in that moment he experienced all the anguish of a terrible death.

"Fire!" roared Rodney Grant. "Shoot at their eyes!"

A deafening report rang out as the men fired their rifles. Three of the crocodiles, wounded to death, sank in a welter of muddy foam. The fourth dived madly under the water.

The fifth brute, uninjured by the bullets that smashed against its hard, scaly hide, moved onward in an undeviating course. It was out of the water now, on the edge of the bog itself, and not a yard away from its intended victim.

The great jaws opened to close over Dick Dalcham's head. There was a cry, a wild rush, and the report of a sharp explosion. Leaping to the rescue, Grant had fired his rifle point-blank into the gaping throat of the hideous reptile. Coughing violently, the crocodile rolled over, lashing furiously with its tail, and slowly sank out of sight.

Taking a firm grasp of the palm-tree held out to them, the two midshipmen were dragged out of danger, breathless, exhausted, but little the worse for the ordeal.

"Thanks!" said Dalcham to his chum. "That shot of yours was a beauty. I'd forgotten all about those crocs. until they tried to rush me."

"So'd I," Grant answered. "They're done for now. Phew! What a mess we're both in! Now to follow up that trail."

The interrupted search was continued, and the footprints that had first excited attention were followed until they were lost in the bush. Nothing of a more tangible nature was discovered, and an hour later, weary and disheartened, the search-party rowed back to the gunboat.

The impossibility of finding the unknown assassin was brought home to the mind of everyone on board. In the wild and trackless forest he would be immune from the pursuit of an army of men who had never been there before.

"I'd anchor alongside the shore until morning," said Carewe, "if I believed any useful purpose would be served by it."

"None would be," Polson, the doctor, replied. "And an anchored ship might tempt the scoundrel who shot poor Barham to repeat his performance."

"More than one man had a hand in that, Polson," said Carewe. "You can depend upon it that we're being spied upon by a band of Fernand Lefarge's native spies. No doubt they're watching us at this very moment from each bank of the stream."

"It seems to me a curious thing that Barham should have been the chosen victim," Polson remarked thoughtfully "Why did they fix on him?"

Carewe's eyes flashed.

"Simply because Barham was the best navigating officer this side of Suez," he answered. "Not another man in the Navy could equal him in knowledge of this part of the world. No one else but himself could have brought the Flame so far without an accident. The Arabs knew it, and so they've put him out of the way, just when his skill and caution were required the most."

"Isn't there anyone to take his place?"

"Oh, yes," Carewe replied, with a bitter laugh; "we all of us know a little of navigation, but not enough to take the Flame to Lake Dembea without running a big risk of wrecking her on the way. Barham knew this river. He sailed up it once on a captured slave-dhow, and did a lot of Government surveying all round the lake. His death has placed us in a nice fix."

The doctor was silent for a moment or two.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Do!" said the other. "Why, go on to the lake, of course, and smash up Lefarge and his gang. To return to Suakin for a pilot is out of the question. That would mean a delay of four or five days at the least, and we should get to Dembea to find the birds missing."

There was a cry, a heavy fall, the rush of feet across the deck. The two men, a wild fear at their hearts, ran out of the chart-room. One glance at the bridge told them everything.

"Heaven!" muttered Polson shudderingly. "Another one!"

The second lieutenant, Osborne by name, who had taken the place of Barham on the bridge, was lying at the foot of the steps. Blood was trickling from his right side, from which protruded the feathered top of an arrow exactly like the one that had slain his predecessor at the post of duty.

He had pitched backwards off the bridge on to the deck. As Polson bent over him he looked up into the doctor's face, his lips twitched, and then his head fell back. He, like Barham, had gone to his eternal rest.

The men came crowding forward, with pale, set faces, impotent rage, hate, and grief gripping hold of them. Brave and fearless they were, scorning hardship and danger, but here was something utterly new in their experience of warfare. Out of the black night, the dense, impenetrable forest that shut them in like a vast shroud, death sprang upon them.

"Dalcham," whispered Rodney Grant, "swing the searchlight round for a minute. Then flash it straight along the edge of the stream."

The white glare of the searchlight moved up-stream. Suddenly it swung round again, and Grant, with a thrill of fierce joy, threw up his rifle and fired at the savage face that was visible above the bushes at the side of the bank.

Shot through the brain, the assassin bounded convulsively into the air, crashed into the bushes, and toppled over the edge of the bank into the river. A savagely exultant cheer rose from the crew of the gunboat. There was not a man amongst them who did not envy Rodney Grant for the revenge he had taken.

"That is only one of them," said Carewe gloomily. "There are more of the cowardly hounds on the watch."

The searchlight was kept burning throughout the night. The quick-firing guns were trained on either bank of the river. Every man remained at his post. Yet, in spite of all that armed strength and iron discipline could do to avert disaster, the flying death that came from the forest claimed two more victims.

They were able seamen, one an old, grizzled veteran, and the other a young fellow who, but a few months before, had parted from his sweetheart in an English village. In each case a poisoned arrow was the cause of death. There was no remedy for the poison. Its deadly properties took instant effect.

Shot and shell swept the riverside, tore huge furrows in the

bank, and flattened tree and bush. In their rage and fury the men of the Flame would have gone ashore and hunted all night for their hidden foes. But Carewe knew that such a search would be as useless as the previous one.

Against the elusive enemy who had the mighty forest to shield them, the gunboat and its armed crew were powerless to take effective action.

A few half-naked savages, with bows and poisoned arrows, dealt out death to the men of the mightiest fighting force in the world. One had paid the penalty of his treacherous daring, but only one, and there were more to take his place.

The night seemed an age in passing. At last the pale, grey light of dawn crept up the sky. Then the pealing music of the bugle called the crew to muster on deck. Soon after sunrise the bodies of the gallant men slain while at their duty were committed to the keeping of the river which had borne them onward to the fate awaiting them.

With her flag at half-mast, with grief and gloom at the hearts of her men, the Flame steamed on into the unknown.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Night Attack—The Flame Captured—In Retreat—The Cave of Refuge.

"THANK goodness," said Rodney Grant, "we shall be there to-morrow!"

"And before night comes on," added Dick Dalcham jubilantly, "the gun-runners will know what it means to face the crew of a British gunboat. But I don't suppose they'll put up a fight. We shall have them on the run the moment they get wind of our coming, and that'll mean a nice long chase after the beggars across country."

Frank Langford looked a little dubious.

"Don't count the chickens before they're hatched," he remarked. "The gun-runners know already that we're after them, and if they stay to fight us it'll be because they fancy they've a good chance of winning. Otherwise, they'll scoot long before we get to the lake."

The three midshipmen were poring over a map in the chart-room of the Flame. It was late in the afternoon, and the gunboat, with Lieutenant Carewe on the bridge, was making a steady seven knots an hour. Two days had passed since the fateful night when Barham and his comrades had been killed by the poisoned arrows, but in the meantime there had been no repetition of the tragedy.

The vigilant watch that was maintained every minute of the day and night no doubt helped greatly to keep the lurking danger at a distance. Then again, Carewe, thoughtful for the welfare of his men, was keeping the gunboat on her up-stream course at a speed that the ill-fated Barham would have considered as highly dangerous to the safety of the ship.

"Pooh!" said Dalcham, after Langford had spoken. "You talk like an old woman, Langford, as you'll be ready to admit when we've captured Lefarge and his happy band."

They left the chart-room, and Grant went up on to the bridge.

"We ought to make Dembea early in the morning, sir," he said to Carewe. "Another hundred miles will see us there. I've just been marking up the chart. Shall I relieve you, sir?"

The other shook his head. There was a hard, strained look in his face, for the anxiety of the last few days had told on him far more than he would have cared to confess to anyone.

"No," he said. "I shall keep on for another hour or so, and then Pritchard can relieve me in the usual course of duty."

After his young subordinate had gone, Carewe glanced at the setting sun with an anxious eye. There was a presentiment of coming disaster in his mind that he could not shake off. It had been with him all day, and now, with night drawing near, it became stronger and more insidious in its effects upon the man.

The strain upon his strength, bodily and mental, had wrought a subtle change in him. He had been practically without sleep since the night of the tragedy, and that had broken down his bold confidence, and made him a prey to all sorts of nervous doubts and fears that he would have laughed to scorn a week before.

"I never imagined that I should ever suffer from jumpy nerves," he muttered, with a grim little laugh. "I've been under fire often, and rather enjoyed it, but this responsibility is worse than any amount of physical danger. And if anything happened to me, who is there to take command? With Barham and Osborne gone there are only the middies to rely upon."

The soundings for the last two or three hours had given an average of nine fathoms as the depth of the river. This being so, Carewe was convinced that he would be justified in increasing the gunboat's speed. With the searchlight shining far out ahead of her, the Flame cut through the water at ten knots.

A grim struggle ensued between the two men. Locked in a terrible embrace, they reeled to and fro.

This rate of progress was kept up for some time, to be reduced as a sharp bend in the stream showed in the distance. At this time the three midshipmen were taking their customary promenade on deck before dinner, to which they sat down every evening at half-past six. Most of the crew were below, but a few of the men were on deck, keeping watch, or engaged in other routine duties.

"I say," remarked Langford, as the gunboat approached the bend, "how narrow the river is in front of us! Hope it widens out again round the corner, or we shall be obliged to go dead slow."

"Not necessarily," said Grant. "If it's narrower, it'll be deeper, and a hundred yards, more or less, in the width of the stream won't affect the safety of the Flame. She's a slim craft, considering her tonnage."

The searchlight blazed across the river, lighting up the tree-fringed banks on each side, and a minute later the Flame was rounding the bend. Owing to the sudden narrowing of the stream at this point, the water rushed along like a mill-race, and as the gunboat was head on to the current the utmost skill was required to navigate her into a straight course again.

It was at this highly critical moment that the presentiment of coming evil, which had so long attacked the mind of Lieutenant Carewe, reached a pitch of intensity that made his strong frame shudder from head to foot.

The perspiration stood out on his brow. His eyes, as they peered into the gloom ahead, had in them a shrinking look that was painful to see. What was that? The searchlight flashed upon the moving figures of men amongst the bushes on the riverside.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, laughing unsteadily. "Only a trick of the imagination. There's no one there!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when a sheet of flame seemed to leap at the gunboat from each bank of the stream. Then there was a shattering report that awakened the sleeping echoes of the forest, a furious hail of rifle-bullets that struck the Flame in a hundred places, and the fierce yells of a thousand savage foemen.

That roar of sudden warfare acted on Lieutenant Carewe like some magic potion. The doubt and misgiving that had oppressed him vanished in a moment. He became once more the cool, alert, and daringly resourceful commander to whom

was entrusted the responsibility of saving his ship and the lives of those under him from a terrible disaster.

"Full speed ahead!" he signalled to the engine-room. "Take my place, Pritchard," he said to the petty-officer, who had sprung up on to the bridge. "She's round the bend now. Keep her in mid-stream, and all will be well!"

He ran down the steps to the deck, his voice carrying swift decisive orders to every part of the ship. They were obeyed with marvellous rapidity and precision.

The bluejackets went to their posts as one man. A minute after the attack commenced the guns of the Flame were roaring out death and destruction to the enemy. What a sight it was that the gunners looked at. The banks of the river were swarming with white-robed sons of the desert.

Scorning death, they poured volley after volley at the gunboat. The decks of the Flame were swept with hurricanes of shot, and littered with blazing brands that were hurled by the fierce foemen. In a few minutes clouds of smoke hid friend from enemy.

Yet the firing never ceased for a moment. The Arabs went down in batches, and hundreds more sprang to take the places of those killed and wounded. The Flame rushed on, full speed ahead, her steel hull echoing stridently to the ringing impact of the bullets.

"The beggars are losing ground!" yelled a bluejacket jeeringly. "They can't keep up with us. Hang me if I don't reckon we ought to drop anchor and go for the whole blessed lot of 'em!"

Something seemed to strike the Flame a mighty blow. She shuddered from stem to stern, pitched, rolled, and trembled to a complete stop. Nature had done what the Arabs could not do.

The gunboat had run aground.

She would not move. A great sandbank, rising to within a few feet of the surface of the stream, held her in a grip that her powerful engines were unable to shake off.

"Allah! El Allah!"

The roaring cry swelled to a frenzied tumult of sound. Pushing off from the shore in boat and on raft, or plunging headlong into the water, the fanatical tribesmen converged on the gunboat. They were mowed down like grass, but so great was their number that a horde of them reached the ship, scrambled up the hull, and swept across the decks.

In place of the thunder of the guns, and the crackle of rifle-fire, sounded the clash of sword and the heavy thud of the driving bayonet. The bluejackets fought for their lives. They were outnumbered twenty to one on the stranded gunboat itself, and on shore, ready to pounce upon them, should they escape, was an army of savages.

Valour and discipline were of no avail against such fearful odds. To Carewe, fighting like a lion, the thought of losing his ship was far worse than that of sacrificing his life. Yet what could be done to avert such a disaster? He pondered with fierce intentness over that problem as he struck down foeman after foeman with his long sword.

"We can all of us die on board," he thought; "but that would not prevent the ship falling into the hands of our enemies. But if some of us could succeed in reaching the shore, and then escape into the forest, we might retake it later on."

The plan, daring though it was, seemed a feasible one. Calling some of his men to his aid, he fought his way to the 8-inch gun mounted in the bows. The mechanism by which it could be turned in any direction was set in motion.

A moment later the gun was pointing to the left bank of the river, where the Arabs were fewest in number, and a great shell screamed from the huge engine of destruction and crashed amongst the enemy, bursting with fearful effect.

"Lower and man the boats to larboard!" shouted Carewe. "Everyone who can must leave the ship and make for shore!"

Again the 8-inch gun was fired, and the Arabs, at their weakest point, broke and fled. Now was the time for Carewe's bold plan to take effect. Fighting, struggling, swept from side to side, the bluejackets reached the side of the gunboat, and tumbled into the boats.

The last to leave the vessel was the commanding officer himself. Even as he was jumping into the boat as it was being pushed off, a bullet pierced his heart, and he fell back into the river, to be swept away by the current.

In the midst of that wild scene of strife and confusion, the fate of their gallant leader was seen by but few of his men. Fired upon from all sides, the bluejackets rowed to the shore with death shrieking in their ears. As they sprang on to dry ground, the Arabs closed in on them.

Many were struck down, or captured, but most of them succeeded in fighting a way through into the forest. Amongst these were Rodney Grant and Frank Langford, so ragged, wild-eyed, and smoke-blackened that they scarcely recognised one another.

"Where's Daleham?" asked Grant.

"Haven't seen him since we left the ship!" answered the other. "He's sure to turn up, though, before long. Where are we to make for now?"

"Straight ahead!" said Grant grimly. "Our only hope lies somewhere there."

Hating to retreat, yet understanding the motive of their commander in ordering them to do so, the bluejackets pushed on into the dark and gloomy depths of the forest. Now and again they halted to turn to send a volley into the disorderly ranks of the Arabs pursuing them.

"Not so many chasing us as I thought there would be," said Grant. "And if we keep on thinning them down, we shall soon have seen the last of them."

"The others can't leave the poor old Flame!" replied Langford bitterly. "Just listen to them howling with triumph. It makes me sick to hear it."

"They'll howl to a different tune soon!" said Grant, his eyes flashing fire. "We've not abandoned the Flame for good, remember, nor our intention to make an end of the gun-runners. Seen anything of Carewe?"

A queer look showed in Langford's face. When he spoke there was a catch in his voice that told of the emotion under which he was labouring.

"Don't you know, then?" he said. "He was shot dead as he was getting into the boat. I saw him fall. The current swept him away at once. Nothing could be done to save even his body."

A mist of tears that he was not ashamed of, came before Rodney Grant's eyes.

"Ah, well," was all he said. "He died doing his duty, as a British officer should do, and we needn't fear the same fate overtaking us."

The triumphant shouts and cries of the Arabs on board the Flame gradually died away into silence, but the fugitives pushed on without a halt, for they knew that their enemies would soon commence a vigorous pursuit of them.

The dense growth of tropical vegetation had made progress a slow and toilsome business for the first mile or two, but now the forest undergrowth was thinner, and natural glades and avenues between the trees began to make a welcome appearance.

"Looks as though there's been an earthquake in these parts," said one of the men, as hills and mounds of fantastic shapes suddenly loomed ahead in the starlight. "A good spot to defend, at any rate!"

The remark was overheard by Rodney Grant, and the sense of it impressed him at once.

"I think you're right, Harris," he said. "We'll make an inspection of the locality and see what chances we may have of holding our ground there."

The mounds, covered thickly with grass and bush, extended in every direction for a considerable distance. Evidently they were the physiographical results of some volcanic eruption in a bygone age.

"Ten armed men might dodge about here and defy a small army," said Langford. "Why not stay here and throw up some kind of fortification? That could soon be done!"

Grant, who had gone on in front, uttered a cry of delighted surprise.

"No need of a fortification!" he exclaimed, falling on his knees and burrowing between a quantity of thick grass and reeds. "Come and look here. The entrance to an underground cave, as I live!"

The others hurried forward and quickly perceived that Grant had stumbled upon the entrance to some sort of subterranean cavern. The hole was large enough for anyone to crawl through, and the grass growing in front effectually screened it from sight.

"It's a cave right enough," said Langford; "but what if it's only a small one?"

"We'll soon see what the size of it is!" answered Grant. "Get a few armfuls of those dry reeds. They'll come in useful to burn as torches. It looks mighty dark and lonesome inside."

Twisting some reeds together, he applied a light to the torch and entered the cave, followed by the rest of the fugitives.

It was necessary to crawl on hands and knees for some distance. Then the roof took an upward curve, the walls widened, and the explorers found themselves in an immense cave, with innumerable passages leading out of it.

"This is a find!" exclaimed Grant. "We shall be able to stay here as long as we like. Wonder how far those passages extend? We'd better explore that big one to the right there, for it might lead to an opening that has no convenient clump of grass to hide it."

An investigation of the passage indicated revealed an interesting fact. It extended in a winding direction for close on fifty yards, and ended abruptly against a wall of solid rock.

Clearly, there was no outlet from the cave in this direction,

and an examination of some of the other passages met with a like result. The fugitives had reason to congratulate themselves upon having discovered a place of retreat where they would be able to mature their plans for the future.

There were twenty-seven of them all told, out of a total of one hundred and ten, the number of the crew of the gunboat. What had happened to their missing comrades they could conjecture. Some were dead or wounded, and those of the remainder who had not been drowned or swept away by the current while fighting a way across the river must have been captured by the enemy.

The gloom that these thoughts inspired affected the whole company. Each man was silent, thinking of those whom he might never see again, and reflecting upon his own desperate lot.

They were armed, it was true, and had ammunition enough to last them for some time, but they were without the vital necessaries of life. To live they would have to shoot the wild animals of the forest, and so daily run the risk of being discovered by the savages, who would hear the report of a rifle a long way off.

"Come, my men!" said Grant cheerily, glancing at the gloomy faces of those around him. "We've had some nasty knocks, but don't let us forget that we've a lot to be thankful for. Nothing more fortunate for us could have happened than the finding of this cave. We can snap our fingers at the Arabs while we're here, and that won't be for long, for we've a big account to settle with those chaps."

A murmuring hum of assent to this expression of opinion passed from lip to lip.

"The Flame has got to be retaken," continued Grant, 'and by us. More than that, the gun-runners must be taught the lesson we set out to teach them. Before we think of going back to civilisation we must break up the Lefarge gang once for all. Has anyone any objection to raise? If so, let him state it."

The bluejackets, silent for a moment, suddenly broke into a lusty cheer that sent ringing echoes along the vaulted roof of the cave. They realised that in Rodney Grant they had a leader whom they could put their faith and trust in, and they wanted no more.

"We'll follow you through thick and thin, sir!" cried Harris, the chief gunner of the Flame. "What you've just said is good enough for us. There'll be no going back until you give the word."

A flush of proud joy at the confidence so readily given to him rose to Grant's face. As the senior middy he was entitled to assume command, but in such a desperate situation as they now found themselves in the men might have hesitated to act on the bold and reckless plan he had outlined to them in a few hastily-spoken words.

That they did nothing of the kind, but placed themselves without demur at his command, was a splendid testimony not only to his own influence and popularity but also to the magnificent spirit of discipline and esprit de corps pervading the great service they belonged to.

"That question being disposed of, then," said Grant, "we'll see about turning in for the night. Rest is what we all need to make us fit for whatever to-morrow may bring us."

The first watch was set, exactly as on board ship, and the men stretched themselves out on the hard floor of the cave. Wearied out in mind and body, they were quickly asleep, and for a space forgot the nightmare of misfortune that had come upon them.

In this place of shelter, under the forest from which disaster had attacked them, they were safe for a while. It augured well for the immediate future. Yet Rodney Grant, who had inspired his companions with renewed hope and courage, lay awake for a long time, his mind a prey to acute distress and misgiving.

He thought of Carewe, shot dead and cast into the river; of Dick Daleham, the lad whom he cared for as a brother—of all the brave and gallant comrades who had gone to their graves away back there by the riverside.

At last he, too, fell asleep, the leader of a forlorn hope, the lad to whom was now entrusted the saving of his country's honour.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Sold into Slavery—The Arab with a White Man's Heart.

"WHAT are they going to do to us, Pritchard?"

"Cut off our heads, most likely!" answered Pritchard, with a ghastly smile. "That, or something like it, they're most bound to do."

Dick Daleham shook his head.

"They'd have killed us last night," he said, "if they meant to. We weren't brought here to be put to death, I'm thinking."

The other did not answer, the look of despairing gloom that had been there before Daleham spoke to him settling over his pale, haggard face again.

He and Dick Daleham, and fifteen men of the crew of the

captured gunboat had been taken prisoners by an overwhelming force of the enemy while fighting to escape on the river-side. Roped together, and guarded by brutal savages who cudgelled them at the least sign of resistance, they were marched away through the forest to an Arab settlement.

The settlement was situated in a large clearing, and consisted of a great number of palm-thatched huts swarming with men, women and children. It was evidently a place of call for travellers, for it stood close to a wide track through the forest, used by Arab merchants and camel-drivers.

In the middle of the clearing the prisoners were halted. They had been there since dawn, and now the sun was almost overhead, sending its scorching rays down upon them with pitiless intensity.

They were suffering the cruellest pangs of thirst, for no water had been given them to drink, their requests for it meeting only with jeering laughter. A quick death would have been preferable to this slow torture, but that had been denied to them, although they had been in the thick of danger.

Hope of escape there was none. They were doomed men. Their enemies swarmed all round them. Wherever the eye looked it saw the fierce, white-robed sons of the desert, armed to the teeth.

The growing apathy of the prisoners was suddenly checked by the arrival of a band of horsemen, who rode into the clearing amidst the excited cries of the Arabs already gathered there. As the foremost of them dismounted, Dick Daleham gave a quick start.

"Fernand Lefarge!" he exclaimed.

It was the formidable chief of the gun-runners himself. With a cruel smile on his lips, he strode forward until he was but a yard away from the captives. Then he stopped, and looked at them with a searching glance. The men who had ridden to the settlement with him also came up and stared at the prisoners.

They were Arabs, slave-dealers, and they were there to trade in human flesh and blood.

"There are seventeen of them," said Lefarge, speaking in a native dialect, "and they are worth twenty English pounds apiece. I have no use for them myself, and were they left on my hands I should have them put to death. As it is, they are my prisoners, and I want to make a profit out of them. They are for sale at the price named."

Pritchard, who understood enough of the dialect to follow the meaning of what Lefarge had said, uttered a fierce cry that sounded high above the chattering voices of the Arabs clustering in the background.

"You hound!" he shouted, his features writhing under the stress of unutterable emotion. "You eternal disgrace to the name of a white man! Sell us into slavery, would you?"

The look of a fiend swept over Lefarge's evil face, and, stepping forward, he slashed Pritchard twice across the cheek with his riding-whip. The sailor turned deathly pale.

"Your life for that blow one day!" he whispered hoarsely. "Your life for it!"

The inhuman monster who had so foully struck him uttered a savage laugh.

"You'll never be able to carry out your threat!" he said. "You and your comrades are going to be sold into slavery. Separated one from the other, henceforth you will live and toil amongst those who hate and despise you. When your commander followed me here, he came to meet his own death, and he brought you to slavery. The boasted might and power of your country cannot save you. None will know of your fate except those who purchase you as so many cattle. My life for the blow I gave you? Fool!"

And with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders he turned on his heel and strode back to the slave-dealers. They had watched what had happened with impassive faces. Now they began to talk eagerly and quickly to Lefarge, and it was evident from their gestures that they were bidding one against the other, and endeavouring to make Lefarge lower his price.

At last one of them, a richly-attired man of middle age, with a proud, hawklike face, took Lefarge aside, and talked alone with him for a few minutes.

"That means we're sold!" said Dalcham, as Lefarge nodded his head, and turned away with a gloating smile on his lips. "Sold, by Heaven—sold into slavery!"

He bent his head, sick with a great horror and loathing, stunned into silence by the shameful indignity put upon him and his comrades. The same sense of intolerable insult and wrong affected those around him. No one uttered a sound except Pritchard, and he laughed, a laugh that chilled the blood of those who heard it.

"Well, boys," he said, "things have come to a pretty pass, haven't they, when British bluejackets are put up to auction and sold at twenty pounds apiece? Twenty pounds! I've got that much put by in the bank at home. Wonder if I could draw it out, and purchase my freedom again?"

At an order from Lefarge, the Arab guards drove the prisoners across the clearing to a large hut. Here they were confined, the heat of the place almost driving them mad, for there was not a window in the walls, and the door was closed and barred from the outside.

Suffering the torments of the lost, they remained shut off from all communication with the outside world until late in the afternoon. Then food and water were brought to them.

Never had water tasted so sweet as it did then. It saved them from utter despair, from madness, from death. And such is the working of the human heart that it inspired them with fresh hope.

"We may have been sold into slavery," said Daleham; "but we're not slaves yet. And as we're not to be separated, going by the look of things, we shall have plenty of opportunity to escape."

"True!" exclaimed Pritchard. "There are seventeen of us, and if we can't regain our liberty then we shall deserve the worst that fate can deal out to us!"

. . . . . .

The light of the stars shone down on an African desert.

On the fringe of the desert, close to the shadow of a great forest, a caravan of Arabs and camels had halted for a space. The camels were kneeling at rest, and their drivers were sitting round about, chatting and smoking.

Near by the owner of the caravan was talking in a low and earnest tone of voice to a group of white men. He was the Arab slave-dealer—El Teb by name—who had traded in human flesh and blood that same day with Fernand Lefarge, and the white men were those who had been sold to him as slaves.

"White men," he was saying to them, "you regard me as your enemy. Yet I am your friend. You go with me no farther. You are free!"

Free! When they heard that word of magic meaning, Dick Daleham and his comrades thrilled and tingled from head to foot. Bound and helpless, they had marched with the caravan from the Arab settlement through the forest to the desert to a place far beyond which they expected to be taken, and now they were told that the liberty they had lost was given back to them.

"I am a friend of your people," El Teb continued. "They are a great and a mighty people, just and generous, but swift to take vengeance upon those who wrong them. The day is fast approaching when the man Lefarge and all those who are associated with him will be punished for their guilt. When that day comes may the kindness I am showing to you be placed to my account."

"It shall be," said Daleham, his eyes glistening. "You will be rewarded as you deserve to be. But why were you with Lefarge if you are not his friend?"

A dark flush of hate rose to El Teb's cheeks.

"Listen!" he said. "Two years ago Lefarge did me a cruel wrong. I was powerless to avenge it, but I knew that my hour would come; that one day I should be in a position to bring about his downfall. I bided my time, with the patience of my race, and at last I heard that Lefarge was planning to capture a British gunboat that was on its way to Lake Dembea to look for a large cargo of rifles that was on the point of being landed there for distribution amongst the Arab traders."

"Has that cargo reached Dembea yet?" asked Daleham eagerly.

"No," replied El Teb, "the sailing-ships conveying the rifles have not got there yet."

"Hurrah!" cried Daleham excitedly. "That's bully news!"

"When I heard of Lefarge's plan," continued El Teb, "I journeyed down to the settlement where you were taken to, intending to see what took place, and report on the matter to the British authorities at Suakin. On the way there I was delayed, and when I reached the settlement I found that the gunboat had been taken. Then you came, and were offered for sale. I saw my chance, and I paid over to Lefarge the money that he demanded for you. Now you are free. One of my men shall lead you to a place on the banks of the river where you met with disaster, and there you will be able to take ship to Suakin, and rouse your countrymen to hunt Lefarge to his doom.

Dick Daleham drew Pritchard aside.

"What had we better do?" he whispered. "It won't do to refuse the offer of a guide, and yet we can't go back to Suakin."

"Never!" said Pritchard, with fiery earnestness. "Never, until we know what's happened to our comrades who escaped into the forest. They got away on the far bank of the river, and there we must go to look for them, whatever comes of it. There's no harm, though, in taking the guide with us. And we may find him mighty useful."

So Daleham, turning to El Teb, accepted the offer of the guide, without saying anything of the plan he had determined on.

Ten minutes later El Teb parted from those who, placed in his power, he had restored precious liberty to. Then he and his men rode away across the desert.

"He may have a black skin," said Pritchard, as he and his comrades stood and gazed after the caravan, as it was starting on its long journey; "but he's got the heart of a white man, anyhow."

"You're right!" remarked Daleham. "Still," he added thoughtfully, "he mightn't have been so ready to help us if he'd not had a grudge against Lefarge. What d'you think?"

Pritchard significantly touched the ugly marks that Lefarge's whip had left across his face.

"No," he said, "perhaps not. There's few things sweeter than revenge!"

Then he and his comrades turned away from the starlit desert, and plunged into the shadowy darkness of the forest, captives no longer, but free men animated by a single purpose.

To find their lost friends, to hunt down the gun-runners, and to regain possession of the Flame, that was the stern resolve of one and all of them.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Meeting in the Forest—Re-United—Victory—Suspense.

"BROILED antelope isn't bad eating," said Frank Langford; "but I wouldn't like to live on it for a week. Plainer fare is more in my line."

"Think yourself lucky that you've got anything at all to eat," Grant answered. "We should all have been starving now if those antelopes hadn't put in an appearance."

The two midshipmen had just finished a hearty meal of the meat whose richness had provoked Langford's remark. They and their companions, who had likewise been satisfying the pangs of hunger, were taking things easy in the cave where they had found shelter three nights before.

In the meantime numerous bands of savages had been searching for them, but their retreat kept its secret well, although the enemy had frequently passed close by the hidden entrance to it.

A violent storm had interrupted the search, and, taking advantage of the opportunity thus afforded, Grant and three or four bluejackets had gone out with rifles, and shot some antelopes, which provided the refugees with the first real food they had eaten since escaping from the captured gunboat.

"Well," said Langford, "we're not likely to bag any more antelopes so long as this wild weather continues. Shouldn't wonder if the storm isn't the beginning of the rainy season. What d'you think, Harris?"

"What you do," replied Harris. "And in that case we should soon be flooded out. But as we're not staying here it doesn't matter much if it rains cats and dogs. The more rainy it is, in fact, the better it ought to be for us. These Arabs hate the wet like poison, and scuttle into cover away out of it."

"Then we're not likely to see much of them?"

"Not on the journey," said Harris; "but I expect it'll be a different matter when we get to the river. They'll be camping somewhere there."

Grant looked round at the stalwart bluejackets with a confident smile.

"They took us by surprise the other night," he said, "and now we're going to give them the same sort of treat. And I reckon, Harris, that we shall be the victors."

"No doubt about it!" agreed Harris. "When do we make a start?"

"There's no time like the present," said Grant, "so we'll make a move now."

The departure from the cave was welcomed with high glee by the men, who had chafed and fretted sorely under their enforced inactivity, and were ready to follow Grant anywhere.

The rain was pouring down in sheets, vivid flashes of lightning ripped across the sky, and thunder roared and rumbled incessantly. Leaving the place that had given them such timely shelter, the wanderers commenced their return journey to the river.

Anticipating that the Arabs would have refloated the Flame, they had resolved to make a desperate attempt to recapture the lost gunboat. Everything depended upon the success of this daring enterprise.

Without the ship they could do little. To regain possession of it, therefore, was the first object they had in mind. In deciding on this course, they were acting as Carewe would have done had his life been spared to him.

Guided by the ghostly glare of the lightning, they followed the tracks they had themselves made on the night of the

Five enormous crocodiles were converging from different points towards the midshipman, who was struggling for life in the treacherous morass that held him prisoner. "Fire!" roared Rodney Grant, dashing up with his party of bluejackets just in the nick of time. (*See page* 34.)

escape. The forest afforded them little protection from the storm, which raged with extraordinary violence.

Now and again some wild animal, seeking shelter from the storm, darted across their path and vanished amongst the bushes. Of the Arabs they saw no sign. They seemed to be the only human beings braving the fury of the elements.

"It's pretty evident that we're not going to be attacked on this trip," said Harris. "My word!" he added quickly, as a terrific flash of lightning struck a great mimosa-tree a few yards away. "That was a stunner, and no mistake!"

As the crashing peal of thunder that followed the flash rumbled away in the distance, Langford suddenly stopped, and caught his chum by the arm.

"Did you hear that shout?" he exclaimed, his voice trembling with suppressed excitement. "I heard it distinctly. It came from somewhere ahead of us."

"Are you sure?" said Grant. "I didn't——"

He drew in his breath with a jerking gasp. Loud enough for him and all his comrades to hear there came a cry, repeated again and again, from a dozen voices.

"It's some of our lads!" shouted Harris, throwing up his arms, and breaking into a quick run. "Hallo, there—hallo!"

"Hallo!" came the answer. "That you, Harris? I'm Pritchard! Hurrah!"

There was a rush of feet, shouts, and cheers, and next moment Dick Dalcham and his men were in the midst of the comrades whom they had scarcely dared to hope they would ever see again.

The explanation for this unexpected meeting was soon given. After parting from El Teb in the desert, Dalcham and his party, led by the Arab guide, had made their way back to the river, and crossed it on a raft at a point five or six miles below the spot where the Flame had run aground.

After persuading the guide to help them in the search they had set out to look for their lost comrades. Several times they narrowly escaped falling into the hands of the savages, the coming on of the storm alone saving them from such a fate.

At last they struck a trail, which the guide declared was one made by white men. While inclined to believe that he was mistaken, they had decided to follow it up.

"And that's why we're here," said Dalcham. "We caught sight of you when that flash of lightning struck the tree. Now let's hear what you've been doing?"

The reunited comrades wasted no time in telling each other of their experiences. Elated and confident, they marched on towards the river. The tide of Fortune, they were convinced, had turned in their favour.

"You've not told us yet, Dalcham," said Rodney Grant, "how you came by that raft that brought you across the stream. Did you make it?"

"Not we!" Dalcham answered laughingly. "It was ready made fo rus. As we approached the riverside," he continued, his face growing stern and thoughtful, "we took care to move very cautiously, thinking that some of the Arabs might be lying in wait for us. It was a jolly good thing we did, too. There were ten or a dozen savages on the raft, which was moored to the bank, eating boiled rice, or something of the sort."

"You couldn't have had much trouble in dealing with them?"

"We might have had," answered Dalcham, "for they were the wretches who shot down poor Barham and the others with the poisoned arrows. They heard us moving amongst the bushes, and showed fight, sending a flight of arrows at us.

"Not one of us was hit, thank goodness; and we got in a rifle volley that made them jump, I can tell you. Five were killed, and one badly wounded. The others dived overboard, and we saw no more of them."

"Pity you didn't shoot them, too!" said Grant. "What happened to the wounded one?"

"We took him prisoner, of course," Dalcham answered. "He was badly hurt, and he died a few minutes later. He

made a clean breast of it, though, to Pritchard here, who can speak the lingo. Said that he and his friends had been employed by Lefarge to do that shooting business as the Flame was steaming up the river."

Grant clenched his teeth.

"The hound!" he said. "What a reckoning we have to settle with Lefarge when we meet him next time!"

The fury of the storm began to weaken, although the heavy rainfall continued, and it was necessary to push on at increased speed.

So long as the lightning flashed the comrades had no difficulty in finding their way, but they knew that complete darkness would quickly confuse and baffle them. They were nearer to the river, however, than they imagined.

"If those aren't lights in the distance," said a bluejacket, "then, blow me, I can't see straight!"

"Fireflies," remarked another. "They show up a long way off like gas-lamps."

"Lights they are," said Pritchard, and moving, too!"

Impelled by an eager curiosity, the comrades hurried on. Soon the lights became more distinct. They shone down on the black waters of the river. They were the lights of the Flame.

"The gunboat!" exclaimed Grant excitedly. "So the beggars have got her off the sandbank, then?"

"It strikes me that she was floated off by the rise in the stream," said Pritchard. "See how the water's flooding out over the banks. We shall have to do some wading, boys."

The river had risen several feet owing to the terrific rainfall, and the banks were flooded inland for over a mile. Nothing daunted, the bluejackets pushed onward through the water, wading in places, and swimming in others, with their rifles strapped across their shoulders.

The Flame was proceeding up stream. She was going slowly, with a swirling current against her, and towing several boats and rafts at her stern.

"I didn't expect that those Arabs would know how to manage her," said Grant, "and yet they're doing it as if to the manner born. A bit strange, that, isn't it?"

"You may be sure that Lefarge would get an experienced crew for the job," replied Pritchard. "He'd have no difficulty in doing that down at Suakin. There are plenty of lascars and other niggers who've had proper training to be bought at a price."

The comrades drew nearer to the stream. They could see no one on the deck of the gunboat, owing to the darkness, but now and again the sound of voices was borne to their ears by the wind.

The time had come to make the great attempt. After instructing the men how the enterprise was to be carried out, Grant dived into the stream, followed quickly by his comrades. But the force of the tide was too strong to fight against. One and all were swept back to shore.

"We must get higher up," said Grant. "Ought to have thought of that before."

Reaching a point about a hundred yards above the gunboat, they again entered the river. This time they succeeded in approaching the Flame without a useless exhaustion of strength.

Acting on the order given, the bluejackets scrambled on to the rafts that the ship was towing. The operation was carried out with complete success. Not a man was missing. Those on board the vessel had not the least suspicion of what was taking place.

One by one the daring adventurers climbed up the towing ropes, and regained the deck of the Flame. Fortunately, the deck aft was but dimly lighted, so that they were able to muster without running any great risk of being seen by the enemy.

In bare feet, ragged, mud-stained, drenched with water, their appearance was in striking contrast to the one they had presented when assembled for inspection on that same deck not many days before.

Yet they were the same men, only harder, fiercer for what they had gone through, and burning to wreak vengeance on the foe.

"Now for it!" whispered Grant. "The deck's to be cleared first with the bayonet! We've got them this time!"

Moving forward round the deck-house in two parties, the bluejackets came upon some Arabs under the awning. The savages were most of them asleep, and they were overcome before they had a chance to offer a determined resistance.

Their yells, however, brought those who were below swarming up on to the deck, and a fierce and desperate fight ensued, in which many of the enemy were killed and wounded. Those who escaped plunged overboard, and struck out for the shore.

Ten minutes after boarding it the bluejackets were in possession of the gunboat. A thorough search was made below, and in the engine-room, where he had taken refuge, the Arab placed by Lefarge in command of the ship was discovered in hiding.

He was dragged up on deck, where Grant offered him his life and liberty, on condition that he navigated the Flame to Lake Dembea. Realising that he was hopelessly cornered, he accepted the offer, and, with a bluejacket guarding him on either side, returned to the bridge.

"Think he'll stick to his word?" asked Daleham.

"I fancy so," said Grant, "for he knows that if he shows the least sign of playing us false he'll be shot. Besides, if it comes to that, we can manage to run the Flame to the lake ourselves. This heavy rain must have raised the level of the river seven feet at the very least, and it keeps on rising. We've nothing to fear now."

An inspection of the vessel revealed the fact that none of the stores had been removed. Almost everything was the same on board as before the Arabs had captured the ship.

The bluejackets, flushed with victory, were ready now to strike a final blow at the enemy.

The guns were loaded and trained on the shore. Now and again shots were fired at the gunboat; but no harm was done, and the silence maintained by the savages lurking amongst the bushes along the riverside showed that they had been utterly demoralised by the dashing success of the white men.

Towards daybreak the rain stopped, and the stars shone out in the sky. The river grew wider. High hills, covered with feathery palms, sloped down to the banks. The density of the forest became broken up into glades and open spaces of green grass, where zebras and antelopes could be seen browsing over the pasturage.

"We shall soon be there now!" said Grant. "Another twenty miles will see us at the lake."

At this moment a sharp cry rang out from the bridge. The Arab who was navigating the vessel, seizing the opportunity that he had been looking for, suddenly turned and sprang at one of his guards like a tiger.

The man reeled back against the rail, and the Arab, with another spring, leapt overboard. Even as he touched the water, however, the other bluejacket on the bridge fired at him.

The bullet pierced him to the heart. Throwing up his arms with a convulsive gesture, he struck the water with a great splash and vanished from sight, to be seen no more.

"He brought it upon himself," said Grant. "Well, we must do the best we can without him. You, Pritchard, take his place."

An hour later the waters of Lake Dembea could be seen in the distance. The lake was about ten miles away, an inland sea set down in one of the wildest parts of the African continent, where the gun-runners believed that the long arm of Britain could not reach them.

The excitement on board the Flame was intense. Had the fleet of sailing vessels containing the rifles reached the lake yet? That was the question everyone was asking. If not, then Lefarge would have time to intercept it with a warning.

"He's sure to have heard by now," said Langford, "that we've got back the gunboat into our hands."

Grant shook his head.

"I'm not at all sure that he has," he replied. "We've been coming along at a good speed, faster than a horseman could travel through the forest, which isn't so easy to make a way through, as you know. I'm still hoping to take him and his followers by surprise."

With his glasses he searched every visible part of the lake, but no sign of any sort of craft could he see. An uneasy feeling that the gun-runners had been warned came over him. In that case he and his comrades would be baulked of their purpose.

It would be impossible for them to follow Lefarge and his gang into the wilds of an unknown country. Impatiently he strode up and down, while the Flame, slipping through the water at twelve knots an hour, swiftly approached her destination.

"Sail ahead!"

The cry came from the look-out man.

Rounding a long spit of land that came far out into the lake, was a big Arab dhow under full sail. Scarcely was she seen when she disappeared from sight.

"Eureka!" cried Grant. "That's one of the fleet, I'll be bound, and the rest of the ships must be concealed on the far side of the spit. It's high enough to hide a cruiser from sight."

"That dhow was a scout," remarked Pritchard. "She's seen us, and has gone to give the alarm. No matter. The Flame could overtake the fastest sailing vessel afloat."

The speed of the gunboat was increased to fifteen knots. Twenty minutes later she was cutting through the deep waters of the lake. The spit of land round which the dhow

had sailed was five or six miles from the entrance to the lake. Towards the shore end it sloped upwards to a height of close on two hundred feet.

"A small battery placed on the top of it," remarked Langford, "could sink us in five minutes. There doesn't seem to be one there, though, thank goodness!"

Bearing away from the spit, the Flame rapidly passed it. As she did so, a wild cheer broke from the bluejackets. With every sail spread, tailing out one after the other in a straggling line, were eight or nine large dhows.

They were making for the head of the lake, keeping as close in to shore as possible, and making desperate efforts to escape.

"Hurrah!" shouted Daleham. "We've taken 'em by surprise!"

The Flame came round in a wide curve and headed for a point where she would intercept the escaping fleet. The dhows hugged the shore still closer. Then, evidently in response to a preconcerted signal, the sails were let down.

"The beggars are going to skip!" cried Langford. "They're deserting the fleet!"

Suddenly a dense cloud of flame-lit smoke shot up from the deck of the leading dhow. A terrific explosion followed a second later. The dhow, shattered and broken, collapsed in ruin on the surface of the lake.

"We must stop that!" said Grant quickly. "Send a shell or two over them, Harris."

The other ran to one of the quick-firers and discharged a shell that hissed over the dhows and broke, with a screaming report, in the bushes on shore. Another followed, and then another, and the bluejackets saw the Arabs plunging overboard in a disorderly crowd.

"They've had enough," said Pritchard. "The first dhow's sinking fast, but we shall collar the rest. They'll not stop to sink them."

"Man the boats!" ordered Grant, as the Flame drew close to the drifting fleet. "We must capture as many of the rascals as we can."

The boats were quickly lowered, the bluejackets laughing and joking as they tumbled into them. Protected by the guns of the Flame, they reached the lakeside. One party under Grant landed, while the rest of the men, with Daleham and Langford, sprang on board the dhows.

The escaping Arabs showed fight when they saw the small force opposed to them, but a few well-directed shots from the quick-firer that Harris was attending to on the starboard side of the Flame sent them scattering in every direction.

After pursuing them for some distance, and taking about a dozen of them prisoners, Grant and his bluejackets returned to the assistance of their comrades on the dhows, which were roped together and anchored at a safe distance from the shore.

Then the hatches over the holds were removed, and an inspection taken of the cargo.

This consisted of forty thousand rifles, of the Lee-Enfield make, and vast quantities of cartridges, which the three midshipmen and Pritchard between them calculated would ensure a supply of two hundred and fifty for each rifle.

"It's a nice little haul!" said Langford jubilantly. "There'll be some disappointed tribesmen when the news of our raid gets known. Wonder what they'd have done with all these popguns?"

"Used 'em against us," Grant answered. "What else could they want them for? If we'd failed this time there'd have been a rising of the natives in the Soudan, or somewhere else, and Great Britain would have had another costly little war on her hands."

"Wish we could have collared Lefarge," said Daleham. "So long as he's at liberty this gun-running will go on."

"We'll have him!" answered Grant. "He can't be far away."

"But how are we going to get at him?"

"Look for him, of course, you duffer!" said Grant laughingly. "We must fit out an expeditionary force and search the whole country hereabouts. I don't think that Lefarge will be in a hurry to leave the locality so long as he imagines there's a chance of doing us harm. The seizure of his property will make him mad as a tiger-cat. Shouldn't wonder if he's spying on us at this very minute."

"There's plenty of cover for him to hide in, anyhow," said Daleham, glancing round at the thickly-timbered hills that enclosed the shores of the lake. "We might search for a week and never find him."

Pritchard, who had been deep in thought for some moments, gave a grimly humorous laugh.

"If you'll allow me to suggest it," he said, "I don't think there's any need to make a search for him. He'll show us his whereabouts soon enough if we leave him alone."

"What d'you mean?" asked Grant.

"I mean that if he thought there was a chance to take us by surprise," answered the other, "he'd seize it. Let the dhows remain here. They'll be quite safe with the Flame so close to them. Then I'll guarantee that to-night the gun-runners will be fools enough to make an attack on us. We can put all lights out on board and stand ready for action. What d'you think of it?"

"I think it's a rattling good plan!" said Grant heartily. "We'll act on it, too!"

During the day nothing was seen of the enemy. If Lefarge and his followers were in the vicinity, they were taking care to keep themselves well out of sight.

The plan that Pritchard had proposed was enthusiastically welcomed by the men. The guns were loaded. Everything was done to prepare for the attack should it come.

There was just enough starlight when night came on to make the shore of the lake and its surroundings visible to those on board the gunboat. Any force of men seeking to attack the ship must inevitably be seen. At the same time, the gunboat was anchored in such a position that it was in the shadow of the high cliff that extended into the lake.

Hour after hour went by.

The silence of the night was unbroken except for the murmuring of the wind and the rippling splash of the water. The gun-runners had given no sign of their presence on shore.

To the men of the Flame it was a time of suspense.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Last Fight of Fernand Lefarge.

AWAY up on the summit of the cliff overlooking the lake, concealed amongst the grass and bushes that flourished there in unchecked growth, was a band of Arabs, fierce, silent, watchful.

There was a solitary white man with them. He was Fernand Lefarge, the gun-runner, whose triumph of a day or two before had been so swiftly turned into defeat and disaster.

Yet Lefarge had not given way to hopeless despair. He was planning vengeance on his foes, plotting to regain possession of what he had lost, and which meant so much to him.

With the fortune that he would have made by the sale of the rifles to the Arab tribesmen, Lefarge had intended to return home to his native land, and there live in luxury until the end of his days. He had grown tired of the wild excitements and terrible hazards of the life of reckless adventure he had been leading for so many years.

When he embarked upon it he had resolved that this should be the last gun-running expedition he would ever take part in. And so that it should be one to cause a sensation throughout the world, he had made an elaborately thought-out plot for the capture of a British gunboat.

The plot had succeeded, only for success to be snatched from his grasp, and he now realised the mistake he had made in not leaving the Flame alone. But for it his position would have been an entirely different one to what it was now.

The fleet conveying the rifles to Lake Dembea would have shaped a course for some place where the gunboat could not have followed it.

"Too late to regret now!" he muttered fiercely. "What is done cannot be undone, and had I better men under me, my plans would never have ended like this."

He stared down with savage eyes at the shadowy form of the gunboat in the lake under the shadow of the cliff. Not a sound came up from it. There was no light on its decks. It might have been deserted for all the suggestion that it gave of life and activity.

"The infidels are sleeping!" whispered an old Arab slave-dealer in his ear. "Now is the time to steal upon them!"

Lefarge glanced at the speaker with a contemptuous smile.

"Sleeping!" he muttered. "I wish they were! But their silence is assumed in the hope of trapping me. The first movement of attack on our part would bring their gun-fire on us!"

"You think so?" said the other. "Then we must act so cautiously that they will not know we are attacking them. Listen! On board one of the dhows, and that the one nearest to the gunboat, there is a large quantity of gunpowder in one of the holds."

A sudden, fierce light of understanding flashed in Lefarge's eyes.

"A fuse can be set to the gunpowder," continued the Arab, "and the dhow set adrift. The set of the current will take it alongside the gunboat. Then the great explosion will take place, and the infidels and their ship will find a grave in the bed of the lake. Is it not a good plan?"

"It is!" replied Lefarge. "I'd forgotten the gunpowder. There is half a ton of the stuff in the hold of that dhow. Capital! It shall be done!"

He soon completed his arrangements for the accomplishment of this daring object. Only a few men were required,

and these he chose from those around him, fanatical tribesmen who counted their lives of no account so long as they were sacrificed in an attack on the hated white man.

Stealing cautiously down the cliffside, Lefarge and his associates crept through the bushes to the edge of the lake. Here they remained motionless, but watchful, for some minutes.

Then the most hazardous part of the performance commenced. The distance between the nearest dhow and the shore was over thirty yards, and the greater part of it was illuminated by the light of the stars, which meant detection to any swimmer.

But the plotters had already decided what to do. One by one they silently entered the lake, swam for a few yards, and then dived, not rising to the surface again until they were in the shadow thrown by the towering hulls of the dhows.

Lithe and active as mountaineers, they climbed up the side of the dhow, crossed it to the next one, and so kept on until they had reached the end vessel, that one containing the gunpowder, and also the nearest to the gunboat.

"Listen," whispered Lefarge suddenly, his gaze turned in the direction of the Flame. "I heard someone speaking over there."

The sound was not repeated, even if there had been one such as the gun-runner imagined he had heard, and the plotters resumed their work of death.

The gunpowder hold was situated aft, and protected by hatches of double thickness. In the darkness, Lefarge and his men removed the hatches, and then the gun-runner, armed with a dark lantern, descended into the hold.

Pushing back the slide, he flashed the light around on the barrels of gunpowder that were stored there.

At the same moment a broad band of light of intense brilliancy swept down upon the dhow.

It was the searchlight of the Flame. Cautious though the Arabs had been, their movements had been overheard by Pritchard, and he, going to the searchlight apparatus, had set it in motion.

The group of savages gathered round the gunpowder hold was revealed in a second of time.

"By heaven!" cried Pritchard, as the meaning of what he looked at flashed across his mind. "They're going to explode the gunpowder! Quick, men! Quick, and follow me!"

With a dozen bluejackets at his heels he rushed to the side of the gunboat, and took a mighty leap that landed him on the deck of the dhow. Some of the bluejackets followed his example, some missed the dhow and fell into the lake, while others dived into the lake and swam to the vessel.

The Arabs, cornered and at bay, made a stubborn resistance. Knives flashed, and a report of rifle-shots rang out. Collared round the waist by a gigantic tribesman, Pritchard was lifted clean off his feet, and hurled across the deck.

In endeavouring to regain his balance, he tripped over a rope and tumbled down into the gunpowder-hold. A man was there—Fernand Lefarge—setting light to a fuse inserted in the lid of a barrel of gunpowder.

Dazed and partly stunned by his fall, Pritchard looked up to see Lefarge light the fuse, and then start to leave the hold. Restored to a fiery activity by the sight, Pritchard, uttering a loud cry, sprang to his feet.

Snarling like a tiger-cat, Lefarge turned and fired at him with a revolver. The shot missed its aim, and next moment Pritchard had thrown his strong arms round the gun-runner, and pulled him down into the hold.

A grim and desperate struggle ensued between the two men. Locked in a terrible embrace, they reeled to and fro. Suddenly Lefarge wrenched his right arm free, and struck the other a fierce blow in the face. Pritchard staggered back against the side of the hold.

"Hang you!" cried Lefarge, drawing a knife from his belt. "If I die, you shall die, too!"

A sharp report echoed out, and Lefarge, shot through the brain, fell dead. The revolver he had dropped had been snatched up by Pritchard, who owed his life to his enemy's weapon.

"I told you," said Pritchard, as he looked down into the face of his dead foe, "that your life should pay for your treatment of me when I was in your power!"

Then he snatched the blazing fuse from the gunpowder-barrel, and stamped it under foot. Regaining the deck of the dhow, he found the Arabs prisoners in the hands of his comrades.

"Any of them down there?" asked Daleham.

"Lefarge," said Pritchard, "but he's dead now!"

* * * * *

Three months later, while the Flame was anchored off Aden, Rodney Grant received a dispatch from the Admiral of the British squadron stationed in the Eastern seas. It informed him that he and his chums, Dick Daleham and Frank Langford, had been raised to the rank of lieutenants for their exceptionally brave and skilful conduct in the affair with the gun-runners.

Various promotions and rewards were also given to the members of the crew of the gunboat, the history of whose cruise had caused a profound sensation in Great Britain. It was now returning to Gibraltar, where those who had fought and suffered together were to be drafted to other ships flying the white ensign, the flag of the mighty Navy that rules the sea.

THE END.

CHIEF OF THE DELAWARES!

A Splendid Long Complete Tale of Thrilling Adventure Among the Redskins.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Band of Survivors—Straight Pine's Eloquence—The Two Paleface Warriors—Eagle Eye.

"WHO was the wolf who bit at my son in the night? Do the Delawares and the Mohicans sleep that they are not already close on the trail of the beast?"

Thundering Voice, one of the last of the great chiefs of the Delawares, raised his aged form, and shook his hands towards the sky as if to call down vengeance. Something of the natural calm of the men of his race had left him, and his mouth twitched and his eyes blazed with passionate emotion. The paint of peace was streaked on his lined face, as it was on the faces of the dozen Delawares and Mohicans who squatted round the fire, but there was nothing of peace in the tones of his ringing voice.

From brave to brave passed the blazing eyes of Thundering Voice; then the light went out of them, all the erectness left his figure, and he lowered himself wearily to the ground, half-covering his face with his blanket.

"Thundering Voice has lived too long," he said brokenly. "He has lived to see the words of the Mingoes and Hurons come true, to know that they spoke the truth when they said that the Delawares and Mohicans were women!"

A dead silence followed these words. If they had come from a younger chief, or one less renowned than Thundering Voice, he would not have lived long after having uttered them. As it was, the Delawares and Mohicans continued to stare into the fire, the shadows of the forest around them growing deeper. Up in the tops of the tall trees a breeze was sighing plaintively.

Thundering Voice drew his blanket higher over his face—the Indian expression of profound sorrow or shame—but still none of the others moved or spoke, though now and again one or another glanced sharply sideways at his neighbour.

From among the trees came the cracking of a twig. In an instant the Delawares and Mohicans were on the alert. Their fingers closed over their rifles, which had been lying beside them, while one of them, by a quick kick, scattered the embers of the small fire. Then all lay down, waiting for what was to happen, save Thundering Voice. He still sat as if he cared nothing for whatever might happen.

From among the shadows came the tall figure of a warrior, a knife and tomahawk in his belt, a rifle balanced in the hollow of his arm. The moon, filtering down through the trees, was strong enough to show the new-comer's features, and as they were revealed to the crouching men they all rose to their feet.

"Welcome, Straight Pine!" one of them said. "The coming of spring is not sweeter than the footstep of the Delaware."

Without a word, Straight Pine moved further forward, then halted as he caught sight of the figure of Thundering Voice, who still held the blanket across his face.

"Why is my father, the great Thundering Voice, ashamed?" he demanded, in a curiously deep and mellow voice.

For a moment the old chief lowered the blanket, and his eyes blazed round upon the warriors.

"He has lived to see the hearts of Delawares and Mohicans filled with water," he said wearily, "and to wish that their squaws shall make skirts for them."

No token of surprise, no suggestion of any kind, crossed the new-comer's face.

"Let the council fire be lit," he said quietly. "Straight Pine has been away towards the sun, and in the fort where the palefaces dwell, but now that he has returned he will not lie like a log while Thundering Voice hides his head in shame."

The youngest brave present quickly collected dry sticks, and a fire was soon burning. The braves once more seated themselves around it, leaving a place for Straight Pine opposite the one occupied by the old chief. Fully five minutes passed before a word was spoken, for it is not the habit of the redskins to do anything hastily. Then, Straight Pine rose to his feet, drew up his fine figure, and prepared to speak.

"Through the suns of many days, through the dews of many nights have I come," he said, "that my eyes might be gladdened when they looked upon the faces of the few of my tribe left. But now the heart of Straight Pine is sad, for he sees that Thundering Voice, whose words were enough to bring tears to the lodges of the Mingoes, is not glad."

Having spoken, Straight Pine seated himself, awaiting the answer which was bound to be given. Again there was a silence of some minutes, then Thundering Voice dropped the blanket from his face, and rose to his feet. His eyes were blazing again, and there was the tremor of rage in his voice when he spoke.

"Listen, Straight Pine!" he cried. "And tell me if I wrong the last of the Delawares and Mohicans when I call them women.

"Three days back the young chief Arrowhead, the last of the sons left to me, went into the forest after buck. With the fall of night his returning footfalls had not gladdened our ears, and we searched for his trail in the forest. We were keen of eye, and we found it—and more."

Thundering Voice paused, and shook a clenched hand upwards.

"There, too, was the trail of the cursed Mingoes, the mark of the mocassins of Arrowhead among them. The young chief walked as a brave who has been wounded, and we saw that he was a prisoner.

"I am old, I have lived long—long enough to see my race, who ruled these forests, dying out as the embers of a fire when no hand brings fresh wood for the flames to feed on; but had I been old as the hills, had I been so weak that I could but crawl, even then would I have struck the war-trail at the head of my braves."

Once again the old chief covered his face with his blanket, but quickly threw it down again, and his blazing eyes darted from face to face.

"I have lived too long!" he cried. "The Delawares and Mohicans are women!"

With a gesture of despair, Thundering Voice seated himself, and Straight Pine rose. For a moment he stood silent and sorrowful, then his deep voice broke the stillness.

"Straight Pine is glad that he has returned," he said. "He will wake his brothers from their dream that they are women, and soon the Mingoes shall hear the crack of their rifles. The moon is high, and the trail as clear as under the sun. What binds the feet of the warriors to the ground?"

Another chief, a fine-looking man, who looked a trifle ashamed of himself, though he tried to appear as listless as usual, rose.

"The dogs of Mingoes are as many as the sands at the shore of the salt lakes, Straight Pine," he said. "What should we do?"

"Bend the Mingoes till they lick of the salts!" the Delaware thundered. "Are the numbers of the Mingoes larger than the fear of the chief?"

The chief raised his right hand eight times, with all the fingers extended, in that manner indicating that the enemy were forty in number.

"It is better that Arrowhead die," he said sombrely, "than that the last few of the Mohicans and the Delawares shall have their scalps drying at the lodge-poles of the Mingoes."

Straight Pine's eyes flashed, and his hand hovered near the tomahawk in his belt as if he were inclined to make use of it then and there.

"Is it well that the great Manitou shall refuse ye entrance to the happy hunting-grounds?" he cried. "Is it a place for women?"

"The river that tries to climb a mountain is foolish," the other chief muttered.

"Yet it eats into the heart of the rock until it has pierced away to the other side," Straight Pine said coolly. "See, we do not go alone on the trail of Arrowhead."

A curious call broke from the lips of the Delaware, to be immediately answered from among the trees, from which stepped two figures, those of a man of unusually large stature, and a fine-looking lad of about sixteen. Both were dressed in buckskin, and carried rifles on their shoulders.

"See!" Straight Pine cried. "Have ye heard of No Scalp?"

A murmur from the men round the fire told of assent, which was not remarkable, for Nat Wild had made himself feared by his enemies, both red and white.

"This is Eagle Eye, whom I have made brother," the Delaware continued, waving a hand towards Dick Wild, the brother of the trapper.

"He is but papoose fit for the back of the squaw," one of the chiefs muttered, but not so low that Straight Pine did not hear him.

"Can the papoose shoot?" he asked quietly, turning to Thundering Voice, who was staring moodily into the fire. "Let him choose the best of his chiefs, that they may prove themselves better warriors than the Delaware's brother."

Dick had drawn near to the chief, and now he touched him on the arm.

"What's the game, chief?" he asked eagerly.

"Arrowhead, son of the great Thundering Voice, taken a prisoner by the Mingoes," Straight Pine answered. "I would strike the trail, but these chiefs doubt their strength."

"What!" Dick cried indignantly. "They won't get after the brutes when one of their own number is a prisoner?"

"I have spoken," Straight Pine agreed quietly.

"It don't surprise me, lad," Nat Wild whispered. "These savages ain't over fond o' goin' into a fight 'less they're sartain ter win, though I did think better o' the Delawares an' Mohicans than that."

Thundering Voice rose to his feet again, and his eyes rested upon the figure of Dick.

"Eagle Eye is young to be on the war-trail," he said softly, "and Thundering Voice had thought to let the tomahawk rest in his girdle. But Arrowhead is in the hands of the Mingo dogs, and they will prepare the torture for him; therefore will the old warrior and the young start together on the war-trail, that the young men of the Delawares and Mohicans shall be shamed."

With a quiet dignity, Thundering Voice picked up his rifle and stood a moment with his old body as erect as that of a young man, his eyes flashing upon the figures of the braves staring moodily into the fire. Then he lowered his rifle to the trail and moved away.

"Come, Eagle Eye," he said, as he passed Dick.

Dick Wild was ready enough to go on the track of the Mingoes, and he fell in behind the old chief. He did not even look to see that Nat and Straight Pine did the same, for he knew that neither would leave him under any circumstances, even as he would not have deserted them when to stand by them meant nothing short of death.

With rapid steps, despite his advanced age, Thundering Voice led the way through the dense forest. There was a track of sorts to follow for the present, so that there was nothing to hinder progress. An ambush, too, was unlikely, for the Mingoes were practically certain, now that they had got their prisoner, to make a march for the hills, where they would be safe to torture him to the content of their savage hearts.

For between two and three hours Thundering Voice led the way. Fully a score of years seemed to have dropped from his shoulders, for he marched on with the light step of a young brave. At the end of that time he halted, pointed to the ground.

"The trail of Arrowhead," he said.

Dick dropped to his knees, and even in the darkness he could see that the old chief was right. In one spot the ground was soft, and in that place there was the plain print of a moccasin, of the kind which would only be worn by a Delaware or Mohican. All round this were other tracks, for the captors had not troubled about leaving a trail; and to Dick, well trained by Straight Pine, they told plainly of the feet of Mingoes and Hurons.

"It is a Delaware print, sure enough, chief," Dick said as he rose to his feet, "and the Mingoes have left a trail that we'd be able to follow if we were blindfolded. Do ye rest, or are ye ready to follow?"

Thundering Voice seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree and laid his rifle close to his hand.

"Rest, Eagle Eye," he said, "that the last of the Delawares and Mohicans may still prove themselves men."

Dick did not for the moment understand the import of these words, but, without questioning, he seated himself close to the old chief. Nat Wild threw his great frame on the ground, and Straight Pine, his rifle still in his hand, reclined against a tree.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Band Increased—The Deserted Camp—Dick Finds a Traitor—Straight Pine Saves Dick.

FEELING pretty tired, for he had accomplished with his two companions a long march before joining Thundering Voice and his men, Dick presently began to nod, and, from nodding, slipped into sleep, though he still retained his seat on the trunk of the tree. Nat had gone to sleep, too, so that only the redskins remained awake—Straight Pine standing by the tree, his fine eyes occasionally darting round as if in search of possible dangers, while Thundering Voice, his chin sunk on his breast, stared moodily into space.

With a start Dick awoke, and half raised his rifle, with the instinct common to the frontiersman, as he saw three Indians come gliding out from among the trees. A second glance, however, showed him that they were of the men left behind by Thundering Voice, and he guessed correctly that they had decided to throw in their lot with the old chief.

One by one they advanced into the little clearing just as day was beginning to dawn, and squatted on the ground before Thundering Voice. The old chief gave no sign that he saw them, but still sat staring before him with unseeing eyes.

Four more braves—Mohicans this time—stalked into the clearing, lengthening the line of squatting forms before the old chief. They laid their weapons beside them, and not a word was spoken. Still Thundering Voice's eyes seemed to see nothing—unless it was that they stared away into things beyond the ken of mere mortal man.

Dick rose and crossed over to where Straight Pine stood.

"We'll be all right, after all, chief," he said, "and we'll be able to get Arrowhead back."

"The Mingoes are many, Eagle Eye," the Delaware answered quietly, "but our hands and eyes are sure and our scalps shall dry if Thundering Voice still be without a son."

As Straight Pine finished speaking, three more braves strode into the clearing, and joined their fellows. Then, for the first time since the halt, Thundering Voice seemed to rouse himself. His chin rose from his breast and his old eyes flashed as they had in days long dead. He rose majestically to his feet and threw his gaunt arms up towards heaven.

"Thundering Voice rejoices!" he cried. "The Delawares and Mohicans are still the lords of the forest, and they do not fear the Mingoes even when they are many as the tufts of waving grass on the great prairies. Thundering Voice is glad!"

"Guess I'm a bit glad, too," Nat observed, addressing the chief. "I ain't afeerd o' much above ground, but the odds is pretty strong against us now."

"Oh, but we'll win, Nat!" Dick said eagerly.

No Scalp pushed his hat back slightly, and his fingers touched the spot which was bald.

"Reckon they cairn't scalp me again," he muttered. "But ye'll hev ter fight pretty haird ter save yours."

The big trapper was right enough. Thundering Voice had said that the captors of Arrowhead numbered forty, while the little party now going in pursuit numbered only fourteen all told, and of those one could scarcely be counted; for Thundering Voice, though the spirit of his people was still strong in him, had but the withered arm of an old man.

In silence the rescue-party made a meal of dried venison, then all was ready for the pursuit to be continued. Thundering Voice rose to his feet and drew himself upright, though it was obvious that the strain was already beginning to tell upon him. The warriors followed his example, and Straight Pine, with Dick and Nat, crossed the small narrow clearing to take up the trail, which was still plain enough.

Walking in single file—Straight Pine first, Dick second, and the rest following as they willed—the little band wound their way on through the forest. It was broad daylight now, save where the trees were thickest, and there, even when the sun was shining, there was no more than twilight among the trees. It needed no great light, however, to follow the trail of the Mingoes. Evidently they had had no fear of pursuit, for they had not taken even the simplest precautions to hide their trail. Yet Straight Pine glanced anxiously from side to side as if he feared something that the others did not see.

Nothing happened, however, and at noon a halt was called by Straight Pine, who had, without a word being spoken, taken over the command. Thundering Voice at once sank down on to a log, worn out, though not a word of complaint escaped his lips. It was obvious that he would not be able to keep on the trail much longer.

While this rest was being taken Dick strolled round the clearing, then, having nothing better to do, moved a few yards further along the trail, examining it carefully in the hope of learning something from it. Straight Pine had taught him how much might be learnt from the bend of a twig or a bruised leaf, and he was always ready to test his powers.

Only a few yards did he go now before a fallen tree lay right across his path. He quickly examined the roots to see whether it had been cut down, then discovered the reason for the fall. The trunk had been bitten clean round by beavers, but the tree had fallen—a very rare thing—away from the water instead of towards it, as the cunning little beasts had intended. That it had fallen recently was plain to Dick, for the leaves were only slightly withered. He searched the trunk for marks of the feet of the Mingoes, but found none. Then a slight cry escaped him, and he dropped to his knees.

The tree did not lie exactly where it had fallen, and Dick's examination of the ground soon showed the boy why. In one place the grass and leaves were all broken and bruised, and several were stained by blood, which was now dry. Still further Dick examined, and discovered that the feet of two of the Mingoes made heavier marks, as if they carried a burden.

One of their number had been badly injured by the fallen tree, and the others had had to carry him on with them!

Dick walked quietly back to where the others were resting. He was burning with excitement, but he was trying to gain the calm of the redskins under any circumstances, therefore there was little expression on his face as he rejoined the others. He found Straight Pine talking to Thundering Voice, and he approached them.

"Let Eagle Eye draw near," the old chief said, as he caught sight of the boy. "It were well if the paleface had been born with a redskin, then would he have been the chief of the Delawares when Thundering Voice goes to roam the happy hunting-grounds with his fathers and his sons who have already died."

"The words of the great chief are full of wisdom," Straight Pine agreed in a soft voice, glancing for a moment towards the boy. "What has Eagle Eye discovered?"

Dick had thought his face quite expressionless, at least, he had had no idea that it betrayed any emotion, yet he was not surprised at the Delaware's question. Straight Pine had the eyes of a hawk, and could read a face as well as he could read the signs of a trail.

"One of the Mingoes is injured," Dick answered quietly, "and others carry him, so that their mocassins press hard on the trail. They journey but slowly, and we should be upon them before another day is gone."

"Good!" Straight Pine grunted, rose to his feet, and followed Dick to where the tree lay across the trail.

The Delaware examined the signs as Dick had done, yet more closely, and when he rose to his feet there was a look of satisfaction on his face.

"It is a chief who is hurt," he announced quietly.

"What makes ye think that, chief?" Nat, who had drawn near, demanded.

"Would the Mingoes slacken their steps for less than a chief?" Straight Pine answered. "They have Arrowhead, son of the great Thundering Voice, a prisoner, and would they risk pursuit and his loss for less than a chief?"

"I guess ye're right, chief," Nat agreed, realising the strength of the other's reasoning. "We'll push along right now. If thar's got ter be a fight we may es well hev it over an' done with."

Ten minutes later the little party had once more struck the trail, and they moved swiftly along in the wake of the Mingoes. Thundering Voice was showing signs of fatigue only in his dragging feet, for the fierce light of his eyes was undimmed—the spirit was there, but many years had sapped the body's strength. And so for some hours Straight Pine and Dick, with Nat close behind them, led the way, moving cautiously as if the enemy were within a score of yards. That might have been the case, so that there was need for every caution.

Evening drew in, and almost as its shadows began to feel the forest, Straight Pine emerged from among the trees and halted abruptly. Ahead, not a hundred yards distant, stood close upon a dozen tents of skins, which had been pitched in the dry bed of a watercourse, on both sides of which rose rocky banks some thirty or forty feet high. Beyond this the ground lay bare for a couple of miles, then the dense forest began again.

At sight of the tents the Indians had drawn quickly back into the cover of the trees—all save Straight Pine, Dick, and Nat, who stood their ground. The Delaware leant on the long barrel of his rifle, and stared ahead. For a minute or so he stood in this attitude, then he turned to the men behind the trees.

"Do my brothers fear empty tents?" he asked quietly. "Can the ashes of dead fires burn them?"

Thundering Voice stepped rather wearily from among the trees.

"The eyes of the chief are old," he said, "and the eyes of others must be his. What can Straight Pine see?"

"That the tents are empty," the Delaware answered promptly. "Where is the smoke from the fires, chief? Are there rifles by the entrance to the lodges?"

"It may be an ambuscade, chief," Dick suggested.

"It may be that the Mingoes are men and not dogs," Straight Pine answered calmly. "The brain of a Mingo is like that of a bird who sings in the branches of a tree, and thinks that the bullet of the hunter cannot reach him. Follow!"

Without the slightest hesitation Straight Pine led the way towards the tents, the rest of the party following, and slid down the steep banks of the watercourse into the place where they stood. No shots burst from the cover around, no shrill warcry broke upon the stillness. He had been right when he said that the Mingoes were not there.

Dick bent over some ashes and felt the ground with his hand. It was still warm.

"Not more than a couple of hours gone, chief," he said eagerly.

"Good!" Straight Pine answered, then turned to Thundering Voice. "My father will rest here," he said quietly, "that he may be fleet of foot on the morrow."

Thundering Voice hesitated. He would have given much to have gone straight on, but his strength was failing him, and he realised that he could proceed no further without rest.

"The words of Straight Pine are sweet to the ear as the ripple of fresh waters," he said wearily, and passed into the nearest of the tents.

No fires were lit, for the Mingoes might not be far away in the forest, and another meal of dried venison was made. Then most of the redskins lay down on the ground and fell asleep. Nat Wild had taken possession of one of the tents and was already sleeping soundly in it, but Dick, not feeling in the least tired, sat outside it cleaning his rifle.

It was dark now, and only a star or two glimmered in the sky. It was an ideal night for a surprise attack.

Suddenly Dick stopped cleaning his rifle, and laid down flat on the ground. His eyes were upon a spot where two of the redskins had been lying. Now one of them had moved, and was crawling warily towards the left bank of the watercourse.

What did it mean, Dick asked himself? He knew this man—a young warrior of the name of Umtawa, who was one of those who had held back most persistently when the rescue of Arrowhead had been suggested. Yet here was this man crawling away by himself in the direction that the Mingoes had taken.

Swiftly Dick loaded his rifle, and, trailing the weapon behind him, moved off in the track of the man, who was already climbing, softly as a snake, up the bank.

Without fear Dick followed, reaching the foot of the steep bank just as the Indian reached the top. Then he started to mount, but his foot, catching a loose stone, sent it rolling down with a little rattling sound. Instantly the head of Umtawa was thrust over the bank, and a second later he came swiftly down to where the boy stood.

There was a fierce look on the savage's face, and his hand hovered round the haft of his tomahawk. He carried no rifle.

"For what does Eagle Eye walk in the night?" he demanded.

"Might not he ask the same question of Umtawa?" Dick answered coolly. "Might he not ask why the warrior walks away towards the camp of the Mingoes?"

The hand of the redskin closed over his tomahawk, but he relaxed his grip as Dick suggestively moved his rifle.

"Umtawa should sleep beside the others," the boy said meaningly, "then bad thoughts would not enter the heads of those who have seen him stealing from the camp."

With a grunt which might have meant anything, Umtawa moved back towards the tents, and threw himself down in the spot that he had occupied before. Dick watched him, debating what he should do. Should he warn Straight Pine or not? He decided not to, feeling that he would be wronging Umtawa, for he could hardly bring himself to believe that the man would be a traitor to his own tribe.

No, he would go into the tent occupied by Nat, and from there watch the man, himself unobserved, until the morning.

Entering the tent without disturbing his brother, Dick seated himself just inside the opening, meaning to keep guard until the morning. Very soon, however, he found himself nodding, and fought hard against his desire to sleep.

Umtawa never stirred as he lay upon the ground.

Presently Dick lay asleep, too, his feet towards the opening of the tent.

. . . . . .

Up on the bank of the dry watercourse lay Straight Pine, his rifle thrust out before him. He, too, had seen Umtawa move away from the camp, and had prepared to follow. He had seen Dick stop the man, watched him lie down with the others, and so had waited and watched. That there was good reason for his vigil was now obvious.

Umtawa no longer lay with the others. He had moved, slowly and softly, worming his way like a snake along the ground, moving always towards the tent in which Dick lay.

Now he was quite close to it, moving on all fours, a knife between his teeth. He feared that Dick might tell Thundering Voice of what had happened earlier, and he knew that the old chief would guess the truth—that he had intended to sell them to the Mingoes.

Up on the bank of the watercourse Straight Pine lay quite still, save that as Umtawa drew nearer to the tent he drew his rifle back to his shoulder, and one gleaming eye ranged along the sights. Umtawa was very near to death.

Right to the entrance to the tent the treacherous redskin crawled, and his right hand went up towards the knife between his teeth. As it did so, Straight Pine's finger pressed upon the trigger of his rifle, but not hard enough to discharge it. The chief had remembered that the Mingoes might be quite close, and so he dropped his rifle and jerked the tomahawk from his belt.

Straight through the air whirled the deadly little hatchet, just as Umtawa took the knife from between his teeth, and, with a wild shriek of agony, the traitor collapsed in a heap before the tent.

Instantly every man of the party was awake and alert, thinking that the Mingoes were upon them, and Thundering Voice, his eyes flashing, came striding from his tent.

Dick was standing amazed, horror in his eyes, staring down at the body of Umtawa.

"Who has slain a Delaware warrior?" Thundering Voice cried, as he saw what had happened.

Straight Pine stepped quietly forward through the group gathered round the dead man, and plucked up his blood-stained weapon.

"A traitor has died at the hand of Straight Pine," he said quietly.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Mingoes' Messenger—The Contest Arranged—Dick and Nat Win—Straight Pine Scents Treachery—For Safety.

IN silence, without further questions being asked, for the Delawares could read the truth as they looked at the knife that had fallen from the fingers of the dead man, Umtawa was borne away into the forest, and his body hidden in the bushes, so that pasing Mingoes or Hurons might not find it, and get possession of the scalp. The dead man had proved himself a traitor, but he was of their tribe, and, therefore, they were merciful. That task accomplished, the little camp once more seemed to slumber until the dawn, though in reality, not one man, red or white, actually slept.

It was just after the first flush of dawn, the favourite hour of the Mingoes for an attack, that Straight Pine, clambering out of the watercourse, stood looking away towards the forest. His hands rested upon the barrel of his rifle, and his chin was upon his hands. For some minutes he stood in this attitude, and he scarcely moved as he saw the figure of an Indian emerge from the distant forest, and come swiftly towards him.

This Indian, whatever his object or mission, came forward unhesitatingly, until Straight Pine was able to see that, save for the knife in his belt, the man was unarmed. He was a messenger from the captors of Arrowhead.

Just for a moment the Delaware stepped right back to the edge of the watercourse, and looked down. Dick stood below him.

"Let Eagle Eye have fires lit in every tent," he ordered quietly.

"But there are more tents than men, chief," Dick protested, not understanding, though he would have done so had he seen the Mingo messenger approaching.

"Need the Mingo dogs know that?" Straight Pine said meaningly.

Dick understood now, guessed that in some way or another the enemy was near enough to observe, and hastily set to work to carry out the chief's orders, two of the younger braves helping him. The rest, including Thundering Voice, squatted before a blazing fire, and seemed to take no interest whatever in the proceedings. Yet, in reality, they wondered why this order had been given, and waited for Straight Pine, in whom they had absolute faith, to tell them. They had not long to wait.

"Let the great Thundering Voice and his warriors come to meet the messenger from the Mingoes!" Straight Pine cried down.

As if by one accord the Delawares and Mohicans reached out for their weapons.

"Let them come unarmed," Straight Pine continued quietly, "that the Mingo dog may not think that they have fear."

With some difficulty, for his recent severe exertions had told upon him, Thundering Voice managed to reach the top of the watercourse just as the Mingo arrived within a couple of hundred yards from the spot, and the others, including Nat and Dick, were quickly beside him. Except for the knives or tomahawks in their belts, they were all unarmed.

The Mingo approached with great dignity now, holding above his head a belt of wampum, a sign that he had power to treat with the chiefs. In answer Thundering Voice raised his hands high above his head, to show that they held no weapons.

"Let the messenger of the Mingoes approach!" he cried and much of the old ring had come back into his voice, "he will find no treachery in the heart of a Delaware or a Mohican, for they can slay their enemies in the open."

"It is well said," the Mingo answered coolly, "and Swift of Foot draws near with confidence in his heart."

Swift of Foot, as the mesenger had named himself, drew nearer. His face was quite placid, but his cunning eyes searched round eagerly. He noticed the small number of the Delawares and Mohicans, then looked to the smoke rising from all the tents. It was obvious that he did not know how many men Thundering Voice had under his command, and it was also plain that he was more than a little anxious to know, though it was only his eyes which betrayed the desire.

"Shall not the Mingo go down into the camp," he suggested, "that all the Delawares and their friends may hear his message?"

"Swift of Foot has already journeyed far," Thundering Voice answered coolly, "and the bank of the watercourse is steep."

"The feet of the Mingo are sure," Swift of Foot began to protest, "and——"

"Shall a Mingo or a Huron leave the camp of a Delaware alive?" Thundering Voice interrupted sternly. "Let Swift of Foot say why he is here. Let him say how it is that he has captured Arrowhead after the war hatchet has been buried. Is that an act of peace?"

"Is there ever peace between the wolf and the doe?" the Mingo answered meaningly.

Thundering Voice drew his old form more erect, and his eyes flashed upon the Mingo. It was men of this tribe who held his son, and his fingers itched to bury his hatchet in Swift of Foot's brain.

"The patience of the Delaware is but the space between the steps of a moccasin," he said sharply. "Let the Mingo say what he has come for."

"Hear, hear," Dick Wild muttered, for he was anxious to know what the enemy could gain by this move, unless it had been done solely to discover the strength of Thundering Voice's men.

"The Mingoes and Hurons are warriors," Swift of Foot answered readily, realising that it would be as well for him to state his mission without further delay, "and now that the hatchet is buried, they grow tired of the chase, which can bring to them but little honour.

"Arrowhead, son of Thundering Voice, is in their hands, and they could have killed him easily as the lightning bends and makes fall the greatest trees of the forest. But the Mingoes and Hurons have warm hearts, and would even now set the son of Thundering Voice free."

Not a trace of expression or hope showed in the face of the old chief, for he was too old to believe in the truth of such idle words.

"And what is the price for Arrowhead's life?" he demanded.

"This is the word of Lame Bear," Swift of Foot cried. "Let Thundering Voice send three of his braves to meet three of the Mingoes. Two of them shall wrestle until the one is broken, two shall throw the hatchet, and the other two shall shoot at the mark. If Thundering Voice's men win, then shall Arrowhead go free."

Even now Thundering Voice's face betrayed no sign of emotion. Such contests of skill between two tribes, the prize to be the life or death of some prisoner, had taken place many times before, yet the old chief could not believe that the Mingoes would risk the loss of such a capture as Arrowhead.

"Thundering Voice hesitates," Swift of Foot sneered; "he fears that his braves will be beaten."

"Does he understand the message? If the Delawares win they shall have Arrowhead restored to them, but if the

Mingoes win then shall they be allowed to depart in peace, taking their prisoner with them, and the Delawares shall not pursue."

Now Thundering Voice understood. Although Lame Bear's party of warriors was powerful it still feared its old enemies the Delawares, and was anxious to stop further pursuit. The eyes of the old chief lit up as he realised this, and he glanced round at his small party of men.

"The words of Lame Bear are good!" he cried. "When the sun stands at its highest in the heavens then will Thundering Voice bring his braves to defeat the Mingoes. Let them have the bonds of Arrowhead loose, that no time may be lost when it comes that he is to be handed back to his own."

A curious smile twisted the lips of the Mingo for an instant, and was gone. He bowed haughtily, and drew his robe round him, ready to depart.

"When the sun is high," he said, "Lame Bear shall bring his men, the same number as the Delawares, to the edge of the forest. Let the Delawares send one of their young men back to the lodges with news that Arrowhead must die, that th squaws may weep for him."

Swift of Foot turned on his heel and strode away towards the forest. The Delawares watched him go; then Thundering Voice led the way down into the watercourse, after motioning one of the younger braves to remain above to watch, and the rest followed him. Fresh wood was flung on the fire, and every man present seated himself before the embers, including Dick and Nat Wild, close to whom was Straight Pine. It was Thundering Voice, as the oldest chief present, who spoke first.

"The Mingo's words were full of boastfulness," he said. "What does the wise Straight Pine think of them?"

The Delaware rose to his feet, out of respect to the old chief, before answering. There was no hesitation in his voice when he spoke, and his eyes flashed with the fire of a man who scents victory although it is still afar off.

"We shall go to meet them when the sun rides high in the heavens, great chief," he said, "and we shall overthrow them, for the Mingoes have ever fallen before the Delawares and Mohicans. Let the chiefs choose those among them who shall meet the Mingoes."

"It is good," Thundering Voice agreed.

Nat Wild had listened closely to all this, and now he rose to his feet, and stood towering above the others.

"See here, chiefs," he said bluntly, "it ain't fer me ter go boastin' about what I kin do, but I reckon thet if thar's wrestlin' ter be done thet ye'd best leave thet ter me."

"No Scalp speaks wisely," Thundering Voice agreed, for he knew of the strength of the great trapper; "the Delawares are proud that he should fight for them."

"An' see here," Nat continued, "if it comes ter shootin', what's the matter with Dick—Eagle Eye as ye call him?"

"Eagle Eye is young, though his name is already heard in the lodges of the Delawares and the Mohicans," Thundering Voice answered, rather doubtfully. "What says Straight Pine, whose words are those of many wise men?"

"The bullet of Eagle Eye flies straight to its mark," the Delaware answered, glancing with pride towards the boy. "The Mingo bullet has not been cast that will strike the same mark."

"Then let him fight for us," Thundering Voice agreed, though still with a little of the doubt in his voice. "Last, who is he who shall throw the tomahawk, for all three must win if Arrowhead is to be restored to us?"

There was no hesitation about the choosing of the third champion.

"Straight Pine!" half a dozen voices cried.

Thundering Voice rose to his feet, fire in his eyes, his body quivering with excitement.

"We wait for the coming of noon!" he cried. "The great Manitou be on our side!"

High overhead shone the sun, showing that the hour of noon had arrived, its rays beating down upon Thundering Voice and his little band of followers as they stood within a score of yards of the fringe of the great forest. True to their word, they had brought their champions to meet the picked men of the Mingoes and Hurons. Dick looked a trifle nervous, as well he might when it is considered how much depended upon him. Nat, who was already stripped to the waist, was coolly rubbing the great muscles of his arms, while Straight Pine, his handsome face absolutely expressionless, leaned over his rifle, his eyes fixed upon the forest. He was watching for the Mingoes to come.

The Delawares had not long to wait. From among the trees stepped Lame Bear, a man who would have been a particularly fine-looking specimen had it not been for the decided limp, caused by a wound, which had earned him his Indian name. After him followed twelve Mingoes and Hurons, carrying no arms, save their knives and tomahawks, with the exception of one man, evidently he who was to be matched against Dick, who balanced a long-barrelled rifle in the hollow of his arm.

There men, walking with the natural dignity of men of

their colour, filed into the open, and drew themselves up in a line facing the Delawares and Mohicans, whose faces were equally expressionless. No man unused to the ways of the redskins could have imagined that these little bands of savages were men who had been at enmity for years, and who were likely to be, until not one man of one or other of the races was left.

The two chiefs, Lame Bear and Thundering Voice, moved forward to meet each other.

"Greeting, Thundering Voice," the Mingo said haughtily.

"There can be no greeting between the Delaware and the Mingo," Thundering Voice answered calmly. "The Delawares and Mohicans are but here to win the freedom of Arrowhead."

A rather contemptuous smile was allowed to curl the lips of Lame Bear for a moment.

"It is well," he said.

It was a curious sight to see the two bodies of Indians, the whites with one, drawn up facing one another, and few could have realised that they were declared enemies. All wore the paint of peace, and their faces were quite expressionless, save, perhaps, for an occasional gleam which flashed from their watchful eyes.

The Mingoes and Hurons numbered only the same total as the Delawares and Mohicans, but there were more within the borders of the forest, and Dick, as he glanced at the treacherous face of Lame Bear, wondered whether a wise thing had been done in accepting this challenge. Would Arrowhead be given up if the Mingoes and the Hurons lost all three contests?

Little time was lost. At a signal from Lame Bear a Mingo of fine proportions, clothed only in a waist-cloth, stepped from amongst his fellows, and stood with folded arms waiting for his adversary to appear. Then he threw up his head and cried in a sonorous voice:

"See! Hugging Bear awaits the strong man of the Delawares that he may make him crawl in the dust, for the strength of the Mingo is as the strength of a whole tribe, and no brave can fight with him and live. Ten moons back did Hahataki come against him, and for ten moons have the bones of Hahataki lain white on the prairie."

To ordinary ears this would have sounded mere empty boasting, but such speeches are common among the redskins, and there is nothing bragging to them in them.

Nat Wild, looking as cool as ever, stepped from among the Delawares. There was a slight smile on his lips, and his eyes were cold as steel.

"Say," he said in his deep voice, "I ain't goin' ter howl about what I kin do—but I'm trying."

"No Scalp," was murmured by more than one of the Mingoes, and some of the braves who had looked quite confident a short time back now commenced to look a trifle uneasy, though they hastened to assume their normally wooden expression.

The two men faced each other, the white and the red, equally fine specimens of the races from which they sprang. The redskin was rather the taller of the two, and his muscles were of the long, wiry type. On the other hand, Nat was undoubtedly the heavier man, and the muscles stood out on his arms and back in solid lumps. A hard man to beat, whoever essayed the task.

A sharp cry broke from Lame Bear, and, as if this were a signal, the redskin promptly leapt at his opponent. Nat grabbed at him, bending low to get a good body-hold, but the Indian swerved to one side, spun on his heels, and closed on the trapper from behind. With most men this would have been fatal, taking the Indian's great strength into consideration, but it did not seem to trouble Nat. As he felt the man's arms go round him, and a knee thrust into the small of his back, he suddenly bent double, and his opponent, flung clean over his head, fell heavily to the ground.

Even the Delawares and Mohicans could not suppress a yell of delight.

No Scalp stood quite still, breathing a little hard, though more from excitement than exertion, and waited for Hugging Bear to rise. Had the Indian been placed in this position, he would not have hesitated, and by now No Scalp would have been a dead man. When they fight to win they do not stick at niceties.

With a dazed expression on his face, Hugging Bear scrambled to his feet. His eyes were savage, and he glared at Nat Wild furiously. Never before had he been vanquished, as he had boasted, and now this paleface, the friend of the hated Delawares and Mohicans, had flung him into the dust.

More cautiously this time Hugging Bear advanced towards his opponent. He had had his lesson, and it had taught him something. He knew now that No Scalp was quite equal to throwing him, and therefore decided that the contest must be

fought out on the ground, where both men would have a pretty equal chance.

With a rush the two men came together; the redskin's heel went behind Nat, and the two fell heavily to the ground, the trapper underneath. The fall was a heavy one, dazing Nat for a moment, and in that brief space of time Hugging Bear had got a strangle-hold which would have meant the finish of the majority of men.

Nat felt the grip across his throat, and it brought him back to his full senses with a rush. Hugging Bear was forcing upon him with all his strength, bearing the arm down upon his opponent's neck until it seemed as if the spine must break under the strain.

With a quickness for which few would have believed him capable, Nat turned bodily, at the same time wrenching his neck free; his great hands went up behind him, and gripped the body of the Indian, who, with a suddenness which must have surprised him, turned a complete somersault, to find himself underneath, where only a few seconds ago he had been on top. This time, however, the fight was not knocked out of him, and he struggled like a panther to recover the advantage which he had lost. From side to side he wriggled, straining every muscle, but Nat Wild merely contented himself with holding him round the body and pressing him down upon the ground until the redskin could feel his ribs bending.

"Hed enough?" Nat suggested coolly.

"Hugging Bear never beaten!" the redskin gasped, though it was all that he could do to find breath enough to form the words.

"Is thet so?" the trapper muttered, and at the same moment slightly altered his grip. He would have spared the redskin had he given in, but as he meant to go on, Nat decided to finish the contest without further delay.

Hugging Bear struggled violently as he guessed the other's intention, but he was held in a grip that there was no shaking. Slowly but surely Nat rose to his knees, with the redskin clasped close to his breast. Then higher he drew himself, until he stood upright. Hugging Bear still struggled, but only weakly.

Just for a moment Nat Wild stood passive, then the redskin was swung up into the air as easily as a child handles a doll, every muscle in the great arms of the trapper stood out plainly, and Hugging Bear was flung clean up into the air, to fall some considerable number of feet away, where he lay still and motionless, stunned but not otherwise injured.

Lame Bear, chief of the Mingoes, attempted to look as if this defeat did not trouble him in the least, but old chief though he was, he could not keep the anger quite out of his eyes.

"No Scalp has done well," he said condescendingly, "but now let the champion of the Delawares meet Falling Buck."

Dick knew that his time had come, and though his heart possibly beat a trifle faster than usual, his face was calm enough as he stepped from among his companions. Lame Bear laughed as he caught sight of the boy, and threw out an arm in a gesture of protest.

"My braves do not shoot against papoose," he sneered.

"The mouth of Lame Bear should not open so wide," Thundering Voice answered quickly, "when already one of his greatest braves lies beaten."

Preparations for the shooting match were already in progress. From the branch of a tree, standing about a hundred yards distant, hung a tomahawk. This was quite a common type of target among the Indians, the small blade of the axe being counted the bullseye.

The solitary Mingo, who was armed with a rifle, now stepped forward, examining the priming of his weapon as he came, and dropped to one knee. Three times he raised his rifle, and his keen eye glanced along the sights, and as many times, hesitating, he did not fire. On the fourth occasion, however, his finger pressed back the trigger, and a yell of triumph broke from the Mingoes and Hurons as the tomahawk hit on the blade, swung sharply, spinning round at the same time.

"Can the papoose beat that?" Lame Bear cried contemptuously. "Let him draw nearer, as he is young."

Dick glanced at the swinging tomahawk, and no feeling of nervousness made his hands shake, or his eye lose any of his keenness. Since childhood he had been used to the handling of a rifle, and in Nat, who stood high in the ranks of trappers and hunters, he had had a more than usually able teacher. He meant to prove now that the confidence reposed in him by his friends the Delawares and Mohicans was not wrongly placed.

Even as the tomahawk swung, not waiting for it to hang still from its suspending thong of hide, Dick raised his rifle to his shoulder. He did not drop to one knee, which would have given him a steadier aim, but fired standing. Even Straight Pine, confident though he was of the boy's ability, looked a trifle anxious as he saw this.

The rifle cracked, and the tomahawk swung violently, hit as truly in the blade as was possible. Dick lowered his weapon, and smiled round at Straight Pine. The Mingoes and Hurons looked savage.

"It was chance!" the Mingo marksmen cried angrily, quite aware that the paleface boy's shot had been superior to his own.

"Chance?" Dick echoed coolly. "Let Falling Buck cut the thong from which the tomahawk hangs if he would prove his words."

The Mingo looked doubtful, but Lame Bear, with a quick gesture, ordered him to obey. Falling Buck therefore loaded his rifle carefully, Dick doing the same, and once more dropped to his knee. This time he took longer than ever to fire, only to meet with less success. When the smoke cleared away it was seen that the hatchet still dangled from the thong, which had not apparently been so much as grazed.

Now it was Dick's turn, and, taking no chances, he dropped to one knee. His rifle went up, the barrel suddenly seemed to stiffen into a thing held in a vice, and the trigger came back so steadily that the barrel never trembled.

A great yell of triumph broke from the Mohicans and Delawares. The thong of hide had been divided by the bullet, and the axe now lay upon the ground.

Lame Bear and his men looked savage, yet there was something in the expression of the chief which seemed to suggest that he had good reason for not being entirely down-hearted. Possibly Straight Pine noticed this, for it might have been seen that his companions, at a whispered word from him, drew closer together.

Preparations were now being made for the hatchet-throwing contest, the last of the three that were to decide the fate of Arrowhead, the son of Thundering Voice. A small post had been driven into the ground at a distance of thirty paces, and on this a white mark had been blazed with a hatchet.

Straight Pine stepped in a dignified manner from among his companions, and raised his tomahawk. Strangely enough, his eyes were not upon the mark at which he was to throw, but upon a clump of bushes just at the edge of the outer fringe of the forest.

The Delaware's arm came back, then his tomahawk swept away in a curve through the air, straight at the clump of bushes. At the same second a sharp report of a rifle came from that direction, and a bullet just grazed the shoulder of Thundering Voice.

From the bushes came a wild yell of agony, and a Mingo brave, Straight Pine's tomahawk in his shoulder, rolled into view.

A dozen rifles spoke from amongst the trees, and a Mohican fell, never to rise again, a bullet through his brain. Thundering Voice, his face ablaze with anger, realised that all this was an act of treachery on the part of the Mingoes and Hurons, and darted straight towards the forest. After him went the others, Dick and Nat with them, for only among the trees would they stand a chance against their treacherous foes, who considerably outnumbered them.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Running Fight—Thundering Voice Wounded—Dick to the Rescue—Proclaimed a Chief—Thundering Voice Dies.

So sudden had been Thundering Voice's rush for the forest that it was successful, and he and his men reached the shelter of the trees before more shots could be fired, and took up their position to the left of the spot from whence the volley had come. With the quickness of many years of training, every man of the Mohicans and Delawares took up his stand behind a tree, ready to let fly a bullet the moment the opportunity occurred, but indulging in no reckless firing, which would only mean the wasting of ammunition which might be wanted later on.

Dick and Nat had stationed themselves behind trees which stood close together, while Thundering Voice, his old eyes blazing furiously, a rifle in his hands, stood close to their left. He came of a race of redskins whose word was as good as their bond, and this act of treachery on the part of his enemies had fired his old blood, and he once more felt young again. Once more the thirst for scalps possessed him, and more than once he raised his rifle as he fancied that he caught sight of a feather showing from behind the trunk of a tree. But still he waited, with the caution of the redskin, until he was sure.

Every man of Thundering Voice's party understood, though no order had been given, that they were to fall back until they found a spot where they could offer a better defence, for not one of them doubted that Lame Bear meant to continue the attack. He had failed to win by treachery, and now he was likely, as his men were superior in numbers, to try and add more victims to the one—Arrowhead—who was already in his keeping.

Straight Pine's rifle cracked, and a yell from among the trees told that he had not fired in vain.

"The chief's bagged one o' the varmints," Nat muttered, peering round the trunk of the tree behind which he stood, "so I reckon as it's my turn nex'——"

A bullet cut the leather on the big trapper's left shoulder, and at the same moment his rifle spoke. A Mingo, a hole bored neatly between his eyes, fell forward from behind a tree little more than a score of yards away. He had missed Nat by little more than a hair's breadth, and the miss had cost him his life.

Rifles began to crack more frequently now, and a Delaware, exposing himself for a second to try and draw the fire of the enemy, paid the penalty of his rashness with his life, though his death was avenged by the man beside him, who fired just as his comrade fell, bringing down the Huron whose aim had been so true.

For the present the battle was fairly equal, considering the difference in the numbers of the enemies, and if anything the advantage lay with the smaller party.

The retreat was being conducted more rapidly now, for the Mingoes and Hurons, urged on by Lame Bear, were pressing forward, knowing that their enemies would stand no chance once it came to a hand-to-hand fight. It was every man for himself, and the risk of death at every move from tree to tree. Dick moved skilfully as any Indian, though he still kept well in the van, and managed to lodge a bullet in the arm of Lame Bear just as that chief disappeared behind a tree which proved to be rather too narrow to shelter his whole body.

Even Thundering Voice, old man though he was, seemed, for the time being, to have regained his youth and the prowess which had placed him at the head of his tribe. He moved from tree to tree as swiftly as the most agile brave present, and twice his rifle caused groans among the enemy, though without fatal results.

So swift was the retreat of the Delawares and Mohicans now that Dick and Thundering Voice, more intent upon the enemy than their comrades, were soon left practically alone, neither noticing the fact, however, until a bullet, better aimed than the majority which came from the rifles of the Mingoes and Hurons, struck Thundering Voice in the shoulder, and he fell insensible to the ground.

Quick as lightning, Dick stopped, gripped the old chief by the ankles, and dragged him behind the shelter of a broad tree, two bullets whistling past his head as he did so.

Only for a second had Thundering Voice lost consciousness, and now he opened his eyes, looked round, and realised the isolated position of himself and his youthful companion.

"The day of Thundering Voice is ended," he said, in a weak voice. "Let Eagle Eye leave him to rest so that he may fall back to join the other braves."

Dick shook up the priming of his rifle, and his jaw set hard.

"Not I, chief," he answered quietly. "D'you think I'm going to leave you now that you're down? You're hit pretty hard, but we'll save your scalp yet."

Thundering Voice managed to raise himself on to his elbow, and with shaking head pointed back along the way that the others had retreated.

"Go!" he said. "Thundering Voice commands!"

Dick looked round quickly, and saw that the Mingoes and Hurons had drawn very close indeed. A desperate plan entered his brain, and he did not hesitate to put it into execution. It was an old dodge of the redskins.

For a moment he stood stiff and still behind the tree, then with a swift movement, he circled clean round the trunk and back to his hiding-place.

His move had been successful, for the bullets of the Mingoes and Hurons bit, in a volley, into the tree.

Now was the time for action, and Dick did not hesitate. He slung his rifle over his shoulders, and, exerting all his strength, which was by no means slight, he lifted Thundering Voice in his arms. Bearing the old chief, who was luckily light, he sprang back after his comrades. Two bullets followed him, passing dangerously close; but only two. The rest he had drawn when he circled the tree for that purpose.

Straight Pine had not retreated far with the others before discovering that Dick was missing, and promptly, followed by Nat, he had advanced again, regardless of anything but the safety of the boy. A cry of relief broke from his lips—few had ever heard him give such a cry of emotion before—as Dick staggered behind the tree with the wounded Thundering Voice.

The retreat was continued now, Nat bearing the old chief as easily as if he were a baby.

A cry of triumph came from the rear, the reason for which was soon plain. In their retreat the Delawares and Mohicans had stumbled upon a log cabin in pretty good condition standing right in the centre of a small clearing. There were many such deserted habitations in the great forest, but to have fallen upon one like this was more than a little fortunate for the gallant band of men, who now numbered only eleven all told, most of them wounded, for Thundering Voice could no longer be counted as a fighter.

A rush was made for this hut, the door was jammed fast, and the rifles of the defenders were thrust through the loopholes with which the stout little building was provided. The former occupant of the hut had evidently prepared for redskins, and it was more than likely that he had met his death at their hands, for in more than one place the stout logs had been cut by ragged bullets.

A yell of rage from among the trees showed that the Mingoes and Hurons had discovered the retreat of their enemies, but they made no attempt to attack for the present, knowing well enough that the defenders of the hut had every chance of beating them back. The Mingoes and Hurons are not given to taking chances.

There was time now to attend to Thundering Voice, who remained conscious despite pain and the quantity of blood that he had lost. He was placed tenderly on the ground, his back against the log wall, and Dick, Nat, and Straight Pine did what they could for him. He motioned Nat away when that worthy advanced with a rough bandage.

"Let the sun of Thundering Voice's life set," the old chief said quietly. "Already his voice is but the whispering of the wind among the leaves, and he scents the grasses of the happy hunting-grounds."

The old warrior's eyes closed, and it seemed as if he were already dead. When he opened them again, he turned them full upon Dick, and a curiously sweet smile crossed his stern face.

"Let Eagle Eye draw near," he whispered.

Dick, in obedience to the command, knelt beside Thundering Voice. He held his rifle in his hand even at such a moment, for there was no telling how soon he might be called upon to use it in deadly earnest. The old chief looked up into his face with eyes the light of which was fast failing.

"Nearer still, Eagle Eye," he whispered, "and Straight Pine, whose words have always brought wisdom to the council-fire of the Delawares."

Straight Pine took up his stand beside Dick, genuine sorrow showing in his heavy, brooding look. There were few enough Delawares and Mohicans left, and with the dying of this old chief one of the most famous of the leaders of the tribes would be gone.

"I listen, father," the Delaware said softly.

By an effort Thundering Voice raised himself a trifle, and even tried to gesticulate with one hand, for no redskin thinks of oratory without gesture.

"Many moons back," he said in his weak voice, "the palefaces came across the great salt waters, bringing with them many guns and men who wore coats such as none had seen before. We knew them for enemies, and our own young men dug up the hatchet and went out against them. Sometimes our young men won the fight, many times they were beaten back, but always with damp scalps at their belts, for when a paleface fell two sprang up in his place, more coming across the great salt waters."

Thundering Voice paused, his eyes closed, his face once more wearing the hue of death. His lips twitched slightly, and that was the only sign of life. Presently he opened his eyes, and it could be seen that they were fast glazing.

"Palefaces fell, the warriors of the Delawares and the Mohicans dewed the ground with their blood," he continued, and his voice wearied rapidly towards death, "and in the end the chiefs knew that the palefaces had come to stay.

"Many in time became their friends, even as No Scalp and Eagle Eye are the friends of Thundering Voice, and after many moons there was much peace where there had been war and the spilling of blood.

"There are good redskins and bad, good palefaces and bad; and the best of both are men good to look upon, fit to be leaders of those who still remain of our once great tribe."

Straight Pine lifted the old chief a trifle, for his head was falling forward.

"So it is," Thundering Voice went on, and his words were scarcely audible, "that among the palefaces I have found one whom I would call my son, whom I would have rule as chief when my feet have strayed to the happy hunting grounds."

Thundering Voice made a gesture towards his neck, where a curious leather token, the badge of the chiefs of his tribe, hung.

"Take it off," he contrived to whisper; and Straight Pine obeyed.

"Eagle Eye," the dying man panted.

Very quietly, guessing what was required of him, Straight Pine placed the token round the neck of the astonished Dick Wild. Then, by an effort that cost him his last strength, Thundering Voice rose to his feet, and stood with one shaking hand on the boy's shoulder. His face was already that of a dead man.

"Hail to your new chief—Eagle Eye!" he cried.

The cry was taken up by all present, though some dared

not turn from their posts to utter it, and before the sound had died away Thundering Voice had pitched into the arms of Straight Pine.

"And so a fine man dies," Nat Wild muttered huskily, as Straight Pine laid the body in a corner and turned to a loophole.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Plan—Burrowing Out—A Flank Attack of Two—The Mingoes in Retreat—A Fresh Plan—Arrowhead Released.

EVERY brave present knew that their great chief was dead, and that he had appointed Dick, despite the fact that he was a paleface, as his successor, yet they gave no sign. Just for the present they had plenty to occupy them, for at any moment the Mingoes and Hurons might risk an attack. The defenders only hoped that they would do so, instead of waiting for the night, when, under cover of the darkness, it would be considerably harder to beat them back.

As time passed, and Dick, feeling more than a little depressed at the death of the old chief who had done him so much honour, stationed himself at one of the loopholes, it became more and more evident that the enemy was going to adopt its usual plan, and that no attack would be made before night. Indeed, anyone looking through the loopholes of the hut could see nothing but the tall trees and the deep shadows amongst them. There was not a sign of a redskin visible, yet every man in the hut knew that nearly two score pairs of eyes were watching from among the shadows and the trees.

Dick realised this, and turned to Straight Pine, who stood, motionless at a statue, at the next loophole.

"I'd clean forgotten that I had been made a chief," he said quietly. "Ought we not to think out some plan now that we have the time?"

"The words of Eagle Eye are good," the Delaware answered. "Straight Pine has been wondering when the chief would call his braves together in council."

Dick looked amazed; then he remembered his new position, and could not help smiling, despite the fact that he was not feeling particularly cheerful.

"I'd clean forgotten that I had been made a chief," he whispered, "and I want you to forget the same."

Straight Pine looked round quickly, and then bent his lips close to the boy's ear.

"In the forest, when Straight Pine and Eagle Eye hunt together, they will be brothers," he said.

Dick understood, and nodded, while Straight Pine, passing round the hut, said a few words to the braves at the loopholes. Six of them at once left their posts, and squatted in a circle on the ground, a space being left for Dick. Even the ceremony of smoking the pipe was gone through, despite the enemy waiting to spring; then Straight Pine rose to his feet and faced Dick.

"Eagle Eye, the chosen of Thundering Voice, whom the great Manitou hath claimed, hath called this council," the Delaware announced, in his deep voice. "Let him hear the wisdom of his braves, that he may decide in what manner the cursed Mingoes and Hurons shall be driven back, leaving behind them Arrowhead."

The braves sat moody and silent, and it was plain that not one of them was ready with a suitable plan. They knew that they were in a tight corner, that one or two determined rushes would see the end of them, and they could certainly not see their way out of it.

Keeping to the Indian custom, Dick allowed fully ten minutes to pass, then he rose quietly to his feet. He knew that he was now regarded as head chief, for the words of Thundering Voice would not be taken lightly. A feeling of pride possessed him as he glanced round upon the noble redskin warriors. They were few in number, but finer men no leader could have wished to have as followers.

"Chiefs," the boy said firmly, "there is but one way by which we can prove to the Mingoes and Hurons that we are men while they still remain women. Are there not spades in yonder corner?"

The Indian furthest in that direction turned his head, then grunted in assent.

"Let three of the braves take them," Dick continued quietly, "that they may dig a tunnel between these walls. Then, when the night comes, some of us can creep out, reach the forest, and wait in the rear of our foes. They will make their attack, and, in turn, will be attacked from the rear. They will not know how many there are, they will think them to be fresh enemies, and they will turn and run for their lodges—all those whose scalps do not fall into the hands of the Delawares and the Mohicans."

A murmur of approval broke from the braves, and one of them, ranking higher than his fellows, and with a fresh scalp hanging from his belt, rose to his feet.

"The chief Eagle Eye is young," he said, "and there are those present who hunted before he had seen the light of day. Yet are his words the words of wisdom, and the great Thundering Voice drew a straight arrow on the mark when he chose him to rule when he had gone.

Another chorus of approval came from the braves, and Dick felt distinctly relieved. He had feared to make a fool of himself at this first council, and he was not sorry that the ordeal was over.

No more was said now, for neither the Mohicans nor the Delawares are great talkers. Three of the youngest of the warriors took the rusty spades from the corner of the hut where they had been left by their last owner, and were soon at work digging down into the earth at a spot exactly opposite to where the door stood. At this point the forest was nearer than at any of the other sides, so that anyone creeping out by the tunnel would not have to crawl so far to find shelter among the trees. Besides, the enemy were much more likely to watch the door, which was the point they would rush when they came to make their attack.

Dick superintended this work, for he meant to take no chances, and he knew that if this scheme of his failed all present would be dead men before the dawning of the next day. He would willingly, too, have taken a hand, but his position of chief forbade him to do so.

The tunnel was cut deep, and only just large enough to admit a man's body, so that there might not be much risk of it falling in. It was not easy work, all the earth having to be forced back along the passage with the spades. In time, just before darkness set in, in fact, the task was accomplished, and only a thin crust of earth covered the exit from the tunnel.

Rather more than an hour passed now, and still the Mingoes and Hurons in the woods made no movement, though it was already dark.

Straight Pine glanced towards Dick, who was looking to the loading of his rifle with more than ordinary care.

"Who are the warriors who shall go out into the forest, Eagle Eye?" the Delaware asked.

"I am going," Dick answered quietly, "and the other——"

"Straight Pine will go," the chief interrupted quietly but firmly. "No Scalp will be of use here if the dogs break down the door."

Every man in the hut had heard, but not a word was spoken. The chiefs had decided what was best to be done, and the braves were content. Even Nat Wild, standing watchful at a loophole, only turned and nodded to his brother as the latter knelt by the opening of the little tunnel.

Dragging his rifle behind him, after putting the hammer off the cock, Dick entered the passage, and crawled forward, Straight Pine following close behind him. It was not a pleasant task, for both man and boy were aware that the ground above them might collapse at any moment, and that then they would never get out alive again. Despite these thoughts, however, the two pushed on without hesitation, until Dick was stopped by a solid wall of earth. He advanced a hand cautiously, not as yet knowing whether the end of the tunnel had been reached or if the earth had fallen.

A slight push drove his hand through the earth and out into the fresh air, proving that he had reached the end of the tunnel.

With the utmost caution now he forced the earth away, then thrust his head through the opening. No bullet greeted him, so he drew his shoulders through. His body followed, and he lay full length on the ground, waiting for Straight Pine to join him. This very soon happened, and both began to crawl away towards the trees, moving as noiselessly as snakes in the grass.

This was really the most unnerving part of their task, for at any moment the bullets might have hit them before they even had time to locate their enemies.

In this fashion the two reached the edge of the forest, crawled on among the trees, then rose to their feet. They had successfully left the hut, and now it only remained to get behind the Mingoes and Hurons, who were waiting to make their rush at the hut. Neither Straight Pine nor Dick expected to find any difficulty in this, as the enemy were sure to be waiting near to the edge of the clearing.

Drawing further in among the trees, so as to make a wider circle, Dick and Straight Pine skirted round, moving noiselessly as Indians alone know how, until they knew themselves to be facing the entrance to the hut. If the Mingoes and Hurons were waiting to attack these two, the plucky man and equally plucky boy had successfully got to their rear.

One of the most dangerous parts of the expedition had now arrived. Moving from tree to tree, waiting and listening behind every one, Dick and Straight Pine drew nearer and nearer to the hut.

The Delaware halted, his finger to his lips, and pressed close to the tree behind which he was standing. Dick very soon saw the reason. Not ten yards distant, crouching

(Continued on page 55.)

CHRISTMAS TOPICS.

An entertaining article which will help a Christmas party to :: go with a swing. Specially written for this number ::

By W. BARNARD.

FOR THE CHRISTMAS PARTY.

Within a few weeks from now the Christmas season will be upon us. Plans are already being formed, invitations to parties sent out, and Christmas decorations commenced.

Decorations occupy the large part of the junior mind just at present, and certainly there is great scope for latent art and ingenuity in thus brightening the "party" room for this festive season. Paper-chains are started upon and finished, holly is gathered and fixed, as also is mistletoe, and sometimes little paper Chinese lanterns are fastened to every possible projection. It is here that a great danger from fire arises, and it should be well guarded against. Chinese lanterns are very apt to catch fire, and if they are to be used at all they should be fixed only in places where, even if they do happen to burn, there is little danger of the flames catching any other part of the decorations, and so spreading. Chinese lanterns are, however, very pretty, and shed a soft light over the room. Some people make a good imitation of snow by spreading a little cotton-wool out upon whatever subject is to be decorated, and spraying over it a small quantity of frosting powder, which can be bought for a few halfpence at any big stationer's during the Christmas season. This imparts a sparkling glitter whenever the light catches it, and is consequently very pretty, but terribly inflammable. So many fires have been caused by cotton-wool that it is best to avoid the use of this dangerous material altogether.

As decorating is purely a matter of taste, little need be said.

I have no doubt that many readers this year intend to have a rousing good party, and perhaps do not know the "why's" and "wherefore's" of organising it. Of course, the first thing to do is to go over your list of friends and acquaintances, and mark off those who are likely to be able to come; and the second thing is to fix the day. Naturally, you will not choose Christmas Day, as this is usually an "at home" day, or at least a day when relations unite and celebrate, and when strangers are forbidden. A good date for a Christmas party is one of the days following Boxing Day, or the Bank Holiday itself. When making up the list of friends, a sister proves a great help! When the number is completed, the question might arise of "What shall we do?" on the night. To avoid confusion, and to make the party run smoothly, it is a good idea to make out a rough programme—for the use of the host or hostess only—giving the most suitable entertainments for the evening.

The usual evening party is generally composed of games, music, and sometimes a little entertainment by one of the guests or the host. With regard to this latter, an entertainment which will prove an unfailing source of amusement and delight to both young and old is the old-fashioned

PUNCH-AND-JUDY SHOW.

There is no need to describe this show, except to say that it consists of a light framework, having a stage erected about a foot from the top, the whole thing standing between five and six feet high. A framework suitable for a show at home can easily be made, and need only have three sides, which can be hinged together, and so folded and packed away when not in use. A show of this description takes up little space when put away, and is easily rigged up ready for the performance.

To build it, six uprights, six feet high and one inch thick, will be required, and six cross-pieces three feet long and the same thickness. These pieces are fixed together after the style of a clothes-horse, having the cross-pieces screwed tightly into the uprights. On completing the framework, the next thing is to fix up the stage, which should be fastened about a foot from the top, so that it projects six or seven inches over the front. The show is now finished, with the exception of the curtains and the covering. Obtain some thick material for the curtains, and use a fairly stout piece of wire as a pole, when it will be an easy matter to draw and close the curtains on the night of the performance. Now get enough thin green baize to cover the whole of the framework.

The work completed, the question of figures must now be considered. These can be made fairly easy if the showman is at all handy with his tools. For instance, a cheap wooden doll can be transformed into Judy with the addition of suitable clothing, and with the skilful application of a sharp knife to make the features more prominent and laughing. However, such places as Gamages, of Holborn, London, sell the necessary figures for a Punch and Judy show. The mouthpiece, to imitate Punch's voice, can also be bought from Gamages.

If you do not feel equal to composing your own dialogues, Messrs. S. French & Co., of 26, Southampton Street, London, W.C., publish a book, giving the "patter" and necessary movements, at a price of 7d., post free.

Now for a few good all-round parlour games to still further add to the success of the party. A good game, which tends to do away with the natural constraint and timidity at the beginning of a party, is that of

BROKEN QUOTATIONS.

Before the guests arrive the hostess should write out a number of quotations on slips of paper, equal to half as many again as the number of guests, and having cut each slip into two or more pieces, should pin the parts on to such subjects as curtains, cushions, or the decorations, where they can be seen without the players having to move any other objects. When the guests arrive they are to be told that they have to find all the parts of as many quotations as they possibly can, and that the player finding the most complete quotations is to be declared the winner.

A very exciting game, and one which can be played by almost any number of guests, is called

THE POSTMAN.

The room is cleared of furniture as far as possible, with the exception of chairs, which should be placed in a circle and occupied by the players. One guest is blindfolded and placed in the centre of the ring and called "postman," while another volunteers to fill the position of "postmaster." This latter stands outside the circle, and gives all the players the name of some city in the British Isles, by which he or she is to be known. He next calls out that he has sent a letter from one city to another—for example, "I have sent a letter from Glasgow to Birmingham." When two players who bear the names of these two towns hear them being called, they have to quickly change places. The postman's duty is either to catch one of these or to take one of their seats, in which case the person who is caught, or who loses his—or her—chair, must take the place of "postman."

MOTOR OMNIBUS.

is the modern version of the game of Stage-coach. Here are a few suggestions for the various parts to be taken by the players:

Motor-horn must rise and imitate the noise of the horn.

Driver must crouch forward and make pretence of holding steering-wheel.

Conductor must walk across room and call "Fares, please!"

Bell must go "Ding, ding!"

Straps must rise and sway as if holding on to the strap in a 'bus, at the same time making a squeaking noise.

Passengers all rise and sit down again, etc., etc.

During the reading of the story whenever any one of the various parts is mentioned, the person to whom it has been allotted has to stand up and perform the action given. If he fails to do this before the leader continues with the story or if he forgets his part, he has to pay a forfeit.

OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL STORY. START THIS WEEK!

TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE!

THE STORY OF THE GREAT MAN-HUNT

BY **SIDNEY DREW**

Ferrers Lord, millionaire, and owner of the Lord of the Deep.

Prince Ching-Lung, adventurer, conjurer, and ventriloquist.

Nathan Gore, jewel collector and multi-millionaire. Ferrers Lord's terrible rival.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

"BY FOUL MEANS OR FAIR, I'LL WIN!"

Nathan Gore, millionaire and jewel-collector, clenched his hands furiously, and raved like a madman on the deck of the liner Coronation. He had started specially from America in order to be present at the sale-room in London where the costly diamond, "The World's Wonder," was to be put up for auction. "A telegram for Mr. Gore," a voice rang out through the darkness. The American was told the message, and as he listened, his face came over deadly pale, and he gave vent to a terrible oath. The message was: "Ferrers Lord purchased 'The World's Wonder' privately. No bidders. Price unknown." "I'll win yet," shrieked the man. "By foul means or fair, I'll win!"

"THE WORLD'S WONDER."

In the magnificent drawing-room of Ferrers Lord's house in Park Lane was assembled a varied collection of individuals. First of all there was the celebrated millionaire himself, and close to him sat Ching-Lung, a Chinaman, busily engaged in making paper butterflies. Hal Honour, the great engineer, was sipping tea, and Rupert Thurston yawned in a chair. "How much did you pay for that great diamond?" presently asked the latter. The millionaire smiled. "Money and fair words, Rupert," he replied. "By the way, you have not seen it yet?"

The priceless gem passed from hand to hand. A thousand fires burned in its crystal heart; a thousand colours, ever changing, leaped from every facet. "I guess it would have been more money and less fair words if old Gore had turned up," remarked Ching-Lung sagely.

"I'LL TAKE THE CHALLENGE!"

The millionaire's house was wrapped in silence. A faint light shone from the drawing-room. Ching-Lung pushed open the door, then a cry broke from him. A man lay face downwards on the floor. There was a ghastly crimson stain on his collar. The man was Ferrers Lord. "Ching—the diamond!" came a hoarse voice. Ching opened the drawer which Lord indicated, but there was no diamond there. But a message had been left behind: "To Ferrers Lord,—Knowing that you would not sell 'The World's Wonder,' I have taken it. Do your worst. I defy you. The stone is mine.—Nathan Gore." The millionaire rose to his feet. "I take the challenge, Ching," he said. "I'll hunt him down and bring back my diamond." He begins the chase after the diamond thief, and for five months pursues Nathan Gore through Europe, New Zealand, Teneriffe, and back to London, never once being able to catch him up. While in London, he hears that Nathan Gore has bought from the Dutch a remote island named Galvin. Lord immediately purchased an island four miles south of Gore's, christening it Ching-Lung. Learning that Gore is fortifying his island, and has actually fitted out warships for his own use, Ferrers Lord arranges a hurried expedition, and in a few hours the whole party are aboard the Lord of the Deep, bound for the island of Ching-Lung. When they arrive they visit Nathan Gore's island, and find that it is well protected by forts. Ferrers Lord sends Rupert Thurston to interview Gore, taking word that unless Gore returns the diamond, and publishes an apology in every newspaper in the world, he will take further steps. Nathan Gore refuses the terms, and Ferrers Lord declares war.

(Now go on with the story.)

Ching-Lung and Gan-Waga are Arrested and Tried.

There had been an air of mystery about the ship for several days. Something had been going on in the forecastle; but what it was even Ching-Lung had been unable to discover. The men were unusually quiet. They kept the door locked, and a coat was hung over the circular pane of glass. On two occasions Gan had been expelled from the forecastle by means of hard thick-soled boots that had large feet inside them. Such treatment hurt the Eskimo's feelings. In vain Ching-Lung strove to penetrate the mystery. He was quite sure of one thing—that these secret assemblies were hatching some evil against him.

"Dey just loves me, Chingy," sighed Gan-Waga. "Dey goin' quaw, drang, and hawter me if I go in dere any morer. What dat mean, Chingy—hunk?"

"Nothing nice, Gan," said Ching-Lung. "I presume you mean hang, draw, and quarter."

"Dat's him, Chingy!" nodded Gan-Waga, taking a thoughtful bite from a tallow-dip. "Barry say him."

They were in the billiard-room. Ching-Lung gave his head a jerk that made his pigtail crack like a whip.

The conduct of the crew was puzzling, the stern measures they took to keep their debates secret argued a conspiracy.

"Dey going to mootineers—hunk, Chingy?" suggested Gan.

"Possibly, my bonnie one. I don't know; can't make it out."

He kicked off both slippers and caught them. With a couple of lead-pencils and two sheets of paper he rigged up a mast and sail in each. Then he placed them on the billiard-table, one at each end.

"What dat fo', Chingy?"

"This, my son," said Ching-Lung, "is the race for the America Cup. My slipper is the Shamrock, yours is the Defender. I'll race you. You must not touch the boats with your hands, but just blow 'em along. The winner gets a free ticket of admission to the dogs' home. Get ready! It is just on eleven. When the clock strikes, go."

"What de winners-posts?"

"The end of the table. Get ready! You go one way, I go the other."

Gan took a long breath, puffed out his cheeks, and prepared to put a small tornado behind his yacht. The clock struck, and Gan, his eyes bulging, blew mast and sail clean out of his craft. Swiftly and unseen Ching-Lung seized his vessel, hurled it across the table, and smote Gan violently on the nose with it.

"Yo' not fairs, Chingy!" wailed Gan, whose eyes had filled with tears.

"Not fair, you villain! What do you mean?"

"Yo' not sends him hards like dat wif yo' breffs."

"Gan," said Ching-Lung, in pained accents, "did you ever hear me tell a lie?"

"Nevers, Chingy!"

"Then I give you my solemn word of honour that it was a blow."

This was true. It was a blow, as Gan's sore nose amply proved.

Gan was not perfectly satisfied how to take the statement, and he was pondering it over in his mind when the door opened, and he was seized from behind. Ching-Lung, taken by surprise, was also seized. Before either of them could offer any resistance, handcuffs were clipped over their wrists.

"Here!" cried Ching-Lung. "What the—who the—when —— Confound it, what's the game?"

There were four policemen in the room, and each of them grasped an enormous baton in his fist. There was also an inspector, and, in spite of his great black beard, they recognised him as Joe.

"Silence!" said the inspector gruffly. "I arrest you, Ching-Lung, prince, and a ruler of the province of Kwai-hai, a Chinese subject, but sailing under the British flag, and therefore answerable to the British law for any misdemeanour, on the terrible charge that your face is a cause of suffering to his Majesty's subjects, and, furthermore, that you are a rogue and a vagabond."

"Oh, thank you sweetly!" grinned Ching-Lung.

The inspector turned to Gan-Waga and read from the warrant:

"In his Majesty's name, I arrest you, Gan-Waga, hereditary chief of the Chooblubber and Wankeywump tribe, on the charge of aiding and abetting the aforesid Ching-Lung. And I solemnly warn you both that anything you say, cough, whistle, wink, or eat will be used in evidence against you. Bring in the van!"

The van appeared, and Ching-Lung roared.

It was the store-room trolley; but Joe had cleverly covered it with black canvas, and turned it into a splendid imitation of a "black maria." The letters "G. R." were painted on it in gold, and there was the usual little grated window. Between the shafts was a fiery steed, with one of Yard-of-Tape's flue-brushes for a tail, and the steed reared, buck-jumped, and whinnied in a most terrifying fashion.

"'Adn't we better put the desp'rit ruffians in irons, sir?" asked the sergeant, whose voice was the voice of Maddock.

"Certainly!" said the inspector.

The prisoners submitted to the ordeal of having a few yards of chain attached to their ankles; and then, with a wail of agony, Ching-Lung sank at the inspector's feet.

"Spare me!" he moaned. "Have mercy! Have pity! Mercy! I have—oh, I have some white mice dependent on me for—for their daily toasted cheese!"

"XYZ 9540683½," said the inspector, "put that down. He admits that he has mizzled with some tons of tame toasted cheese."

"Yes, sir, at——"

Unfortunately, the policeman was in the kicking-line, and as the fiery steed planted both hoofs in the small of his back he was hurled across the room, followed by his notebook. The other policemen blew their whistles, an ambulance speedily arrived, and the injured man was borne away, sucking at a two-gallon jar labelled "Brandy."

"Mr. 'Specters," sobbed Gan, falling on the bosom of that limb of the law, "lets me offs, and I never does it no morer tills next times. I gots chillblains. They sore 'nough to murders me!"

"RSTUVWXY decimal 00683½," roared the inspector, "put that down! The dastardly criminal has confessed with his own lips that he is the murderer of four hundred sore children!"

"Yes, sir, at——"

The second policeman was also in the firing-line. He was kicked clean on to the ottoman. Again the ambulance appeared, and, swearing that the prisoners had committed the outrage, the two other policemen set upon them and beat them savagely with their clubs. As the clubs were only made of cloth they did not hurt.

"Now, you'll come quiet, will you?" growled the inspector. "Search them!"

A great cardboard box was brought from the van. As its contents were turned out the inspector made a list of the articles supposed to be found on the prisoners. There were four revolvers, fourteen knives, a bottle of nitro-glycerine, a dead body (dummy, of course), some sausages, a pair of ragged trousers, a bundle of letters, a string of onions, and a toothbrush. The policeman signed and attested the list; and then, as the horse was trying to browse off the inspector's hair, they bundled the prisoners into the van and shut the door.

"Good-bye, people!" sobbed Ching-Lung. "I'm pinched."

"Tell muvver me whiskerses was stills sproutings when I died!" moaned Gan.

"Silence!" roared the inspector. "Or you'll get fifty thousand years seven minutes!"

The arab steed had tired itself out. It kept falling down as fast as they picked it up. They tied a jumping-cracker to its tail, but that did no good. In vain they dragged at its head, kicked it, and beat it. At last, in sheer desperation, the inspector chalked "Beer" on the fat constable's coat, and started him off at a run.

The moment the noble arab saw that magic word it chased the policeman at full gallop. Ching-Lung found a hole in the canvas side of the prison van, and stuck out his head to survey the landscape. He immediately received a blow from a baton that made him take it in again at full speed.

The fiery steed collapsed at the forecastle. The prisoners were dragged out and escorted to a cell built of lockers and cases. A few dog-biscuits and a jug of water were handed in, and they were left in gloom.

"Oh, Chingy!" sobbed Gan.

"Oh, Gan!" sobbed Chingy.

"Lets uses escapes," said Gan.

"Impossible," said Ching-Lung, peeping through a crack. "There's an armed warder outside. Fly? Not much! We are innocent! Let us face our feet—I mean, our fate! Of course, I don't know much about you. I am as innocent as a pickled onion, but you may have aided and abetted me, all the same. Oh, auntie, if you could see the darling boy you used to chivvy with the rolling-pin! A prisoner, a felon, a convict! Oh, it is too much! That is what comes of smoking cheap cigarettes! Ow, ow! The judge will give us fifteen billion years!"

Ching-Lung burst into tears at the thought of his terrible position, and Gan clanked his chains in misery. While doing so he broke the jug, and, finding himself sitting in a pool of cold water, Ching-Lung yelled for a boat to be lowered.

A tramp of feet was heard. Someone, after a great jingling of keys, pulled aside a box. Guarded by four policemen, the prisoners were marched to the swimming-bath. They saw that the bath had been covered with boards and the room converted into a court. The court was quite crowded. On the right was the jury-box, with twelve grinning sailors. The dock—a couple of barrels—stood in the centre, and close by it the witness-box. The judge's seat was on the raised platform.

The escort lifted the prisoners into the tubs. Escape was rendered impossible by putting ropes round their necks and fastening the ends to two rings in the floor.

"Rub-a-dubs-dubs," chortled Gan, "two mens in two tubs!"

"Silence!" yelled the inspector.

The grinning jurymen stood up as the judge, in wig and robes, entered and took his seat. After him came the counsel, also wigged and gowned—Barry O'Rooney and Thomas Prout. The learned judge was Rupert Thurston.

"Me lard!" said Prout, bobbing up. "I appears for the prosecution, me lard!"

"And Oi apair for the defince, av there is wan, me lud!" said Barry.

"Have the jury been sworn in?" asked the judge.

"No, me lord," answered a juryman; "but we've been sworn at."

The charge was then read over, and, sticking a pair of spectacles on his nose, Prout rose to open the case.

"Me lard," said Prout, "in all my long experience at bars—hem!—at the Bar I have never been called upon to force home a blacker, wickeder, nastier charge than I shall force home to-day! That, by hokey, is a fact, me lard! The two vile scoundrels there in the dock have wallered in crime from the day they were born. The younger villain—the one wi' the yaller complexion and the murderous eye—attempted to murder his nurse wi' a flat-iron when only twenty-five minutes of age. I could prove this up to the hilt if I'd been there at the time. The elder rascal, me lard—he of the podgy visage—aided and abetted the other rogue by pinching the flat-iron. I think, me lard, that I have said enough to convince you that both men are desperadoes of the dypest dee—deepest dye. I will now call the first witness. Inspector Joe, of Portland Yard, who is, me lard, the champion pie-shifter of the Force."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 253.

The inspector went into the witness-box.

"You are a policeman, I believe?" said Prout.

"I am," said the inspector.

"Does it hurt you much?"

"Not a trifle, sir!" said the inspector.

"Now, be careful, sir!" said the counsel sternly. "Look at the jury, sir, and tell them exactly what you saw the prisoners do."

Gazing hard at the jury, the inspector made the following truthful statement:

"On Toosday night I went round to wake up the cops on night duty, which I does wi' a pin. Knowin' 'ow many desprit characters there was about, I stopped in an area at Park Lane. The cook of the mansion is my aunt's mother-in-law. I was fatigued and faint, and she gave me some cold rabbit, the pie 'aving run short. While eatin' the rabbit, I was startled by a cry of "Murder!" I drored my truncheon and dashed boldly up the steps, just in time to see the two prisoners attackin' a stout gent wi' pickaxes.

"The prisoners fled. When I reached the gentleman, he was a corpse; but he revived soon enough to tell me that he had been robbed of two million pounds in coppers and a dog-license. Then I blew my whistle, and 'elp came, policemen bobbin' out of areas all down the street. These gallant men at once chucked away the pies they were eatin', and an orful chase commenced. On several occasions the prisoners fired Maxim-guns at us. At last we tracked 'em to a winkleshop. The shop was surrounded by four 'undred of us, and, arter a 'orrible struggle, we secured the miscreants.

"Me lard," said Prout triumphantly, "you must hang 'em, by hokey! Stand down, sir!"

"Bedad, no! Sthind up!" cried Barry. "Oi must question this witness. "Look at the jury, sir, and not at me. How old are yez?"

"Forty-two."

"Good! Are yez as big a liar as ye luk?"

"Well—er—no—yes," replied the perplexed witness.

"Then, be jabbers, yez are a purty big wan!" said Barry. "Do not answer my nixt question widout some thought. Whin the dead man spoke to yez, what was the colour of his breath?"

"It wasn't water-colour, anyhow," said the witness promptly. "It smelt of rum."

"Thank you! Have yez ever had the mumps? Say so, how many, and whoy?"

"Now and then a few," replied the witness. "Sometimes, ocasionally, once or twice at odd moments."

"How often do yez change your socks—— No, Oi don't mane that! Confound ut, sor, luk at the jury! Now, sor! Be very careful, sor! Ay, the prisoners hit the man wid a poleaxe? Whoy shud the colour of frozen termarters be pink? And, this being so, whoy does the Sultan of Turkey toie crape in his whiskers ev'ry Wednesday, part his hair on the roight soide wid a garden-rake, and purchase his laager-beer from a wan-oied Dutchman, wid a squint at the back of his neck, who never pays his water-rate? Answer me, sor!" roared Barry, thumping the table. "Answer me, Oi repate!"

But the witness had fainted. He was carried out, and then it was discovered that the judge was fast asleep. A few prods in the back with a mop roused him, and he was heard to murmur something about having a kippered egg for his breakfast if they were fresh caught.

The next witness was the sergeant, Maddock.

"On the night of the fire—er—the thunderstorm—I mean, the shipwreck," asked Prout, "where was I—you?"

"Eatin' pie," said the witness.

"You saw the prisoners—er—steal the—the—you saw them kidnap—— By hokey! You saw them, anyhow?"

"It was a nice pie!" said Maddock.

"Certainly! When the female prisoner hit the omnibus-conductor with a brick, what did he say?"

"It was a glorious pie!" said Maddock.

"Excellent! I fancy that when the prisoners were arrested for stealing tickets for soup they made some confession about a dog-bite? What did they say?"

"They said it was a treat of a pie," said Maddock—"a gem of a pie! It was a pork-pie, and the crust was joy!"

"Me lard," said Prout, when the mop had wakened up his lordship, "you must give them fifty billion years!"

Barry did not cross-question this witness, and he stood down. This closed the case for the prosecution.

Barry straightened his wig and rose to his feet. Great heaps of paper handkerciefs were distributed through the court, and a few buckets were handed to the jury to hold their tears if necessary.

"Me lud, and gintlemen of the jury!" began Barry

huskily. "Oi have no witnesses to call. The fate of two fellow-crayturs depinds on yez this day. Luk at thim, gentlemen—luk at thim as they sthind there, wid their socks in their boots and their trilbies in their socks! Luk at their swate, honest faces! Luk at their chins, wid not a sign of whiskers on thim! Think of their youth, think of their beauty, and think—oh, think of the debts they owe, and the people who'll lose their money av yez hang thim!"

Barry broke down and wept, so did the jury, so did the listeners. In a choked and trembling voice the counsel continued:

"The elder prisoner is an Eskimo. Fancy! Think! Let me recall his days of childhood. Imagine him sittin' on a chunk of oice, a lump of blubber in his little hands, grease and dirt on his choildish face, and the snow hut behind him! Oh, ut is too much—ut is too much!"

Barry collapsed again, and the members of the jury sobbed into the buckets. When the counsel recovered from his emotion, Ching-Lung handed him a slip of paper. Barry read it.

"Me lud and gentlemen," finished Barry, his voice almost drowned by the sobs, "that is my defence. Av the verdict goes agen us Oi have wan request to make on behalf of the younger prisoner. Av they must hang, the younger prisoner begs to be hanged first, while the rope is clane. He says that his poor cōmrade in misery hasn't washed his neck since Christmas, 1871."

The judge was again asleep, but an application of the mop roused him. He summed up:

"This case is peculiar in many ways," said his lordship. "If the prisoners are guilty, they are not innocent. If they are innocent, we can only hang them. From the evidence, it seems clear that the stolen mangle found in Ching-Lung's waistcoat-pocket was the property of the unfortunate washerwoman who was found drowned in the pint jug of mild-and-bitter. Whether the prisoners were responsible for the Great Fire of London is not material, but we certainly cannot doubt the evidence of the blind man who saw Gan-Waga seize a watch-and-chain in the Strand."

Here the judge paused, and it looked as though a further application of the mop would be necessary.

"If, gentlemen," continued the judge, "you should find the charge of arson proved, it will not be necessary to consider the charges of cat-stealing and bigamy. For murdering the showman in cold blood both prisoners are guilty of forgery. I do not agree with the witness who declared that the dead man used strong language when he—the witness—attempted to take his purse. A dead man would know better.

"On the treason charges, I can only suggest that the prisoners would not have stolen the bloaters had they known they were all soft-roed ones. If they set fire to the haystacks, it is quite certain that they were capable of throwing orange-peel on the footpath to the danger of the public. Their gifted counsel has given us a heartrending picture of the elder prisoner's home life. But whether their home life has anything to do with the charge of playing pitch-and-toss, and sending large quantities of arsenic to members of the House of Commons, labelled, 'Epsom Salts; one dose will do it,' I must leave to your discretion, gentlemen.

"Gentlemen, have you decided upon your verdict?"

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoners guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!"

Someone at the back of the court shrieked. The shriek woke up the judge. He looked in vain for the black cap, but one of the jury gave him a black-pudding, which he stuck on his wig by skewering a pen through it.

"Prisoners at the bar," he said, his voice quivering with emotion, "the verdict of this court is extra grog!"

There was a loud applause as Ching-Lung and Gan-Waga hissed their counsel. The grog was brought, the floor cleared, and, sitting on the judge's table with three wigs on his head, Ching Lung fingered his tin whistle. Jurymen, police, counsel and spectators caught the infection, and began to "welt the flure," as Barry termed it, till it threatened to give way, and let them through into the bath. The arrival of the fiery steed with the prison-van behind it, caused some commotion, until the restive animal was gallantly lassoed by Gan and tied up in a corner. Promising to be good, it was set free, and when it—it was Yard-of-Tape—danced a can-can with Barry O'Rooney, enthusiasm reached a climax.

So ended the famous trial.

(Another splendid long instalment of this serial story in next week's issue of THE MAGNET Library. Usual size, usual price. 1d.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 253.

CHIEF OF THE DELAWARES.

(Continued from page 50.)

behind the trees ready to make their attack, was the whole party of the Mingoes and Hurons.

Scarcely had the two taken up their positions close to the enemy before the expected attack took place. A sudden yell rose from the among the trees, a volley rattled against the hut, and the whole of the Mingoes and Hurons dashed away across the clearing.

Now was the chance for Dick and Straight Pine, and they did not throw it away. Their rifles went up, and two bullets flew straight into the mass of men struggling to force the door of the hut.

Almost before the enemy had realised that they were attacked from behind, two more bullets had crashed into them, each one bringing down its man.

This was too much for the Mingoes and Hurons. They fairly turned and bolted for the shelter of the trees.

With Dick leading the way, the Delawares and Mohicans entered the forest. Ahead of them, and not far distant, too, they could hear the Mingoes and Hurons retreating, for they moved noisily in their fear. Presently, however, an hour or two later, all sounds ceased, and Dick, by a motion of his hand, signalled his men to halt.

"See why they have halted, Straight Pine," Dick whispered; and the Delaware, with a nod of understanding, disappeared among the trees ahead.

In a surprisingly short time Straight Pine returned, and strode up to Dick.

"The dogs wait for us within rifle-shot!" he whispered. "Arrowhead lies bound behind them."

Dick smiled, not in the least put out by this information.

"The path among the trees is full of bullets," he said, in a low voice, yet distinctly enough for all to hear; "and Eagle Eye would not have his braves die. But who watches the trees? Do not their branches form as sure a path to the enemy as the tracks of their feet upon the earth?"

A slight ejaculation of admiration escaped one or two of the braves, and every man of them looked up at the branches of the trees, realising that Dick was right. They would be able to crawl right over the heads of their enemies, and, while safe themselves, pour down a deadly fire upon them.

"At the hoot of an owl you will fire," Dick said quietly, and, seizing a low-hanging branch of a tree, began to swing himself upwards. Close on his right he could see Nat doing the same, and a slight creak now and again told him of the presence of the others.

From below came the click of a gun butt upon the ground, and Dick lay still upon the branch he had reached. He looked down keenly, and his eyes, accustomed to the darkness, made out the forms of the Mingoes and Hurons crouching behind trees waiting for the attack which they expected.

Five minutes Dick lay still, so as to give all his men time to reach the spot. Everything was curiously still.

The hoot of an owl sounded distinctly.

Crash! The rifles of the men in the trees spoke out all together, and more than one of the crouching men on the ground dropped lower, never to rise again. Wild yells rang out, followed by more bullets, and those of the enemy who were left turned and fairly bolted.

Down from the trees leapt the Mohicans and Delawares, but once more the voice of Dick held them back from a pursuit as he hurried across to where Arrowhead lay bound on the ground. A couple of cuts with a knife soon freed the young warrior and he rose stiffly to his feet.

"Thundering Voice's heart will rejoice," Arrowhead said, addressing his rescuers, who now stood around him.

"Thundering Voice cares no more for sorrow or joy," Straight Pine answered, in his deep voice, "for he roams the happy hunting grounds."

With a quick gesture Arrowhead drew his robe across his face and stood so for some minutes in silent grief. Then he lowered the robe.

"A new chief must be chosen to lead us," he said quietly.

"Even as Thundering Voice died, he chose for you a new leader," Straight Pine put in quietly.

"Name him!" Arrowhead cried.

Straight Pine turned and laid a hand on the shoulder of Dick Wild.

"Eagle Eye, chief of the Delawares!" he cried proudly.

With dignified stride Arrowhead advanced towards the boy, and dropped to one knee before him.

"Arrowhead hails the new chief," he said quietly, and there was something in his voice which showed that he meant it.

THE END.

My Readers' Page.

TO ALL MY READERS!

In putting before the great army of my readers this, the Grand Christmas Double Number of "The Magnet" Library, I feel that we are all entitled to congratulate ourselves upon the fact that to-day, with another Christmastide but a fortnight distant, our grand little paper is in a better and more impregnable position—more firmly established in popular favour—than ever before. This magnificent result is due to the combination of my chums, and my efforts, and I truly appreciate the splendid way in which my readers have stood by me.

It is with all my heart, therefore, that I express my very best thanks to all my friends, at home and abroad, and wish them at the same time the old, old wish—

A MERRY CHRISTMAS!

FOR NEXT MONDAY.

"BOB CHERRY'S BARRING-OUT; or, The Return of the Chums of the Remove Form."

By Frank Richards.

In next week's grand, long, complete tale of Greyfriars School, which will bear the above title, it is Bob Cherry's turn to bear the brunt of his rival Vernon-Smith's deadly attack. One after another the leaders of the Remove Form, the members of the famous Co., have been driven from the school by the relentless, snake-like methods of the Bounder of Greyfriars. But Bob Cherry proves a harder nut to crack. He flatly refuses to accept his marching orders, and enforces his determination to stay by barring himself out from the rest of the school, being supported only by his staunch and true chum, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur. The result of

"BOB CHERRY'S BARRING-OUT"

is as astounding as it is decisive, and his chums have good reason to bless his sturdy resistance to Vernon-Smith's evil forces.

OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY.

A recently-introduced feature, which my readers appear to appreciate very much, is "The Magnet" Portrait Gallery, and many are the letters and postcards I have received in praise of the idea. A postcard on this subject from a Colchester reader runs as follows:

"Colchester.

"Dear Sir,—Just a line to let you know that I think the idea of the Picture Gallery of the Boys of Greyfrairs in 'The Magnet' is capital.

"I hope you will continue them till all the boys of whom we have read have appeared, and then I hope we shall have the masters. We shall now be able to have a picture gallery of our own, and at the same time recognise the characters in the pictures. If this is thoroughly carried out, I am certain that it will meet with every reader's approval, and also get many new readers.—Yours truly,

"LOYAL READER."

Your wish that this series of portraits should be continued, "Loyal Reader," is echoed on all sides, and you may rest assured that I shall not ignore this plain expression of opinion on the part of my readers. The more my readers tell me what they want, the better I always like it!

"THE PENNY POPULAR."

Our latest little companion paper is forging steadily ahead, and I am making great efforts to make every issue still better than its predecessor. This is becoming a somewhat difficult task, but I am sticking to it, and the steadily-increasing circulation is giving me the greatest encouragement. The issue now on sale is absolutely "It," and I am expecting it to beat all records. My chums have only to read this current issue of our splendid little companion paper to convince themselves that the best service they can do their friends is to advise them to read

"THE PENNY POPULAR."

SIMPLE TRICKS FOR THE CHRISTMAS PARTY.

A few conjuring tricks pass the time very pleasantly at a Christmas party, and can easily be performed by an amateur with a little practice.

One that is very popular, and will not fail to cause a small sensation, is

Bringing Coloured Ribbons from the Mouth,

and it is performed in the following manner. First procure a fairly deep saucer, or dish, and in it place a fairly large quantity of cotton-wool. Concealed in this cotton-wool should be a small roll of coloured ribbon. You must announce, when you are ready to begin, that you are going to eat the cotton-wool, and afterwards remove it from your mouth in the form of a coloured ribbon, stating the colour it will be.

Stand well in front of the audience, and take a small quantity of the wool and place it in your mouth, and chew it vigorously. Get another portion ready in your hand, and, when placing this in your mouth, you can remove that which you have chewed, without the audience noticing the fact, if you are careful.

Go on like this until you have eaten all the wool except that which contains the ribbon. Then, beginning to look distressed, as if you had consumed too much, place the last piece into your mouth. After having chewed this for a little while, you must then announce that you are ready to take the ribbon from your mouth. This you proceed to do by catching hold of the loose end of the roll, which can be placed near the teeth, by the tongue, and gradually drawing it out. The slower this is done the better the effect.

Another simple conjuring trick is

The Vanishing Sixpence.

This should prove to be a very popular trick, owing to its great simplicity. Stand before your audience and announce that you intend, if anyone will lend you a sixpence, to make it disappear. Also add that you do not propose to do it by the ordinary method of letting it fall down your sleeve, and to prove your words you will take off your coat and turn up your cuffs. This you should do, and directly afterwards you should fasten securely to the nail of your middle finger a small piece of white wax. Take the sixpence from the generous member of your audience and place it in your hand. Then close the fingers so that the wax adheres to the coin, and, after making a few passes with the other hand, blow hard upon the one containing the coin, saying, "'Tis gone!" At the same time open your hand sharply, and to the amazement of your audience they will find that the coin has disappeared. It will, of course, really be sticking to the finger-nail at the back of the hand. To bring it back it is easy to reverse the order of things.

If you do not wish your trick to be discovered, be careful to remove every trace of the white wax from the coin when you return it to your friend.

A Rather Startling Trick,

which can be used to open the entertainment or to finish up with, is this. Before you commence, obtain equal weights of loaf sugar and chlorate of potash, and crush them both to very fine powder, afterwards mixing them well; then place them in an egg-cup. When the trick is to be performed, clear everything else off the table, and place the egg-cup exactly in the centre. The audience will concentrate all their attention on this. While they are so staring they are startled by a blinding glare of light issuing from the egg-cup. It is caused in this manner. After having placed the egg-cup upon the table, the operator takes hold of his wand, which in this case should be a small length of glass rod, and, dipping it into some sulphuric acid, proceeds to wave it over the cup, saying some peculiar words—such as "Hi, presto, abogravitch!" or any other words which can be easily coined. Suddenly allowing the rod to drop near the cup, the operator should touch the powder with the end. Instantly the mixture catches light, through the action of the sulphuric acid. If this trick is performed, the operator should be careful with the acid, which is dangerous stuff to play with.

THE EDITOR.

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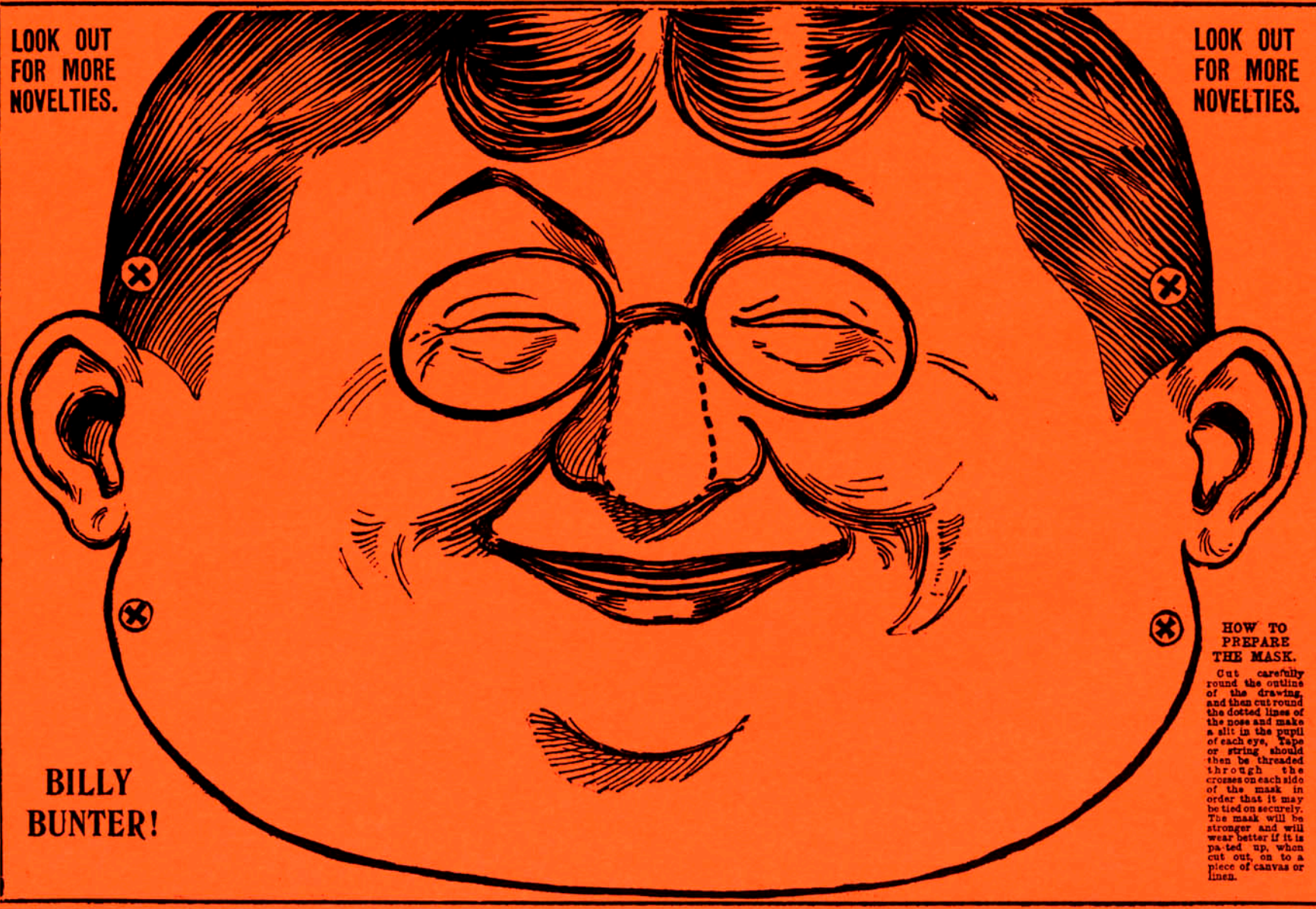

BILLY BUNTER!

HOW TO PREPARE THE MASK.

Cut carefully round the outline of the drawing, and then cut round the dotted lines of the nose and make a slit in the pupil of each eye. Tape or string should then be threaded through the crosses on each side of the mask in order that it may be tied on securely. The mask will be stronger and will wear better if it is pasted up, when cut out, on to a piece of canvas or linen.

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