

THIS WEEK **TOM, DICK, & HARRY** and **JACK, SAM, & PETE** IN THIS ISSUE.



PLUCK

1[¢]

**PLEDGED TO
SILENCE.**

By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON.**

**TOM, DICK, and
HARRY.**

By
**S. CLARKE
HOOK.**



**Harry
Plays
the Ghost.**

NO. 94.
VOL. 4.
NEW SERIES.

"Martha! Martha!" shrieked the terrified landlord, "here's that thing with the indiarubber face haunting me again! Come and turn it out!" "Wow! wow!" gurgled Harry, pulling an even more hideous grimace.

THE SECOND LONG STORY.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.



PLEDGED TO SILENCE.

A School Tale.

By CHARLES
HAMILTON.

CHAPTER 1.

How Jim Romayne was Sent to School.

"UNCLE, I—I don't half like the idea."

The boy spoke in a hesitating tone, and his voice trailed off falteringly as James Romayne brought his fist down upon the table with a blow that made it shake. The man's little grey eyes glittered as he fixed them upon the boy.

"You won't cross me in this matter, Jim, if you know what's good for you," he said, in a rasping voice. "I rely upon you in this matter, and I cannot carry out my plans without you. If you fail me—"

"I—I don't want to cross you, uncle, but—"

"But you're afraid!" sneered James Romayne.

Jim flushed.

"I'm not afraid," he said hotly. "It isn't that. But to go to a big public school like Northmoor, in another boy's name, to try and deceive so many people, and to get them to repose confidence in me, only for the sake of betraying it. Oh, uncle!" The boy's eyes filled with tears, and he broke off abruptly.

James Romayne looked at his nephew, the bitter sneer still upon his face.

"Your scruples do you credit, Jim," he said. "But they come a little too late in the day. What are you? How have you lived for years? You are one of us, my boy, and as liable as the rest of us to go to prison if our luck should change. And to prison you shall go if you fail me in this thing. You know I could send you there if I chose. But be sensible, lad," he went on, changing his tone. "This will work out as much for your profit as for mine. And a term at a public school will do you good. And you've got to thank me that you're fitted to play your part there. You can't say that I haven't done well for you."

Jim was silent.

It was true that he owed everything, both good and evil, to his uncle.

He had been left an orphan when a mere child, and James Romayne had taken him into his charge. He had spent most of his time at this old house in Kent, and his childhood had not been unhappy. His education had been carefully attended to, for James Romayne was an old Varsity man, and knew the value of that. It was not till he had grown quite a big lad that Jim began to realise that there was something secret, something "shady" in his uncle's life.

But James Romayne's secretiveness, his frequent long absences from home, his mysterious consultations with strange visitors from London, had all been explained at last, when Jim learned that his uncle belonged to the birds of prey of the great city. James Romayne was that most dangerous of characters, a man of intellect and education gone to the bad. He had, in his way, an affection for his nephew. But his moral sense had been blunted by a long career of crime, and he did not hesitate to force Jim into

unlawful ways when he was old enough to be of use to the gang in their schemes.

His influence over the boy was strong, and Jim had no other home, no other friend. Yet the boy was not wholly warped by his evil training. The longing to do what was right was strong in his breast, his whole nature was in revolt against his surroundings. But he seemed as helpless as the bird in the net of the fowler.

Sometimes, as on the present occasion, he broke out into passionate protest against the part he was required to play, but his uncle's authority, and the influence of his environment were always too strong for him in the end. It was a wonder that the last spark of honesty was not extinguished in his breast; but it still burned there, and better circumstances might fan it to a flame.

The boy's silence showed James Romayne that the short conflict was over. His face cleared as he went on to explain his plan.

"The novelty of it ought to appeal to you, Jim. You are fond of adventure. This boy, Kit Clavering, is an entire stranger at Northmoor College. His people have sent him over from South Africa, and he landed at Dover yesterday. He was in charge of the captain, but he went down to the school alone. But he has not arrived there yet."

Jim started.

"You mean that you have—"

He did not finish, but his uncle nodded.

"Yes. Of course, the lad will not be hurt. A few months of captivity won't do him any harm, and he will be well fed and looked after. You needn't have any uneasiness on that score. And when he is released, he won't have the least idea of where he was imprisoned. I shall take care of that."

"But how did you know anything about him?"

"The Dandy was on board the Southern Star, and I met him at Dover. He had made friends with the kid, and learned his whole history. It was really the Dandy's idea; you know he has good ideas. You can see the plan is a good one, Jim, and cannot fail. The new boy comes from South Africa, and is utterly unknown at Northmoor. You arrive there with his name, his clothes, his luggage. You'll be shoved into the Fifth Form. You'll like the life, Jim, as long as it lasts. I was a public schoolboy in my time, and I can put you up to some wrinkles. Only you'll have to be careful in talking about your home—ha, ha!—in South Africa."

"What do you want me to do at Northmoor, uncle?"

"Never mind about that now," said James Romayne, with a smile. "Get there first, and we'll see about that afterwards. I shall come down to see you, of course; on the strict Q.T. We can discuss further plans when you are safely installed at Northmoor."

"You promise me that the boy shall not be harmed?"

"Of course I do. Do you think I'm a fool?" said his uncle testily.

"I suppose I must do as you wish."

"I suppose you must," snapped Romayne. Then he went

on more gently: "You wouldn't fail me, Jim, when I rely upon you. You don't like this life. This coup we are going to make may enable us to leave it for good. But there's one thing you shouldn't lose sight of. You were left destitute when your father died. If I hadn't taken you, you would have grown up in the streets. Do you think you would have grown up honest? No, Jim; you'd be stealing for a living, but you'd be flying at small game, and spending half your life in prison cells. I've saved you from that. And when I've once pulled off a big coup, Jim, I shall cut the gang adrift, and you'll yet take a good place in the world, my boy."

Poor Jim!

Threats from his uncle awoke obstinacy in his breast, but when James Romaine spoke in a kind and affectionate tone,

he felt his resistance melt away. Romaine knew it well; and he knew he could always sway the boy to his will. But there was one thing he had not, with all his cunning, taken fully into consideration.

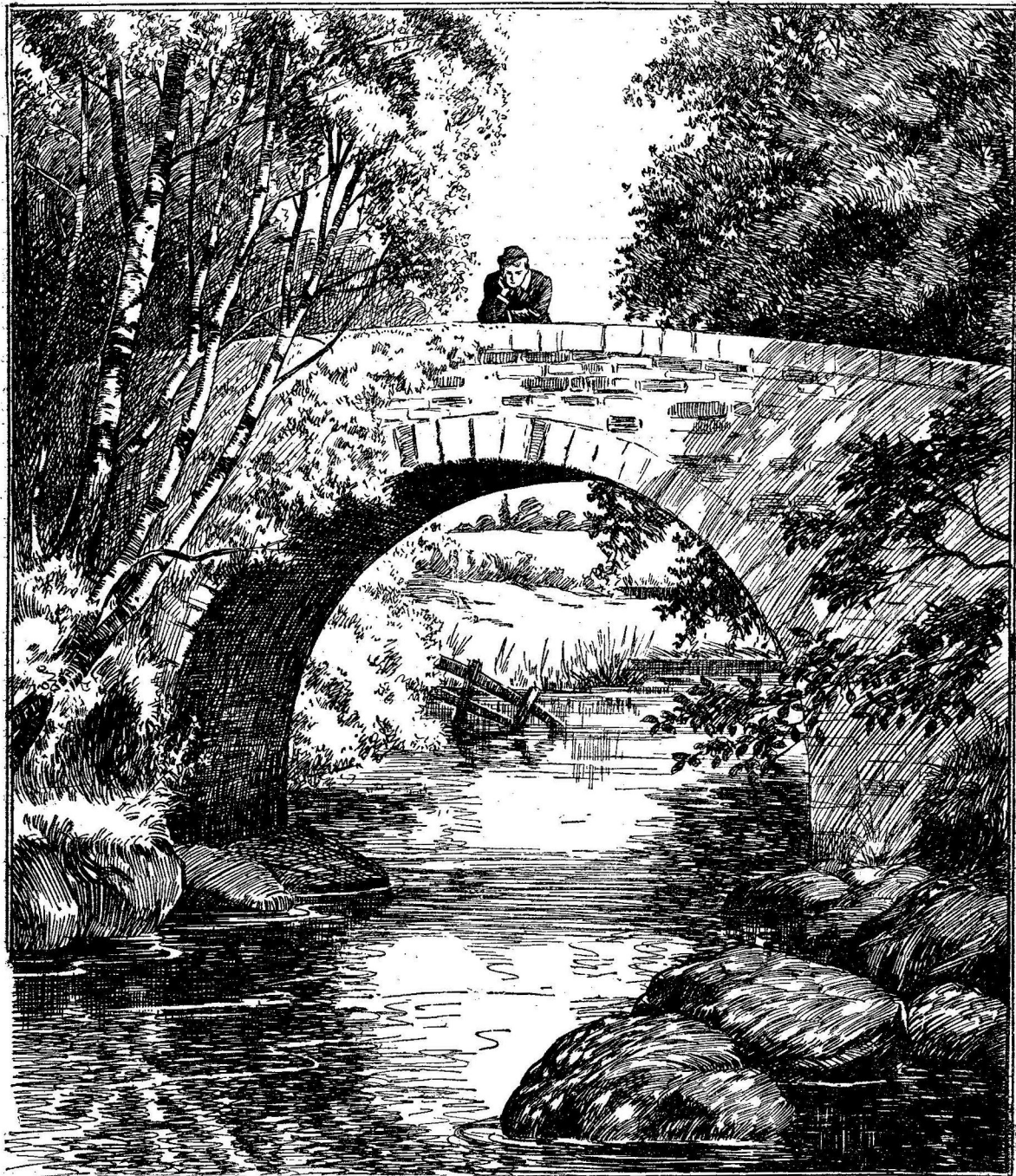
The talk was interrupted at this point by the entrance of a tall, slim, elegantly-dressed man, with a fair moustache. Romaine nodded to him.

"Halle, Dandy! Permit me to introduce Master Kit Clavering, the new boy at Northmoor!" he said, with a laugh.

"Jim's agreed?" asked the Dandy, with a glance at the boy. He had had his doubts.

Jim nodded.

"Yes," he said heavily, "I'm going to do it. From this day I'm Kit Clavering, of Northmoor; Heaven help me!"



Kit folded his arms, and leaning upon the stone parapet gazed down into the pool from which he had rescued Ralton the day he came to Northmoor. (See page 23.)

"He fancies he is at home," said a deep voice. "It is all right, my boy. You are with friends. Go to sleep, now."

And then Kit remembered. The colour flooded his white face, as he realised how nearly he had betrayed himself. He closed his eyes, but opened them again the next moment.

"Is he safe?"

"Railton? Yes, my brave lad, quite safe, thanks to your courage."

And Kit's eyes closed once more, and he slept. In a bed near him Railton, the captain of Northmoor, lay, still unconscious.

"I'd better go up to the school and tell them," said Wharton. "Dr. Langham will send the trap for them, Mr. Giles."

And Wharton left the farmhouse. His face was rather clouded. He was not satisfied with the part he had played in the affair, and he was inclined to be spiteful towards the new boy for showing so much more pluck than himself. Kit in his coming days at Northmoor was not likely to pull well with Wharton of the Fifth.

When the trap arrived from the school in the late afternoon, Kit was well able to go in it, but by the physician's advice Railton was left for the night under the roof of the hospitable farmer.

Kit drove up to the great gates of Northmoor College with a flutter at his heart. His spirits sank at the sight of a great crowd in the quadrangle, and he was a little alarmed when a rush was made for the trap.

Unknown to him, several of Railton's friends had gone over to the farmhouse after hearing Wharton's story, and from the farmer they had heard a full and graphic account of the gallant rescue.

Wharton had dwelt very lightly on the peril encountered by Kit, but from the farmer's account it was easy to see how near the new boy had come to death in the attempt to save Railton; and the boys of Northmoor had prepared a rousing reception for the new chum who had saved the life of their popular captain.

Kit, ignorant of all this, was considerably startled when the trap was surrounded by a flowing tide of shouting boys, and many hands grasped the pony and stopped him.

"Here he is!"

"That's the chap!"

"Have him out!"

"Hurrah! Collar him!"

Kit was collared out of the trap in a twinkling. He struggled in the grip of his captors.

"Here, I say, what's the row?" he exclaimed. "What are you up to? What have I done?"

There was a roar of laughter.

"Done?" ejaculated Moore of the Sixth. "Why, you've saved Railton's life, you young kipper, that's what you've done. Up with him, kids!"

Kit realised that the intentions of the Northmoor lads were not hostile. He submitted patiently as he was hoisted on the shoulders of a couple of stalwart Sixth-Formers.

The rest of the boys, of all Forms, crowded round, shouting and cheering, and Kit was marched triumphantly across the quadrangle to the door of the schoolhouse.

There an awe-inspiring figure in gown and mortar-board met the procession, which fell back in dismay; but the doctor was not angry. He adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses, and looked benignantly over the crowd.

"Ah, I see that you are doing honour to your new school-mate!" he exclaimed cordially. "I am very glad to see that, my boys. An heroic action should never go unrecognised. I am sure that this brave lad from a distant Colony of the Empire will bring credit upon Northmoor. I welcome you to the college, Clavering."

Kit was set down before the doctor. Dr. Langham held out his hand, and Kit took it timidly. The doctor shook hands with him heartily, and passed into his study, and Kit was left in the hall with the crowd of boys.

Never in his life had the boy felt so small and mean as at that moment. He had done a brave action thoughtlessly upon the impulse of the moment—the impulse of a noble nature. But that was not what he was thinking of. The doctor's kindly words went like a dagger to his heart. The whole guilt of the deception he was practising rushed upon him in a moment.

The doctor, who pressed his hand so cordially, the boys, who cheered him with such hearty enthusiasm—how they would shrink from him if they knew the truth! He could have cried aloud with the misery of that thought.

But he had his part to play, and he played it with a heavy heart. It was too late now to retreat. He had come to Northmoor College as Kit Clavering, and as Kit Clavering he must remain there.

His confusion of looks, his faltering tones were set down by the boys to the modesty of a hero, and the total absence of any assumption of "side" in his manner raised him in

their esteem. The new boy had made a very good start at Northmoor.

The interview in the doctor's study which followed was a painful ordeal to Kit. So far as his attainments went, he more than satisfied the doctor; for James Romaine, as we have said, had been very careful of his nephew's education. It was when the doctor began to speak of private matters that the new boy shivered inwardly.

"I understand that your father was an old Northmoor boy," the doctor remarked, "and he very naturally desired to send his son to his old school. You are old enough and sufficiently advanced for the Fifth Form, and in that Form I shall place you. I hope I shall be able to send a good account to Mr. Clavering at the end of the term."

"I shall do my best, sir."

"I am sure of that, Clavering. You have made many friends already. Your athletic training has not been neglected, I see. But, of course, you led a good deal of an outdoor life in South Africa."

"Yes, sir," said Kit, colouring.

He answered somehow or other the remarks the doctor made about the Colony, his life there, and his voyage. Naturally Dr. Langham was totally without suspicion, and this helped the unfortunate boy out. But when Kit left the study he was in a cold sweat. Was there to be no end to deception, no end to lying?

But there was a pleasant side to his adventure. When he left the doctor's study he was dragged off to a tea-party in a Fifth-Form study, and he found it jolly. His announcement that he was to go into the Fifth was cheered, and his new Form-fellows thumped him on the back till he ached with the excess of their enthusiasm.

"You'll be my study-mate, Clavering!" exclaimed Owen Redfern. "I was hoping there'd be no more in the Fifth this term, so that I could keep it to myself, but I'll be glad to have you. I've nobody yet, you know, and we go two to a study. Come with me presently, and I'll help you to get your things straight."

And presently Kit accompanied the Fifth-Former to the study which they would share for the ensuing term. It was a small room, not to say a poky one; but it was cosy, and there was room for the two boys and their belongings.

As Redfern had arrived on the opening day, his goods and chattels were unpacked and sprawled all over the room. Kit's box had arrived from the station, and Redfern helped him unpack.

"I say, your pater's done you down all right!" exclaimed Redfern. "He must be a jolly good sort. What a splendid bat! You play cricket?"

Kit had coloured painfully. Not a single article in that big box really belonged to him; but the mention of cricket drove miserable reflections from his mind. His eyes sparkled. In his home in Kent he had found solace for many troubles in the grand old game. While he handled the willow or the leather he could forget that his life was shadowed by crime.

"Yes," he said eagerly. "Do you go in for it much here?"

Redfern grinned. "Well, I should say so! Why, we live on cricket at Northmoor—talk it, think it, and breathe it. If you're a good cricketer you'll go down all right. Did you play a lot out there on the—what's the blessed word—the veldt?"

"I've played a lot," said Kit.

"Then you'll do. We're simply rottenly weak in cricketers this season. We've been licked by St. Olaf's last term," said Redfern solemnly.

"Were you really?"

"Yes; and Railton took it awfully to heart. If you shape well at the wicket, you've got a good chance of being shoved into the First Eleven."

"Ah, how I would like that!" said Kit wistfully.

"You might. Wharton's trying hard to get his cap, but he's no class."

"Wharton? The chap who—"

"The chap who funk'd going in for Railton," said Redfern, with a curl of the lip.

"Oh, I say, that isn't right. Railton and I would never have got out but for Wharton fetching help."

"That's all very well; but if he had gone in with you, you wouldn't have wanted any help fetched. He funk'd it, whatever he says. He's no class."

"Thank you, Redfern!" said a voice at the door. It was open, and Wharton, passing, had caught Redfern's words, and put his head in. "Thanks!" He looked viciously at Clavering. "So that's your thanks for my helping you—you start running me down behind my back."

"I wasn't running you down," said Kit. "I said—"

"But I was!" said Redfern, breaking in. "Not behind your back, though, Wharton. I'd say it to your face sharp enough. You funk'd going in for Railton. There!"

Wharton scowled and withdrew his head, and went down the corridor. Redfern grinned.

"That's one for his nob!" he said. "He can put that in his pipe and smoke it. Wharton puts on a lot of swagger, but he hasn't enough real pluck for a tame rabbit. He'll have his knife into you, Clavering, for making him look small. You'll see, he won't forgive you for fishing Railton out of the Nare."

Kit felt that his study mate was right; but he did not guess then how much Wharton's enmity would mean to him.

CHAPTER 4: Something at Cricket.

Kit fell into his place at Northmoor naturally enough. If he had come there under happier auspices, he felt that public school life would have delighted him. Even with the secret weight upon his mind, he began to feel glad that he had come. Much of the time he succeeded in driving painful reflections from his mind.

After school the next day he strolled down to the cricket-field with his new chum, Redfern. The study mates were pulling together exceedingly well. Redfern had shown Kit round the college, explaining to him everything that it was necessary for a new boy to know.

Kit found his friendship a great help. In the cricket-field a number of Sixth-Form seniors were at practice, Railton among them. The captain of Northmoor spotted Kit at once, and came towards him, as he stood with Redfern near the pavilion.

Railton was looking little the worse now for his experience of the day before. He had come back to Northmoor in the morning, but he had not had a chance of speaking to Kit yet.

"Hallo, youngster!" was his greeting. "You are the new kid, of course—Clavering?"

"Yes," said Kit.

"Give us your fist!"

And Railton gave Kit a grip of the hand that made him wince.

"You fished me out of the Nare," said the captain of Northmoor. "I didn't know anything about it till this morning. I was seized with cramp in the Pool, and I should have been done in to a certainty if you hadn't brought me out. It was an awfully plucky thing to do. Most fellows, older than you, would have thought twice before diving off the bridge with their clothes on into the Pool."

Kit coloured.

"I'm glad I was on the spot," he said. "It's nothing."

Railton laughed.

"It was something to me, Clavering, and I sha'n't forget it. If I can ever do you a good turn, don't forget that I'm ready to do it."

"Thank you, Railton! But—"

Railton was running his eye over the boy's athletic figure.

"How do you shape in sports?" he asked suddenly.

"What kind of a bat are you?"

"I was considered a pretty good one where I came from."

"South Africa? Let's see what you can do. I shall have to put you through your paces, and there's no time like the present. Moore, see if you can take Clavering's wicket."

Kit's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

Quickly he donned pads and gloves, and took the bat that was handed to him. The new boy's exploit in the Pool still made him an object of general interest, and so a good many fellows gathered round to see how he would shape at the wicket. Was he likely to prove as good a cricketer as he was a swimmer? If so, Northmoor had indeed gained an acquisition.

And the old hands remarked the businesslike way in which he took his stand, and the bowler thought that it would not be the easiest of tasks to shift him. And the event proved that he was quite right. Moore was the champion bowler of the Northmoor first eleven, but he had met his match in the new boy.

He sent down two or three, which Kit distributed over the field. Then he began to put his best work into the bowling, and the ball came down with a tricky break on it that had sent many a batsman bootless home. But Kit was there, and the trickiest ball and the simplest seemed all the same to him. He sent the leather all over the field, and gave a good deal of hunting to the fags who were fielding for the seniors.

"What-ho!" said Railton. "He can bat, and no mistake! Why don't you take his wicket, Moore?"

Moore gave a grunt.

"Try it yourself."

He tossed the ball to Railton, who caught it and went on to bowl. He tried the new boy with every style he knew, but the wicket remained intact.

Kit was enjoying himself. He had never played so well in

his life before, and the thought of getting into the first eleven was like wine to him.

"Hurrah!" shouted Redfern, as Railton gave it up. "Good old Clavering! Why don't you take his wicket, Railton?"

Railton grinned good-humouredly.

"Give us some bowling, Clavering."

Nothing loth, Kit took the leather.

Railton stood at the wicket, all eyes.

Kit took a little run, and the ball came down, and Railton was just murmuring to himself, "This'll be a wide," when the ball, by some mysterious twist on it, curled in, and there was a clatter of falling balls.

Railton stared at his wrecked wicket.

"Jerusalem!"

And then he stared hard at the new boy.

"Was that a fluke?"

Kit grinned.

"Try again."

Railton tried again. He stopped the next ball, and the next. He cut away one or two. But then again came a tricky ball that took him by surprise, curling in just where it was least expected, and again his wicket went down. The boys standing round the pitch gave a ringing cheer.

Railton did not show any sign of annoyance. He was too good a sportsman for that, and he was too delighted at securing a first-class cricketer for his team. He rushed up to Kit and fairly hugged him.

"You'll do—you'll do!" he exclaimed. "Holy smoke, what a rod in pickle for St. Olaf's! Eh—what? You're going into the first eleven, my son, right in. Why, you're a Ranji and a C. B. Fry and a W. G. all rolled into one, to judge by what you've done to-day! We'll put you through a trial match on Saturday, and if you show the same form you'll go-up against St. Olaf's at the big match!"

And Kit flushed with delight. His love of the grand old game, his assiduous practice, had their reward now. Redfern was grinning with pleasure as he walked off the field with his new chum.

"I never expected you to shape like that Clavering!" he exclaimed. "Old Railton is more pleased by your cricket than by your pulling him out of the Pool, I verily believe. You'll go into the first eleven, for sure, and Wharton's chance is a goner."

"Don't be so sure of that," said Wharton, coming out of the pavilion. "You know a little too much, Redfern. As for that cocksure jackanapes—"

"Oh, rats!" said Kit. "I haven't said a word. What do you want to go for me for?"

"You're trying to shove yourself into the team in my place."

"Is the place yours? I should have imagined that it belonged to the best man."

"And do you think you're better than I am?"

"What I think has nothing to do with it. Railton has to decide, and what he says goes. If he decides to put you in, I sha'n't say a word about it."

"No; because you know you're certain of your cap, just because you fished him out of the Pool," said Wharton, with a sneer. "Only a cad would profit by favouritism!"

Kit stopped, and looked him full in the face.

"That's a lie!" he said bluntly. "Railton is too decent a chap to show favouritism to anybody, and you know very well that my fishing him out of the Pool has got nothing to do with his putting me in the eleven."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course you say so, but I know better. You, a new kid, promised your cap for the eleven on your second day at Northmoor! It's never happened before."

Kit gritted his teeth.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Wharton, but I must say that you are a rotten, suspicious cad! And if you run down Railton in my presence again I shall hit out! So just put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Wharton turned pale with rage.

"You rat," he hissed, "I'll give you a chance to keep your word! I say that Railton has favoured you, and passed over a better player—"

Biff! Straight from the shoulder came Kit's blow, and Wharton's guard was too late. He went down flat on his back, with a red smear on his nose.

Kit stood looking down at him with flashing eyes. Two or three fellows came running to the spot. Wharton slowly rose to his feet. His eyes were burning.

"We can't fight here," he said thickly. "Come over to the fields, and we'll have it out. There's plenty of time before calling-over for me to give you a hiding."

"I'll take it, if you can give it me," said Kit disdainfully.

Wharton, not trusting himself to speak, turned and strode away. Kit followed with Redfern, and there were soon a dozen of their Form-fellows at their heels. Wharton stopped

NEXT WEEK:

"THERE'S MANY A SLIP,"

A Tale of Dr. Nevada,
Detective

AND

"WIELDERS OF THE WILLOW,"

A Tale of Specs,
by H. Clarke Hook.

TWO

**Grand Long,
Complete Stories.**

In a secluded place, where the trees hid them from general view, and peeled off his jacket.

Kit peeled, too. He was quite ready for the conflict. Wharton was older and taller than he was, but, as Kit had already seen, his pluck was not of the first order. And Kit, though he was the smaller of the two, was grit to the backbone, and in the pink of condition physically. Win or lose, he was determined to put up the best fight he could, and to stand up till he was knocked out; and that was the spirit that makes for victory.

Wharton, too, was in too furious a temper to use the advantages that he really possessed. He attacked Kit like a bull, rushing at him fiercely, and was brought to his senses by the rattle of hard knuckles upon his nose and mouth. He staggered back, and was for the moment at Kit's mercy; but the generous lad refrained from following up his attack with a knock-down drive, as he might easily have done.

"Round No. 1," said Mackenzie, of the Upper Fifth, who had taken out his watch to act as time-keeper. "One minute rest, ye cripples!"

Redfern looked savagely at Kit.

"You silly cuckoo! Why didn't you dust him when you had the chance?"

Clavering grinned. "That's all right," he said. "He laid himself open to it, you know, and—"

"Rats! He won't spare you, you may depend upon it."

"I fancy I can handle him."

The adversaries faced each other for the second round. Wharton was savage, but calmer, and more on his guard. He realised that by his passion he had nearly given the fight away. Kit received some severe punishment, but he got in a couple with his right which made Wharton look rather sick, and at the end of the round the general opinion was that the advantage was with the new boy.

In the third round Wharton went to grass, with a plentiful stream of claret flowing from his classic nose. He grunted as he fell, and was in no hurry to rise. The timekeeper began to count, and the fallen champion scowled and scrambled up. Again Kit spared him; but this time Redfern did not growl, for he was assured now that his principal was to have the best of the battle. And so it proved. Coolness and pluck were destined to win the day against mere size and strength.

Wharton, enraged by pain, attacked Kit furiously, and got in his right upon the new boy's nose, the pain of the concussion bringing the water with a rush to Kit's eyes. But the new boy did not allow it to disconcert him. He countered with his left, and Wharton reeled under a heavy blow. He threw up his hands blindly, and gave Kit a golden opportunity. Rushing in, the new boy drove his fists together into his adversary's face.

The concussion would have felled a prizefighter. Wharton went down in a heap, and rolled over on the grass. He lay there, staring dazedly at the sky for a few seconds, a thousand lights dancing before his dazzled eyes. His second, Lucas, picked him up, Wharton being quite unable to help himself. He was staggering blindly, and more than one of the spectators suspected that he was less hurt than he pretended to be.

"Time!" said Mackenzie.

Kit stepped forward briskly. But Wharton only grunted.

"Are you done, Wharton?"

"Yes," groaned Wharton—"yes, confound you!"

"You're quite sure?" asked Redfern. "There's some more to come, if you ain't quite satisfied, Wharton."

Kit took his jacket from his chum. His face was a little clouded. He would gladly have shaken hands with Wharton over the affair, now that they had had it out fairly and squarely; but the defeated one's look showed pretty plainly that he would only meet with a rebuff. Kit walked away with Redfern, and the rest of the boys dispersed. Wharton remained with Lucas; he went down the stream to bathe his face.

"I'll make his suffer for that yet," he smiled. "Oh, my eye—my nose! I shall be a sight for a week!"

"You will," said his friend, surveying him critically.

"You've got yourself hurt this time, old chap. That new kid is hot stuff. But really, Wharton, you shouldn't have picked on him."

"Oh, shouldn't I?" snapped Wharton. "I'll make him sit up yet. I wasn't in form, or he would never have got the better of me this time."

CHAPTER 5. James Romayne's Demand.

IN the trial match on Saturday, the new boy shaped so well that Railton decided definitely to put him in the first eleven, and Kit had the pleasure of winning his cap for the college team. He was congratulated heartily enough by nearly all his Form. Wharton remained sulkily apart, but it is safe to say that there was not another boy at Northmoor who did not wish Kit well.

After the game, Kit changed his things and walked down to the village. For safety's sake it had been arranged that when his uncle wrote to him he should call at the post-office for letters, and on this Saturday he was expecting one.

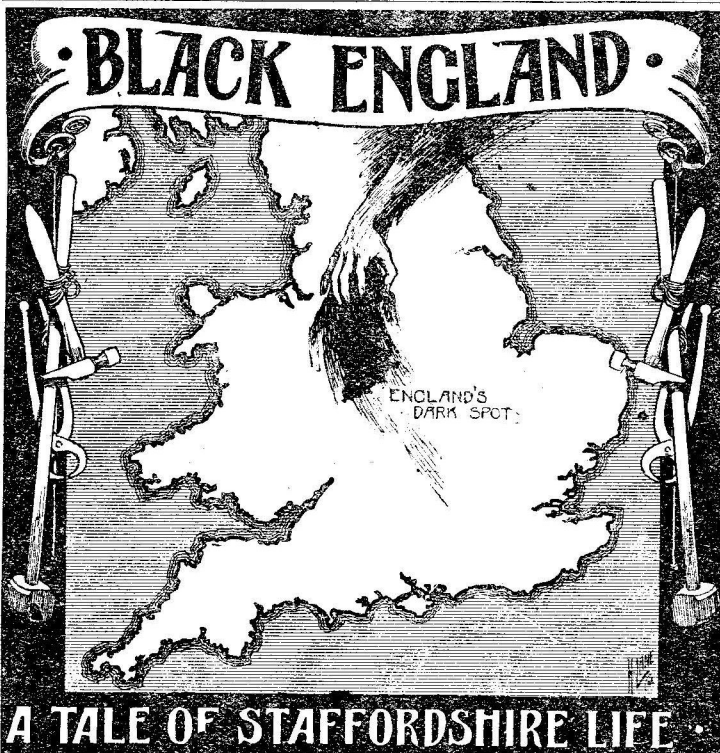
It was not with any pleasurable anticipations that he went to fetch his letter. He did not wish to hear from his uncle. He did not know why he had been sent to

Northmoor, but he was certain that it was for no good purpose. Short as was the time of his stay there, it had been long enough to open a new world to him. The past—the black, wretched past—seemed to have fallen an immense distance behind him.

There was a letter for him at the post-office, addressed, of course, in his new name. He took it and left the little place. As in most country villages, the post-office was merely a part of a building, the rest of the shop, in this instance, being the "tuck" establishment, chiefly patronised by the Northmoor boys. Wharton and Lucas had come in, and were standing before the counter, as Kit turned away with his letter, and both of them looked at it and at him curiously. Kit, who was feeling very depressed with the thought of what was probably in the letter, did not observe them, but walked out with a clouded face. The two looked at one another.

"Hallo! Hallo!" ejaculated Wharton. "The new fellow's having letters sent to him at the post-office. Why don't his people write to the college?"

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"Something fishy," said Lucas. "You know, Lambert, who was expelled last term for going in with bookmakers, used to have their letters addressed to him here. The Head got to know of it, and there was an awful dust-up over it."

Wharton's eyes gleamed. "By Jove, Lucas, I shouldn't wonder if Clavering was up to something of that kind!" he exclaimed. "He didn't make a good impression on me from the first. He—"

Lucas grinned. "Better let it alone, Wharton," he advised. "It ain't your business, anyhow, and if you said anything people would put it down to spite because he licked you."

"Who said I was going to say anything? Of course, it isn't my business, but I think a fellow has no right to bring disgrace on his Form."

The subject was dropped, and Lucas soon forgot about it; but Wharton did not forget. He had been defeated all along the line, so to speak, by the new boy. In courage, in cricket, in fisticuffs he had been outdone, and it rankled deeply.

If Clavering was really engaged in any underhand business which would not bear the light it would be a splendid revenge to expose him. Wharton snapped his teeth with vicious anticipation at the thought of showing Kit up before all the fellows who were singing his praises.

"I'll have a look at that letter," he muttered to himself. When his rancour was aroused he was not greatly troubled by honourable scruples. "I'll have a look at that letter, and, if it's what I fancy it is, then I'll show him up!"

And he kept that purpose steadily in view.

Kit, of course, was not in the least upon his guard against such an attempt, and his enemy found an opportunity that evening. Kit had gone out in his cricketing things, for another spell of practice at the nets, and Wharton knew that in all probability he had left the letter in a pocket of the clothes he had changed. To slip upstairs was the work of a minute.

No one else was there, and quickly Wharton went through the pockets of the clothes Kit had taken off. In the breast-pocket of the jacket he felt a paper crumple under his searching fingers. He drew it out and unfolded it. Upon the envelope was the Sevenoaks postmark, and he wondered how the new boy from South Africa came to have a correspondent in Kent. The letter was amazing. It was brief enough:

"My dear nephew,—I wish to see you. On Wednesday, I believe, there is a half-holiday at Northmoor. Come to the bridge over the Nare, as near six o'clock as you can, and I will be there to meet you.—Your affectionate UNCLE."

There were no names mentioned. But Wharton had no doubt that this was the letter he had seen Kit take away from the village post-office. He read it through a second time, and made a note on his shirt-cuff. Then he replaced the letter exactly as he had found it, and hurried downstairs. He entered his own study, and sat down to think.

His first suspicion—that Kit was mixed up in some gambling transaction—was evidently wide of the mark, and had to be abandoned.

It was plain enough that there was something "shady" in the affair. The new boy, who was supposed to have no relations in England, had an uncle who wrote to him from Sevenoaks, and who wished to meet him secretly, without showing himself at Northmoor.

And it did not take long for Wharton to realise that he was upon the track of something more serious than an escapade of the kind which led to an expulsion at Northmoor the previous term.

"What does it mean?" he muttered in perplexity. "There's something wrong, that's plain enough. Why should his uncle write to the post-office instead of here? Why should he be so careful to mention no names in the letter? Why should he make a secret rendezvous instead of coming honestly up to the school? How comes the fellow to have an uncle in England at all? I heard the Head himself say that he had no relations this side of South Africa."

"By Jove, I don't know what it all means, but it's something pretty deep, and I fancy I shall be able to catch him on the hip if I play my cards carefully. Let me see." He consulted the note he had pencilled upon his cuff. "About six o'clock on the bridge of the Nare. That's chosen, of course, because it's a solitary place at that time. But there will be three at the rendezvous, and I shall be one of them. I mean to know what the matter is. For the present, mum's the word."

Wharton strolled down to the playing-field after he had come to this decision. He observed Kit carefully, and found evidence enough in his looks

that all was not well with him. His cricket was not quite up to his previous mark, for one thing. And there was a depression in his looks which he could not wholly disguise, though he tried to do so.

"Anything up, Clavering?" asked Redfern, as they walked back to the school when the practice was over.

Kit shook his head.

"No. What should be up?"

"Oh, I don't know; but you are looking pretty dumpy!" laughed Redfern. "You ought to be in high feather to-day, I should imagine, after getting your cap for the eleven."

"So I am, Redfern; I'm jolly well pleased!" said Kit.

"Well, you don't look it, that's all."

Kit took warning by his chum's remark, and tried to keep his depression out of his looks. For one wild moment he was tempted to confide in Redfern. It was but for a moment, of course. Short as was the time during which they had known one another, a very real friendship was growing up between the two boys. But Kit felt that all friendship must necessarily be at an end if his chum knew the truth. He could picture the horror that would dawn in Owen Redfern's face as he learned that the new boy was an impostor, a living lie. So far from receiving his sympathy, Kit could hardly have depended upon his silence.

No; though he longed for help and advice, he was fated to bear his burden alone, and to keep closed lips, whatever he suffered.

What did his uncle want? That was the question that haunted Kit during the ensuing days. He became anxious to have the meeting over. He felt that he could not breathe freely until his uncle had come and gone.

"You'll be playing in the Form match this afternoon," remarked Redfern to his chum on Wednesday morning. "Will you come with me to Dalton's Wood afterwards, Clavering? There's a nest there I want to have a look at."

"I'm sorry, Redfern," he replied; "I can't."

"Got something on?"

"Yes."

Redfern did not ask what it was, and Kit was relieved. If his chum had questioned him, he must have been driven to an untruth to escape.

Kit played up well in the afternoon, and the match was fortunately over in ample time for him to keep the appointment at the bridge on the Nare. He reached the bridge

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just as the strokes of six came pealing over the wood from the village church.

The place was quite lonely. James Romaine had not yet arrived. Kit leaned his arms on the stone parapet and gazed down into the pool, from which he had rescued Railton on the day of his coming to Northmoor. A step aroused him from his gloomy reverie. He turned and faced his uncle.

James Romaine looked keenly at the boy, and held out his hand.

"How are you, Jim? Getting on all right at Northmoor?"

Kit shook hands with his uncle.

"Yes," he said; "better than I could have expected."

"All is going well?"

"Yes."

"You don't look as if you had been enjoying yourself."

Kit was silent.

"I suppose it is my visit which makes you look so down-hearted?" sneered James Romaine. "You find it pleasant enough to be at Northmoor, but you don't want to do your work there—the work you were sent there to do!"

"No, I don't!" broke out Kit fiercely. "I don't know what you want; but—"

James Romaine broke off suddenly, his face changing.

"I am here to tell you, Jim. I—"

His quick ears, accustomed to constant alertness, had caught a faint sound from the bushes that grew close to the end of the little bridge, and it aroused his suspicion at once. His way of life made him swift to suspect a trap. He turned from Kit, and ran along the bridge towards the bushes, and in a moment had plunged into them, seeking the supposed listener.

A sharp crashing of twigs warned him that his suspicion had been well founded; but as he blundered through the brambles the sound died away, and he knew that the eaves-dropper had escaped. It was useless to pursue him through the wood, and Romaine returned to the bridge with a clouded brow.

Kit looked at him in amazement.

"What was it, uncle?"

"Somebody was hidden in that bush, listening to us."

"I can't understand it. Why should anyone listen?"

"Some curious fool, I suppose. But so long as it was not anyone from Northmoor School I do not care."

Kit started.

"From the school?"

"It is possible," said Romaine uneasily. "Is there anyone at the school of whom you have made an enemy, Jim?"

"I have one enemy who hates me bitterly—Wharton of the Fifth."

"Could he have known anything of your coming here to meet me?"

Kit shook his head.

"Impossible!"

Romaine was only half satisfied.

"Well, as I spotted him so soon, he can have learned little," he said. "A Northmoor fellow would be surprised to hear that you had an uncle in England, and to hear your uncle call you Jim. Any outsider would learn nothing from that."

"It was probably only some village boy."

"Well, I hope so. But it was a piece of carelessness on my part to mention names at all, and I will be more careful. Let us go somewhere where we can talk without danger of being either heard or seen."

Kit made no demur. He followed his uncle into the wood, and they stopped under a big oak-tree. James Romaine looked about him carefully. The place was utterly deserted save for themselves.

"We can talk here. If that was a Northmoor boy listening yonder, you'll hear something of it, probably, when you get back to the school, and can let me know."

"Very well."

"Now, I'll tell you what you are to do, Jim. You've had a good look round the school, of course, and sized it up?"

"Yes."

"You've probably noticed that it's one of the richest cribs to crack in this part of the country?"

Kit felt a cold shiver. So that was his uncle's purpose!

"Yes," he said again, faintly.

"You are a fair draughtsman," James Romaine chuckled. "I've taken care of that. You can draw up a plan of a house as well as anybody."

"Is that what you want me to do?"

"Exactly. A plan of the school, with any points that are specially worth our attention, and taking care to mark the window you will leave open for us."

Kit was silent.

"Of course you will not be suspected," continued his uncle. "The robbery will not be discovered until the following morning. Why should anybody think of you in connection with it? I expect to make a haul worth at least six or seven hundred pounds. You shall have your share—"

"Not a shilling! Not a penny!"

His uncle looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean, boy?"

"Mean?" broke out the unhappy lad passionately. "I mean that I would sooner starve than touch a penny stolen from those who trust me! Heaven help me! Oh, what can I do?"

The outburst alarmed the plotter. He was accustomed to the writhings of his victim, but he had never known Jim to take matters so deeply to heart before. Anxiety and rage gathered on his brow, and he remained silent.

The boy took advantage of his silence to make a passionate appeal:

"Uncle, why won't you spare me this? Let me remain honest, and able to look the other fellows in the face! Think what a rotten cad I should feel! I couldn't remain at Northmoor afterwards! I'd die first! Why won't you let me alone? The doctor has been kind to me, and the fellows all like and respect me. I should die of shame if they knew anything of—of what I am!"

James Romaine smiled unpleasantly. The boy's words showed him that he had a new hold over his victim—a new and stronger hold.

"What, you shrink from letting the Northmoor fellows know you as you are, Jim?"

"I think it would kill me."

"Well, you may be certain that they will know, unless you do as I ask."

"Do you mean that you would expose me?" muttered the boy.

Romaine shrugged his shoulders.

There was a long silence. More than he shrank from prison and punishment, Kit shrank from allowing the school to know him in his true colours. What was he to do? Truly he was in the toils of Fate!

His uncle saw his advantage.

"Will you do as I want you to, Jim?"

"You've left me no choice," said the boy brokenly. "I—I couldn't face that. I couldn't bear it. I'll do as you ask."

"The sooner the better; and I need not linger here," said his uncle. "Good-bye, Jim!" He held out his hand. The boy did not touch it.

James Romaine scowled darkly, and strode away through the wood. Kit took his way dejectedly back to the school. Near the gates he encountered Wharton. He did not notice the curious look his enemy cast upon him.

"Jim—ch?" muttered Wharton to himself—for, of course, he had been the unseen listener. "So that's his name! What can it mean? I'll find out. What a pity that brute was after me before I could hear more! But I'll find out."

CHAPTER 6. Kit's Resolve.

IT was done!

Kit had given his word to his uncle, and he kept it.

The plan was made and despatched to James Romaine, the boy forcing himself to the task, and getting it over without allowing himself time to think further about it.

After it was done he felt a sense of relief.

The horrible thing had weighed upon his spirits like a nightmare, but now it was done. He was free for a time.

A few days later he called again at the village post-office for letters, and received one there from his uncle.

It was a brief one, but to the point.

"Next Saturday."

That was all, but it was enough for Kit.

It meant that James Romaine had fixed next Saturday for the robbery at Northmoor; that upon that night he was to contrive to leave open the window agreed upon.

He tore the letter up, and scattered the fragments in the lane after he had read it, and walked back to the school in the blackest of moods.

He was far from dreaming that spiteful, watchful eyes had been fixed upon him from the moment he entered the post-office. Wharton had followed him to the village, and had seen him receive the letter. He had watched the passionate gesture with which Kit scattered the fragments in the lane. And as the boy strode away, never thinking of looking behind him, Wharton ran to the spot and collected up what pieces he could. Many of them were gone, but he recovered sufficient to show him that the paper had been blank save for a couple of words written across it. And the portions of those two words—"Nex—Sat—y"—sufficiently indicated what they were.

Wharton was profoundly astonished.

Why anyone should write a letter to Kit Clavering containing only those two words, "Next Saturday," he could not conceive.

He felt that he was upon the verge of a discovery, but it

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was impossible, turn it over as he would, for him to penetrate the mystery.

He could only wait and watch.

And for the present he determined to keep his own counsel. It would be time to speak when he had a definite accusation to make against the new boy.

Kit never suspected what was in his enemy's mind, and it was fortunate that it was so, for the unhappy lad had enough to bear.

The great match with St. Olaf's was to be played the following week, when the school had a whole holiday for the occasion, and Kit was hard at work now at cricket.

When he was on the cricket-ground he could usually forget the troubles that at other times shadowed his thoughts. There is nothing like good physical exercise to drive away the "blues." With a bat or a ball in his hand, Kit forgot that he was James Romaine's nephew, and remembered only that he was a schoolboy and a cricketer.

And upon these occasions Wharton would watch him with spiteful eyes, and when the others praised him his rival found comfort in the reflection that the new boy's head should soon be brought low enough in disgrace.

The fatal Saturday arrived.

Kit went through cricket practice in the afternoon as usual, and then went to his study. He wanted to be alone, but after a time Redfern came in.

"Hallo! What are you mewed up here for, Clavering?" he exclaimed. "I noticed you were looking rather seedy after the play this afternoon. Is it the heat?"

Kit shook his head.

"Feeling nervous about the St. Olaf's match on Wednesday?" asked Redfern sympathetically. "I can understand it, but you've no reason to be afraid, Clavering. I heard Railton say that, with a couple of exceptions, you're the best man in the team."

"That was awfully good of Railton," said Kit, with a flush of pleasure in his cheeks.

"It's the fact, my boy. We are going to stagger humanity over at St. Olaf's on Wednesday, and don't you forget it," said Redfern impressively. "How I wish I had my cap! But you'll uphold the honour of the Fifth Form."

"I'll do my best, Owen, you may be sure."

"Well, don't stick in here; it won't do you any good."

"Come out, you boulder. Nothing wrong with you, is there?" he added, as Kit did not stir.

"I'm feeling worried."

"About the match?"

"No."

"What is it, then? Get it off your chest."

Kit smiled faintly.

How gladly he would have confided in the frank, cordial lad if he had dared! The temptation to do so was almost overwhelming.

"Have you ever been in a horrible fix, Redfern?" he said slowly.

"Lots of times," said the other cheerfully. "When old Mumford caught me breaking bounds, for instance. He—"

"I don't mean that kind of thing. Have you ever been placed in a position when you seemed forced to do what you knew was wrong?"

Redfern stared for a moment, and then, seeing how set and pale Kit's face was, he came over to his chum and dropped a hand upon his shoulder.

"What's the trouble, old son?" he said softly. "I've thought for some time that you had something on your mind. What is it? You can confide in me, can't you? Hang it, I'm not much good at talking. But you know I'll stand by you like a brick, Kit."

Kit's eyes were moist. If only he dared to tell!

Redfern spoke with perfect sincerity; but, then, he had not the remotest suspicion of what the truth really was. The thought of crime had never even crossed his mind.

"You're in some bother," said Redfern, as Kit did not speak. "Is it something at home—something to do with your people?"

"Yes," said Kit.

"Well, if it isn't a secret, get it off your chest. It will make you feel better."

"If I only could!" murmured Kit.

"Why can't you?"

"It's—it's a secret."

"That makes it a different matter, of course. But I say, old chap, are you quite sure you ain't making a mountain out of a molehill?" suggested Redfern. "Aren't you feeling run down, and looking at things in a wrong light—eh?"

"Perhaps," said Kit quietly. "But suppose you were placed as I said? Suppose you seemed to be driven to act in a wrong way? What would you do?"

Redfern looked puzzled.

He was not a metaphysician; he was only a healthy British schoolboy, with a kind heart and a careless head,

and he did not quite know how to answer a question of that kind.

"I don't know," he said, at length. "I don't set up to be a saint. But I hope that in any case, whatever the circumstances were, I should play the game."

Play the game!

The great rule of boyhood, and of manhood, too. That was what Kit had always longed to do, and which adverse circumstances had prevented him from doing.

But his eyes sparkled at Redfern's words.

"You'd play the game, and face the music?" he said.

"I don't know; but I hope so, Clavering."

Kit rose to his feet.

"Let's get out, Redfern. I want some air. I've been feeling beastly depressed. Come on!"

They went out together. Redfern was curious, and a little disturbed, but he asked no questions.

That short talk with his chum had decided Kit.

Ever since his meeting with his uncle he had been vacillating, and he had gone so far, as we have seen, as to send to James Romaine the plans he demanded.

But now his mind was made up. The robbery should not take place!

Whatever the consequences, he would not be guilty of the odious treachery his tyrant required of him.

He could not betray his uncle. Deeply as the man had injured him, he could not be instrumental in sending to prison the man who had taken him in as a child and cared for his infancy. But the planned robbery should be prevented. Upon that Kit was resolved, come what might. He would "play the game."

At bed-time Kit went up to the dormitory with his Form, and seemed to be the first asleep. In reality, though he lay still and his eyes were closed, nothing was further from his thoughts than sleep. Healthy slumber soon descended upon the rest of the dormitory, and only Kit Clavering lay wakeful. He was waiting.

Midnight boomed out from the clock tower.

The last sounds had died away in the vast pile of North-moor.

Still the boy did not move, and still his wide eyes were fixed staringly upon the glimmering square of the window.

One!

The deep boom seemed to reverberate with a peculiar distinctness through the solemn silence of the night.

Then the sleepless lad slipped quietly from his bed and hurried on some of his clothes. Barefooted he stole from the dormitory, closing the door behind him, with great caution. Noiselessly he glided down the dark stairs, feeling his way by the banisters.

His heart was beating hard.

It seemed to him that faces looked from the dim corners, that the darkness was peopled by grim figures. In the darkness and silence everything had an aspect strange and new. He hurried on with bated breath.

By this time, he believed, the intended robbers were in the grounds. They were to scale the outer wall at a certain place Kit had indicated, and so much of their task was easy. The rest would be equally facile if Kit carried out his uncle's instructions. But that was exactly what he was determined not to do.

He stopped at the little window which had been selected for the secret ingress of the thieves. He unfastened it and opened it a few inches. Then he waited.

The quarter struck from the clock tower.

Then dead silence.

Still the boy waited. There was a sudden slight sound without. In the dimness a dark form loomed up outside the window. Then another.

There was a low ejaculation of satisfaction.

"All right, Dandy! Here's the place!"

"It's unfastened?"

"Yes, and open a couple of inches."

"Right-ho!"

A hand touched the sash. Then James Romaine became aware of the white, strained face staring out at him through the glass, and he started back with an oath. But in a moment he realised who it was.

He put his face to the crack under the partly raised sash.

"You startled me, Jim. Why have you remained here? You ought to have gone back to bed. Go back at once!"

Kit did not stir.

The man tried to push up the window; it went up a few inches more, and then stopped fast. He muttered an oath. Then he observed that Kit was holding it, and he ground his teeth.

"What are you doing, boy?"

"You must go, uncle," said the lad, in a strained voice.

"Go? Are you mad? What do you mean?"

"You must go."

His uncle made a violent effort to push up the window, but Kit held it fast.

"You confounded brat!" hissed Romayne. "What do you mean? Are you going back on me?"

"I am going to do what is right. You shall not rob the doctor with my help."

"Hang you! What did I send you here for?"

Kit was silent, but his white, hard face showed his determination.

Prudence restrained James Romayne from giving vent to the rage that was boiling in his heart. He stepped back, and consulted with his companion in a low voice. The burglars were clearly puzzled. Finally Romayne approached the window again.

"Jim, what's the matter with you?" he said, in a gentler voice. "You sent us the plans. You agreed to open the window. What's come over you all of a sudden?"

"What ought to have come over me before," said the boy huskily. "I can't take part in this horrible affair, and I won't."

"I don't ask you to. Go back to bed, and we will carry it through without your help."

"No."

"You mean that you will prevent us from carrying out our purpose?" hissed James Romayne, his voice shaking with rage.

"Yes."

"Do you understand what the consequences will be to yourself?"

"Yes; and I don't care. I am sick of lies and treachery—sick to death of it all!"

"If you don't—"

The Dandy touched Romayne on the shoulder, and he drew his head back. The two men consulted again in whispers. Romayne's rage seemed to be gone when he turned to Kit.

"All right," he said. "If you mean it, there's no more to be said. I don't think you are treating me fairly, Jim. But that's enough. Have your own way."

"You're going to give the idea up?"

"I've got no choice. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Kit, greatly relieved.

He closed the window, and fastened it. The two men disappeared into the shadows. Kit, with his heart lighter than it had been for a long time, crept upstairs. He regained the dormitory, threw off his clothes, and crept into bed. There was not a sound in the room, save the deep breathing of the sleepers. His absence had not been noted.

He would have been less easy in his mind if he could have known that Romayne and his companion, instead of quitting the school grounds, had ensconced themselves in the shadow of a tree, and were waiting there.

"It will be easy," grinned the Dandy. "Of course, the open window would have made it safer and simpler; but old hands like us know how to open a window for ourselves, I suppose. Eh—what?"

Romayne grinned, too.

"I should say so. We have the plans, and it will be perfectly easy to carry out our purpose as arranged, once we are inside."

"You don't think the boy will suspect—"

"No. He believed me when I said I had given up the idea; but we must wait an hour. He is quite capable of giving the alarm if he heard anything and knew that we had played him false."

"That's all right. We can wait. Scott! There will be a surprise for the cheeky young dog to-morrow!"

And both rascals chuckled. Poor Kit! In the Fifth dormitory he was sinking into slumber, little dreaming that while he slept the crime would be carried out which he had sought to prevent.

CHAPTER 7.

Wharton Makes Terms.

THE rising-bell had gone, and Kit, contrary to his usual custom, was the last to leave his bed in his dormitory. The sleeplessness of the night had told upon him. He was heavy-eyed when he turned out, at Redfern's jerking the clothes off him.

"Get up, lazybones!" said Redfern cheerfully. "Buck up! You're sleepy this morning."

The quiet of Sunday was on the old school; but soon after the boys came down there was seen to be something amiss—something that underlay the surface, disturbing the usual Sunday serenity of Northmoor. The doctor's face was frowning and worried, the masters looked serious, and some of the prefects talked together in subdued tones.

It was clear that something was "up," though what it was none of the boys, with the exceptions of the captain and prefects, had any idea.

It was after chapel that a rumour spread in the school, and was passed eagerly from mouth to mouth. There had been a robbery at Northmoor overnight. Burglars had

gained admittance to the school in the hours of darkness, and the doctor's study and the plate-closet had been plundered.

Kit turned deadly pale when he heard the news. It stunned him, for he knew at once that it was true, and he knew whom the perpetrators were. His uncle had broken his word. After disarming his suspicions, Romayne and the Dandy had effected an entrance and committed the robbery. There could be no doubt of it, and Kit's heart was sick within him.

His impulse was strong to go straight to the doctor and tell him all. He was sick of deceit, and burning with indignation at Romayne's treachery. Had the doctor at that moment been at hand there is little doubt but that the boy would have blurted out the whole truth, but reflection came in time. Wicked as his uncle was, he could not send him to prison. He deserved it, but Kit's was not the hand to punish him.

And himself? To hold himself up to the scorn and contempt of the school, where he had become so popular—how could he do it? Could he face it?

And yet, he reflected miserably, it must come. The deception could not last for ever. The real Kit Clavering must sooner or later reappear in the world, and then Northmoor would know the truth.

The sight of a policeman in uniform crossing the quadrangle made him shiver. Before night the rumour was confirmed, and the school knew the whole story. The doctor had been robbed of money and valuables amounting to three hundred pounds, and the police were in active pursuit of the thieves. Kit, however, knew that an old hand like James Romayne had little to fear from the police. The topic, of course, was one of great interest in the school. Kit heard Wharton holding forth upon it in the common-room.

"Railton says that the sergeant said the burglars must have had a plan of the building," he said. "I heard him say so to Moore. They forced open a window on the ground floor."

"And nobody heard them?" remarked Lucas.

"No. They must have known their way about, you see. Perhaps they had someone to help them inside the house."

"Oh, rot! Who could they have had?"

"Oh, I don't know. I've heard of such things."

Wharton's eyes were glittering. He had glanced at Kit as he made his suggestion, and he had seen the new boy palpably change colour. The shot had gone home.

Wharton did some hard thinking that night, and went to bed in a very contented mood. The next day lessons went on the same as usual, and the burglary was less talked of. No arrest had been made, though the police were supposed, as usual, to possess a "clue."

After school Kit went into the cricket-field, where the form he showed fully satisfied Railton. When he came into his study afterwards, he was surprised to find Wharton there, sitting at the table.

"Hallo!" he said.

Wharton looked up coolly.

"Hallo! I wanted to speak to you, Clavering, so I thought I'd come here and wait, as what I have to say is quite private."

Kit looked surprised. What Wharton could have to say to him in private he could not imagine. However, he closed the door and came in, and stood looking at his enemy, waiting for him to speak. That Wharton had come to the room as an enemy was easily to be seen in his eyes and his malicious smile.

"I suppose you're surprised," said Wharton. "You thought that you were playing your little game without a suspicion from anybody at Northmoor, didn't you?"

"I don't understand you!"

"My dear Jim, you are very dense."

Wharton had anticipated making a point by the sudden use of the name, but he had hardly looked for such a result as followed. The boy sank into a chair, white and wild-eyed.

"Jim! What do you mean?" he gasped.

Wharton grinned.

"I mean that I know all about you, my beauty. You're here under an assumed name, and you know more than you will tell about the burglary on Saturday night."

Kit could only stare at him helplessly.

"Who you are and what you are I don't exactly know," continued Wharton, with a sneer; "but it's plain enough that you're a humbug of some sort. You had a letter the other day, and the chap who wrote it said nothing but 'Next Saturday.' I wondered what that meant, and made up my mind to note carefully anything out of the usual run that might occur on Saturday. But, by Jove, I never expected it would turn out to be a burglary!"

Kit looked him steadily in the eyes.

"So you read that letter? You collected up the fragments and read them?"

NEXT WEEK:

"THERE'S MANY A SLIP,"
A Tale of Dr. Nevada,
Detective

AND

"WIELDERS OF THE WILLOW,"
A Tale of Suspense
by H. Clarke Hook.

TWO Grand Long,
Complete Stories.

"Yes, I did."

"You cur—you miserable cur!"

Wharton flushed.

"You're a good one to call names!" he said savagely.

"What are you? A confederate of thieves. I could get you expelled if I liked."

"Could you?" said Kit. "Then you had better go ahead. What have you come here for? Not only for the pleasure of telling me that, I suppose?"

"Oh, no."

"What do you want, then?"

"You confess that what I've said is true?"

"I confess nothing, and I don't intend to discuss the matter with you. Tell me what you want, and get out."

Wharton snapped his teeth.

"Very well. You're in the team that's going to St. Olaf's."

Kit stared at him.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"A good deal!" said Wharton significantly. "You've got the place that belongs to me of right. Will you give it up to me?"

"Let us be plain. You have formed some suspicion about me, and that's your price for not communicating it to the rest of the school. Is that correct?"

"You can put it that way if you like. I suppose that's what it amounts to."

"Then I can only repeat what I said just now—that you are a cur!"

Wharton rose, his eyes gleaming with spite.

"If that's all you've got to say, I may as well be off," he said. "You'll be sorry for it, Master Jim Nobody." He went towards the door, and then paused and looked back. "I'll give you one more chance. Will you resign from the eleven?"

"If I do, you don't know that Railton will put you in."

There was surrender in the words, and Wharton was quick to note it.

"I'll take my chance of that," he said, with a sneer.

"You got in by favouritism—"

"You know that's a falsehood."

"You needn't argue about it. The question is, will you resign from the team?"

"And you'll promise to keep silence if I do, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said Kit heavily, "I'll do it. Now get out."

Wharton had no desire to linger. He had gained his point with a success he had hardly dared to hope for. He met Lucas downstairs.

"Hallo, kid! Come and bowl me a few," he said. "I haven't done any batting to-day, and I want to keep in form."

"What's the hurry?" said Lucas, staring at his excited face. "Any of the first eleven fallen down and broken their necks?"

Wharton laughed.

"No; but they might, you know. Nothing like being ready for eventualities. If one of them failed, don't you reckon I should have a good chance?"

"Oh, yes," said Lucas dubiously; "but if one of them failed, I think Railton would boil him in oil, or something nice like that. I don't quite make you out, Wharton."

"Don't try. Come and bowl instead."

And Wharton went off in high spirits. He cared nothing for the boy he had left in the study in the lowest depths of misery.

CHAPTER 9.

Kit's Defiance.

KIT remained alone a long time after Wharton had left him. He tried to think, but he could not think very clearly. He was in Wharton's power; he understood that clearly enough. That Wharton could know all was impossible, but that he knew enough to ruin the new boy at Northmoor was certain; for if he communicated his suspicions to others, older heads would not be long in arriving at the truth.

To agree to Wharton's terms, or to face immediate exposure, was the only alternative that presented itself to Kit. The attack had come so suddenly that he was not prepared for it, and so he followed the law of self-preservation. There was nothing for it but surrender.

"But what's the use?" he said to himself miserably. "It can't last much longer. It must come out. Oh, how I wish I had never come here! It's too late for that now. And, when I leave, where can I go? Back to my uncle's? Never!"

He set his teeth at the thought. Never would he go back to

James Romaine's roof—never would he accept another crust from his uncle. That part of his life, at all events, was over—that was gone, never to return.

He must leave Northmoor; he had no choice about that. But he would not enter his uncle's house. There must be a place for him in the world somewhere. By honest work he could at least earn his bread. He was young; he had courage. He could face the world. Whatever came of it, there was one resolve he would keep—never again to depart one jot or tittle from the path of rectitude. He would "play the game."

But to resolve for the future was all very well; it was the present that had to be dealt with. He had told Wharton that he would resign. How would Railton receive his resignation? Kit could guess, and the thought made him miserable; but he had to go through with it. He left his room presently, and took his way to the captain's study. Moore came out as he passed it, and Kit saw that Railton was alone. He caught the captain's eye, and went in.

"Squattez-vous!" said Railton cheerfully. "I want to have a jaw with you over the match on Wednesday, Clavering. I hear that St. Olaf's are stronger than ever this time, and Ferrers, their captain, has been batting for the county. From what I hear, they are mighty cocksure about our visit, and think they are going to wipe the ground with us."

"I hope not," said Kit.

"Hope not! You must do more than hope, my son. We've got to lick the St. Olavians right out of their boots. Do you understand? And I rely especially upon you, Clavering. I don't want to flatter you, chappy, but I may tell you that I was awfully doubtful about the result of the match before I captured you. You'll turn the scale in our favour, I verily believe. You'll be playing for the county some day, Clavering, and in the meantime you're going to knock spots off St. Olaf's, and make ours the winning colours!"

Kit was silent. What he had come there to say was doubly hard to utter now, in the face of Railton's confidence and utter unsuspiciousness. He was inclined to chat with the captain, and go with his mission unspoken, and postpone the thing. But he did not yield to the temptation.

"I want to speak to you about that, Railton," he said, with an effort.

"About the match?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead."

"I don't feel that I can go to St. Olaf's—"

"Eh? What?"

"The fact is, Railton," blurted out Kit desperately, "I came here now to resign."

Railton stared hard at Kit, as if he thought the new boy had suddenly taken leave of his wits.

"You came here to resign?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes."

It was out now, and Kit dropped his eyes and sat silent, waiting for the storm to burst. But the storm did not come. Railton was quiet—dangerously quiet.

"You mean what you say, Clavering?" he said slowly.

"You are not joking?"

"No."

"Have you a reason for your action?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me that reason?"

Kit did not reply.

"You heard my question, Clavering?"

"Yes, I heard you."

"Don't you intend to answer?"

"I can't."

"You mean that your reason's a secret one?"

"Yes," said Kit desperately.

"You know your action's unheard of, outrageous, and you refuse to give the reason. You have been shoved into the eleven over the heads of a dozen fellows who considered that they had a better claim, and now you calmly propose to fail us at the last moment, for a reason you don't condescend to give us."

Railton's voice trembled with anger, and Kit flushed crimson; but he did not speak.

"I refuse to accept your resignation," said Railton shortly. "You'll play, Clavering. I don't care a rap what is your reason for wanting to resign. It doesn't make an iota of difference to me. You'll play!"

"But—"

"Mark my words," said the captain of Northmoor, with emphasis, "you'll play, or you'll be sent to Coventry by all Northmoor!" Then, as he saw the utter misery in Kit's face, he added, more gently: "What does this mean, Clavering? Why should you want to resign, when any other fellow at Northmoor would give his ears to get into the team? If we could spare you, I tell you jolly plainly that you shouldn't turn up your nose at the college cap twice. But the team needs you, and you've got to stay in it. Are you off your rocker?"

"You won't accept my resignation?"

NEXT WEEK:

"PLEDGED TO SILENCE,"

A Fine School Tale,
by Charles Hamilton.

4NT

"TOM, DICK, AND HARRY,"

A Splendid Tale,
by S. Clarke Hook.

TWO

**Grand Long,
Complete Stories.**

"Certainly not—not till after the St. Olaf's match, anyway," said Railton angrily. "You make me tired, Clavering. I don't want to say anything rough; but, after being put into the team over so many other heads, I think you might have the common decency to be a bit grateful. To chuck it back in our faces like this is, to say the least of it, caddish!"

"You don't understand," said Kit miserably, "and I can't explain."

"I don't see why you can't explain. What's all this blithering mystery about, anyway? Why can't you talk straight out, like a Christian, and not make a lot of mystification? I don't understand you. You'd better be off, and think it over. But, understand this, your resignation's not accepted, and you've got to play for Northmoor."

And the captain of the school angrily bundled Kit out of the study.

There was no more to be said, and Kit went back to his own room, feeling the wretchedest boy in all Northmoor. What was to happen now? He had kept his word to Wharton, but Railton had done the unexpected thing. If his resignation was not accepted, if the captain and the cricket committee insisted upon his playing, there would be no place left in the eleven for the ambitious aspirant. What would Wharton do?

"He will give me away," muttered Kit. "Well, it must come, sooner or later. I shall have to leave Northmoor. The best thing will be to run away, and leave them to find it all out after I am gone. I could not face the exposure."

It seemed to be the most feasible plan, and yet it had its disadvantages. When he was gone he would not be able to speak for himself, and they would think the worst of him—far worse than the truth. Wharton would do his best to blacken the character of one who could not defend himself, and he would be adjudged not only an impostor, a cheat, but the accomplice and assistant of the burglars. And—he had not thought of it before, but now the thought forced itself into his mind—although he had been driven into his present position by stress of circumstances, the law was not likely to take a merciful view of it. It was not only exposure, contempt, he had to fear, but the police!

He was in the midst of these miserable reflections, and the course he should follow was not yet decided upon, when Wharton came in from the fields, and went direct to Kit's study to learn whether he had kept his word.

Kit felt hatred and rage rise in his breast as he saw the face of his enemy at the door.

"May I come in?" said Wharton. "Thanks! I thought I'd run in and see you, Clavering. You've seen Railton?"

"I've seen him."

"And offered him your resignation?"

"Yes."

Wharton rubbed his hands. He did not take the trouble to conceal his ungenerous glee from Kit.

"Good!" he said. "That will be all right."

"Not so all right as you imagine," said Kit grimly. "Railton has refused to accept my resignation, and he insists that I shall play for Northmoor the day after to-morrow."

An extremely ugly look came over Wharton's face.

"Oh, he does, does he?" he sneered. "Do you think I cannot see through a shallow trick like that, Master Nobody? You've offered your resignation in a way to make Railton decline it. Oh, I understand the little game!"

"I did my best; but I couldn't explain my motives."

"No; you couldn't very well explain that you were a cheat, and in league with burglars!" sneered Wharton. "Railton would have accepted your resignation fast enough if you had."

Kit's eyes gleamed.

"I've stood a good deal from you, Wharton," he said—"about as much, I think, as I can stand. You'd better be careful what you say."

"I've no more to say, except that unless you leave me my place in the eleven I shall show you up before all Northmoor."

"Railton refuses to let me resign. Do you think I can fail the team at the last moment, then, and let them down on the day of the match?"

"Yes, I suppose you can, if you want to."

"It would be a cad's trick."

"Suit yourself; but if you play in the St. Olaf's match, on the same day all Northmoor will know you as you really are!"

Kit drew a deep breath.

"Very well. I am going to play, Wharton. Do you understand? I am going to play in the St. Olaf's match, and do my best for the school, whatever comes afterwards. Now, you can go and do your worst!"

Wharton turned pale with rage. He was far from expecting a direct defiance, and he was not quite prepared for it.

"I'll give you another chance," he said thickly. "You can save yourself, if you like. I'll give you a chance till Wednesday. But if you play St. Olaf's, Clavering, look out for squalls! I'll have no mercy on you!"

"I don't ask for any. Now, get out of my study, before I kick you out!"

Wharton turned to the door. It opened to admit Redfern. Wharton passed him with a brow like thunder, and Redfern looked at his chum in amazement.

"Have you been rowing with Wharton?" he asked.

Kit nodded.

"Cool, by Jove, to come here to row!" exclaimed Redfern.

"He's been gassing a lot of stuff, Clavering, I hear. Some of the chaps say he thinks he still has a chance of getting into the first eleven, though I don't see how he'll work it. Got any idea?"

"Yes; he fancied one of the present members would resign."

"Scott! What a chump! He'll be disappointed."

"Yes," said Kit grimly; "he'll be disappointed."

CHAPTER 9. The End in Sight.

"HALLO, Jim!"

Kit started. It was after morning school on Tuesday, and he was taking a solitary stroll through the fields, to think over his situation, and try to hit upon some way out of his difficulties. Wharton had not spoken to him since the interview in the study the previous day. Kit's determination was not changed. He intended to play up for Northmoor on Wednesday, and let his enemy do his worst afterwards. He was thinking of anything but James Romaine at that moment when his uncle's voice suddenly fell upon his ears, and he looked up to see Romaine coming towards him.

Romaine had been seated upon a stile, and he had observed Kit coming across the fields, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes downcast. Kit had not observed him, and he was amazed to see him now.

"Uncle!"

James Romaine smiled.

"You are surprised to see me?"

"Yes, after your action the other night."

"You left me no choice but to deceive you. What did you mean by failing me at the last moment in that way?"

Kit looked at him steadily.

"We needn't go into that," he said. "You deceived me, and I consider that accounts between us are square. You brought me up, I know, when you might have left me to starve. But you brought me up to crime. I wish you had left me alone. It is better to be dead than to be a liar and a thief!"

Romaine shrugged his shoulders. The action irritated the boy.

"I say all is ended between us!" he said sharply. "You yourself have broken the link. I always hated the life you made me lead. I always revolted against it. Now I've lived among honest people, and seen honourable ways, I'd rather die than go back to the old life. You were a fool to send me here, cunning as you think yourself. I am going to leave Northmoor, but I shall never come back to you."

"You'll change your tune when you are face to face with starvation."

"I shall never change my tune. I will be honest, or starve. And—and I don't want to see you any more!" said Kit abruptly. "What have you come here for, now?"

"First, to ask whether anything has turned up at the school—any suspicion as to the facts, I mean? All goes well—eh?"

"All goes ill," replied Kit. "The fellow I spoke of to you—Wharton—suspects me. He has played the spy, and knows a lot about me; exactly how much I don't know."

Romaine looked startled.

"What has happened, then? Has he betrayed you?"

"No; he has tried to make terms. If I'll let him have my place in the cricket-team, he'll keep my secret."

"You've agreed, of course?"

"No; I've refused."

"Are you mad?"

Kit did not reply.

"Why do you run such a risk for such a trifle?" exclaimed Romaine impatiently. "I don't understand you lately, Jim. A change has come over you ever since you first came to Northmoor."

"I am quite aware of it. I shall never be the old Jim Romaine again, though I may not continue to be Kit Clavering. Don't talk about it. I am not going to change my mind and give in to Wharton. Nothing will make me do it."

"You are a fool—an absolute fool!" said Romaine savagely.

"You can think so if you like."

Romaine looked inclined to spring upon his nephew for a moment. He had never known Jim in this mood before, and

CHAPTER 10.

The Cricket-Match.

it irritated him. But he restrained himself. As a matter of fact, it would not have been wise of him to attack the finest athlete in the Fifth Form at Northmoor.

"What do you want with me?" said Kit suddenly. "That wasn't all you came down for?"

"No. I have something else for you to do." James Romaine paused and bit his lip. Of what use were his threats now, when Kit had already determined to face the inevitable?

"What is it?"

"Look here, Jim, why don't you act like a sensible lad? If you help me in this matter, I'll make it worth your while. You can leave Northmoor, and I'll send you to a public school in your own name, and you'll have a chance of making a name in the world. Will you?"

Kit's face was expressionless.

"What is it you want?"

"You could find out where Dr. Langham keeps his cheque-book?"

"I dare say I could."

"And procure me a specimen of his signature?"

"That would be easy."

"Well, you understand now?"

"Yes; I think I understand."

"The Dandy will do the business, but we shall go halves."

What do you think?"

"I think that you are the biggest rascal in England, and that if you were not my father's brother I would kick you across the lane!" said Kit.

Romaine started a little, and his face turned pale with rage.

"So you refuse, do you?"

"Yes; I refuse."

Romaine snapped his teeth. Kit was calm and quiet, but there was a dangerous gleam in his eyes. His temper was at boiling-point, though he controlled himself.

"I was a fool to send you here!" said Romaine at last.

"I might have foreseen that you would get silly, sentimental ideas in your head. But I'll bring you down, my beauty! I will teach you to defy me! You little fool! Don't you know that I can break you like a reed? Listen! Unless I receive a letter from you to-morrow night promising to do what I require of you, I shall release the real Kit Clavering and send him to Northmoor. You can guess what your position will be like, then."

Kit drew a deep breath. His uncle's words, so far from terrifying him, came as a real relief. The situation, which was becoming intolerable, but which he knew not how to end, would be ended by Romaine's action if he carried out his threat. And, whatever came of it, Kit felt that he would be glad when the imposture was over.

Romaine's face was dark with rage. There was no doubt that he would keep his word.

"Now, what do you say?" he snarled.

"What I said before. Do your worst. I refuse to help you in any dishonesty."

"Very well, look out for squalls."

And, with an oath upon his lips, James Romaine turned away.

Kit walked back to Northmoor, and, strange as it may seem, his heart was lighter than it had been for many a long day. The misery of doubt and uncertainty was over, and he had come to a decision. The future was dark enough, but there was comfort in knowing exactly what he had to face. He met Railton in the quadrangle, and the captain looked at him grimly.

"What do you think about it now, Clavering?" he asked.

"Have you got that bee out of your bonnet?"

Kit smiled faintly.

"I've changed my mind, Railton. I shall be glad to play."

"I thought so. I suppose it was an attack of stage-fright—eh?" said the captain, with a good-humoured laugh. "But you needn't be nervous, kid. You are one of the best in the team, and I don't know a man I wouldn't rather spare than you. Keep your pecker up. You'll do famously!"

"I'll do my level best."

Kit threw himself into practice that day with the keenest zest. His form was magnificent, and gave splendid promise for the great match of the morrow.

"He won't dare to play," Wharton said to himself—"he won't dare!"

But even while he said it he felt a growing doubt.

That evening Kit wrote a letter in his study, sealed it, and addressed it to Dr. Langham at Northmoor. When the Northmoor cricketers left the school the following morning to go to St. Olaf's, the letter was in Kit's pocket. And as the brake passed a country pillar-box near St. Olaf's, it was stopped for a minute for Kit to jump down and post his letter. The boy resumed his place in the brake with an unconcerned face, and his companions were far from dreaming what that letter contained.

IT was a splendid day, perfect cricket weather. The Northmoor team had arrived early on the ground, and were given a hearty welcome by the St. Olavians. Half Northmoor accompanied the team, and they fraternised cordially enough with the Saints round the match-ground. Both sides being confident of victory, all faces were cheerful, with the exception of Wharton's.

Wharton could no longer doubt that Kit meant to defy him. He was pale with spite, and could hardly conceal his rage. He found an opportunity of speaking to Kit once more before the match, and his reception filled his cup of wrath to overflowing. He touched Kit's arm as the new boy was going into the pavilion.

"I want to speak to you a minute, Clavering," he said, drawing him aside.

Kit looked him in the eyes.

"Buck up, then!"

"You intend to play?"

"Yes."

"Just think over it. Any excuse would do—you can feel faint, or be taken ill—and then Railton will shove me in as a substitute. And then I swear that I will keep your secret without asking anything further from you!"

Kit's lip curled contemptuously.

"Have you anything more to say?" he asked

"No."

"Then get away from me, before I kick you!"

Wharton ground his teeth.

"You mean that?"

"Yes, you cur!"

"I'll make you repent it! You rotter, you——"

Bi! Straight from the shoulder Kit struck out, and Wharton measured his length on the grass.

"Hallo, hallo!"

Several fellows ran towards the spot. Wharton staggered to his feet.

"What's this about?" exclaimed Railton angrily. "Wharton, what are you up to?"

"He struck me——"

"Oh, I know you, you've been down on him ever since he got his cap for the eleven!" said Railton. "Don't tell me Clavering is to blame, for I shan't believe you! Get along with you—do! Come on, Clavering!"

"You're thick with him now," hissed Wharton. "Maybe you won't be so jolly fond of him when you know him in his true colours."

"What are you talking about, duffer?"

Wharton had quite lost control of himself.

"You don't know what he is! He's a humbug, a thief. He——"

Bi! Kit hit out again, and Wharton guarded too late. He dropped like a log. Railton looked at him sternly.

"If Clavering hadn't done that, Wharton, I'd have knocked you down myself," he said. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Get off this field. Do you hear? Not another word. Get off the ground, and go back to Northmoor. You can miss the match. Not a word!"

There was no disputing the captain's order. Wharton picked himself up, and, with a glance of hatred at Kit, moved away. Kit walked off with Railton. The captain was deeply annoyed by the occurrence, which had attracted curious glances from the St. Olaf's fellows, but his anger was all against Wharton.

But there was no time to talk about it, luckily. The two captains tossed for choice of innings, and Ferrers of St. Olaf's won, and the St. Olavians decided to bat.

There was a ringing cheer from the Northmoor crowd as Railton led out his merry men and placed them to field.

St. Olaf's opened the innings with Ferrers and March. They opened well. St. Olaf's cheered every good hit, and they had a good many to cheer. The score went up in jumps, and four overs gave the batsmen thirty. Railton went on to bowl, and sent down one that tempted Ferrers to swipe. Smack went the bat, and away went the ball.

"Three, at least," the St. Olavians were saying to themselves, when there was a sudden roar, of dismay from the Saints, and jubilation from their rivals.

The ball went up, straight as a die, from the hand of Kit Clavering, to be caught in his palm.

Ferrers looked daggers for a moment at the Fifth Former of Northmoor. It had been a splendid catch.

"Out!"

Ferrers walked off glumly. He had meant to do wonders, and to be caught out at such an early stage of his innings was annoying, to say the least of it.

"A blooming fluke!" said the Saints to one another.

The Northmoor fellows grinned as they heard them say it. "Just you wait a bit," said Redfern confidently.

And that it was not a fluke was soon conclusively proved

for a little later another batsman was caught out by Kit in the slips.

St. Olaf's realised that they had to deal with a fieldsman of no mean order.

But when Kit was put on to bowl, he showed that, however dangerous in the field, he was a still more formidable antagonist with the leather in his hand.

In his first over he took a wicket, and Northmoor howled with delight. They howled again when a second fell to his bowling.

Bright as was the promise Kit had given in earlier matches at Northmoor, he was more than fulfilling Railton's choicest expectations.

The last St. Olaf's wicket fell to him, and Railton fairly hugged him when the home innings closed for 101.

"You boulder!" he ejaculated. "And you're the man who wanted to resign! You're the chap who was going to leave us in the lurch! Now, fair and square, don't you feel ashamed of yourself?"

"I've been lucky to-day," he said.

"It isn't luck, it's training and brain. I'll bet the Saints wish you had never been born," grinned Railton gleefully.

Ferrers and his men were indeed in grim humour. They realised that Northmoor had got a very hot player, and the total of runs for the innings disappointed them. Ferrers had counted on 150 at the least. All out for 101 made him look glum.

"That's a terror, that kid," he said. "But there's one comfort, it stands to reason that his batting won't be up to his bowling and his fielding."

"Hope not," said March. "If it is, we may as well chuck it up."

The Northmoor innings opened.

Railton and Moore wielded the willow, and made a very fair show against the home bowlers. Railton was out for forty, at last, neatly caught in the slips by Cranby of St. Olaf's. The wickets went down at a fair rate, with a fair average of runs. Kit went on as partner to Bridge, who was famed at Northmoor for his stone-walling abilities. And then Owen Redfern rubbed his hands with glee, and winked at his companions.

"Now you'll see the fur fly," he remarked.

A Saint near him sniffed.

"What do you think that kid will do?" he asked.

Redfern grinned.

"Just you wait and see, my son," he replied. "Just you wait and see. You won't have to wait long. There, what did I tell you?"

For the very first ball of the over had been cut away finely by Kit, and the batsmen were running. Three were taken for that ball, and then Bridge gained one, and Kit had the bowling again. A four, a couple of twos, and a boundary finished the over. And that was only the beginning.

Kit was playing up like a Trojan, and evidently meant business.

The Northmoor fellows were hugely delighted, and they cheered Kit to the echo when he carried out his bat at last with seventy-four to his credit.

The home fieldsmen welcomed the lunch interval, for they had had enough leather-hunting to last them for some time.

Northmoor had finished up with 180, and so were seventy-nine ahead of their rivals on the first innings.

It was in a very chastened mood that the home team opened their second innings. They had commenced the match with an easy confidence of victory. They went on now with that confidence shattered, but a grim determination to do or die in its place. And fortune, ever fickle, smiled upon them at first, and Ferrers, their mightiest batsman, piled up the runs, and defied the Northmoor bowling. He had taken ninety off his own bat, and the Saints were cheering him wildly in anticipation of a century, when Kit was put on to bowl.

Railton chuckled the ball to Kit.

"Get him out," he said laconically.

Kit had tried in more than one over, but had not succeeded. Now he went on to bowl with a deadly determination that Ferrers should not survive.

The first ball Ferrers stopped dead on the crease, and the second. He was playing cautiously. The third he ventured to cut away through the slips, and it gave him two. The fourth came down with a twist on it that was a bit outside Ferrers' experience, and it broke in just where he didn't expect it. His bat swept the desert air, and—

There was a roar.

"How's that?"

The middle stump was gracefully reclining on its back.

"Out," said the umpire grimly.

And "out" it evidently was. But ninety-two was good, and the Saints gave their captain a rousing cheer as he carried out his bat.

"Good for you, Kit," Railton grinned. "That's the sort. I want some more like that."

Ferrers' prowess made the Saints' total a respectable one, though the rest of the wickets went down for a very average amount of runs.

Quite early in the afternoon St. Olaf's were all out for 160. The total would have been a much larger one but for Kit, and his comrades congratulated him heartily.

Kit was not in the least conceited, but the praise he listened to sent a thrill of pleasure through him.

He was playing that day as he had never played before, and he knew it. He had determined that he would put up a good game for his side, and his determination was taking effect.

Railton had said that if Northmoor pulled off a victory, it would be mainly due to Kit, and Kit was glad to hear him say it. For the thought was in his mind of what Northmoor would be saying of him on the morrow. Although no one guessed it, this was his last day among them; to-morrow he would be gone, and the whole school would know that he had been an impostor. Then the fact that he had helped the school to win its most dearly-coveted victory of the cricket season might make them think more gently of him.

"We shall win," he said to himself. "We must win. They'll know what I was, but, at least, they'll know that I played the game as far as I could, and did my best for the school."

And with that reflection, he threw himself into the game with untiring ardour. When all the others, of both teams, were beginning to show signs of fag, Kit seemed to be as fresh as paint.

Northmoor opened their second innings in high spirits. But their high spirits were soon considerably dashed, for St. Olaf's were "bucking up" with a vengeance. Luck and determination combined to make their bowling successful, and Northmoor had the unpleasant experience of seeing five of their wickets down for twenty-two.

Things looked up a bit when Railton went in. The Northmoor captain could always be depended upon to furnish his side with a solid number of runs. But his partners came and went. It was clear that bowling was the strong point of the Saints, and that they were doing their very best, excelling all their previous efforts.

And at last, when the visitors' score was only at forty-eight, Ferrers made the joyful announcement:

"Last man in! We must give 'em socks, and finish 'em!"

But "last man in" was Kit Clavering!

Northmoor wanted thirty-three to win, but their two best batsmen were at the wickets.

"They'll do it," said Redfern serenely.

St. Olaf's were determined that they should not.

Kit played very cautiously at first, but as soon as he felt himself set, he began to hit out, and then the fur began to fly. It was in vain that the home bowlers tried him with their trickiest balls. Whatever they sent him, he stopped or sent back, and few were the balls that he did not cut away for two, three, or four.

The score crept up. St. Olaf's were getting desperate. Was the rival team to pull out ahead after all?

Ferrers went on to bowl, with a look of determination. He sent down a lightning ball, and Kit smiled, and stepped out to it, and smack went the bat. Away went the leather sailing, and the batsmen started to run.

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"WILDERERS OF THE WILLOW,"
A Tale of Spec,
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TWO

**Grand Long,
Complete Stories.**

One, two, three! There was a shout. The home fieldsmen were still hunting for the elusive leather.

The batsmen were off again! How they scudded! But the ball was in hand now, and in it came with a whizz, like a four-point-seven shell, straight for the stumps, and Kit was not yet on the crease. He saw the danger, and made a desperate spurt. The crowd was breathless. Would he do it?

Right forward he flung himself, and the bat was on the crease. Crash went the falling wicket.

But the bat was on the crease! And the umpire shook his head.

"Not out!"

Northmoor breathed again. It had been a narrow escape. But a miss was as good as a mile. And now Northmoor only wanted three more to win, and St. Olaf's last chance was gone. For Kit's next hit gave him side the three.

And then the stretch of level green was invaded by a surging crowd, and Kit and Railton were seized, and lifted shoulder-high, and carried back to the pavilion amidst a hurricane of cheering.

Northmoor had won!

In the midst of the enthusiasm Kit made his escape. As he did not reappear, Railton sent someone to look for him; but he was not to be found. Then several fellows began to search, but it was in vain. Kit Clavering had disappeared!

CHAPTER 11.

Farewell to Northmoor.

RAILTON saw that something was amiss the moment his eyes fell upon the doctor's face. Dr. Langham was seated at his writing-table, and an open letter lay before him. His face was darkly troubled.

"I am glad you are returned, Railton," he said gravely. "I want to see you. Come in, and sit down, please. Where is Clavering?"

"I don't know, sir. That's why I came to you. He has disappeared."

"Then the unfortunate lad has kept his word!" the doctor exclaimed, with some trace of agitation in his manner.

"Kept his word, sir? I don't understand."

"I have had a letter, Railton—this letter—from the boy known here as Kit Clavering. It must have been written before he left Northmoor to go with you to the cricket match, for it was posted to-day near St. Olaf's."

The captain took the letter, and read it, the amazement and dismay deepening in his face as he did so.

"When this letter is in your hands, sir," so it ran, "I shall be gone from Northmoor for ever. It will rest with you to seek my punishment, or not, as you think fit, for the deception of which I have been guilty. I do not confess now for the purpose of asking pardon, but because I wish you to know the facts, and not to believe that I was worse than I really was. My name is not Kit Clavering; it is Jim Romaine. I was an impostor when I came to Northmoor; though Heaven knows it was against my will. I need not trouble you with details as to my earlier life. I was left an orphan, and came into my uncle's charge. He was kind to me, in his way; but he lived by crime, and he brought me up in his ways. That is all I need say, except that I always longed to follow honest paths, and always revolted against the life I was compelled to lead. I hope you will believe this."

"Kit Clavering was kidnapped the day he landed from the steamer. I was sent to Northmoor in his place. The fact that he was a stranger from a distant Colony made the deception easy, and you were very unsuspicious. I did my part against my will, but I could not control circumstances. But after I came to Northmoor a change came over me. I don't know how it was, but I shrank from duplicity and crime as I had never shrunk before after I had lived and chummed with honest and honourable lads. I might have been as good as they, if I had had equal chances. I determined that I would be as good, in spite of circumstances. My uncle had sent me to Northmoor for a purpose. That purpose was to obtain inside help in robbing the school. He had other objects in view which I need not go into, as they came to nothing. At first I yielded to him, and sent him the plans of the building which he demanded. But when the time came for the robbery I refused to allow it to take place, and he agreed that it should not. He broke his word, as you are aware."

"That ended my allegiance to him. I defied him afterwards, and made up my mind to leave Northmoor. To-day I shall play in the cricket match, because Railton has told me that he depends upon me. If I can help to win a victory for the school, it may make you and all the fellows think more kindly of me. The real Kit Clavering will arrive at Northmoor to-morrow. I shall be gone. JIM ROMAYNE."

Railton laid down the letter.

"It's true, I suppose?" he said.

"I am afraid so. Wharton has been here, and he has

told me a strange story. I am afraid he was actuated by a personal dislike of Clavering, and he certainly acted very meanly in the matter. But what he had to tell bears out this letter, though he placed a worse construction upon Clavering's actions than I am inclined to do."

Railton nodded.

"Poor lad! Poor lad!"

Then he went on eagerly:

"You will not let the police come into the affair, sir. It's easy to see that the poor fellow has been more sinned against than sinning."

"I wish to speak to you about him, Railton. From what I have seen of him, I thought him an exceptionally brave and generous lad."

"You were right, sir," the captain exclaimed. "Look how he fished me out of the Pool. Lots of fellows would have thought twice before they dived off the bridge into that place. I should have thought it pretty risky myself. He nearly lost his life in saving mine, and he thought nothing of it."

"I was thinking of that, Railton, and about Wharton."

"Then see how he played up for the school. We beat St. Olaf's, sir, but without Kit Clavering we should have been nowhere. He won the match for us. A fellow who plays cricket as he does will always 'play the game.'"

Dr. Langham smiled.

"I am inclined to agree with you, Railton."

"Then you will forgive him, sir?"

"Certainly. He has, as you say, been more sinned against than sinning. I regard him as a most unfortunate lad, who has been wronged by the relative to whom he had a right to look for guidance and good counsel. I feel for him deeply."

"Then perhaps, sir," said Railton, a little timidly—"perhaps you will find some way of helping him. He mustn't be allowed to starve, sir, or to fall into the clutches of his uncle again. Something ought to be done for him, don't you think so? I'll stake my life that there isn't a truer, braver lad in England than he is."

"Something shall be done for him, Railton," said the doctor gravely. And he kept his word.

CHAPTER 12.

New Prospects.

THE real Kit Clavering could tell little of the place where he had been imprisoned, and the police were unable to even get on the track of the kidnappers. Equally difficult Dr. Langham found it to get on the track of the missing boy.

To help Jim, and to put him in the way of making a respectable place for himself in the world, the doctor was determined. In this he was aided by Railton's father, who was naturally interested in the lad who had saved his son's life. Long before Jim was found, the doctor and Colonel Railton had decided about the future.

It was a detective in the colonel's employ who found the boy at last. For found he was, and brought to the colonel's house, the doctor deeming it inadvisable for him to reappear at Northmoor. The sooner his existence was forgotten there, the better.

"The past is dead and done with," said the doctor gently. "You have been wronged far more than you have wronged others. You must look wholly to the future. Colonel Railton has not forgotten your courage in saving his son's life, and he wishes—"

Jim coloured.

"I don't want—"

"Nonsense!" broke in the colonel briskly. "You don't want to be rewarded, you were going to say. Quite so, a very proper spirit. But you cannot refuse help freely offered. Your immediate future is in our hands. It is, unfortunately, impossible for you to return to Northmoor. But I have fixed upon a public school in the South of England to which you will be sent, by me, and under your own name. The fees will be my care. My son is quite with me in this; and Dr. Langham approves."

Jim burst into tears.

"I will try to deserve your kindness, sir," he said, "and I shall repay, when I grow up, what the doctor has lost by my uncle's dishonesty. I don't know how to thank you, but—but I shall always be grateful."

The colonel shook his hand cordially.

His uncle Jim never saw again. He was useless to James Romaine, and so the man was well content to let him go without a single inquiry as to his fate. Under the care of his new friends the boy prospered, and sunshine came into a life that had long been shadowed.

THE END

(Next Saturday your **PLUCK** will contain another Two Long, Complete Stories.)

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