

EXTRA LONG, FUNNY SCHOOL STORY.

The UNION Jack 1st

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Every Friday.

THE SECRET OF THE SCHOOL

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

Illustrated by T. W. HOLMES.



ROUND AND ROUND THE GYM. THEY WENT, AND SIDNEY BLAKE, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, EXPERIENCED THE JOYS OF THE FROG'S MARCH. (See "THE SECRET OF THE SCHOOL.")

T. W. HOLMES

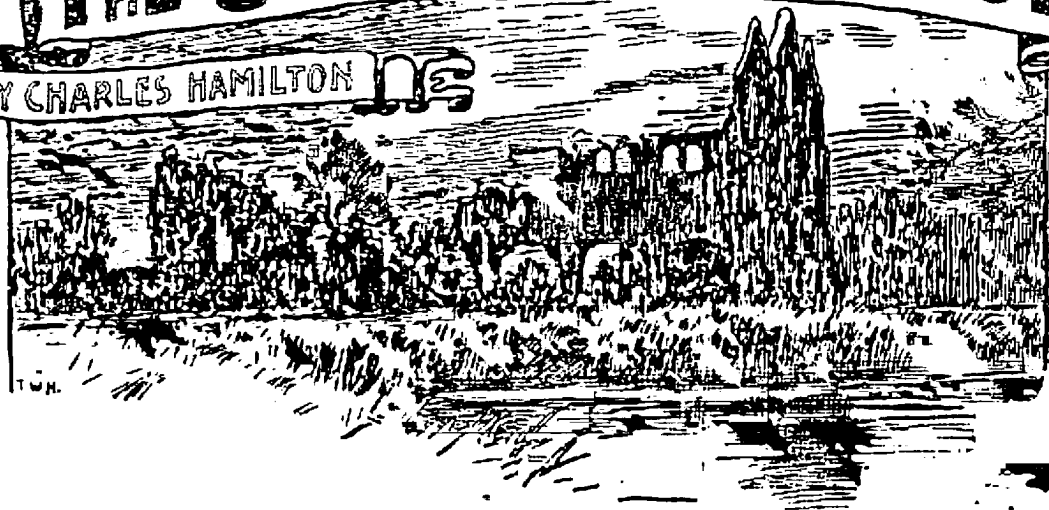
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A WEEKLY STORY-BOOK FOR ALL.

OUR POWERFUL, LONG, COMPLETE NOVEL.

THE SECRET OF THE SCHOOL.

BY CHARLES HAMILTON



PICTURES BY T. W. HOLMES.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Hundred-and-Ninety-ninth Boy.

SIDNEY Blake sat in a corner of the carriage, looking out with interested eyes as the train rushed on through the wintry landscape. Beyond that line of leafless elms in the distance a grey tower rose against the pale-blue sky, and he knew that that was St. Cynthia's—the school which was to be his future home.

He was going there, to join at the half-term. He was wondering, as he watched the grey tower above the trees, what the place would be like, and how he would get on with his future schoolfellows.

His meditations were interrupted by the slowing down of the train into a station. He put his head out of the window.

"Lonsfield!" he called out to the sleepy porter; Lonsfield being the station for St. Cynthia's.

"Next station! 'Urry up there!"

Two boys in Etons were racing up the platform towards the carriage from which Sidney Blake was looking.

One of them, a well-built and very good-looking youth with fair hair and blue eyes, reaching it first, seized the handle of the door.

"Are you the new kid for St. Cynthia's?"

"I am going there," said Blake wonderingly.

"I've got him," shouted his questioner. "Here he is. Come on, Paddy."

"Sure I'm coming as fast as I can," panted the other, a freckled, merry-faced Irish boy. "Get in wid ye, Cissy, darlint."

"'Urry up, there!"

"Rats to you. Here you are, Paddy."

And the two boys bundled headlong into the carriage,

the door slammed, and the train began to move out of the station.

Sidney Blake looked at the invaders in surprise, not unmixed with alarm. He guessed that they belonged to St. Cynthia's, but he had not the faintest idea of what they could want with him.

But they began to explain themselves immediately; though, as they both talked at once, it was not easy to discover what they were driving at.

"Won't you dry up for a minute, Paddy?" exclaimed the fair-haired youth. "We shall be at Lonsfield in ten minutes, and you know that cad Rice and his set will be waiting there, as sure as fate, to collar the new kid if they can. We want to put him up to their little game before they can begin their mean tricks."

"Arrah, thin, get on wid ye!" said Paddy; and in lieu of talking he began to devour toffee.

"Now, you new kid—by the way, what's your name?"

"Sidney Blake."

"Mine's Cecil Langdale. This bounder is Pat O'Connor. We belong to the Lower Fourth at St. Cynthia's. We know you were coming by this train, because Taggles was told to meet it with the trap, and it occurred to me—"

"Don't desave the new kid," broke in O'Connor. "You know that it was my idea, Cis."

"Your idea! Rats! Why—"

"Didn't I say—"

"And didn't I tell you—"

"Oh, chuck it," broke in Blake. "Can't you talk one at a time?"

The two St. Cynthia's boys looked at him, and then at each other, with a very peculiar expression. It was clear that they did not exactly relish a new boy taking such a tone with them, and yet had some reason of their own for not appearing to resent it.

"Go on, thin, Cissy."

And O'Connor returned to his toffee.

"Well, we had the idea," Langdale amended, "of sprinting

across to the first station this side of Lonsfield, and catching the train here, and so having a little talk with you on your foot, as Mossoo Renaud says."

"Oh, I see," said Blake, "this is a sort of informal welcome, is it? I don't mind confessing that I took you for a couple of giddy lunatics at first."

Again Langdale and O'Connor exchanged that peculiar look.

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Langdale.

"Yes, and I'm blessed if I felt quite safe at being shut up in a railway carriage with you," said Blake. "But never mind, I'm glad to see you. I'll have some of that toffee."

It was becoming clear to the St. Cynthia's boys that the new kid was a cool customer. In silence Pat O'Connor handed across his packet of toffee, and Blake calmly selected a chunk.

"Thanks," he said; "this is spiffing. Go on, my pippin!"

Langdale, appearing to choke down something, went on.

"We want to put you up to a wrinkle or two about the state of affairs at St. Cynthia's, so that you won't be likely to put your foot in it."

"That's very kind of you."

"The fact is, our intention is to be kind," said Langdale blandly. "As a new kid, who doesn't know the ropes, of course you'll be glad of a word or two of advice."

"Of course," assented Blake politely.

But he had already guessed that these two extremely disinterested youths had an axe to grind somewhere, and he was wondering what it was.

"There is a crisis at St. Cynthia's," continued Langdale. "The school's divided between our party and the rotters. The rotters are Darke's lot. You'll soon know Darke; he's a prefect, and a bully, and a snob."

"If you tell him everything that Philip Darke is, we shall be at Lonsdale before the end," interrupted O'Connor. "Get on with the explanation, ye gossoon."

"All right. Where, the captain of St. Cynthia's, had to leave the school suddenly, and the election was held for a new captain, the candidates being Arthur Clare and Philip Darke, both prefects; but, while Clare is the finest fellow breathing, Darke is a horrid mongrel, who ought to be kicked out of St. Cynthia's—and would be, if Dr. Earle took my advice."

"Which I suppose he isn't very likely to do?" said Blake, as grave as a judge.

Pat O'Connor broke into a chuckle, and Langdale went on hastily.

"H'm—well, as I've said, we held an election, and the candidates tied; a thing which nobody remembers to have happened before at St. Cynthia's. You know, every boy in the school has a vote, big and little, and there's just one hundred and ninety-eight boys in St. Cynthia's, and they're equally divided upon the question of who shall be captain, ninety-nine for Clare, and the same number for Darke."

"Oh, I see," said Blake.

He understood now the reason why the two juniors of St. Cynthia's had taken the trouble to meet his train at the station before Lonsfield, for the sake of having a talk with him en route.

"So you see," Langdale went on eagerly, "you are the hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy, and if you vote you'll turn the scales on one side or the other."

"Will they allow a new boy to vote?"

"Oh, yes. The election's to be held over again next week, and if you're at St. Cynthia's you'll vote with the rest."

"Next week. Then I shall have time to think about it, and make up my mind," said Blake, helping himself to another chunk of toffee from O'Connor's packet.

Langdale and Pat looked at each other.

"Not exactly," drawled Langdale. "Haven't I explained to you which is the only side a decent fellow can vote on? What more do you want?"

"Well, I'm generally in the habit of thinking for myself," said Blake. "When I want to put my brain-work out to be done, I'll be pleased to come to you, but just at present I can manage it myself."

Pat chuckled. Langdale turned red.

"Look here, Blake, you've got altogether too much cheek for a new kid," exclaimed Langdale. "You won't find that sort of thing go down at St. Cynthia's. I warn you. I may as well tell you that I am chief of the Lower Fourth."

"Rate, sure and you know I am," O'Connor interrupted. "Why, will ye tell crammers to the new kid, Langdale?"

"Look here, you fathead—"

"Who are ye calling a fathead—"

It looked like war, but just then the train roared into a tunnel, and Langdale exclaimed:

"Chuck it; it's only three more minutes to Lonsfield from this, and then we shall be among Rice and his lot. Now, Blake, I want you to promise me to vote for the right side when the election comes off. We've taken a lot of trouble to speak to you before those sneaks could get at you, for we knew they'd steal a march on us if they could—they're mean enough for anything. Now, give me your word."

"I think I can give it, as far as that goes," said Blake, cocking his head on one side, as if giving the matter the very deepest consideration. "I'll vote for the right side, to the best of my judgment."

"You'll vote for Arthur Clare?"

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps, eh? So that means that you might possibly vote for Darke?"

Blake nodded coolly.

"I certainly might, if I thought fit," he assented.

"Well, that answer won't do."

"Sorry," said Blake, in an indifferent tone, as if that ended it. "I say, what sort of footer do you play at St. Cynthia's?"

Langdale's eyes gleamed.

"Never mind the footer now," he said. "We'll just settle about this question of the voting."

"Why, that's settled!"

"Oh, no, it isn't, my boy, not by long chalks!" Langdale exclaimed emphatically. "I want to know how you're going to vote."

"I'm sorry I can't give you any definite information on that point at present, but—"

"Look here, I've had about enough of your cheek!" cried Langdale, getting red in the face. "You've got to give your solemn promise to vote for Clare, or take a licking. And you've only got half a minute to decide in, so buck up!"

"Upon the whole," said Blake, still with the same air of deep reflection, "I think I'll take the licking—if you can give me one!"

"Mangle the cheeky kid, Cis, darlint," ejaculated O'Connor.

"By Jehosophat I will!"

And Langdale simply hurled himself at Blake.

The new boy jumped up quickly. He took it very calmly. Somehow or other Langdale's hands were swept upward, and a fist, that seemed like a lump of solid iron, came crashing upon his nose.

And Langdale, the great fighting-man of the Lower Fourth at St. Cynthia's, went down in the bottom of the carriage as if he had been shot.

He lay there for about twenty seconds, wondering what had happened, and whether anybody else had been hurt in the collision, and then, with a friendly helping hand from Pat O'Connor, he gained his feet.

Sidney Blake was munching toffee in the most placid way in the world. O'Connor was grinning from ear to ear.

"Then—then there hasn't been a collision!" gasped Langdale, in a dazed way.

"Ha, ha, yez, omadhaun—no!"

"I dotted you on the boko," explained the new boy cheerfully. "Hope I didn't hurt you much. Sorry if I did."

And he went on eating toffee.

Langdale looked at this remarkably cool new boy, then at the grinning O'Connor, and finally at his own reflection in the little glass under the rack. He saw his nose, which, in its normal state, was of Grecian shape, decidedly bulbous in its aspect, as red as a beetroot, and with a thin stream of red trickling from it.

And before he could decide what to do the train roared into Lonsfield Station, and stopped.

Blake stepped out upon the platform. Langdale and O'Connor, with doubtful looks, followed him.

"Mother av Moses!" whispered O'Connor to his companion. "He may be a new kid, but he knows how to take care of himself. Sure, that was a beautiful thump he gave yez on the nose, Cis, intirely; I never saw a nater thing."

"Was it?" said Langdale grimly. He hadn't noticed the beauty of it himself.

"Sure and it was, spaking from a scientific point of view, of course. My opinion is, that that kid knows how to put them up, and I shouldn't advise yez to let this go any further, Cissy, me boy."

"Rats!" was Langdale's grateful and polite acknowledgment of this wise counsel.

"Look, there's Rice and his lot; I know they'd be here to get hold of the new 'un!"

As Sidney Blake passed the barrier he found himself in the midst of a group of boys, evidently juniors, from St. Cynthia's.

"Here's the new kid!" exclaimed a lanky, somewhat pasty-complexioned youth about a year older than Sidney. "How do you do, youngster? I'm Jim Rice, of the Upper Fourth at St. Cynthia's. We've come to see you safe to the school."

"Have you?" said Blake, not very favourably impressed by the lanky youth's looks. "That's extremely polite of you, I must say!"

"Yea, we want to—— Scott, there's Langdale and O'Connor!" exclaimed Rice, staring at the two. "Oh, I see your little game, you cad! You thought you'd steal a march on us, did you? I might have known that you'd be up to some mean trick or other."

Then he looked more attentively at Cecil, and a grin overspread his ill-favoured face.

"Sciagora! I say, Langdale, what have you been doing to your nose? Got it run over on the railway?"

"Mind your own business," snapped Langdale, turning red.

"Perhaps the new chap punched it for you. Oh, he did, did he? Serve you right for bothering him. I suppose you've been touting for his vote. Come along with me, young 'un, and I'll just give you an idea how matters stand."

And with an air of condescension the Upper Fourth boy made a move to fling his arm in Blake's, and walk him off down the lane towards St. Cynthia's.

But Blake stepped back, politely but firmly declining the honour. He had not the slightest intention of being patronised by the lanky Upper Fourth boy.

"Thanks," he drawled, in his cool way. "This chap"—with a nod towards Langdale—"has already given me a pretty clear idea of things."

Rice's brow darkened a little. He was a bully by nature, and was extremely unaccustomed to making himself agreeable to younger boys, and to have his overtures calmly rejected made him feel very sore. He was tempted to pick a quarrel with the new boy on the spot, but the thought of the one vote needed to turn the scale at the election checked him.

"Oh, then, as you know all about it, perhaps you'll tell me how you intend to vote?" he said brusquely.

"Haven't decided yet," answered Blake airily. "I'm going to think it over, and look into the merits of the two candidates."

Rice's dark look became a positive scowl.

"Don't you think you're taking a good deal upon yourself for a new kid and a Lower Fourth boy?" he demanded. Blake put his hands into his pockets and whistled. Pat O'Connor nudged Cecil Langdale.

"Sure, Cissy, darlint, the young 'un's a broth of a boy," he murmured. "Darke's fag won't make any more of him than you did."



Blake caught sight of a tall figure draped in a long cloak. From holes in a black mask two startled eyes glared out at the boys. (See page 16.)

Rice stretched out a large hand and took Blake by the shoulder.

"Look here, youngster, I don't want to quarrel with you, but you've got to promise to——"

Blake looked him coolly in the face.

"You don't want to quarrel with me?" he queried.

"No, but——"

"Then you'd better take your hand off my shoulder, and sharp, or else you will quarrel with me, whether you want to or not."

Rice's face became like a thundercloud: and instead of complying with Blake's request he tightened his grip, and with his other hand aimed a heavy blow at the new boy's face. Even the value of the hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy's vote was forgotten in his rage.

But his blow never reached its mark.

For Blake's left went up with lightning swiftness, and Rice's arm was knocked aside, and in a fraction of a second after that the new boy's right fist caught the taller boy on the point of the chin with terrific force, and Darke's fag went rolling over on the ground.

He was up again in a second, white and panting with rage, and he flung himself at the new boy with almost the fury of a tiger.

But Blake was ready for him. With wonderful agility he dodged Rice's furious rush, and gave the Upper Fourth boy a thump upon the side of the head which laid him upon

his back, dazed and bewildered; and this time he was not in such a hurry to rise.

"Sure, and it's a broth av a boy ye are," yelled Pat O'Connor in delight; and he rushed at Blake and hugged him as if he had been a long-lost brother.

"Here, I say, draw it mild," protested Blake, struggling to free himself.

"Master Blake, are you comin' in the trap?" It was Taggles, the school-porter, who spoke. He had taken Blake's box aboard, and was waiting to drive off. "Dr. Earle ordered me to take you in the trap."

"Then you mustn't disregard your borders, Taggles," said Blake, laughing; and he escaped from Pat and jumped up beside Taggles. "Here I am, old son!"

And as Taggles gathered up the reins, the new boy turned to the group outside the little station.

"Sorry to disturb your serenity, Rice," he said agreeably. "Same to you, Langdale. I'm the most peaceable chap in the world, but I can't stand bullying. I'm going to look into the merits of this case, and I'll let you know my decision later. Ta-ta."

He waved his hand as the trap drove off.

The boys looked at each other in an uncertain sort of way.

"Well, he's a coughdrop, and no mistake," remarked one of Rice's companions, at length. "Did he hurt you much, Jim, old chap?"

To which Rice replied with something which sounded extremely like a swear-word.

Langdale and O'Connor walked away together.

"That's a new kid a bit out of the usual run," Langdale remarked, rubbing his nose. "He will be setting himself up as cock of the walk in the Lower Fourth, if we don't look out, Paddy."

"I think that's very likely, Cissy, darlint. Sure, he'll be in hot water before he's been long in St. Cynthia's."

And O'Connor's words proved prophetic.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Rivals.

ARTHUR CLARE crossed the old, elm-shaded quadrangle at St. Cynthia's with his quick, springy stride.

He was a splendid specimen of young British manhood—tall, straight as a pine, his form developed by every manly exercise. His face was clear-cut and handsome, his eyes clear and steady and true.

But just now there was a serious, in fact, slightly anxious expression upon his face, as if he were bound upon an errand not wholly pleasing to him, and were uncertain of the kind of reception he might meet with.

He entered the school-house, and passed along the corridor, upon which opened the doors of the Sixth Form studies.

Nearly at the end of the corridor was a half-open door, and as he approached it he heard Philip Darke's voice raised in anger, and a frown for a moment darkened his frank face.

"Bullying his fag, as usual! What a brute that fellow is!"

"You miserable little whelp! You've made a mess of it. Why couldn't you do as I told you?"

"Please, Darke, I did my best!" whined Rice. "But almost at the first word he flew at me, and—"

"Bah! Don't talk to me! You'll have to set it right somehow. If the new kid doesn't vote for me, I'll—"

Arthur Clare coughed loudly, and the voice within the study broke off abruptly.

Philip Darke looked up with a scowl as Clare stood in the doorway. There was no love lost between the two prefects.

"I should like to speak to you, Darke," said Clare, affecting not to notice the prefect's unamiable expression.

"Come in," said Darke shortly.

He made a sign to Rice, who hastily left the study, glad of the chance to escape further bullying. Darke sat on the edge of the table, with his hands in his pockets, and looked at Clare with a veiled insolence in his expression.

He was not a bad-looking fellow. He might have been called handsome, but his chin was weak, and his eyes too

small, and a keen observer could have discerned in his face the signs of a jealous and uncordial spirit.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"It's about the election."

Instantly Darke's face took on a more hostile expression.

"Well, what about the election?"

Clare took no notice of his exceedingly unpleasant manner.

"We are in rather a peculiar position, Darke," he said.

"A tie in the voting has never happened before at St. Cynthia's and—"

"Perhaps there won't be a tie when the election comes to be tried over again next Tuesday," suggested Darke.

"That's just what I'm coming to. Now, I don't think it's likely that any who have voted for me will change their minds and vote on the other side. I dare say that you feel just as sure about it."

Philip Darke nodded.

"Still, one never knows what may happen," he remarked.

"That is true. But supposing that the lists remain the same?" said Clare. "You are aware that a new boy comes to St. Cynthia's to-day—"

"Let me see," said the other, with an air of reflection. "I believe I have heard it mentioned."

"Yes, I believe you have," said Clare quietly. "This new boy is going into the Lower Fourth, and he will be entitled to vote at the election on Tuesday. If he takes advantage of this right—and I see no reason to suppose that he will not—then the whole result of the election will depend upon his single voice. Now, I think you'll agree with me that that is not a very desirable state of affairs. It is absurd that a Lower Fourth boy, who has been only a few days at St. Cynthia's, should decide all by himself who is to be captain of the school."

Philip Darke laughed.

"It does seem rather a responsibility to shove upon a youngster's shoulders," he said, with a nod.

"Do you think we ought to allow it?"

"I don't see how we can help ourselves, Clare. There would be a row if we tried to deprive the youngster of his vote, that's certain. Besides, that would leave us at the same impasse; the votes would tie again."

Clare paused a moment before he spoke again. He could not tell exactly how the rival candidate was likely to take what he was about to say.

"I want to make a proposition to you, Darke—or, rather, a suggestion," he said slowly; "and I want you to believe that what I say is dictated simply by a desire to do the best thing possible for the school as a whole."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Darke carelessly. "No harm in speaking your mind, anyway."

"You don't feel like withdrawing your candidature, do you?"

"Not by a long chalk," said Darke promptly.

"Neither do I. But would you be agreeable to withdrawing if I withdrew also, and leaving the captaincy to a third party?"

Darke did not reply at once. The proposition took him quite aback.

"What's your little game?" he demanded at length.

Clare coloured, but he kept his temper.

"Astonishing as it may seem to you, I have no little game," he said coldly. "I am thinking solely of the school."

"Yes; that's all very well for a speech to the electors," said Darke rudely. "But nobody can overhear us here, and we may as well be frank with one another."

Arthur Clare bit his lip. Dearly he would have liked to reply to Darke's insolence with a blow straight from the shoulder. But he restrained himself.

"You quite misunderstand me," he said calmly. "My offer to withdraw if you do should prove to you that I have no axe to grind."

"But why should we both withdraw?" said Darke, looking at Clare out of the corner of his eye. "It appears to me that the withdrawal of one of us would do. If you're willing to forfeit your chance—"

"It's only fair that you should do the same."

"I don't see it. If you stand out another candidate will come forward, and I shall try conclusions with him."

"In that case you would almost certainly head the poll."

"Well, why shouldn't I? That won't hurt you, as you profess yourself willing to stand out."

Clare was silent.

Darke looked at him with an evil glitter in his eyes.

"That won't hurt you, Clare, unless the truth is that you are determined not to let me get in at any price."

"Well, to be quite frank with you, Darke," said Clare slowly, "I don't think that you're likely to do much good to St. Cynthia's as captain, and—I have no feeling against you—but I don't like your methods—"

"Now we're getting at the truth," interrupted Darke, with a sneer. "All along your aim has been to injure me; and that was half your reason for putting up as captain at all when Wharfe left. And this precious proposal of yours is only another underhand attempt to keep me from getting in as captain."

"You have no right—"

"Oh, there's no need to mince words. There's no love lost between us, Arthur Clare; and all St. Cynthia's knows that pretty well, I think."

Clare kept cool, though it cost him an effort.

"It's a pity I came," he said quietly. "It hasn't done much good. I suppose, after this, that you decline my proposition?"

"Well, yes, rather," said Darke, with emphasis. "You won't get rid of me so easily as all that, I promise you."

Again Clare bit his lip. Darke's manner was very hard to bear.

The prefect slid from the table.

"And now, if you've finished, Clare, I'll ask you to excuse me," he said. "My uncle returned to Glynhurst from abroad yesterday, and he's coming here to-day, and, in fact, I'm expecting him every moment."

There was a tone in Darke's voice, a glitter in his eyes, as he said this, which made Clare look at him with quiet suspicion.

Darke's uncle, Sir Nevil Glyn, was squire of Lonsfield, and one of the governors of St. Cynthia's College. Few of the boys of St. Cynthia's had ever seen him, however, for he had been abroad for the past five years—where and why nobody seemed to exactly know.

His return to Glynhurst had been talked of a good deal at St. Cynthia's, especially as it was an open question whether certain privileges which the boys had enjoyed on the squire's land during his absence would be rescinded now that he was home again. That question was a very important one to most of the St. Cynthia's fellows, and Sir Nevil's decision was awaited with a good deal of anxiety.

It seemed to Clare that Darke was basing a hope of some kind upon the coming of Sir Nevil Glyn. Although he was a member of the governing body—and from his rank and wealth an influential member—the baronet could not interfere in such a matter as the election of a school captain. But it occurred to Clare that, in the very exceptional circumstances of a tie in the voting, Sir Nevil's natural influence with Dr. Marle might count for something. Perhaps that was what was in Darke's mind.

Darke saw the momentary troubled look which crossed Clare's face, and grinned. Clare looked him full in the eyes.

"Very well," he said quietly. "But before I go, Darke, I want to say one word more. As I came here I couldn't help hearing what you said to your fag, as the door was open, and your voice was raised. And I couldn't help putting two and two together—"

"And making five of it, I suppose," said Darke, with a sneer, but with an uneasiness he was not quite able to hide. "Well, and what wonderful discoveries have you made by your eavesdropping?"

Clare flushed scarlet.

"I did not listen, as you know very well," he broke out hotly. Then, with renewed calmness, "But never mind that. As for the discovery I made, I should be a fool if I did not learn from your words that there has been an attempt to intimidate the new boy on this question of voting at the election."

"Rot! I suppose there was no harm in my fag asking him how he meant to vote?"

"Was that all?"

"Certainly, so far as I know," answered Darke unblushingly; but his eyes sank before Clare's as he said it.

NEXT WEEK!

A GRAND STORY OF THE BOAT-RACE AND SEXTON BLAKE, ENTITLED
"ON THE TRACK."

"If that was all—"

"Do you doubt my word?"

"We won't discuss that. If that was all, as you say, there's no harm done; only I want you to understand, Darke, that no in-

timidation will be permitted. I shall keep my eyes open, and if I see any foul play, there will be a row about it. That's all."

And he turned to go.

It would have been well for Philip Darke if he had let him go then. But Clare's words, and above all the scorn of his clear steady eyes, had roused all the spite and venom in the prefect's nature. He burst into a bitter, taunting laugh.

"So that's your game, is it?" he cried. "If the new kid votes for me, you're going to talk about intimidation, and go whining to the doctor with some lying tale—"

He had gone too far. Clare swung round, his eyes blazing, his anger at white heat. He made a swift step towards Philip Darke.

"You'll take those words back, Darke! Do you hear? or I'll knock them down your cowardly throat!"

"Bah! you spying—"

He got no further, for Clare's hand smote him on the mouth; the open hand, but the prefect reeled under the blow.

He staggered back, and caught at the edge of the table to steady himself. His face was distorted with rage and hatred.

"You—you hound! You nameless thief!" he panted. "A nameless beggar's brat, picked from the gutter out of charity—"

It was the last straw, and Clare's sorely-tried self-control utterly gave way.

That Arthur Clare's birth and parentage were a mystery, that he had never known father or mother, was an open secret at St. Cynthia's. He was a protégé of the doctor's, and he had come to St. Cynthia's no one knew whence. He never talked upon the subject. That it weighed upon his mind no one could have told from his manner. He was not the kind of fellow to wear his heart upon his sleeve.

It was the first time he had been taunted upon the matter; for even Darke had never gone so far before, and he would probably not have done so upon this occasion had not the tingling slap on the mouth made him forget all prudence in his rage. Then the mean taunt had leaped out from the mean heart.

The blood ran riot in the veins of Clare. He sprang at Darke, his eyes flashing fire. The prefect's fists went promptly up, but Clare's left swept away his guard in the twinkling of an eye, and Arthur struck out, straight from the shoulder, and Philip Darke went rolling over on the floor of his study.

And as the half-dazed prefect raised himself upon his elbow, and Clare stood over him with heaving chest and flashing eyes, a figure appeared in the open doorway; a man of about thirty, in riding clothes, with a crop in his hand, who stared at the strange scene in the study in amazement.

"Is this my nephew's study? Phil, my boy, is that the way you kill time while you are expecting a visitor?"

Philip Darke scrambled to his feet. Clare turned, abashed and disconcerted by the arrival of the baronet at such an inopportune moment.

"I—I— Uncle—"

"I am sorry," said Clare quietly, "I lost my temper. I regret very much that you should have witnessed such a scene, sir."

At the sound of his voice Sir Nevil Glyn started violently, and the colour wavered in his darkly sunburnt face.

He made a rapid step towards Clare, fixing his gaze upon his face with a strange intensity.

Clare looked at him in amazement; and even Darke forgot all else in wonder at his uncle's strange conduct.

"Who are you? How came you here?"

The words broke from Sir Nevil Glyn in hoarse tones, as his wild, frightened look dwelt upon Clare's startled face.

"Uncle, are you ill?" cried Darke in alarm.

The baronet did not seem to hear him. He was swaying drunkenly, and his face was distorted.

"After all these years! After all these years!"

The words were muttered between pale-faced Clara and the baronet, but too late, and the baronet fell heavily to the floor.

In a moment the two boys were kneeling beside him, forgetful of their late hostile encounter, and Clara raised the unconscious man's head upon his knee.

"He has fainted. Have you any brandy?"

A prefect's study was not exactly the place where brandy should have been, but probably Clara had heard rumours which were whispered about St. Cynthia's concerning certain habits of Philip Darke and his set. Darke flushed faintly, and, stepping to a locker, drew from it a bottle, and poured out a glass of the spirit, and handed it to Clara.

Arthur took it without a word, and poured it down the baronet's throat. A faint colour came into the waxen cheeks, and the closed eyes twitched and opened with a wild, terrified stare.

"Do you feel better, uncle?"

"What—what is it? I—I thought I saw—saw his face," panted the baronet. "Was it a dream?"

Clara and Darke looked at each other. But almost immediately Sir Nevil Glyn's staring eyes turned upon the face of Clara.

He made a violent gesture, pushing Arthur away so abruptly that he nearly fell. The young fellow stepped back, his amazement intensified. He began to wonder whether Sir Nevil Glyn was mad.

"Curse you—curse you—"

He broke off suddenly, as if half conscious that he was somehow betraying himself. He staggered up with Darke's assistance, and fell rather than sat in a chair.

Darke made Clara a sign to go; and Clara, perceiving that his continued presence was likely to do more harm than good, left the study quietly. He was astonished and puzzled, and he did not soon cease to wonder about the strange occurrence.

After he had gone, the baronet sat for some minutes silent, breathing hard. Then with a sudden movement he sat upright, and made a gesture towards the brandy. Darke refilled the glass, and the squire of Longfield emptied it. Then something of his self-possession seemed to return.

"What is the matter, uncle?"

"What the deuce does that matter to you?" broke out the baronet, with a heat so sudden and uncalled for that his nephew started back in dismay and alarm.

His expression recalled Sir Nevil to himself.

"Don't be offended, Phil; I—I was taken with a sudden turn, that's all, just now; it's the after-effects of a sun-stroke I got in Egypt. I am taken like that suddenly at times."

Darke knew, as well as hesitating tongue and uncertain eye could tell him, that this explanation of the baronet's late emotion was a pure invention; the first lie that had occurred to Glyn on the spur of the moment. But it was not part of a dutiful nephew's business to let a rich uncle see that he did not believe him. So he nodded his head with an air of sympathetic concern.

"I hope you feel better now, uncle."

"Oh, yes, I'm all right now," said Sir Nevil testily. "By the way, Phil, who was that young fellow I found with you?"

Sir Nevil tried to speak carelessly, but Darke could see the deep anxiety which underlay the words.

"Oh, that was Arthur Clare."

"Arthur Clare?"

"Yes; although, for my part, I don't believe he knows whether that is his real name or not," said Darke.

"Really," drawled the baronet; "you rouse my curiosity. Tell me about him."

"I know precious little, like every other chap at St. Cynthia's," replied the prefect. "He's a protégé of Dr. Earle's—a kind of ward, some chaps say, though others say he's a nameless brat whom Dr. Earle took in out of charity."

"What does he say himself?"

"Oh, he never talks about the matter; he's as close as an oyster."

Sir Nevil was silent for a minute or two, apparently in deep thought.

"You hate him?" he said abruptly.

Darke was somewhat taken aback.

"Oh, I don't know about that, uncle. I don't like him."

"No, I don't suppose you do," said Sir Nevil, with the dawning of a grin as he recalled the scene he had witnessed when he arrived at his nephew's study door. He rose, and picked up his riding-crop. "I feel a bit seedy after—after that attack, Phil, and I won't stay. Come over to Glynhurst some time and we'll have a talk."

And with a nod he strode away.

He left Darke in a state of wondering surmise and suspicion.

"He's afraid of Clara! Why? Why on earth? Perhaps it may pay me to find out!" was the reflection of the dutiful nephew.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Caught in the Act.

"HERE he is!"

Sidney Blake had just come from a rather painful interview with Mr. Carton, to whom had fallen the task of ascertaining the precise amount of knowledge stored in the new boy's brain. The master had expressed himself disappointed, not to say disgusted, at the extent of it, and warned Blake that there were troublesome times ahead if he didn't soon show a marked improvement.

And Sidney, as he strolled into the quad with his hands in his pockets, realised dolefully that life at St. Cynthia's was not to be all football and frolic.

"There he is!"

The exclamation, and the rush of feet that followed, effectually startled him out of his meditations.

In a moment he was surrounded by a crowd of juniors, headed by Langdale and O'Connor.

"Shove him into the gym. We sha'n't be interrupted there!" exclaimed Langdale.

These words did not seem to imply any friendly intentions on the part of the juniors, and Blake began to resist as they hustled him towards the gymnasium.

But against so many he had no chance. He was soon bundled into the gym, and backed against a wall, with the excited juniors pressing round him.

"Now, you new kid," began Langdale, holding up his hand for silence, "I don't want to hurt you—"

"Now, that's what I call kind, considering what a wreck I've made of your boko!" said Blake.

It was evident that the new boy had not lost his coolness. Langdale turned red. His Grecian nose had swollen to almost twice its usual size. And O'Connor's joyous chuckle did not make Langdale feel any the more amiable.

"What the dickens are you cackling about, O'Connor?" he said crossly. "Look here, you new fellow, I don't want any more of your cheek! You've got altogether too much to say for yourself. I repeat that I don't want to hurt you; but if you don't soon find out your place, and keep in it, you'll get hurt—and badly!"

"Have pity on my tender years!" exclaimed Blake, with mock terror. "Don't bring down my grandfather's ginger whiskers with sorrow to the crematorium!"

"You cheeky mongrel, I'll wring your neck!" shouted Langdale, exasperated by the outburst of giggling which Blake's ridiculous appeal excited amongst the juniors.

"Kape cool, Cissy darling!" said O'Connor soothingly. "Get to business, or we shall have some spalpeen of a prefect down on us."

"We're a committee of the Fourth Form," said Langdale more calmly. "All our Form, with the exception of a few mongrels who hang round Rice, are going to vote for Arthur Clare. He's our man, and I can tell you that any Lower Fourth boy who doesn't vote for him will be jolly well sent to Coventry. The Upper Forms are mostly on Darke's side, because Clare is opposed to fagging. Now, that makes it clear to you how you ought to vote, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps!" almost howled Langdale. "Hark to the disgusting rotter, chaps! Perhaps! Blow your perhapses! Are you going to vote with your Form or not?"

"I am going to give the matter my deepest—"



Soon Alger got on to the ball and passed to Clare, who got away in splendid style, and shot the first goal for St. Cynthia's amidst a roar of exultant cheering. (See page 20.)

"Are you going to—"
"consideration."

"Yes or no?"

"Oh, rats! I tell you I haven't made up my mind yet."

"He hasn't made up his mind yet!" said Langdale.

"His dear little mind takes a long time to make up. Perhaps it isn't in very good working order! Shall we make it up for him, chaps?"

"Sure and we will!" ejaculated O'Connor. "Let's frog's-march the omadhaun round the gym. a few times, and likely enough he'll dockle, sharp! There's nothing like the frog's-march to help a chap to make up his mind."

There was a shout of approval from the juniors.

"Now, then," said Langdale threateningly, "you hear that, Blake?"

"I should be the champion deaf man if I didn't!" said Blake.

"Once more, will you give me your answer?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Rats!"

Then they swooped down upon him and clutched him, and though he struck out manfully, and a couple of the juniors went rolling along the floor of the gym., they quickly had him a helpless prisoner; and then round and round the gym. they went, and Sidney Blake for the first time in his life experienced the joys of the frog's-march.

When they stood him upon his feet again he was looking considerably the worse for wear. His hair was like a mop, his collar hung by a single stud, and his Eton jacket had burst down the back.

His appearance excited a shout of laughter.

"Oh, you giddy scarecrow!" howled Langdale. "Ha, ha, ha! Have you made up your mind yet?"

Blake was panting, but defiant still.

"Not yet."

Langdale stared. He had never looked for grit like this in the new boy.

"You'd better give in, Blake."

"Oh, rats!"

"He hasn't had enough," exclaimed Langdale, exasperated. "He looks as if he wants a wash, so we'll shove him under the pump. Come on!"

"Here, I say, chuck that!" ejaculated Blake.

"Oh, you don't like that idea, do you?" grinned Langdale.

"Well, you know how to get out of it. Now, this is your last chance. Give me your solemn word to vote for Clare on Tuesday, or—"

"Langdale, how dare you? What does this mean?"

Langdale swung round with a gasp of terror as a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder. It was the hand of Arthur Clare!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Blake Decides.

AT the sound of Clare's voice the juniors released Blake as if he had suddenly become red-hot. Langdale stared at the prefect with his mouth wide open, the picture of utter dismay. And the rest of the "committee of the Lower Fourth" looked about as sheepish as it was possible to look.

"What does this mean, Langdale?" repeated Clare, his blue eyes flashing with anger.

"I—I was only canvassing for votes," stammered Langdale. "We were just explaining things to the new fellow, in a friendly way——"

Angry as the prefect was, he could scarcely help smiling.

"So that is your idea of a friendly explanation?"

"Well, you see——"

"I distinctly heard you threaten the new boy. You were intimidating him with regard to his vote at the election."

"Oh, don't you worry about me!" broke in Blake, in his cheerful way. "This is only their fun, and I don't mind it a bit, bless their little hearts! As for intimidation, why, I assure you that wild horses wouldn't make me vote otherwise than as I want to. On that point I haven't made up my mind yet. I am going to give the matter my deepest——"

"You would do a good deal better not to vote at all, as new boy," said Clare brusquely.

He did not know exactly what to make of this decidedly cool new Lower Fourth boy. He looked severely at the sheepish juniors.

"You have acted in an outrageous manner," he said. "You have made use of my name in a way you cannot expect me to overlook. You will each of you bring me a hundred lines of Virgil to-morrow; and you, Langdale, who appear to be the ringleader, please follow me to my study."

Langdale made a grimace, and Pat O'Connor broke out: "Sure and it's mistaken ye are intirely, Clare darlint! It's I who am ringleader; ye see, I'm chief of the Lower Fourth——"

"Rats!" said Langdale. "You shut up, Paddy!"

"Arrah, thin, ye omadhaun——"

"Now then, fathead!"

The dispute—an old and familiar one to the Lower Fourth boys—was beginning again. But Clare cut it short.

"You may both come," he said.

And they both went. And they both came out of the prefect's study twisting in the most uncomfortable manner.

Blake had made a bee-line for a bath-room, to clean up after his rough experience in the gym. After Clare's interference, the Lower Fourth boys, though they eyed him in a very peculiar manner, did not offer to molest him. A little while before the tea-bell rang, Rice came hurriedly up to Blake.

"I've been looking for you!" he exclaimed.

"Well, here I am," replied Sidney, regarding the Upper Fourth boy rather warily.

But Rice soon showed that his intentions were not hostile.

"Darke wants to speak to you," he said. "Will you go to his study?"

"Certainly!" replied Blake, wondering what Darke could have to say to him. "Where is it?"

"Come with me, and I'll show you."

"Right-ho!"

Rice took him to the door of Darke's study and left him there, and Sidney tapped at the door and entered.

Philip Darke looked up, and nodded to the new boy in the most agreeable way. The prefect's face showed very plainly the traces of his recent falling out with Clare.

"You are the new boy—Sidney Blake?"

"Yes."

"Please sit down."

Sidney sat down. He thought he could guess the cause of the marvellous politeness from a Sixth Form prefect to a Lower Fourth boy, but his face gave no sign.

"Have you thought about your vote in the election yet?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And perhaps you have come to a decision?"

"Yes."

"May I ask what it is?" said Darke smoothly.

"Certainly. I have decided to give the matter my deepest consideration," said Blake cheerfully.

A glitter came into Darke's eyes for a moment.

"Is that all?"

"That is all, so far."

"Now, I want to have a little talk with you about this, Blake. I want you to vote for me at the election. I want you to make up your mind about it now. I may as well mention—of course, I can trust your discretion——"

Blake nodded.

"I may as well mention then that my opinion is that one good turn deserves another, and that I shall stand by all those that stand by me. If I get in as captain, I sha'n't forget you."

"And if you don't?"

"I sha'n't forget that either, I promise you," said Darke significantly. "By a peculiar combination of circumstances, the result of the election depends upon your single vote. If I don't get in, it will be because you are against me. If you are against me, I am against you all the while you are at St. Cynthia's. If you know anything of public schools, you know what it means for a Lower Form boy to have a prefect against him. I am speaking plainly, so that you will know what to expect."

"That's very kind of you," said Blake.

Darke looked at him suspiciously.

"There's another point," he said slowly. "I've no doubt that, like most youngsters, you run through your pocket-money in next to no time. If at any time after the election you wanted a sovereign, or a couple of sovereigns even——"

Sidney Blake rose.

"Well, what do you think?" said Darke sharply.

"I think you are the worst cad I've ever met!" answered Blake, with deliberate emphasis. "Keep your dirty money! I'm going to vote for Clare!"

The prefect started up furiously.

"You confounded cheeky brat——"

"I'm going to vote for Clare! You've helped me to make up my mind. If you became captain of the school I wouldn't stay in it!"

White with rage, the prefect snatched down a cane from the wall and sprang towards the daring junior.

Blake faced him fearlessly.

"You had better not touch me," he said. "If you do, I'll go straight to Dr. Earle and tell him that you tried to bribe me to vote for you!"

Darke's arm fell to his side. He had placed himself in the junior's power, and he knew it. Such a charge was sufficient to get him expelled from St. Cynthia's.

"You—you whelp!" he hissed.

"Anything else?"

"You can go!"

"Thanks."

And Blake walked out of the study.

Philip Darke ground his teeth as he looked after him.

"Oh, I will make him suffer for that in the long run! He shall find that it does not pay to make a bitter enemy of Philip Darke!" he hissed.

Rice came into the study with an expectant look.

"Is it all right? Here—I say—are you gone mad?" he yelled.

For Darke, seeing someone upon whom he could safely wreak the rage that consumed him, was boxing his ears right and left with brutal vigour, and did not desist until his unfortunate sag twisted himself away and bolted out of the study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Story of Arthur Clare.

BUT who is Arthur Clare?"

Sir Nevil Glyn was seated in the study of Dr. Earle at St. Cynthia's. They had been talking of the contested election, in which the baronet, as the uncle of one of the rival candidates, naturally took a deep interest. Sir Nevil had thus adroitly led the conversation to Clare.

"I have a reason for asking," he continued. "I saw the young fellow yesterday in my nephew's study when I called to see Philip, and the sight of his face gave me a very strange and painful shock."

"Indeed!" said Dr. Earle, looking at the baronet over his gold pince-nez wonderingly.

"I saw—or thought I saw—in his face a resemblance to one I knew well," the baronet continued—"one who has long been dead, but of whom I cannot think even now without pain. Arthur Clare's face brought the features of my dead friend before me with a startling vividness, and I was for the moment completely overcome. If the question is not an indiscreet one, who is Arthur Clare?"

The doctor reflected for a moment.

"There can be no harm in my telling you the story," he said slowly. "Clare is a kind of ward of mine, and he came under my care many years ago, and under the most peculiar circumstances. What you have just told me interests me extremely, for the resemblance you have spoken of may possibly furnish a clue to Clare's parentage."

"His parentage is a secret then?"

"Yes; a secret, which, however, I have not given up the hope of penetrating. The clue to the mystery lies here at St. Cynthia's, if we could but find it."

"You amaze me."

"It is a strange story. But I will tell it from the beginning. It began twelve years ago; that was, of course, long before I came to St. Cynthia's as principal. I was living in London at that time. Late one night an old friend, named Gabriel Locke—"

The baronet started.

"You knew Locke?" said the doctor, with a look of new interest.

"I met a man of that name long ago abroad somewhere. I think."

"He spent many years abroad. I had not seen him for a very long time, when that night he suddenly appeared at my house, bringing the little boy with him, then, as I should judge, about five years old. He was strangely excited and uncertain in his manner, and not quite right in his head to judge by appearances. He told me, in an excited and incoherent way, that his life was sought by bitter foes, as well as that of the little lad he had with him, and implored me, in the name of our ancient friendship, to take charge of the boy, the orphan son, as he said, of a very dear friend of his. Astonished and disquieted as I was by the whole occurrence, I could not refuse such a request, and I consented, and Locke disappeared, leaving the boy with me."

"And he told you nothing more?" asked Sir Nevil.

"Little more. The boy was to be called Arthur Clare, but I am by no means certain whether that is his real name. His birth and parentage were a secret, and must be kept so for his safety's sake, but the documents which proved his identity were enclosed in the black box, which was hidden in the ruins of the old abbey of St. Cynthia's. Poor Locke stayed so short a time, and spoke so incoherently, being in a state of such excitement and fear, that I could gather no more than that from him. He promised, however, to visit me again when he could do so without danger of leading his enemies on the track of the boy. Then he left me as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving me, as you may guess, in a state of total bewilderment."

"And he never came back?"

"Never! I have no doubt that he intended to return at some time and give me more definite information as to the place of concealment of the black box, but something must

have happened to prevent him. Poor fellow, his mind was evidently unhinged when he was with me, and I had great fears for his safety when he left me."

"And the black box? Has it ever been found?"

"Never! Why the old abbey of St. Cynthia's should have been selected as its hiding-place I cannot guess. I had at that time no thought of ever coming here as principal, but when, four years ago, on the retirement of Dr. Crauborne, the offer was made to me, I gladly accepted it. I need not say that I made it a point to make a search of the vaults under the old abbey, but without success."

"May not the whole story have been the freak of an excited imagination?" the baronet suggested.

"That is possible, of course; but I do not think so. Why should Locke have mentioned St. Cynthia's Abbey specifically? No; I really believe that, under the influence of an overmastering terror, my unfortunate friend really hid the box containing these documents in the ruins, and then left the child with me. I do not despair of again seeing him and receiving more definite information."

A glitter shot into the baronet's eyes, but he had partly turned his face from the doctor, who did not observe it.

"And Clare is acquainted with these circumstances?"

"Oh, certainly! I have kept nothing from him."

"Does he ever seek for this mysterious black box?"

The doctor smiled.

"Naturally, he has done so many times. It appears, however, to be well hidden, for he has totally failed to find a trace of it up till now."

"In that case it looks as if it will probably never be discovered."

"Well, I don't know about that, Sir Nevil. Clare's plan is to take a section of the ruins at a time and give it a thorough examination. By this means he hopes to be able to unearth the black box in the long run. I think that there is a certain chance of success, do not you?"

Again that glitter in the baronet's eyes.

"No doubt," he assented. "I wish him every success."

His face assumed a look of the deepest reflection. "From what you tell me, there cannot be any connection between Clare and my dead friend; I suppose it was a chance resemblance, and nothing more. Yet it was very striking."

There was something of disappointment in the doctor's kind old face as the baronet said this.

Sir Nevil's words had led him to hope that the baronet might be able to throw some light on the mystery of Clare's parentage. That hope was gone.

Never for an instant did it cross the good old doctor's mind that Sir Nevil Glyn had purposely misled him for the sake of extracting from him the history of Arthur Clare.

"A strange story," the baronet said thoughtfully. "If the black box should ever be found and the secret brought to light, I trust that you will inform me. I am sincerely interested."

The doctor assented cordially, and Sir Nevil rose to take his leave.

As he crossed the quadrangle he saw Arthur Clare talking with Ainger of the Sixth. Clare lifted his cap, and the baronet briefly acknowledged his salute as he passed on with a rapid step.

Ainger looked after him curiously.

"Is that Sir Nevil Glyn? I heard that he was coming to-day to call upon the doctor."

Clare nodded.

"Yes; I met him yesterday in Darke's study."

"Not a bad-looking fellow," Ainger remarked. "There's something familiar to me in his face. He's like somebody I know. Great Scott!" he broke off abruptly, staring at Clare.

Clare, astonished, looked at him.

"What's the matter now, Ainger?"

"Why, it's you he resembles, that's all!"

"He resembles me?" ejaculated Clare, in wonder.

"Yes, by Jove!"

"That is strange."

Back to Arthur's mind came the scene of yesterday; the unexplained emotion of the baronet at the sight of his face. Was it this likeness which Ainger remarked which had then struck the baronet himself? But, if so, why should it have affected him so strangely? It was a puzzling question.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Election—and After.

SIDNEY BLAKE'S position at St. Cynthia's was unique, and he enjoyed it. As the day of the election came round, the importance of the hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy increased rather than diminished.

After the row in the gymnasium, and Clare's intervention with its painful results, the juniors left off the attempts to intimidate the new voter. They realised that it was useless; the new boy was simply as obstinate as a mule. But it occurred to Langdale that if he could not be driven he might be led; and on the morning of the election, he exerted all his powers of persuasion upon Blake.

"Do let us have your vote, there's a good fellow," he said. "The whole Lower Fourth will take it as a personal favour. We simply must get Clare in."

"What, are you still going to vote for him, after he licked you for your zeal?" asked Blake.

"Rather! He can lick me as often as he likes, but I shall stand by him," said Langdale, with sturdy loyalty. "Bless you, we don't mind Clare licking us! I believe it hurts him more than it does us. It's different with that brute Darke; it's a pleasure to him to handle the cane."

"Yes," he looks that sort."

"Well, then," said Langdale eagerly, "you can see for yourself that Clare is the man. Why don't you set our doubts at rest?"

"Don't you be impatient. The election comes off to-night, and then your doubts will be set at rest," said Blake, with his exasperating coolness.

Langdale looked strongly inclined to commit assault and battery, but he restrained himself.

"Just you wait till to-night, you disgusting bounder!" he muttered to himself, as he walked away.

And, indeed, there were several indications that Blake would have a warm time of it when the election was over, and when—from his great importance as hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy—he would sink into the insignificance of a "common or garden" member of the Lower Fourth.

Langdale's was not the only persuasion Blake had to listen to that day. O'Connor interviewed him, and so did Rice; and several of the seniors who espoused Darke's cause tried the effect of mingled promises and threats upon him. But nobody could extract anything from him that was not of a quite non-committal nature, so that when evening drew near the result was still uncertain.

Little attention was paid to lessons that day, and all were heartily glad when the farce was over, and the school was dismissed.

The one great topic was the election; even the forthcoming football match with Clyffe College was for the time forgotten. Blake was immensely amused by the variety of angry, threatening, and beseeching looks that were thrown towards him. But he went on his way, and made no sign.

And as the boys assembled in the great hall where the elections were held. The hour had come.

Every boy, big and little, at St. Cynthia's was there. Langdale and his friends stood with a group of juniors, and near them Sidney Blake was standing in an unconcerned attitude, with his hands in his pockets.

"Look at the brute," muttered Langdale; "he looks as cool as a cucumber—as if the fate of St. Cynthia's wasn't troubling him in the balance. Oh, won't I wallop him to-night, when I get him in the dormitory, that's all!"

"Sure, I'll forgive the omadhaun if he only votes for Clare," said O'Connor.

"Rats! He wants a hiding for his cheek, and I'm going to give him one!"

There was rather a droll look upon O'Connor's face. He remembered the affair in the train, and he thought that Cecil had set himself a task which might not prove to be an easy one.

"Attention, there!" said Taylor. "There's Darke up to speak."

"He's going to propose Darke; his the rotter!"

Darke, who was a chum of Philip Darke's, proposed his candidate amidst a storm of cheers from Darke's faction

and a chorus of hisses from the younger portion of Clare's supporters. A frown from Arthur, however, silenced the hisses.

Darke called for a show of hands. A forest of hands went up. Langdale and his friends looked at Blake almost in anguish. Darke was staring across at him; but Clare was looking the other way, and did not trouble to turn his head.

Sidney Blake stood in the same easy attitude, his hands deep in his pockets. Langdale drew a long breath of relief.

"He's not going to vote for Darke, at any rate."

The counting was slow and careful, for it was necessary to avoid the possibility of a mistake. And probably Darke wanted to give the hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy plenty of time to make up his mind.

But it ended at last, and Sidney Blake's hands were still in his pockets. Philip Darke's eyes were gleaming as he looked at the cool youngster; he inwardly swore to make his life a burden while he stayed at St. Cynthia's!

The count ended, Ainger rose to propose Clare. It was now the turn of Clare's partisans to cheer, and the Darkites to hiss and hoot.

"Hands up for Arthur Clare!"

Up they went. And then it was observed that the new boy slowly and leisurely withdrew his hands from his pockets and elevated his right in the air. Sidney Blake was voting for Clare.

"Hurrah!" shouted Langdale. "Hurrah, we've got it!"

"Count! Count!" shouted the Darkites, in a vague hope that somebody might have changed his mind since the last election and that there might be a chance left for their candidate.

The counting was proceeded with.

When it was over, Mr. Carton made known the result.

"Philip Darke, ninety-nine votes."

There had been no change.

"Arthur Clare, one hundred votes."

Arthur Clare was captain of St. Cynthia's! The vote of the hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy had decided the election!

A perfect hurricane of cheers swept the hall; every boy who had voted for Clare, shouting himself hoarse in celebration of the victory.

Philip Darke strode away with a brow as black as thunder, and envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness rioting in his heart. He hated Clare, and he hated Sidney Blake; and schemes for revenge upon both of them flitted wildly through his excited brain.

He had slung himself upon a chair in his study, and was thinking in a black and bitter mood of his defeat, when there came a tap at the door, and Clare entered.

The defeated candidate fixed a savage, unfriendly look upon him.

"What do you want?"

Clare held out his hand.

"Let us be friends, Darke. I—I'm sorry I lost my temper the other day. As for this election, there's no honour in winning it, and no disgrace in losing it; and if I had had my way, the new boy would not have been allowed to vote at all. It needn't make us bad friends. I am willing to bury all past differences and start afresh, if you are."

Darke thrust his hands deep into his pockets. Clare slowly let his fall to his side.

"You're willing to bury all past differences, are you? Yes, naturally, now that you've got all you wanted," sneered Darke. "Now that you are captain of St. Cynthia's, you can be magnanimous and bury the hatchet. But if you think I'm going to knuckle under and let you have everything all your own way, you're mightily mistaken."

Clare did not reply. He had acted upon a generous impulse in thus coming to his defeated rival, but he already realised that he had made a mistake.

"You have got in," continued Darke, "much good may it do you! But don't come to me with this hypocritical pretence of friendship; it makes me sick!"

"You do me injustice," said Clare, in a low voice. "I suppose it wasn't wise of me to come here, but I came with good intentions."

"Well, your good intentions are not appreciated, so you may as well clear," said Darke, in his most insulting manner.

Clare bit his lip, and, turning on his heel, walked out of the room. He had hard work to keep his hands off the prefect, but he would not give way to his temper.

The juniors had trooped out of the hall, cheering loudly

In honour of the new captain, trying to drown the hoots and catcalls of the Darko voters. Langdale and his friends were in high glee. But the self-constituted chief of the Lower Fourth had not forgotten his determination to take vengeance upon the hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy for the unkindness he had caused him, and also, perhaps, for the eminence Blake was rapidly acquiring in the Form. Cecil had probably already scented in Blake a rival to his supremacy, and deemed it best to put him in his place at once.

"Are you satisfied now, happy?" Blake asked, when he encountered Langdale after the election.

"Not by long chalks," replied Langdale promptly. "If I don't give you the biggest hiding you ever had in your life for your thundering cheek, you may use my head for a football."

"Thanks," replied Blake serenely. "But I reckon a wooden football would be rough on my tootsies, old chap!" Langdale glared.

"Just you wait till to-night," he said.

"Oh, am I to have the licking to-night?"

"Yes, you disgusting brawler!"

"All right; I'm glad you've warned me. It was considerate of you. I shall be able to make my will and—"

But Langdale walked away without deigning to listen to Blake's chaff.

When bedtime came, and the juniors trooped up to their dormitory, Blake was on his guard, and prepared for rough handling; for besides Langdale's words, he had seen many peculiar looks given him by the Fourth Formers, which warned him of the wrath to come.

A sponge dripping with water flew through the air, and Blake dodged just in time to let it squelch upon the door.

In a fraction of a second he had picked it up and sent it whirling back to the sender, who happened to be Pat O'Connor.

O'Connor gave a wild yell as the wet sponge flopped in his face, sending spurts of cold water down his chest.

"Arrah, ye gwaoson! what for did ye do that?" he shouted.

"Oh, one good turn deserves another, you know," replied Blake.

"Hallo, my pippin, what do you want?"

The question was addressed to Langdale, who had come up to him with a decidedly warlike expression, followed by a crowd of juniors.

"I want you," announced Langdale. "I want you to make your choice—to take a licking or to fight me. Which do you prefer?"

"Oh, I think I'll fight," said Blake carelessly.

"All right. Then as soon as the prepositor's seen lights out, I'm your man. They won't take any notice of a little noise on election night, and we shall be able to settle matters quite comfortably."

"I hope so," assented Blake, "although I've an idea that you won't feel so comfortable when I've done with you as you do now."

Whereat Langdale glared, and showed a strong disposition to begin operations without waiting for the prepositor to come and go; but just then steps were heard in the corridor, and Wilkinson of the Sixth put his head in at the door.

"Not in bed yet, you young rascals?"

"Sha'n't be a tick, Wilkinson."

"You'd better not, or I'll warn you!"

And the juniors tumbled into bed, and Wilkinson turned out the gas, bade them good-night, and took his departure.

Barely had his footsteps died away down the corridor when the beds were vacant again. Langdale produced a bicycle lamp and lighted it, and half a dozen candle-ends added to the illumination of the dormitory.

"Now, you hundred-and-ninety-ninth mongrel!"

"Do you want me?" said Blake, yawning. "Don't you think you had better put off this thing till to-morrow, and—"

Langdale's reply was to rush at him and jerk his bedclothes off.

"Now, out with you!" said Cecil threateningly.

Blake rose in a leisurely manner.

"Very well, if you insist," he drawled.

"Who'll be the mongrel's second?" said Langdale, looking round.

Jones volunteered. O'Connor was acting for Langdale. The two opponents were soon in fighting trim, in vest and trousers, and wearing socks to avoid making a noise which might attract some over-dutiful prefect.

The juniors stood round in nightshirts and pyjamas, looking on with deep interest as the adversaries faced one another.

Langdale was famous for his prowess in the Lower Fourth, and Upper Fourth boys had sometimes come off worst in encounters with him. That he would lick the new boy hardly admitted of doubt to the minds of his Form fellows. But Blake had shown that he had plenty of pluck and grit, so a good fight was expected.

"Steady does it, Cissy," whispered O'Connor, before the fight began. "There's a devil in that fellow's eye I don't like. Don't ye get into a temper, or he'll have you, as sure as there's no snakes in Ireland."

"Pooh! I shall only make a mouthful of him," said Langdale confidently.

"You'll find him a mouthful hard to digest, thin!" said O'Connor.

And Langdale, with the idea of showing Pat how mistaken he was, led off by forcing the fighting, and the impetuosity of his attack made Blake give ground a little, and they went right round the ring, Blake on the defensive, till Langdale paused to get his breath, and then Blake went for him like lightning, and before he knew what was happening, the chief of the Lower Fourth was lying on his back, stretched there by one terrific right-hander straight from the shoulder.

O'Connor picked up his man, and sat him on a bed and sponged his face. Langdale was looking dazed.

"What did I tell ye?" growled Pat. "Sure, ye gave yourself away intirely! If ye fight like that, ye may as well give in at once, Cis."

"Rats!" growled Langdale. "I—I wasn't exactly looking for that."

"Ye'll get some more thumps ye're not looking for if ye don't take care."

"Oh, you dry up, you Job's comforter."

And Langdale stepped up to face Blake again.

He fought the second round more cautiously. It was a hard-contested round, and both combatants received a good deal of punishment. When it ended, the blood was trickling from Sidney Blake's nose, and Langdale's left eye was closing up.

The third round was watched with breathless interest by the juniors.

Langdale, to say the least, had not had the best of it so far, and the possibility of a victory to the new boy was beginning to be considered. The comments which Cecil heard as to his possible defeat exasperated him, and in the third round he resolved to finish Blake once and for all.

But it did not work out exactly as he anticipated. He sparred with great skill and care, and when he saw an opening given him by the apparent carelessness of his foe, he rushed in to take advantage of it, and expected to see Blake go rolling over under a heavy right-hander—only it did not happen. It had been a feint on Blake's part, and he was quite on his guard. Langdale's right was swept upward, and before he could recover, Blake's fist smote him full upon the nose like a lump of solid iron, and he went down with a crash that made the floor creak.

He was rather slow in getting up, even with the help of O'Connor. He sat on the bed looking dazed and dizzy while the Irish lad sponged his beated face and wiped the freely flowing "clear" from his battered nose.

"Better luck next time," said O'Connor consolingly.

"Of course that was only a fluke," said Langdale.

"Of course," assented Pat, with a wink at the ceiling.

"I shall lick him, confound you!" growled Langdale, all the more positively because he was beginning to have doubts upon that point himself.

"Of course ye will, Cissy darlint, but do take care, and don't give yourself away."

And in the next round Langdale did take care. But his care was as useless as his rashness had been, for Sidney Blake was warming to his work, while Langdale was getting dazed and fagged, and the current of the onlookers' opinion soon all came to run one way. Blake was getting the best of it.

He knew it, and the knowledge of it made him cooler and more confident. And Langdale was coming to realise it, too, and to realise that his proud eminence as cork of the walk in the Lower Fourth was tottering. He grimly determined to fight to the bitter end.

Langdale was down again at the end of the fourth round. But in the fifth he had a bit of luck, and Sidney went to the floor with a crash under an unexpected blow which caught him

fairly between the eyes. But he jumped up as if he were made of indiarubber. And in the fifth round he came up smiling, though several eager critics remarked that he was not quite so steady on his "pins" as at the start. But he was a good deal steadier than Langdale.

Cecil fought on hard, resolved not to give in while he could stand or see. But Blake began to press him hard, and his guard was faulty, and blow after blow descended upon his face and chest, and his defence grew feebler each moment. Till at last, Blake, rushing in, delivered a terrible right-hander upon his chest, instantly followed up by the left in his eye, and Langdale dropped as if he had been shot.

"I'm done!" he gasped faintly, as Pat lifted him. "You can chuck up the sponge, Paddy." And he sat on the bed blinking at Blake, too thoroughly used up to even think about the position he had lost by his defeat.

Blake stepped up to him and held out his hand.

"Give us your sin, old boy. A few hard knocks needn't make us bad friends, I hope?"

"Arrah, and be sure he's a broth av a boy!" exclaimed O'Connor. And Langdale accepted Blake's hand frankly enough.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Captain of the School—Bitter Blood—A Strange Adventure.

ARTHUR CLARE had become captain of St. Cynthia's. He had not expected the post to be an easy one; and he soon found that Philip Darke meant to do everything in his power to make it difficult.

Darke was on the football committee, which included also Ainger and Wilkinson, of the Sixth, and three Fifth Form fellows. After Darke's repulse of his overtures on the night of the election, Clare was prepared for hostility, and he did not look for it in vain.

The forthcoming match against Clyffe College was the great topic now at St. Cynthia's, and the constitution of the school team caused the captain a good deal of anxiety.

Clyffe was an old rival of St. Cynthia's for football fame, and had always proved the most formidable foe the school had to encounter, so that the match was always looked forward to with a certain amount of anxiety. The last match between the two schools had been won by Clyffe, and the thought of two consecutive lickings was unendurable to the boys of St. Cynthia's. They were resolved to strain every nerve to win, and the chief worry fell upon Clare, as captain of the team.

That the school eleven wanted improving, and that there was material at St. Cynthia's for improving it, he knew, but he knew also that there would be difficulty with Darke when he made his views known.

And before speaking out in committee, Arthur consulted his great chum, Ainger, who, he knew, shared his views upon the subject.

"There'll have to be a change in the team, Ainger," he remarked. "You saw how we fared in the game with the Town eleven last week. We licked them by the skin of our teeth, so to speak. The Town lot can't hold a candle to Clyffe. If we don't play better than we did last Wednesday, we may as well give up all idea of anything but another thrashing from the college."

"That's true enough, Arthur, but you will have to weed out the team a bit. Dacre's form was abominable last Wednesday; he's been going down for a long time. Between ourselves, we know very well that a lot of drinking and smoking goes on in some of the Sixth Form studies, and that's bound to tell upon a player in the long run. I don't find any fault with Darke; he's one of the best wingers we have, but Dacre and Hancock are not good enough."

"That's exactly what I think. Hancock practically gave the Town a goal last Wednesday, and at the time I saw that he wouldn't do. Dacre is as bad."

"They'll have to go," said Ainger decisively.

"I'm afraid there'll be trouble."

"You mean that Darke will oppose it?"

"Yes; he is certain to stand by his chums, and it would be hard to blame him for doing it, in one way."

"Private friendship must always give way to the public good in football matters," said Ainger. "Darke must look at it in that light."

"I'm afraid he won't."

"Then he'll have to be made to," declared Ainger. "I can see what's bothering you, Clare. You think your motives may be misconstrued if you begin your captaincy by a dispute with Darke. But you mustn't let that worry you. I think the majority of the fellows will see things in the proper light, and do you justice. Besides that, my opinion is that Darke means mischief anyway, and that if you conceded anything for the sake of peace, it would only make him more insolent."

A troubled look came over Clare's frank face.

"I hate being on ill terms with anybody," he said, "and it's intolerable that private animosities should be allowed to interfere with the efficiency of the school team. But I'm afraid there's a great deal in what you say about Darke. Anyway, I sha'n't allow any consideration to interfere with my doing my duty as I understand it. We are going to beat Clyffe this time, if I can possibly bring it about."

The football committee met in Clare's study, and, as the captain expected, Darke's face immediately took on a hostile expression when he made the suggestion of reconstituting the eleven that was to meet Clyffe.

"That depends," said Darke. "I'm curious to know whom you want to leave out."

"I don't want to leave out anybody," replied Clare mildly. "What I say is that the team requires fresh blood, and that some of the present members must stand out for the general good. I should hardly think it necessary for me to say that I have no private feeling of any kind against any individual."

"That's all very well," said Darke, "but there's such a thing as prejudice, and in my opinion, the committee ought to consider very carefully indeed any proposal to interfere with the team as it stands."

"Oh, I am not anxious to pick holes in anybody. The backs are as good as any that St. Cynthia's can produce, and so are the forwards."

"I disagree with you, Darke," said Ainger. "Both Hancock and Dacre have gone down enormously, and, in my opinion, there are members of the junior eleven who are more fit to play Clyffe than they are."

"Yes; and both Dacre and Hancock are my friends."

"That doesn't make them any better."

"And it doesn't make them any worse, except in the opinion of Arthur Clare."

"You speak hastily, Darke," said Clare, keeping his temper with difficulty. "I don't think you would make a charge like that if you were calm."

"The facts speak for themselves."

"The facts are that Hancock and Dacre are not fit to play Clyffe, and that I recommend two new forwards in their place," said Clare sharply.

Darke sneered.

"And whom do you recommend? Let's know that, by all means."

"I am willing to leave that to the committee to decide, but I was thinking of Smith and Norris."

"Oh, yes! Both friends of yours. Did you promise them as much before the election?" said Darke scornfully.

Clare sprang to his feet, pale with anger.

"Darke, you'll apologise for that cowardly insinuation if you are going to remain on this committee!" he exclaimed hotly.

"I won't apologise for saying what is true!"

"True!" exclaimed Ainger, jumping up. "Why, you bound—"

Clare made him a sign to be quiet. Darke had risen too, and there seemed a prospect of a regular "row."

"It will be impossible for me to act with Darke if he does not withdraw his words," said the captain. "I leave it to the committee to decide whether he shall go, or whether I shall."

"There's no two opinions about that," said Ainger.

"Darke, you've got to apologise or clear."

And the verdict was general.

"Well, I won't apologise," said Darke obstinately. "And I don't mind if I do retire from a committee ruled by favoritism. But I protest against the whole proceeding, and I shall appeal to the school."

And he walked out of the room.

The business of the committee was then proceeded with, and Clare's suggestions were adopted, but the committee was in a far from cheerful frame of mind. They all felt that Darke meant to make trouble, and to cause as much friction as he could. And Clare, although he had the support of the committee, saw that some of the members were not wholly convinced by his arguments, and, but for opposing him, would have been willing to give the two failures a further trial.

As soon as the result of the meeting of the committee became generally known, feeling ran high at St. Cynthia's on the subject. Most of Darke's partisans sided with their chief, and represented Clare's conduct as the outcome of jealousy and favouritism. On the other hand, Clare's party upheld his decision, and accused Darke of not caring whether St. Cynthia's won or lost the great match so long as he succeeded in getting his friends into the eleven—which was to a great extent true.

Clare's warmest partisans were among the juniors, and the warmest of all was probably Sidney Blake. Blake admired Clare immensely, and he had publicly announced that any Lower Fourth boy who said a word against the captain had better look out for a licking. And in the Lower Fourth Blake's word was law.

For the fight in the dormitory had had the inevitable result. Langdale had fallen from his high estate, and the hundred-and-ninety-ninth boy reigned in his stead. Cecil had had some idea of putting the matter to a second test, but on second thoughts he had decided that he wouldn't. He was no match for Blake, and he had found it out.

But Blake's frank and hearty cordiality of manner removed the soreness of defeat. The victor showed not the slightest trace of any propensity to crowing or bullying, and so Langdale's fall was easy. And ere the dark hues had faded from round his eyes, he had responded to Sidney's friendly overtures as frankly as they were made, and they were on the way to becoming good comrades.

They were, in fact, thrown a good deal together, for to Blake had been assigned a share of the study occupied by Langdale and O'Connor, and so every evening they had to do their preparation in company. And this arrangement soon proved agreeable to all three, for they pulled together famously.

One evening Blake rose with a yawn, and sent his dog-eared Virgil flying across the room, to signify that he was finished, and stood looking out of the window. The trees in the quadrangle were beginning to show their spring green, and birds were twittering in the branches. Over the top of the Principal's house he could see the grey tower, which was all that remained standing of the ancient St. Cynthia's.

"Did either of yon chaps ever explore the old abbey?" asked Blake, turning from the window. "Perkins says that there are no end of vaults and secret passages under the ruins. It would be splendid fun to explore them."

"It's out of bounds," replied Langdale; "Pat and I tried to get there on more than one occasion, but it was no go. Some beast of a prefect or a master is sure to spot you."

"Why are the ruins out of bounds?"

"The doctor says they're dangerous—old, tumbling stairs and pitfalls, and so on. I suppose that's right; but I should like to go all the same."

"Let us go, then," suggested Blake. "I don't see why we shouldn't. Of course, we shall have to break bounds. But that can't be helped. It's really Dr. Earle's fault for placing the abbey out of bounds."

Langdale grinned.



The man took two steps, then turned with the quickness of a tiger, and sprang at Clare, the cudgel whirling aloft. (See page 26.)

"No doubt; but I don't see how we are to manage it without being spotted."

"That's easily settled. We can go at night," said Blake coolly.

Langdale looked a little startled.

"They say the ruins are haunted," he remarked.

"They say a good many things," answered Blake. "If we find a ghost we'll apologise and withdraw, and the most punctilious spectre can't ask more than that."

Langdale laughed, but his doubts were not quite resolved.

"It's all very well to talk about it now," he said. "But when it's dark the thing'll seem a great deal more creepy. Nobody's afraid of ghosts in the day-time."

"Well, I'm not afraid of them in the night-time either," declared Blake. "And if you two funk it, I shall go alone."

"Oh, draw it mild. You wouldn't have the nerve."

"Well, you'll see."

And when they went to the dormitory that night, and lights were out, Blake had not relinquished his idea. Langdale heard him getting out of bed when the hour of eleven boomed out from the clock-tower of St. Cynthia's.

"I say, are you really going, you boulder?" asked Cecil, in astonishment.

"Didn't I tell you so?"

"Yes; but I didn't think you meant it."

"Well, you see now that I do," said Blake, beginning to lace up his boots.

Whereupon Langdale jumped out of bed.

"Well, you obstinate boulder, you sha'n't go alone, then. I'll come with you. Shall I wake O'Connor?"

Pat was snoring away like one who did not mean to wake up till the Day of Judgment.

Blake stepped up to his bed.

"I'll wake him," he said.

And he removed the bedclothes from O'Connor with a single jerk.

"Arrah, then, what are ye at, ye blitherin' gosssoon, ye?" howled Pat, starting up.

"Time to get up," answered Blake. "Aren't you coming to the abbey? Hand me that jug of water, Cis. He isn't half awake yet."

Pat was out of bed in a twinkling.

"I'll come wid ye, ye spalpeen, and keep ye out of mischief! Ugh! how cold it is! How are you going to get out?"

"I did some scouting this evening. There's a little window it will be easy to unfasten, and we can get in again the same way. Come on!"

Some of the other boys had awakened, and wanted to know what was "on." And when Blake explained, the general opinion was that the adventurers would lose their nerve, and return before they reached the haunted abbey.

"We'll see," said Blake cheerfully; and he led the way from the dormitory on tiptoe.

In the silence of the night the stairs seemed to creak with unusual loudness, and the boys held their breath when they passed a door under which gleamed a light. But without mishap they reached the window Sidney had selected as the place of egress, and unfastened it, and one by one passed out.

The night was dark but fine, a few stars twinkled in the sky. It was cold and sharp, and the keen air made them catch their breath quickly.

"We shall have to get across the doctor's garden," said Langdale, in a whisper. "That's the only way to avoid going a thundering long way round. Give us a leg over this wall."

The garden was crossed in safety, with no worse mishap than O'Connor tumbling off a wall into a mass of evergreens. They dragged him out, and proceeded, and in a quarter of an hour they stood among the ruins of the ancient abbey.

The place was certainly ghostly in the extreme. Huge masses of mossy masonry rose on all sides, shadowy, dark, and undefined. The opening where the crumbling stone steps led down into the lower regions was black and forbidding.

Langdale shivered.

"Cheerful sort of place, isn't it?" remarked Blake. "We had better light the lantern before we go down, I think. Nobody will see us here."

He had brought Langdale's bicycle lamp. He struck a match and lighted it, and cast the light into the yawning cavity. The upper steps of a broad stone flight were revealed.

"Come on, chaps."

Blake's perfect coolness reanimated his companions, who were beginning to hesitate. As a matter of fact, the silence and darkness were not without their effect upon Sidney, but he was determined not to show it.

He stepped carefully down, for Langdale had warned him that the steps were in a rickety condition, and led the way below.

A dozen or more steps were there. Then Blake stood upon a floor of cracked and broken flags, and cast the rays of the lantern round him into the endless darkness. He could dimly make out the form of the vaults stretching before him.

"Come on," he said.

And the others, not liking to hang back and show the white feather, followed him. But their faces showed plainly enough how they would have preferred their warm beds to the dark, damp vaults.

Suddenly, when Sidney had proceeded about a dozen yards, O'Connor clutched him by the arm, with a sharp exclamation.

"What's the matter?" demanded Blake, considerable startled.

"Didn't yez see it?"

"See what?"

"The light!"

"What light? Only the one I'm carrying."

"I tell ye I saw a light—yonder. It's—it's the—"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Do you think a howling spectre carries a light around? All the giddy goblins I've ever heard of can find their way in the dark."

But Langdale had turned pale, too, as well as O'Connor, and was casting uneasy glances into the surrounding darkness.

"Fellows have seen that light before," he said. "I believe that's what started the ghost yarn, a light being seen sitting about here after dark. Come now, don't you think we had better clear?"

"There it is again!" gasped O'Connor.

This time Blake saw it, too. A gleam of light, far away in the darkness—how far away he could not exactly tell.

Blake gave a start and stared at it. He was beginning to feel a creepy sort of thrill, in spite of his nerve.

What could possibly be the cause of the appearance of the mysterious light in the depth of the recesses under the ruined abbey?

"It's—it's coming this way," O'Connor gasped.

"Scott! So it is."

The light was indeed advancing towards them. It was becoming stronger and clearer every moment.

Blake blew out his lantern.

"Ye omadhaun!" said O'Connor, with chattering teeth. "What did ye do that for?" Let's get out of this."

Blake's momentary uneasiness had passed. He was quite cool and collected again.

"Don't be an ass, Paddy. I know what that light is. Can't you see by the motions of it, and the height it is from the ground, that it is being carried in somebody's hand? It's somebody else exploring the vaults, and he's no more spectre than I am. Why, if he's caught sight of our light, perhaps he's taken us for giddy goblins. He would have just as much reason, anyway."

Blake's cool explanation reassured his comrades somewhat. The light, now that they watched it more calmly, certainly did give the impression of being carried in a man's hand.

"But who can it be?" whispered Langdale. "Who could be down in these vaults at this time of night?"

"Well, we're here, old son. Perhaps it's some fellow on the same errand."

"It isn't one of our Form, then. We should know about it if it were."

"That's a fact, so if it's a St. Cynthia's fellow, it's a senior, and we had better keep out of sight," Blake remarked.

"Let's cut," suggested Pat.

"Boosh! I'm curious; I want to see who it is."

"If it's a prefect we shall get into a row if we are seen."

"Then we won't be seen. There's certainly plenty of corners here where one can hide."

"But—but suppose it ain't a St. Cynthia's fellow at all. If it's anybody else, he's here for no good."

"In that case we shall see what the rotter's up to, and see what his little game is."

Blake had his way, as he usually did. The boys felt their way into a dark recess, which Blake had observed before he extinguished the lantern, and waited there, watching the approaching light.

Faintly, eerily, through the dark silence came the sound of footfalls!

Blake nudged O'Connor.

"What do you think of your giddy spectre now, Pat? A ghost in boots."

Closer came the light. It was clear that whoever carried it was making for the stone stair by which the boys had descended into the vaults. He would, therefore, pass within a few yards of them, and they could not fail to see who he was. They waited with bated breath.

They could see the figure dimly behind the light now. It came closer; it passed. They saw for one fleeting moment the face as the light passed on towards the stair.

Blake could scarce restrain a cry of astonishment.

He saw the face, and could scarcely believe his eyes.

It was the face of Arthur Claro!

He heard a quick breath from Langdale and O'Connor. He knew that they had recognised the captain of the school also, and were as amazed as he was.

What was Arthur Clare doing in the old abbey at midnight?

The light disappeared. Clare had ascended the old stair, and was gone. Blake stepped out from the hiding-place.

"I wonder what that means, chaps? Thunder! Rush!"

"What is it?" whispered Langdale, catching his breath.

"I—I believe I heard a step," faltered Blake, even his nerve shaken at last. "There's somebody else in the vaults."

Langdale shuddered. To stand there in the black darkness, feeling that something unknown was lurking near them, was terrible.

"For God's sake let's get out of this," whispered O'Connor. "Come on! Don't light the lantern, or it will give us away."

But as he spoke the sound of a click was heard in the darkness, and a sudden brilliant light shot out before them.

What it was was evident enough. A dark lantern had been suddenly turned on by the mysterious lurker in the vaults, who was probably ignorant of the presence of the boys there. It occurred to Sidney at once that the unknown had been following Clare, and now ventured to burn a light because the captain of St. Cynthia's was gone.

The sudden flashing of the bright light dazzled the boys, but Blake caught sight of a tall figure, draped in a long cloak, with a black cloth fastened over the face to form a kind of mask. From holes in this two startled eyes glared out at the boys, who did not wait to take a second look at the terrible figure. The strange apparition made a movement, whether to advance or to recede they never knew, for they bolted like scared rabbits for the stair, and went tearing up it, heedless of falls and collisions and bruises, and rushed out panting into the starlight.

In the open air their fright calmed down somewhat; but the mysterious figure was still before their mental eye, and they hurried away from the ruins, and did not stop till they stood panting under the elms in the quadrangle.

"Easy does it," said Blake. "We don't want to run into Clare, chaps. Wait here a bit."

"What could it have been?" gasped Langdale and O'Connor together.

"That's a little bit of a mystery. I admit I was startled out of my wits, and didn't wait to take a second look," said Blake, candidly. "I dare say we've been frightened for nothing, and that he wouldn't have hurt us, whoever he was."

"I'm jolly glad we didn't stop and risk it," said Langdale, with a shiver. "Of course, it wasn't a ghost."

But he said it in a very doubtful sort of way.

"Of course it wasn't," said Blake immediately. "It was somebody that was watching Clare, though why he should watch him, and why Clare should be there at all, is a mystery to me. But who on earth could the horrid rotter have been?" he continued. "Of course, it wasn't one of the fellows. It was somebody who didn't want his face to be seen if anybody should happen to spot him while he was ambling around the vaults; that was why he was got up like that. Did you ever hear of any other way of getting into the vaults beside from the abbey?"

"I've heard that there's a way from the ruined priory in Glyndale Wood," replied Langdale. "That was on the abbey lands in the old days, before Henry VIII. gave it to the ancestor of Sir Nevil Glyn."

"Then depend upon it, that's the way this joker came," said Blake. "And my idea is that he was watching Clare. The question is, ought we to give Clare a warning that there's a chap who takes such an interest in his midnight perambulations?"

"Just you be careful!" exclaimed Langdale, in alarm. "If Clare knew that we had been there, it would mean a licking all round."

"Scott! I forgot that! We'll think it over. Anyway, the proper caper now is to get back to bed, so here goes."

And in five minutes more they were between the sheets. But it was a long time before slumber visited their eyelids.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. The Fugitive of Glyndale Wood—A Strange Mystery.

TAP!

"Come in," called out Arthur Clare. Sidney Blake walked into the study. The captain of St. Cynthia's looked at him inquiringly.

"I want to speak to you, Clare, if I may."

Clare smiled, and laid aside his Todhunter.

"Go ahead, youngster!"

And without further preamble Blake related the adventure of the preceding night. The young captain's face grew stern, then startled and amazed, as he listened. When Blake had finished, he looked at him with a very peculiar expression.

"Why do you tell me this, Blake? I suppose you know that it is my duty to punish you for breaking bounds last night?"

"Of course; but when I made up my mind to tell you, I decided to risk that. I've told you because I thought you ought to know. I'm not asking you to explain anything, mind. It's no business of mine. But that chap was watching you, and for all I know he may mean mischief, and so I thought I'd put you on your guard."

"That is very kind of you, Blake," said Clare, not exactly knowing what to make of the cool junior. "And to whom else have you told this story?"

"Nobody. Think I can't keep a secret?" said Blake rather indignantly.

"You did not go alone to the abbey?" said Clare.

"Well, no, not exactly alone," admitted Blake.

Clare smiled. He understood the junior's reluctance to inculcate anyone else.

"I won't ask who your companions were, Blake. But did they see just the same as you did?"

"Yes, both of 'em. We talked it over to-day, and decided to speak to you, and I took it upon myself, as it was I proposed to explore the abbey," explained Blake.

Clare was silent, thinking deeply. The story had evidently startled and puzzled him. Blake waited, wondering whether a licking was in store for him or not.

"I am much obliged to you for telling me this," said Clare at length, "yet I do not see how I can overlook such a breach of discipline as breaking bounds at night."

Blake moistened the palms of his hands.

"Lay it on," he said. "Don't mind me—don't mind me at all."

The captain smiled again.

"I must think it over," he said, "and I'll let you know my decision about it some other time. You can go now."

Blake grinned.

"I see; I'm to come up for judgment if called upon," he said. "All right." And with a cool nod he walked away.

Langdale and O'Connor were rather anxiously awaiting his return in the study they shared together.

"Well, licked?" asked Cecil, as Sidney entered.

Blake shook his head.

"No; Clare's a brick. It's turned out all right."

"That's lucky. But, I say, I should like to know what the blithering mystery is," said Langdale, thoughtfully jabbing his pen into O'Connor's Greek lexicon. "Still, I don't think we'll explore the old abbey by night again. It's a little bit too thrilling."

"I mean to toddle over to the old priory next half-holiday," said Blake. "I'm curious to see whether there is really a passage from there to St. Cynthia's."

"Then you'll have to go alone, for Pat and I both play in the Lower Fourth side, against Upper Fourth, on Wednesday."

And when Wednesday came, while Cecil and Pat donned their football things, Sidney Blake strolled away down the lane, and entered the footpath in Glyndale Wood.

Glyndale Wood was part of the Glynhurst Estate, and belonged to Sir Nevil Glyn. In the summer the St. Cynthia's fellows often picnicked there, or fished in the rippling stream that ran through the wood. The ancient priory was in

the heart of the wood, and was one of the loneliest spots in the county.

Blake struck off from the footpath, and passing through the trees, reached the ruins. There was little standing of the old priory but the lower portion of the walls, weather-blackened and moss-grown, with bushes growing thickly amongst the shattered masonry, and now beginning to show the early green of spring.

The silence, the solitude, fell with rather a sense of oppression upon Blake. He wished that one of his chums had been with him. He thought, too, and not without uneasiness, of the mysterious figure of the previous night.

A low doorway, set in massive masonry, led to the crypt which Langdale had told him was under the ruined priory. Blake was stepping towards it when he heard the sound of a movement within, and as he stopped, his heart beating hard, a figure suddenly emerged from the low opening, and stood staring towards the wood, not for the moment seeing Blake, his head being half turned from the boy.

Blake stood still, hardly daring to breathe, his eyes fixed upon the strange figure. A strange figure indeed it was; a man, in clothes that showed the signs of rough travel, stained with mud and torn by briars, and with a face emaciated and ghastly pale, and eyes with a peculiar kind of rolling gleam in them.

The head turned slowly round towards the boy as he stood transfixed, and the gleaming eyes fixed upon him. For a moment or two they stared at each other in silence.

"Who are you?" broke out the man hoarsely. "What are you doing here?"

Blake was startled, almost frightened, by the vehemence of his manner. As he looked at the wild, furtive face a terrible suspicion crossed his mind. Was he in the presence of a madman?

"What are you doing here?"

"I belong to St. Cynthia's," faltered Blake. "I—I didn't know that there was anybody here."

The man stared at him scrutinisingly. His manner had become calmer.

"St. Cynthia's?" he repeated, as if the name struck some chord of memory in his confused brain. "St. Cynthia's! The black box—the black box!"

"Do you know St. Cynthia's?" said Blake.

His confidence had returned to some extent; he saw that this strange being did not mean him any harm.

The other burst into a wild laugh.

"St. Cynthia's! I was there—yes, I was there! How long ago? Thirty—forty—fifty years! I was there!"

Blake looked at him in amazement.

"You don't mean to say you are an old St. Cynthia's boy?" he exclaimed wonderingly.

"I was at St. Cynthia's, I tell you! I used to go into the old abbey. How else should I have known—"

He broke off abruptly.

"Boy, what is your name?"

"Sidney Blake."

"You belong to St. Cynthia's?" said the man eagerly, apparently oblivious of the fact that Sidney had told him so.

"Yes; I'm in the Lower Fourth."

The strange being advanced closer to him. He had clasped his hands in a gesture of appeal, at the same time throwing a wild, unquiet glance towards the circling woods.

"I am an old St. Cynthia's boy. Will you help me, you who belong to St. Cynthia's? Help me, for the sake of the old school!"

"What can I do?" said Blake.

"Get me food—food—food! I am starving! I have not eaten for two days—two years—two centuries!" panted the other.

And in fact his whole appearance was that of one suffering severe privations, and Blake's heart was touched as he looked at him. He had little doubt now that the man was not right in his head, but he was evidently quite harmless. Blake had a couple of sandwiches in his pocket, and he at once drew them out and handed them to the poor wretch. It was painful to see the eagerness with which he devoured them.

"I wish I had more, my poor fellow," said Blake. "But I can get you more if you like. What are you staying here for?"

"They are hunting me."

Blake started.

"You have—escaped—from—from—"

He hesitated.

The other nodded violently.

"Yes, yes! They said I was mad—mad!" He broke into the wild laugh again. "I have suffered enough to make me mad. But I am not mad! Do you think I am mad?" he exclaimed, thrusting his wild face close to Blake's, and staring at him.

The boy jumped back in alarm.

"N-no," he stammered. "But what makes them think so?"

"They don't think so," said the other, with an air of cunning. "They only want to keep me shut up. Do you see?"

"Ah, yes, of course—perfectly! But why do they want to keep you shut up?"

"Because I did not go down in the ship. Because—because—"

He broke off vacantly.

"They are afraid of me, boy. They dare not let me loose. I escaped, and I came here. I know I could hide among the ruins of St. Cynthia's. But I must have food—I must have food! Will you bring me food?"

For a moment it crossed Sidney's mind to connect this strange man with the mysterious apparition of the night before. But he dismissed the idea. The masked man had been nearly a head taller than the man now before him.

"When did you get here?" he asked.

"I don't know. It was in the daylight. I am afraid I was seen, because it was in the daylight. But I must have food! Will you bring me food?"

"I'll cut across to Lonsfield and get some Tommy, if you like," said Blake pityingly. "I could do it in an hour."

"You won't tell anybody you have seen me. Promise me that you won't tell."

"Honour bright."

Blake had no hesitation in giving the required promise. Mad or not, the man's terror showed that he had not been well treated, and he was evidently harmless; and so Blake did not feel in the least called upon to do anything to lead to his recapture.

"But you can't stay here long," he added. "Haven't you any friends you'd like to send to? I'll write a letter for you if you like."

"Friends!" muttered the other, with a despairing gesture. "Enemies—all enemies! Yet—yet—Earle—Bernard Earle—perhaps—"

Blake gave a start.

"Are you speaking of Dr. Earle?"

The man looked at him eagerly.

"What do you know of Dr. Earle, boy?"

"He is principal of St. Cynthia's."

The other passed his hand across his brow with a dazed look.

"Earle! Principal of St. Cynthia's! Can it be the same? But the boy then—the boy!" he exclaimed, as if struck by a sudden idea. He clutched Blake by the arm, and stared earnestly into his face. "Is there a boy, then, at St. Cynthia's—a boy named Arthur Clare?"

"Well, rather! He's captain of the school."

"You are sure—sure?"

"Of course I am!" said Blake, in wonder.

"Heaven is merciful! Let me see Arthur Clare—let me speak to him once!" cried the other. "That is all I ask. Never mind the food. It does not matter. Tell Arthur Clare to come to me—tell him that I can tell him all that he wishes to know. Tell him to come at once! They may find me at any moment. An hour's delay may ruin all. Will you go to him—will you tell him?"

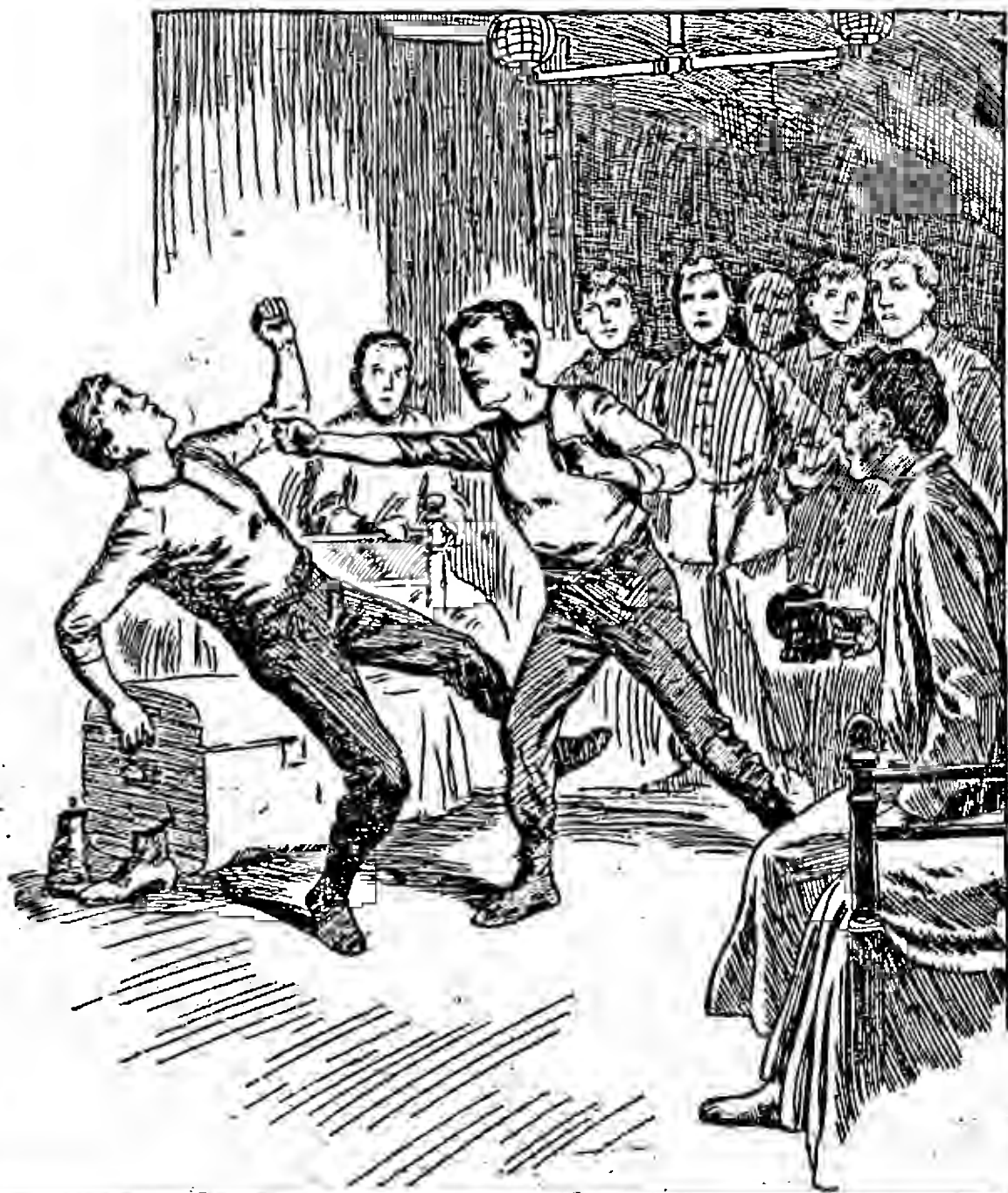
"I will if you like," said Blake, quite bewildered, and inclined to believe that the strange entreaty was only a freak of a mad brain, and yet impressed by the man's vivid earnestness. "I don't know whether he'll come though. He may think it only a lark."

"He must come—he must come! Tell him that his father's friend asks it. Tell him that I know the secret of the black box. Remember, the black box! Go now! Do not lose a moment. But first swear that you will bring Arthur Clare to me."

"I'll bring him if he will come," said Blake.

"He will come when he hears your message. Hasten!"

He waved Blake away with both hands, and disappeared into the crypt. Blake hurried away through the wood, utterly at a loss what to make of the strange affair.



At last, Blake rushing in, delivered a terrible right-hander upon Langdale's chest. The latter dropped as if he had been shot. (See page 12.)

The unknown lurker of the old priory must know something of Clare, that was certain; but he was evidently unsettled in his wits, if not actually mad. The black box! What on earth did it mean? Would Clare know? Or would he take the whole thing for a cock-and-bull story, and refuse to take any notice of it? That certainly seemed more likely than anything else. Still, Blake had given his word, and there was nothing to do but to keep it.

He knew where he would find Clare. The captain had arranged a match that afternoon between two sides picked from the Fifth and Sixth Forms, with a view to finding out the best material for strengthening the first eleven. He was looking on when Blake pulled at his sleeve. Clare glanced down at him.

"What do you want, Blake? I'm busy."

"There's a chap wants to speak to you—"

"Tell him to go and eat coke then."

And Clare turned away.

Blake would have gladly given the whole thing up, but he remembered the wistful, earnest face of the outcast in Glyn-dale Wood, and stuck to his guns.

"I say, Clare, it's important."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know; but he says he was your father's friend, and—"

Clare started as if he had been shot.

"What are you saying, Blake?"

"He told me to tell you so," said Blake desperately,

searched by the look upon Clare's face. "He said I was to tell you he was your father's friend, and that he can tell you the secret of the black box, whatever that is. I don't know whether it's all rot, for he's certainly balmy in the noddle——"

"Where is he?"

"At the old priory in Glyndale Wood."

"I'll go. Ainger, old man, I'm called away suddenly! See this out, will you?"

Ainger looked surprised, but he nodded, and Clare hurried away. To Blake's query as to whether he was wanted, the captain replied only with a hasty shake of the head.

Blake stood staring after him in astonishment. The repeated words of the outcast had produced an effect he had never dreamed of upon Arthur Clare. He was still lost in wonder when a slap on the back startled him.

"Hallo, old son, what are you mooning about?" asked Langdale. "Seen any giddy spectres in Glyndale Priory?"

"Sure he looks as if he had," ejaculated O'Connor. "What has happened to yez, ye gossamer?"

"I s'pose there's no harm in telling you two," Blake observed meditatively.

"Something happened?"

"Yez."

"Then get it off your chest."

"Better not let it go any further than."

"Honour bright."

Blake told what had happened in the old priory. The chums listened with amazement.

"There always was a mystery about Clare," Langdale remarked thoughtfully. "Some of the fellows say he's a ward of the doctor's, and that he doesn't know whether Clare is really his name or not. He's certainly never had any relations come to see him at St. Cynthia's. Perhaps this chap knows something about him. But the black box? What the dickens can that be? I've never heard of it."

"Clare seemed to have heard of it, by the look he gave," remarked Blake. "I'd have given a good deal to see his interview with the lunatic, but I thought he'd rather I wasn't there."

Meanwhile, the captain of St. Cynthia's was hurrying towards Glyndale Wood as fast as his rapid, springy strides could take him.

His face wore a strangely set expression, and his eyes were gleaming.

The message of the outcast had indeed been enough to bring him at once to Glyndale Wood, and it is probable that it would have drawn him away if the boys of St. Cynthia's had been playing Glyffe College, instead of a practice match.

His father's friend! The secret of the black box!

The words rung in his ears as he hurried on towards the old priory. He was too occupied with his thoughts to observe the sound of footsteps in the wood, till a man suddenly sprang out into the footpath before him and barred his way. A man with a bullet-head, a bulldog neck, and little, gleaming grey eyes. He carried a heavy bludgeon in his hand.

"Stop!" exclaimed this unprepossessing individual threateningly. Then, staring at Clare: "Who are you, matey?"

Clare looked at him haughtily:

"What has that to do with you? Get out of my path, will you?"

"No offence," said the man, standing aside, but still eyeing Clare curiously. "No offence, mister; but I'm lookin' fur somebody 'ere, me and my mates, and I thort you was 'im. 'Ave you seen a feller about—a chap who——" And he finished his sentence by tapping his forehead significantly. "Me an' my mates, we're his keepers."

"I have seen nobody," said Clare shortly; and he hurried on.

The man looked after him suspiciously.

"If you ain't seen him, there's somethin' up, anyway," he muttered. "I wonder what that young swell's little game is?"

He plunged into the wood, and a few minutes later joined two men in the thickets, one of them a low-browed ruffian like himself, the other a handsome gentleman in shooting clothes—no other than Sir Nevil Glyn, squire of Lonsfield.

The baronet looked at him inquiringly.

"I thought I heard voices yonder, Wolf."

"Yez, sir; it was only a young swell, from the school, I reckon. I asked him if he had seen our man——"

Sir Nevil started.

"From the school? Which way was he going?"

"Up the footpath."

"That will lead him to the priory. Is it possible that——"

He broke off, his troubled face showing how deeply he was disquieted.

The man called Wolf looked at him curiously.

"He was in a mighty hurry to get somewhere, sir. I saw by his manner that there was some game on; but I don't see how he can be in collusion with our man——"

"Ten thousand devils!" cried Sir Nevil, his secret fears intensified by Wolf's words. "If they should meet—if it is Clare—— Come! Don't lose a second!"

And he went running through the wood towards the priory, bursting furiously through the clinging thickets, his face pale with anxiety. The two ruffians, exchanging a look of wonder, followed him.

Unconscious of all this, Clare hurried on to the priory, and, reaching it, looked round for the man he was to meet there. The ruins seemed deserted, the spring sunshine falling upon still thickets and mossy masonry, without a sign of life. But at the sound of footsteps a head was thrust out of the low doorway of the crypt, and the eyes of the outcast fell upon the captain of St. Cynthia's. He uttered a cry of joy, and came springing out towards Clare with outstretched hands.

"You have come, then?"

Clare looked at him in astonishment. He remembered that Blake had said that the man at the ruins was what he elegantly termed "balmy in the noddle." But the young captain had not expected to see anything like this.

"You know me, then?" he said, astonished at being recognised by a man he never remembered to have seen before.

"Know you! You are exactly what your father was at your age, when he and I were chums together at St. Cynthia's," said the other, gripping both Clare's hands and looking earnestly into his face. "Oh, my dear boy, it does my heart good to see you again, after all these years!"

After all these years! The words had a familiar ring to Clare's ears. He remembered the strange cry of the baronet at the meeting in Darke's study at St. Cynthia's. After all these years! How strange to hear the same words upon the lips of this mysterious being!

"I don't remember seeing you before," he said doubtfully.

"How could you remember, dear, dear boy!" The wildness was all gone out of the strange man's face; only tenderness remained there, with a lurking fear. "You were a baby. I saved your life when they murdered your father."

"Murdered my father!" cried Clare, in horror.

"He went down, down in the cruel sea—they drove him on the rocks. But he gave you into my hands, and I saved you. Heaven, I can still see the waves leaping and foaming round me!" the outcast cried, with a shudder. "I still see them in my dreams, after all these years. I wonder I have not gone mad sometimes." The words recalled his terrors; he cast a fearful glance round at the woods. "Dear boy, they say I am mad; they have kept me shut up, they have beaten me—they are hunting for me now. Save me from them—save your father's friend, who brought you ashore when the Petrel went down with all hands!" He was wandering again now. "Oh, the cold, cruel waves, leaping and foaming—leaping and foaming——" He broke off with a shriek. "Save me—save me!"

"My poor fellow," said Clare pityingly, "you are safe; there is no one here beside ourselves."

The man was staring past him, convulsed with terror, his glaring eyes starting from his ghastly face. Clare looked round in alarm, and saw three figures running towards the ruins from the wood. He recognised the man who had spoken to him in the wood, and the squire of Lonsfield.

Sir Nevil Glyn came panting up. The two ruffians rushed at the shivering outcast. He made no attempt to escape; the sight of the keepers seemed to have paralysed him—or was it the sight of the baronet? It was upon Sir Nevil Glyn that his gaze remained fixed, even after the keepers had seized him—fixed like the gaze of a frightened dog upon a cruel master.

"A nice dance you've led us, ain't you?" growled Wolf

shaking the fugitive roughly as he seized him. "Where have you been these two days, you mad dodger, you?"

The unfortunate man shrank from his rough touch. Clare made a step forward, his eyes gleaming.

"How dare you treat the poor fellow like that?" he exclaimed indignantly. "Mad or not, he has a right to be treated with humanity!"

The ruffian gave him an evil look.

"What's it got to do with you, I'd like to know? We're this 'ere lunatic's keepers, mister, and he's been dodgin' us for two days. The wonder is that he ain't been and done any mischief while he was loose. Why, he's as dangerous as—"

"It is false!" cried the outcast, finding his voice—"it is false! Don't believe him, dear boy. I am not mad, though they have done their best to—"

Wolf's hand, savagely thrust over his mouth, stopped his utterance.

"Nuff of that!" exclaimed Wolf, with an oath. "Jest you come along quiet, or you'll get hurt!"

Clare turned to Sir Nevil Glyn. The baronet had recovered his calmness, and stood looking on with an unconcerned face.

"Sir Nevil, have these men authority to take this poor fellow away? You are a magistrate, and they are on your land—"

"That is true; but they have satisfied me as to their authority," answered the baronet. "The man is mad, and he escaped two days ago from an asylum, and they have been seeking him ever since. But certainly they have no right to ill-use him," he continued. "My men, handle the poor fellow a little more gently. You must remember that he is mad, and therefore is not responsible for the trouble he has given you."

Wolf stared at the baronet for a moment, then he nodded, with a covert grin.

"All right, sir!" he said. "We ain't so rough as the young gentleman seems to think, and when the chap's got his sensible fit on, he ain't afraid of us."

"You had better take him away now."

The prisoner tore himself loose from Wolf's grip for a moment.

"Dear boy, remember—remember—beware of that man—he—"

He was seized and dragged away before he could say more. Clare's fingers tingled to go to his help, but it was futile; even if he could have released him, he had no place of safety for him. He could only have postponed the inevitable capture for a few hours, with the almost certain consequence of additional ill-treatment for the prisoner.

He looked at the baronet. Sir Nevil Glyn had grown suddenly pale, and a startled flash had leaped into his eyes at the words of the prisoner. But as he saw Clare looking at him he lighted a cigar with an air of cool unconcern.

"Poor devil!" he said. "Mad as a March hare!"

"He did not seem to be very mad," said Clare.

"Didn't you hear what he just said?" rejoined Sir Nevil. "Mad, I should think. I believe he was looking towards me when he told you to beware." He laughed. "I have never seen the fellow before, you know."

Clare looked surprised.

"He certainly looked as if he thought he knew you," he remarked.

"Perhaps he took me for somebody else," the baronet said coolly. "I never saw him before, so far as I can recollect. I was out looking for a little shooting when these keepers came looking for him, and after I had satisfied myself as to their authority, I thought I would show them the way to the priory. They had received information about their man being seen in the wood, and I know this was the likeliest place for him to hide. I was surprised to see you here. If I am not mistaken, you are the new captain of St. Cynthia's—the young gentleman I met in my nephew's study a week or two ago?"

Clare coloured a little as he nodded. He was inwardly wondering why the baronet should have considered it necessary to give him that explanation.

"Might I ask what you are doing here?" the baronet said blandly. "I thought it was understood that Glyndale Wood was no longer free to the public."

Clare bit his lip. One of the fruits of the squire's return to his ancestral home was the rescinding of a good many

privileges the boys of St. Cynthia's had enjoyed on his land during his long absence. The right to enter Glyndale Wood, except to cross it by the footpath, was one of them.

"I am sorry to have trespassed on your land, Sir Nevil," said Arthur, reddening. "When I came here I had completely forgotten the new restrictions."

The baronet blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Don't mention it. I only asked why you had come?"

Arthur felt a certain amount of reluctance to satisfy the baronet, but, with the question put in that way, and conscious that he was in fact a trespasser, he could not very well refuse to reply.

"I came here to see that poor fellow."

"You knew he was here."

"I was told so."

And Arthur, raising his cap slightly, turned away, and strode through the trees towards the footpath, leaving the baronet to smoke his cigar alone among the ruins.

But when he was alone Sir Nevil flung the unfinished Havana into a bush, and stood with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, a thoughtful shade upon his brow.

"Did he come here in the hope of seeing Clare, then? How could he possibly have known that he was at St. Cynthia's—I did not know it till I saw him there! Was it by chance—at all events, he can have told him nothing, or Clare's manner would have been very different! But—the devil—I think we were only just in time!"

And the baronet strode away towards Glynhurst Manor with a gloomy brow. There were many people on the countryside who envied the rich young squire; and yet, while fortune seemed to smile upon him, black care was eating deep into his heart.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Football Match.

A SPRING day, bright and clear, but sharp and bracing; the ideal day for a football match. It was the long-looked-for day of the great match, St. Cynthia's against Clyffe College.

The St. Cynthia's team were in fine fettle. Clare's indefatigable labours had not been without their result. And he was satisfied that the team in its present form would be able to give the visitors a warm reception.

He was not quite easy in his mind about Darke. The prefect had protested vehemently against the exclusion of Hancock and Dacre, but without result. In a practice match Clare had given him an opportunity of showing what they could do, and the result had confirmed him in his opinion that he would not be justified in playing them against Clyffe. And so he had firmly given his final decision, and they had to go.

"Darke will make further trouble if he can," he remarked to Ainger in the morning. "He is deeply out about Hancock and Dacre being left out."

"I don't believe he cares two pins for their disappointment," declared Ainger. "He simply seizes on that to make capital out of. But I don't see what he can do now. You don't think he'd be blackguard enough to fail us in the game, do you?"

"I shouldn't like to think that of anybody, let alone a St. Cynthia's fellow," said Clare gravely. "Perhaps I'm over suspicious, but certainly it has seemed to me as if Darke had something up his sleeve."

And as the time drew nigh for the visiting team to arrive at St. Cynthia's, it turned out that Clare's uneasiness was not without foundation. The wily prefect had a secret card to play.

"I should like to speak to you, Clare," Clare looked up, and nodded cordially enough to Philip Darke. "It's about your decision. You said last night that you had irrevocably made up your mind."

"That is so, Darke, and I am sincerely sorry to have to decide in a way you take amiss."

"We can let that pass," said the prefect with a sneer. "I have been thinking over your decision, and, as you know, I believe that it is solely aimed at me. Under these

circumstances, I do not feel justified in playing in a team from which my friends are excluded, as I believe, by favouritism. I resign."

Clare stared at him. There came a loud murmur from the Sixth Form fellows standing round. Darke met it with a look of sullen defiance.

"Are you serious, Darke?" said Clare slowly. "Is it possible that you mean to leave the school in the lurch like this?"

"Shame!" exclaimed Ainger.

"I mean what I say," replied Darke sullenly. "You have got two new forwards; you can get another one, I suppose. I am not a better footballer than either Hancock or Daere, and you have turned both of them out."

"You are incomparably better. You know you are the best winger we have; we cannot get another inside left to take your place with anything like your form. You have no right to spring this on us at the last moment. It's mean and cowardly."

"Thank you," said Darke sneeringly. "Really, I had no idea that my services were so very valuable."

"The school has a right to insist upon your playing, and in the name of the school I call upon you to withdraw your resignation."

"I will do so, with pleasure, if Hancock and Daere are reinstated."

"That is impossible, and I refuse to discuss it."

"Then I have no more to say." And the prefect made a motion to walk away.

"Stop a minute," said Clare, with a glint in his eyes. "Let's have this matter settled. Am I to understand that you definitely refuse to play?"

"Except on the conditions I have stated."

"That is, you refuse. Then in return, please understand this—you are acting like a cad, like a fellow without any sense of honour, and while I remain captain of St. Cynthia's, you shall never play for the school again. Now go."

Darke started a little, and bit his lip, but there was nothing for him to do but to go, and he went without another word.

Clare turned to Ainger.

"We shall have to find another inside left," he said briefly.

Ainger looked deeply troubled, but he nodded assent. He held with Clare's rejection of Darke's insolent demand, but his expectation of a victory over Clyffe had become shaky. There was no disguising the fact that Darke was one of the school's best players, head and shoulders above the rest of the team, with the exception of Clare and Ainger, and the team as it now stood represented the best material at St. Cynthia's. Where was the new man to come from?

That was a question for Clare to decide, and he ran over in his mind every possible fellow. He could think of nobody who was a patch on Darke. He realised that the prefect's defection meant a weak spot in the forward line of the school team, which against players like the Clyffe lot might very easily spell defeat. It was bitter, very bitter, to the young captain, to realise that Darke's cowardly desertion might mean the waste of all his labour, all his efforts to organise victory for St. Cynthia's.

He was not surprised to find that some of the team and of the football committee were inclined to give in to Darke, and accept his services on his own terms. But Clare soon put a stop to talk of that kind. Good-natured, even too good-natured as he usually was, he had put his foot down, and was as firm as a rock.

Darke's manoeuvre excited a sensation in the school, many even of those who had hitherto been his warmest partisans turning against him at last. To wreak his grudge against Clare at the expense of risking the school's victory, was the surest way to unpopularity. And the captain's declaration, that he should never again play for St. Cynthia's, was generally approved. The prefect himself realised probably, that he had gone too far, but he had left himself no retreat.

The indignation of the juniors was boundless. Although the Lower Forms were of course not represented in the first eleven, they took as deep a pride and interest in the team as their elders, and felt the keenest anxiety about the form of the players, and the chances of a win for St. Cynthia's.

"Did you ever hear of such a rotten mongrel, chaps?" cried Sidney Blake excitedly, to a group of juniors in the quadrangle. "He ought to be kicked out of St. Cynthia's, neck and crop, the beast. Why——"

"Scat! here he comes," said Langdale hastily. Darke

had emerged from the school-house, and was passing the group of youngsters.

"Let him come," answered Sidney recklessly. "Hiss him. Let the rotter see that we ain't afraid to show what we think of him. Hiss!"

The excited juniors needed little urging, to forget even their terror of a prefect. A perfect storm of hisses greeted Philip Darke as he passed.

He stopped, glaring at them in astonishment and rage.

"Why, you cheeky rats——"

The hisses burst forth with renewed vigour. The prefect, black with passion, made a savage rush at the youngsters. They scattered, but he collared O'Connor and began to thrash him unmercifully. Pat roared like a bull, struggling and kicking.

"Rescue," shouted Blake; and he rushed to O'Connor's aid, backed up by some of the bolder spirits among the juniors.

Darke released O'Connor to defend himself from his new assailants, and seized Sidney Blake and twisted his arm cruelly. Blake promptly retorted by kicking his shins. The prefect gave a howl of pain, and clenching his fist, struck the boy a brutal blow. Blake dropped as if he had been shot. He did not rise; the savage blow had stunned him.

Darke changed colour as he saw the effect of his hasty blow. He had not meant to hit so hard; in his fury he had forgotten himself.

Langdale knelt down beside Sidney and raised his head. The boy's eyes opened and stared wildly at him. Philip Darke, relieved to see him returning to consciousness, hurried away from the spot. He had for the moment feared that he had seriously injured the boy, and unpleasant visions of the consequences had floated through his mind. Blake rose, helped by Langdale, looking white and dazed.

"The cowardly hound," cried Langdale wrathfully. "Fancy hitting a youngster like that! You ought to go to the doctor and tell him, Blake!"

"Rats," replied Sidney cheerfully. "I will make him sit up myself as soon as I get a chance. Scott! how my head aches. There'll be a nice big lump there soon. Oh, the rotter, I'll get even with him before long."

But, save for a black bruise, Blake was all right again when the time came to watch the football match.

The Clyffe team arrived, and were cordially welcomed. And all St. Cynthia's, of course, turned out to witness the match. After anxious cogitation, Clare had picked out Bruce, of the Upper Fifth, to take the deserter's place. Bruce had played inside left in a school match a few days before, and had acquitted himself creditably. He was not anything like Darke's form, and Clare took him on with many misgivings. But it was the best he could do, and he had a strong hope that the school would yet pull through the ordeal.

The St. Cynthia's captain looked over the Clyffe team with a keen eye. They were in fine form, and looked fit for anything. Warrington, their captain, was a giant, a host in himself. The team was as good as anything Clyffe College had ever sent out, and there was no mistaking that St. Cynthia's had all its work cut out to win.

Clyffe won the toss, and kicked off. The game began with spirit, the school forwards attacking, led in fine style by Clare, who was the finest centre-forward St. Cynthia's had ever produced. And in a few minutes the blue and white of the school team, and the red and white of the visitors mingled close to the Clyffe goal, which was besieged in a very early stage of the game.

Warrington got the ball away, however, and passed to a Clyffite, who escaped with it, and got through the school backs, but Wilkinson in goal was as cool as a cucumber, as alert as a monkey, and he saved with great skill, and the school crowd cheered him joyously. And then Ainger got on to the ball, and passed to Clare, who got away in splendid style, and shot the first goal for St. Cynthia's amidst a roar of exultant cheering.

"Hurrah!" yelled Sidney Blake, giving Langdale a thump on the back that made him stagger. "That's the style, old son!"

"Here, I say, draw it mild!" gasped Langdale, getting out of the reach of his enthusiastic chum. "Just you moderate your transports, fathead!"

The early success seemed to invigorate the school team. The visitors strove hard to equalise, but at half-time they had not succeeded in doing so.

In the interval the boys exchanged gleeful congratulations.

Darke's defection had not apparently done St. Cynthia's any great damage so far. And Darke, who was watching the game, felt the fiercest rage and hate surging up in his heart. He had thought that his defection would be a knockdown blow to Clare. Was St. Cynthia's going to win without him?

The second half began amidst great excitement on the part of the spectators.

It was clear that Clyffe meant to put their best work in to get level. Warrington and his forwards swooped down upon the ball, and by luck and pluck got it away from the blue and white team, and went careering towards the school goal. Even Clare was outgeneralled by the Clyffe captain, and Ainger was lying on his back, rolled over by a charge, when the Clyffe forwards went goalward. The school backs put up a good defence, but they were as infants before the mighty Warrington, and Wilkinson in goal was the last hope; and this time his luck was not so good, or Clyffe's luck was better, for Warrington took a goal in the nearest kind of way.

And then the Clyffe partisans who had come to see their team lick St. Cynthia's cheered themselves hoarse.

The rivals were equal now. When St. Cynthia's kicked off again the excitement was intense and increasing.

Both sides were in fine fettle, both determined to win.

And Clare knew that but for Darke's desertion, the victory of the school would have been assured, for they were putting up such a splendid game that if they had been at full strength they would have been irresistible. If Darke had been in his old place of inside-left, Clyffe might never have taken that goal. But things were panning out better than Clare had dared to hope, and he felt that at the worst now it would be a draw. But he meant to strain every nerve to make it a win.

Gallant was the fight, prolonged with resolute pluck on either side. Boundless courage, presence of mind, quick resource and resolve, all the fine qualities which the grand game calls for in its votaries, were exhibited as well by Clyffites as by the St. Cynthia's team, and there seemed hardly a pin to choose between them. And it was getting perilously near time for the whistle to blow, and still the result was undecided. Was it to be a draw? Arthur Clare inwardly swore that it should not be.

The St. Cynthia's team made a splendid effort, obeying Clare as one man, and before a determined attack the Clyffites broke, and St. Cynthia's fairly rushed the ball goalward, scattering the Clyffe backs before that desperate charge, and Ainger took a goal in superb style. How the school crowd roared then!

The whistle blew. St. Cynthia's had won the great match by two goals to one, after as stoutly contested a fight as anyone there could remember. Blake and his chums hurraed till they were black in the face. The excitement was almost delirious! Everybody was cheering frantically, the Clyffe team coming in for quite an ovation, for all recognized that they had fought a gallant fight, and had been unlucky to lose. It had been a splendid game, and credit was due to every player in it.

There was one, however, who slunk away from the field with black rage and malice in his heart. It was Philip Darke. The team had won without him; his cowardly blow at Clare had failed, or, rather, it had recoiled upon himself. In that, the hour of Clare's triumph, Darke felt that he could have killed him.

But one scowling face was not noticed among so many joyous ones. In the general jubilation nobody thought of Philip Darke and his chagrin and baffled malice.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Sidney Blake Makes a Discovery.

"Is there any news, sir?"

It was Arthur Clare who spoke. He was seated in the doctor's study on the evening of the day after the great victory over Clyffe College.

There was a shade of troubled thought on the doctor's kind old face.

Upon his return from the mysterious meeting at Glyndale Priory a week before, Clare had told his kind guardian all the circumstances of it, and one thought had immediately entered the doctor's mind.

"It was Gabriel Locke," he said, with conviction. "It was the man who brought you to me when you were a little child, Arthur. He must be found; and if it be true that he is mad, he shall, at least, be placed in kind and careful hands."

To find the unfortunate man who had been dragged away by the keepers from the old Priory had not appeared to the doctor at first a difficult task. He had called upon Sir Nevil Glyn, who, when he learned what was wanted, professed himself ready to render any assistance in his power. But then unexpected difficulties had arisen. If the baronet's account was correct, the two keepers had wilfully deceived him, for a very little inquiry showed that the asylum from which they were supposed to have come had no existence. They had, in short, disappeared with their prisoner, without leaving a trace behind.

The doctor's next step was to send for a detective from London to investigate the matter. Clare's eager interest in the quest will be easily understood. An opportunity of learning the long-hidden secret, the secret of his birth, had presented itself to him, only to be snatched away again, and he was intensely anxious to meet the mysterious man of the Priory again.

"Is there any news, sir?"

The doctor shook his head sadly.

"Nothing of consequence, Arthur. Mr. Keene has traced the poor fellow and his keepers to a railway-station, and there the track is lost again. It appears certain that Locke is confined in some private asylum, but where, is a mystery. I have advertised for information, by the detective's advice, but hitherto without result."

Clare looked very thoughtful.

"You still think it was Gabriel Locke, sir?"

"I am sure of it," replied Dr. Earle, with conviction. "No one else could have sent that message to you. Besides, his coming to hide in the ruins of St. Cynthia's is an argument in favour of his being Locke. Evidently he knew these ruins well, or he would not have hidden the black box here."

"No doubt. What he told you, then, on that night so long ago, was true—that he had enemies who were seeking him. It must be the same persons who are keeping him a prisoner now in an asylum."

The doctor nodded.

"It is more than probable."

"Is it not strange that Sir Nevil Glyn should have been so easily deceived by this man Wolf," said Clare abruptly. "There is something in Sir Nevil's conduct which I do not understand. And why did Locke warn me against him?"

"A freak of an unlinged brain, I am afraid," said the doctor.

"It did not strike me in that light. And, it is strange that Sir Nevil should assure me that he did not know the man, when he had already mentioned to you upon one occasion that he knew Gabriel Locke."

"But he has assured me that he does not think the man at the ruins was Locke, that if he was, he was changed beyond recognition."

"Yes, he says so," assented Clare.

The doctor looked at him in surprise.

"Have you any reason for doubting Sir Nevil's word, Arthur?"

Arthur coloured a little.

"It is a painful thing to doubt anybody's word, sir, but I must admit that somehow I do not quite trust Sir Nevil Glyn."

"But what reasons have you for distrusting him?"

"You must admit that there is a mystery somewhere, sir. He fainted when he first saw me, and used some very strange expressions—"

"But he has explained that—"

"By my resemblance to an old friend who is dead?"

"Yes; as I told you."

"But people do not curse old friends, I suppose; and when he came to his senses he both pushed me away savagely and cursed me. If ever a man was in a blue funk, sir, he was at that moment. All that is not explicable. But that is not the only circumstance. It was Sir Nevil who interrupted my talk with Locke before I had time to learn anything. It is Sir Nevil now who really prevents us from tracing Locke. It is Sir Nevil who declares that he does not recognise Locke, yet all the time at the Priory the poor fellow was watching him with a look of fear, and his last words were a warning to me against Sir Nevil. It appears to me impossible to doubt

that Sir Nevil really did know him, and that he is trying to deceive us. I hope you don't think me suspicious, sir, but I cannot help thinking so."

"The doctor's face was very grave.

"You surprise me very much, Clare. Yet there is certainly something in what you say. Is it your theory, then, that Sir Nevil is one of the enemies of whom poor Locke stood so deeply in fear?"

"I cannot help thinking that it is very possible, sir."

The doctor nodded.

"You may be right, Arthur. And if so, a good deal of light is let in on the subject. I will consult Mr. Keene; he is quite a reliable man, and I can trust to his discretion."

The doctor reflected a good deal over what Clare had suggested, with the result that he shared the captain's distrust of the baronet. It happened that Sir Nevil was taking a deep interest in the quest of Locke, and had several times called in at St. Cynthia's to ascertain whether anything had been discovered. The doctor anticipated this next visit very uncomfortably. He was the worst hand in the world at dissimulation, and he was afraid that the baronet would read a good deal in his look and manner. And his fears were not without foundation, as we shall see.

While the doctor and Clare were discussing this matter in the principal's study, the three chums were also in council in the study they shared together.

"I am going to get even with that brute Darke somehow," Blake announced. "See this lump on my cocoonut. It's as big as a walnut. I'll make him sit up before I've done with him."

Langleisle looked up from drawing on his blotting-paper an impossible Jap slaying half a dozen equally impossible Cossacks, and chewed the handle of his pen thoughtfully.

"What can you do?" he asked.

"I've been thinking——"

"Does it hurt?"

Blake flung a book at him and continued:

"And I've got an idea. I'm going to pay a visit to his study this evening——"

"Mind he don't catch you there. He'd skin you."

"I'll take care that he doesn't catch me."

And an hour later, Blake, having scouted round and ascertained that no light was burning in Darke's study, opened the door cautiously, and went in, and closed it behind him. The blind was up, and the starlight was sufficient for his purpose.

He took a thin cord from his pocket, and tied it from the leg of the table to a box on the other side of the room, so that it stretched, a few inches above the floor, directly in the path of anyone entering the room. He had just finished to his satisfaction, and had risen to his feet, when footsteps became audible in the corridor without. He started. If it happened to be Darke coming to his study there would be no time for escape. He devoutly hoped that it was not Darke, but it would not do to risk it, so he hastily squeezed himself behind a cabinet that stood corner-wise in the furthest corner of the room, and waited with bated breath for the footsteps to pass on.

But they did not pass on, they halted at the door, and Sidney heard the handle turn. He held his breath.

"Come in, uncle. I'll have the gas alight in a jiffy."

Blake trembled.

It was Philip Darke, and by the worst of bad luck Sir Nevil Glyn. Why had the squire chosen that unluckiest of all times for visiting his nephew. Blake recollected that he had seen Sir Nevil's horse standing at the gate a while before; the baronet was calling on the doctor. And now——

A sudden crash and a wild yell rang through the study. Darke's foot had caught in the cord, and he had gone down headlong on his hands and knees.

"What's the matter, Phil?" asked Sir Nevil, in surprise.

"Oh, oh! I caught my foot in something. Look out!"

But the warning came too late, for Sir Nevil, following his nephew into the room, had caught his foot in a similar manner, and he came down upon Darke with a yell.

The swearing and scrambling that followed made Blake grin. In spite of the danger he would be in if he were discovered, he could not help enjoying the discomfiture of the bullying prefect.

There was the scratch of a match, and a light in the room. Darke, still grumbling and cursing, lit the gas. The prefect

was hurt, for the baronet had fallen fairly upon him, and Sir Nevil was no light weight.

"Look! It's a trap laid on purpose," exclaimed Darke, bending down and jerking the cord away from the table-leg. "It is the work of one of the juniors, and I'll make him smart for it."

"Never mind that now," said Sir Nevil. "Shut the door. I want to speak to you, and I don't want any listeners to what I'm going to say."

Blake felt a cold perspiration break out over him. There was a peculiar significance in Sir Nevil's tone, and the boy wished he were a hundred miles away. It was horrible to be compelled to listen to a private conversation, and yet to reveal his presence meant to receive a brutal thrashing. He hesitated, not knowing what to do.

The door closed, and a locker opened; there was a clink of glasses and a smell of spirits. The baronet's voice went on:

"It's about Clare."

"What about him, uncle?"

"After the scene in this study a few weeks ago, you know perfectly well that I take a certain interest in Clare."

"I haven't troubled my mind about it, uncle. It's no business of mine."

"I know it's no business of yours, but that hasn't prevented you from wondering and conjecturing," replied the baronet tartly. "Don't try to deceive me, Phil. Look here, my boy. There is a service I want you to do for me."

"I will do anything, uncle."

"You cannot say that I have not done well by you, Phil. I placed you at St. Cynthia's, and I am going to send you up to Oxford when the time comes, and I shall settle you in life. I have a right to ask something in return, even something you may find difficult and a bit unpleasant, perhaps."

Darke looked at the baronet in wonder.

"What is it you want, uncle?"

"Listen. The other day Arthur Clare met a man named Gabriel Locke at the ruined priory in Glendale Wood—a man who knew his antecedents. The man was mad—his keepers arrived and took him away before he could tell Clare much—whether he told him anything I do not know for certain. Clare and Dr. Earle are having this lunatic sought for now, in the hope of learning something from him. Now, I am determined that he shall not be found."

Darke stared.

"Why?"

"Never mind why," the baronet said icily. "It is my whim. I have no liking for Clare, and I am determined that he shall never discover the secret he wishes to learn. That is enough for you to know, Philip."

"If you have anything against Clare, I am with you tooth and nail," he said eagerly. "I hate him—I could kill him."

The baronet gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Good. Now, Dr. Earle has called in a London detective, one Keene, to seek for Locke. I have taken a great interest in the case, and up till the present I have been in the doctor's confidence. But now there is a sudden change. I have just called on the doctor, as you know. His manner has totally changed."

"He knows something then?"

The baronet tugged uneasily at his moustache.

"There must be a reason for the change. Yesterday he was frank and open—to-day he is silent, embarrassed, evidently determined to tell me nothing, and yet trying to act in a way to avoid exciting my suspicion and resentment. He tried to be as cordial as usual, but it was a dismal failure. What is the reason?"

"Perhaps they have found Gabriel Locke and he has told them——"

Sir Nevil made an impatient gesture.

"He has not been found."

"But he has told you nothing, so how——"

The baronet smiled grimly.

"I have the best of reasons for knowing that, Phil. As a matter of fact, I have taken effective measures to prevent Locke ever being found. I am not afraid of that. But the doctor has learned something—I cannot say what. It may be that the detective has hit upon something. At any rate, I must find out what it is. I cannot explain to you how important the matter is, Philip. But it is of the first importance to you and to me."

"To me?" ejaculated Darke, in amazement.

"Yes; for you and I stand or fall together." The baronet paused, as if undecided how much he could safely confide to his nephew. His face was dark with anxious thought. "Philip, my boy, you know how to keep a secret when it affects your own interests. I may as well tell you, then, that if the whole truth of this affair came to light I should be ruined, and you, as a matter of course, would be penniless."

The prefect stared at him blankly, wondering whether he had taken leave of his senses. But the baronet's anxious, troubled face showed how deeply he was in earnest.

"Ruined, uncle! I don't understand how that can be," faltered Darke.

"But it is true, nevertheless; and now you see that for your own sake as well as mine you had better help me tooth and nail."

"I will do anything in my power. But what can I do?" "I want to know this secret, whatever it is. You must find it out for me, Phil. You will have opportunities, or you can make them. Play the spy; listen to what you can; above all, if you could intercept some letter of the detective's to Dr. Earle, it might give them away. I am horribly uneasy; although I think I have secured myself at all points, yet I know very well that there may be a weak spot somewhere. If you can discover what I want to know, Phil, I will give you five hundred pounds."

The prefect's eyes glistened.

"I'll do my best, uncle. I can't say I exactly like the idea, but if so much as you say depends upon it, I should be a fool to hesitate. Rely upon me."

"I do, Phil. And as soon as you have anything to communicate, ride over to the Manor."

"Very well. I hope it will be soon."

The baronet was silent for a few minutes, thinking deeply.

"What terms are you on with Clare?" he asked abruptly.

"We are at daggers drawn since the Clyffe College match," answered Darke. "I refused to play for St. Cynthia's, and that brought things to a climax."

"That is unfortunate. If you had been on good terms with him, you would have found it easier to do as I want."

"Very likely, but—"

"Is it too late to change your tactics? Suppose you were to make advances to Clare, how is he likely to receive them?"

There was a very long pause before the prefect answered.

"I don't know," he said at length; "it wouldn't be a pleasant task for me, and yet—"

"Well, what?"

"I made a false move in refusing to play against Clyffe. I have lost ground with my own party through that. Perhaps if I took a new tack, I might recover it," the prefect said thoughtfully. "If I admitted I was in the wrong, and took the line of forgetting past differences and all pulling together for the good of the school, I think it would do. Clare is as unsuspicious as a baby, and that is just the sort of talk to go down with him. I think it might be done, uncle."

"If you could gain his confidence, it would make the thing much simpler."

"I don't know about gaining his confidence. Clare is as close as an oyster. I don't think he confides much even to his chum Ainger, but I will do the best I can."

The baronet rose.

"Do your best, Phil, and you shall not lose by it. And don't forget to let me have news as soon as you have any."

The prefect accompanied his uncle from the study to see him as far as the gate. That was Sidney Blake's opportunity.

He scrambled out from behind the cabinet, pale as death; and as soon as the footsteps had died away down the corridor, he cautiously opened the door and stepped out. He was desperately anxious to get clear before Philip Darke could return. The corridor was empty, and he scuttled along it swiftly.

But as he passed the door of Clare's study it opened, and the captain of St. Cynthia's stepped out, and Sidney ran full tilt into him.

Clare staggered, and caught at the doorpost with one hand, but with the other he seized Blake by the collar.

NEXT WEEK!

A GRAND STORY OF THE BOATRACE AND SEXTON BLAKE, ENTITLED
"ON THE TRACK."

"Where are you running to, Blake?"

"I—I," stammered Blake. "Let me go."

"Not so fast. You have been up to some mischief in one of the Sixth Form studies." Then, as the

captain saw the pallor of the junior's face, he looked at him curiously. "What is the matter, Blake? What has happened?"

Sidney had not had time to think whether he should tell Clare of the plot he had overheard in Darke's study. But at the captain's question he made up his mind, without pausing to reflect.

"Please, Clare, I've got something to tell you."

"Come into my study," said the captain shortly.

"I—I couldn't help hearing," panted Blake; "if I had shown myself, Darke would have given me an awful licking. I didn't want to listen, but I couldn't help it, and I heard them plotting against you!"

"Against me! Whom?"

"Darke, and Sir Nevil Glyn."

Clare started. And then the whole story came breathlessly out. Clare listened, the shade on his brow growing ever darker and sterner.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Professor Gryp's Victim.

"FOOL! Tell me, where is the black box, and the next hour you are free!"

Sir Nevil Glyn was pale with anger, his eyes were fixed fiercely upon the half-cunning, half-terrified face of the miserable wretch before him.

It was a dull, dark apartment with bare, washed walls, and a window set high out of reach and barred with iron. A room where the silence was continually broken by strange thrilling cries from the other parts of the building—meaningless cries and howls—a room in Professor Gryp's private asylum.

"Fool! Mad fool! Of what use is the secret to you? What can it matter to you whether I discover the black box or not?"

"You shall not rob him."

"Curse you, for an obstinate fool! Is your freedom nothing to you?"

A cunning look passed over the half-sane face.

"My freedom? Would you let me go, to tell what I know to all the world? Liar!"

The baronet hit his lip.

It was not pleasant to be read so easily by one who, if not actually a lunatic, was very near to lunacy—driven there by hard usage and vain pining for liberty. His motives, his intentions, were quite clear to the half-witted prisoner, and he could not deceive him.

"Tell me where the black box is hidden, and I swear that you shall be free."

"I don't believe you; but if I did, I would tell you nothing."

"You shall be made to tell," said the baronet, between his teeth.

The prisoner chuckled cunningly.

"I can keep a secret. You did not learn from me that Frank's boy still lived; you did not learn from me the existence of the black box and the papers. You believed that I had escaped alone from the wreck of the Petrel. Ha, ha! When you hunted me down, when you shut me in this prison, I hugged that to myself—the knowledge that the true heir of Glynhurst was still living, that some day he would find the black box and know who he was, and regain his inheritance."

"Ah, never—never!" said the baronet, with an oath. "In spite of your cunning, you mad villain, I have discovered all that, and I shall discover also the black box."

"You cannot!" He chuckled again. "You have sought it, in these past weeks, have you not? I know you have. Have you found it? Ha, ha!"

Sir Nevil Glyn swore savagely.

"You will never find it. It is Frank's boy who will find it, and learn the truth from it!"

"And if he should," said Sir Nevil fiercely, "it will benefit him little, for I will kill him like a dog! But it shall never come to that. You know where you hid the black box, and you shall reveal it to me!"

"Never!"

"I will wring the secret from you! You are at my mercy. What passes within these walls is unknown to the outer world. Professor Gryp is my tool. I will have the secret from you or kill you by inches!" hissed the baronet.

The unhappy man shrank away, shuddering. His terror of the baronet was very real. Yet he did not falter in his determination. To keep his secret had become with him a fixed idea, and in spite of his weakness—his fear, his wandering senses—he would have parted with his life sooner. He kept to his purpose with the obstinacy of a madman.

"I will tell you nothing," he muttered, shrinking away from his tormentor. And then he began to wander, his disordered brain affected by his terror. "Nothing! Nothing—you shall not rob Frank's boy! You killed him! Oh, the cruel waves—the cruel waves!"

He mumbled indistinctly, rocking himself to and fro. Sir Nevil turned on his heel and strode fiercely from the room.

"You have made nothing of him, Sir Nevil!"

Professor Gryp asked the question in his oily tones. A little stout man, with an oily face, and cruel little piggy eyes, and a manner that could be as servile to his patrons as it was tyrannical to the poor wretches under his charge.

"Nothing," answered the baronet, with a gesture of fury. "He is still obstinate. Professor, you have had a long experience of lunatics, is there no way to cure a madman of his obstinacy?"

The professor smiled—a cruel, oily smile.

"Many ways, Sir Nevil. If you desire it, I will find a way."

"He has hidden somewhere a certain box containing important family documents belonging to me," the baronet explained. "It is of the greatest importance that the documents should be recovered. I did not discover the loss of them until my return to England. If you could compel him to give up the secret, I would willingly pay two hundred pounds for the service. It would be worth that to me."

The little piggy eyes glittered with avarice.

"Rely upon me, Sir Nevil. He shall speak."

And Sir Nevil Glyn left the asylum with a feeling of assurance that the professor would be as good as his word. Certainly, if cruelty could accomplish it, Professor Gryp was not likely to fail. He was to "begin," as he termed it, at once, and send for the baronet as soon as his "process" had inclined the unhappy prisoner to speak freely. What his "process" was, the baronet did not inquire; conscience was not dead within him, and he shrank from knowing what the victim was to suffer. But he did not relent. He had too much at stake for that.

And the same night, as he smoked his after-dinner cigar in the old oak dining-room at Glynhurst Manor, he heard the tramp of galloping hoofs on the avenue, and, walking to the window, looked out in time to see Philip Darke dash up on his pony.

He started. What did his nephew's hasty coming portend? He waited anxiously for the prefect to join him. Had he discovered anything? Did he bring news?

But the moment Darke entered the room, Sir Nevil saw that he brought bad tidings.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Glimpse of the Secret.

"CAN I speak to you for a few minutes, Clare?"

Arthur Clare stopped as Darke spoke. It was the day following the adventure of Sidney Blake in the prefect's study. The young captain of St. Cynthia's was crossing the quadrangle when Darke came up to him.

Clare's face grew a shade darker.

"Certainly," he said drily.

"Some time ago, just after the election, you told me you were willing to bury all past differences, and start afresh," said Darke. "I wasn't willing; I admit I was wrong,

but I was wild, as I dare say you would have been in my place under the circumstances. Since then we have had our differences. But I have been thinking. If St. Cynthia's had lost the match against Glyffo I should never have forgiven myself. It would have been my fault, and I had no right to act as I did. I am sorry. I can't say more than that, only that if you are willing to let bygones be bygones, so am I, and I'll do my best to pull with you in a friendly way for the good of the whole school."

If that speech had been made when Clare knew nothing of the prefect's secret plot how gladly he would have welcomed it—how gladly he would have forgotten all past taunts and injuries, and extended the right hand of fellowship to his old rival; how little he would have suspected of the other's base motives!

But knowing the planned treachery of which this was to be the beginning, he listened with a gathering scorn and anger in his eyes. Darke, a little puzzled by his look, faltered towards the end of his speech, and in spite of his nerve there crept into his manner something of a hangdog look. He did not suspect yet that Clare knew anything, and he did not know what to make of the captain's expression.

"I have been expecting this," said Clare, making no attempt to conceal his scorn. "You could easily have deceived me once, but you cannot deceive me now."

"I don't know what you mean," said Darke, attempting to bluster. "If you mean that you refuse my offer—"

"I mean," said Clare scornfully, "that you can go to Sir Nevil Glyn and tell him that he has failed this time."

Darke turned deadly pale.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"I think you know very well what I mean."

"You—you were listening," muttered Darke, utterly taken aback.

Clare's eyes flashed.

"That is a lie, Philip Darke, and you know it. But someone else heard you, by accident, and placed me on my guard."

Without a word more the prefect turned away. It was useless to speak. He saw that Clare knew all, and even his hardihood faltered before the clear, scornful eyes. Contempt, says a proverb of the East, will pierce even the shell of the tortoise, and Philip Darke walked away with the look of a whipped cur.

Clare went on his way, his eyes still gleaming. He knew that he had acted perhaps imprudently in betraying to the plotter how much he knew, but he did not regret it. It would have been impossible to receive Darke's advances in any other way.

Ten minutes after that interview with the captain of St. Cynthia's, Philip Darke was on his pony, galloping furiously towards Glynhurst Manor. He had news for the squire—though not the news Sir Nevil had looked for.

"What is it?" exclaimed Sir Nevil, as his nephew entered the room. "What has happened?"

"Clare knows all."

"Knows all! What do you mean?" exclaimed the baronet angrily. Then a wave of deadly paleness overspread his face, and he sprang forward and clutched the prefect violently by the shoulder. "The black box—the black box—is it found?"

Darke looked at him in wonder.

"The black box!"

His look was sufficient to show the baronet that his fears were groundless. He stepped back, releasing Darke, and filled a glass from a decanter on the table, and drank it off at a gulp.

"Now go on," he said harshly. "Tell me what you mean. What does Clare know?"

"Someone overheard us talking yesterday, and repeated it all to Clare."

The baronet uttered an oath.

"What infernal ill-luck! But you are sure?"

"I tried to-day the plan we arranged, and Clare told me plainly what he knew. He told me to tell you that you had failed this time."

Sir Nevil Glyn, deeply disturbed, took two or three turns up and down the long room, his brow dark with anxiety, gnawing his underlip till the blood reddened it. He was deeply disturbed and perplexed.

"What infernal ill-luck!" he repeated. "He knows now that I am his enemy—whether he suspected me before or not, and—and the deuce!" he broke out, as a clearer

recollection flashed across his mind of what he had said in his talk with Darke. "He knows, then, that I am keeping Gabriel Locke from liberty—doubtless he has already informed his detective of that. I may be watched; I may have been watched to-day." His look grew almost haggard, and he ground his teeth, while Darke stood watching him in silence, many strange thoughts in his mind. A darker, fiercer look came over the baronet's face. "He knows too much! He had better take care."

The prefect returned to St. Cynthia's in a mood of doubt and amazement, not unmingled with alarm.

He knows too much! He did not soon forget those words of Sir Nevil's, nor the dark look which had accompanied them. What desperate thought had passed through the baronet's mind at that moment?

What did it all mean? What was this secret at the school—what was the meaning of all this mystery? Darke asked himself that question again and again, but he could find no answer to it. He wondered, with a vague alarm and inquietude.

As he walked across the quadrangle on his return he saw a little dark, alert-eyed man ascending the steps of the principal's house. He was at no loss to guess whom it was. It was Keene, the London detective employed by the doctor in the quest of Gabriel Locke. The prefect would have given a good deal to hear what was said in the doctor's study after the door had closed behind the detective.

The captain of St. Cynthia's was with the doctor when Keene was announced. He rose, but Dr. Earle made him a sign to remain.

"You have something to tell us, Mr. Keene?" said the doctor.

"I have my report to make, sir."

He opened a little leather notebook, and referred to it.

"No trace has yet been discovered of Mr. Locke, but I am making every effort, and I have very little doubt that I shall soon be on the track. But upon the other matter I have brought to light some circumstances which may interest you."

"Pray proceed."

"In Mr. Clare's account of the interview with the afflicted gentleman at Glyndale Priory, it appears that Mr. Locke—granting that this individual was Mr. Locke—declared that he brought Mr. Clare ashore when the Petrel went down with all hands."

"That is correct," said Arthur, as Mr. Keene looked at him.

The detective nodded.

"Thank you. Dr. Earle also informs me that it was in May, 1892, that Mr. Locke came to him, bringing the child, then about five years old."

"That is correct," said the doctor.

"I have examined the records of shipwrecks for that year, and I find that in April, 1892, a craft named the Petrel was wrecked in the Channel, going down, as it was supposed, with all hands. Afterwards foul play was suspected, for two bodies which were washed ashore bore unmistakable signs of death by violence before entering the water. What had happened, however, was never precisely known, as no survivors ever appeared to give evidence. I find that the Petrel was a yacht belonging to Francis Glyn, nephew and heir of Sir Arthur Glyn, of Glynhurst."

"The present baronet's cousin," said the doctor.

Mr. Keene gave a nod.

"Mr. Glyn had with him on the yacht his wife and child, the latter a boy. Also his old college friend Gabriel Locke, who appears to have been attached to him in some capacity—a secretary, or something of that kind. All, according to the accounts, were drowned in the loss of the Petrel. A peculiar coincidence is that Sir Arthur, the old baronet, died only a few days before the loss of the Petrel, and Francis Glyn, if he had survived, would have been Sir Francis Glyn, of Glynhurst. Probably he did not know of his good fortune at the time of his death. His unfortunate end left his cousin Nevil heir to Glynhurst. He seems to have been abroad at the time, for it was not till some months afterwards that he claimed his inheritance."

"And my father?" exclaimed Clare. "Is it possible to ascertain whether there was anyone of the name of Clare on board the Petrel at the time of the wreck? For Locke's words certainly indicate that my father was there."

The detective gave him a very peculiar glance.

"I do not think that there was anyone of that name," he said slowly. "In fact, I am sure not. It was clear to me from the first that that was a name Locke gave you to put your enemies off the track, so that they should never learn that you had escaped from the wreck."

"But why," said Clare, in wonder, "why should anyone have wished my death? My father may have had enemies, but a little chap of five—"

"Ah, why?" said the detective drily. "Perhaps you were in somebody's way. I have consulted several newspapers of the time, and it appears that Francis Glyn made a runaway match, and was disowned by the old baronet; and after the wreck, and his death at the very time of succeeding to the title, these romantic circumstances naturally got into the papers. In one of them I found mentioned what I was looking for—Mrs. Francis Glyn's maiden name. It was Clare."

Arthur gave a violent start.

"What?" exclaimed the doctor.

The detective nodded calmly, his little twinkling eyes showing how he enjoyed the sensation his words had caused.

"I may also mention that the only child, so far as appears, that was on the Petrel at the time of her loss was Francis Glyn's little boy—then five years old."

"Good heavens!" said the doctor, turning quite pale.

Like a flash came back to Clare that scene in Darke's study; he saw again the scared, startled face of the baronet, and heard his cry:

"After all these years! After all these years!"

And back to his mind, too, came Ainger's astonished observing of the resemblance between him and the baronet.

He sat silent, his nerves tingling, his heart beating almost to suffocation, his brain dazed by the sudden influx of new and startling thoughts.

"And do you tell us—?" began the amazed doctor.

"I tell you what I discover, and you may draw your own conclusions. But nothing can be known for certain until Locke is found; and he indicates the hiding-place of the box containing the papers relating to Clare. I should have hesitated to tell you this, Mr. Clare, for I am aware that it will raise hopes which may never be realised, but for one circumstance—an important one. The man who will wreck a vessel, and who will shut up a poor wretch in a madhouse to keep a secret, will not lose a great estate without a struggle. If Sir Nevil Glyn sees danger ahead, you also had better look out for danger. I have told you so much without reserve, that you may know your peril and guard against it."

"This is terrible," murmured the doctor.

"Then you think that Nevil Glyn was responsible for the loss of the Petrel?" Clare said thoughtfully.

"I think the facts speak for themselves. Whether we can ever bring the crime home to him is another matter. But"—the detective rubbed his hands anticipatively—"we shall do our best. This will be a fine case. I cannot say how pleased I am that I was called in."

Mr. Keene evidently viewed the matter entirely in a professional light.

He took his leave soon after. Clare and the doctor remained long, talking over the strange new outlook that had so suddenly opened before the captain of St. Cynthia's. The doctor's ceaseless caution to him was, not to allow his hopes to rise too high; to prepare himself for possible disappointment—counsel easy to give, but not so easy to act upon.

Clare's mind was in a whirl. He paced his bed-room that night, restless, unable to think of composing himself to sleep. The thought of the black box was in his agitated mind. If he could but find it, and set his doubts at rest. He would—he must find it! And he took his lantern and quietly left the room, as he had done many a time before, to seek in the ruined abbey for the mysterious box which held the secret of his birth. Many a night, many a day, he had explored the subterranean passages, the gloomy vaults, in search of the black box, with endless disappointment, but endless determination and hope.

While St. Cynthia's slept the captain of the school went quietly on his lonely quest once more, little dreaming what was to come of it.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Fearful Doom.

DARK and gloomy was the aspect of the ruined abbey as Arthur Clare entered it. Silence and solitude brooded over the moss-grown ruins. Clare paused upon the steps to light his lantern, and then descended into the vaults.

Then forward he went, fearlessly, into the silence and the darkness. His exploration of the subterranean recesses was made upon a method, and he went deep into the vaults to take up the search where he had left it off at his last visit.

At another time he might, perhaps, have thought of Blake's tale of the mysterious masked lurker of the vaults, but now it did not occur to his mind. The detective's startling information had strangely excited him. He went on his way without a thought of danger, as he had gone a hundred times before, in quest of the black box.

Strange, eerie, looked the vast vaults in the lantern-light, strange and ghostly, but they had no terrors for Arthur Clare. He paused in a stone passage that led from the tenth vault, apparently into the bowels of the earth,—a passage which he had never yet explored to its extremity. This was to be the scene of his present search. And as he paused, there came to his ears the echo of a distant footfall.

For a moment he thought it was an echo of his own. But no; he was standing still now, and the faint sound continued.

He started. Someone was in the vaults beside himself. And then back upon his mind rushed the warning Blake had given him, that he had been watched in the recesses under the old abbey.

Watched! By whom? He thought he could guess now! Who had an interest in any discovery he might make in the vaults?

Sir Nevil Glyn!

Was it the baronet who had followed him that night, perhaps other nights, and whose footfalls he now heard ringing through the distant darkness?

He determined to know! As he listened the sound suddenly ceased. Clare smiled grimly. He knew what that meant. The unknown had caught sight of the light he carried.

For the footsteps were coming down this unexplored passage, not from the school—coming from the unknown depths of the earth. Clare remembered the story of a passage from the abbey to the priory in Glyndale Wood, and understood. The unknown was coming from the priory.

The footsteps had ceased. Dead stillness reigned in the vaults. Clare flashed his light along the stone passage, and called out in a clear voice:

"Who is there?"

There was no reply. No sound broke the stillness.

Clare waited a full minute. But no sound came from the unknown. It was evidently not his intention either to reply or to show himself.

Clare turned to his quest. It was not agreeable to seek the black box with the hidden spy, perhaps, watching him all the time. But he had no mind to return with his work undone. As for fear, the thought of it never entered his mind.

He advanced along the stone passage, from which, in various places, subordinate passages opened, some leading to further passages, others ending in blank stone walls. The monks of the olden time had evidently planned this labyrinth for concealment in times of danger, and no doubt it had well answered the purpose. Each recess as he came to it Clare scanned with unwearying patience, flashing the light to and fro. Somewhere there the black box lay in its hiding-place.

He emerged from one of the recesses, and flashed his light along the passage, and caught sight of a tall, dark figure vanishing into a black opening a little way ahead. Prepared as he was for it, Clare started, and felt a momentary thrill. Then, with a gleam of anger in his eyes, he moved quickly forward and flashed the lantern into the opening.

He heard a footstep, a muttered oath, and started back. The tall figure was before him. The light gleamed upon the slimy wall of stone that closed up the opening a dozen feet from the passage. The spy had unwittingly darted into a cul-de-sac, and found himself stopped by a stone wall,

and as he swung round with an oath, Clare's light shone upon him, and Clare stood before him face to face.

For some moments the two faced one another, silent, the lantern-light falling full upon the figure draped in the long cloak, with the black cloth mask hiding every feature save the savagely glittering eyes.

Clare was the first to speak.

"So I have found you!"

The other made a movement as if to rush past him.

Clare stepped back.

"Go! I do not wish to detain you! I do not think you will find the black box, Sir Nevil Glyn."

The masked man gave a violent start.

Clare smiled grimly.

"You did not think I knew you. All your mummery is useless, you see. The next time you spy upon me you may as well come with your face unmasked."

"Curse you!"

It was the baronet's voice. He tore the mask from his face with a savage gesture. The face of Sir Nevil Glyn, dark and distorted with rage, was revealed. His eyes gleamed spitefully in the light.

"You hound, how did you know me?"

"What matters that? I do know you," said Clare contemptuously. "This is not the first time you have spied upon me, like a thief in the darkness. But it shall be the last. I will not risk the black box falling into your hands. I will take care that the passage from the priory is blocked——"

"Will you," said Sir Nevil, between his teeth. "We shall see about that, you puppy. So you know me; you know that I have sought the black box here before, and that I have seen you here in your quest! I do not know how you learned all that, Arthur Clare; but I know this, that you know too much."

Clare smiled disdainfully.

"Bah! do you think to trouble me with a threat," he said scornfully. "I do not fear you."

The baronet ground his teeth. His eyes were gleaming with a desperate light.

"I do not fear you, Sir Nevil Glyn," repeated Clare, with a flash in his eyes. "Far from that. Were it not that I felt assured that in the long run justice would be done, and that you would be compelled to answer for your wickedness, you should not escape me easily now. I do not find it easy to keep my hands from you. You had better go."

The baronet made a movement as if to spring on him. Clare did not recede; but Sir Nevil thought better of it. He was ten years older than Clare, and a well-built man. But the young captain of St. Cynthia's, the hero of the football field, the champion athlete of the school, was fully his match, if not more than his match. And he choked down his rage.

"I will go," he said. "I shall not forget your words, Arthur Clare, and you shall have reason to remember them."

Clare stepped back. The baronet passed him. There was a glare of murderous resolve in the eyes of Sir Nevil Glyn.

Arthur Clare knew too much.

That was the thought that was buzzing in his brain, and beating in his heart. He knew too much—and what he knew he should never carry back with him to St. Cynthia's.

The baronet, driven by rage and hate and fear, had come to a determination; and there was murder in his glittering eyes.

He passed Clare, and made as if to stride along the passage towards the priory. His right hand was under his cloak. There, unseen, his fingers had closed convulsively upon a short, thick oaken cudgel which he carried in his belt.

He took two steps—then turned with the quickness of a tiger, and sprang at Clare, the cudgel whirling aloft. Clare, taken almost unawares, started back, flinging up his right arm to protect his head. The oak crashed upon the lantern; there was a sound of smashing glass and scattering fragments on the stone flags. The next moment a savage blow felled Clare to the ground.

The murderous villain had struck hard. The captain of St. Cynthia's lay where he fell, a trickle of red blood running down over his white face.

A light gleamed out; it was the dark lantern carried by the baronet. With a face as white as Clare's own, and the sweat standing in large drops on his forehead, his eyes gleaming wildly, Sir Nevil knelt beside the unconscious victim of his treachery.

Clare was insensible, stunned by the terrible blow. Would his eyes ever open again? The baronet asked himself that question with a shudder.

He lifted Clare slowly in his arms, and placed him over his right shoulder; and, taking the lantern in his left hand, he moved away slowly with his heavy burden. Up the gloomy passage towards the old Priory he went, slowly and painfully.

His eye was scanning the wall on the left as he advanced. He stopped abruptly and placed the lantern on the ground; with his left hand he felt over the surface of one of the huge blocks of stone of which the wall was built. Suddenly, with scarcely a sound, the great stone rolled inwards; a dark cavity was revealed. The baronet took the lantern again, and bore Clare through the aperture.

He stood within a cell-like apartment, cold, chilly, rocking with damp. There appeared to be no other opening, yet the air was at least as fresh as that of the subterranean passage the baronet had just left. Evidently there was some hidden means of ventilation.

Stooping, Sir Nevil placed his burden upon the floor, and then hastily quitted the cell, closing the massy stone door behind him.

"Safe," he muttered. "Let them find the black box now, they cannot shake my position while Arthur Clare's bones are mouldering in the secret chamber. It was his own fault. He knew too much for my safety."

A sudden thought struck him.

"I must leave no clue."

He retraced his steps back to the spot where Arthur Clare had fallen under his treacherous blow. He sought the fragments of the broken lantern, and gathered all he could find. But some of the fragments had been widely scattered.

And then, satisfied that all was secure, that nothing remained to give a clue to the crime that had been perpetrated in those gloomy depths of the earth, he hurried along the passage to the old Priory, feverishly anxious to escape from the silence, the solitude, where from the dark shadows the dead white face, with a red splash of blood across it, seemed to look out at him.

And Clare?

How long he lay in a state of torpor in the hidden cell, he never knew. But at last there was a feeble stirring of the prostrate form, and a low moan in the black darkness. He was coming to his senses.

Slowly, painfully, consciousness came back, and he moaned again, and strove to rise. He fell back, his senses swimming; but his strength was slowly returning, and again he strove, and this time at up.

What had happened?

He recalled it a little at a time. The meeting in the subterranean passage, the sudden, savage attack; the blinding crash on the head. Sir Nevil Glyn had struck him down! How long ago? He could not guess. Where was he now? Was he still in the passage? He drew, with an effort, a box of vestas from his pocket, and struck one.

The light flickered up. He was not in the subterranean passage. Stone walls closed him in on all sides. He crawled to the wall, and felt his way round it slowly till he knew he must have more than made the circuit. There was no opening.

No opening! He stopped, leaning against the wall, and tried to think what that meant. He was shut up in a stone cell, which he had never seen before in his explorations of the ruined abbey. How had he come there? Sir Nevil Glyn, evidently, had carried him there while he was insensible. Why?

Why? He dared not think of the answer to that question. Sir Nevil Glyn could have had but one motive for shutting him up there. He was placed there to die!

He shuddered. He felt stronger now, and his dizzy brain was growing clearer. He went round the walls once more, feeling his way as high as his hand could reach, and downward to the floor. But only solid stone met his touch. There was no mistake. There existed no opening.

He struck another match. He understood that he must husband his matches, and he took an old letter from his pocket and twisted it and lighted it by the match. The flare of it showed him the whole cell.

His eager gaze scanned it. Cold, slimy stone on all sides; cold, slimy stone below, cold, slimy stone above. There was some means of ventilation, for the air was not mephitic.

But some narrow stone pipe doubtless answered that purpose. There was no means of escape. He was shut up there to die!

He stood shivering. The cold stone upon which he had lain had struck a chill to his very bones. Dimly to his mind came the old legend of St. Cynthia's of the secret cell where, in times of peril, in those rough old days, the monks had hidden the treasures of the abbey from lawless hands, and sometimes themselves when foes were nigh. And this was the secret cell. There could be no doubt upon that point. Sir Nevil Glyn had known of it, and had placed him there to die.

The second! Why had he not finished his work as he had begun it? It would have been more merciful.

Yet there must be a secret door somewhere. If he could but find that! And then he gave a groan, for the thought immediately struck him that the baronet must have secured it—he would not have left the safety of his victim to chance.

He stood, his aching head in his hands, trying to think. He tried to calculate what chance he had of being found by his friends. When they missed him at St. Cynthia's, they would, of course, seek for him. But no one knew whither he had gone. He had never told the doctor of his night-visits to the ruined abbey. That had been a secret of his own.

Would the doctor guess whither he had gone? And, if he did, and search were made for him in the vaults, what would be the result? That the hidden cell was some distance from St. Cynthia's, probably near the old Priory, he felt sure. A search extending so far, would be practically endless in the multiplication of vaults and secret passages under the old abbey. He would be dead of starvation long before the searchers came near where he lay, in all probability. And, at the best, they had no clue to the secret cell. He was for ever hidden from the sight of man.

There was no hope!

"No hope!"

He murmured the words with a chill of despair striking to his very heart.

He realised clearly that if there had been any hope of rescue his assailant would not have left him alive there. Sir Nevil Glyn had shrunk from murder, and he had spared himself the terrible deed, because he was sure that his victim would perish in the secret cell.

But after the first few minutes of despair, Clare recovered his calmness. He would not allow himself to give way. While there was life, he persuaded himself, that there was a faint glimmering of hope.

And so he began to seek with calm patience for the trace of an opening in the walls. With aching head and heavy heart, he sought and sought. But everywhere the cold stone presented the same unvarying surface. Wherever the door might be, it was cunningly concealed.

Suddenly he gave a start, and a thrill went through him.

Feeling over the chilly stone, close down by the floor, he had felt something more. For a moment he remained quite still, dizzied by the rush of emotion. Then, steadying himself, he tore five or six leaves from his pocket-book and twisted them together, and struck one of his precious matches, and lighted the little torch. In the flare of it, he examined the spot, kneeling down to get closer to it.

A few inches above the floor, one of the stones of the wall had yielded a little under his hand. It was a stone much smaller than the rest, being not more than six or seven inches in diameter either way. He pushed it again, and it slipped back, leaving a black cavity where it had been. In the vague hope that this might in some way be connected with the secret door of the cell, Clare put his hand into the cavity, and felt round it with great care.

It extended perhaps a foot and a half into the wall. The receptacle, in olden time, of hidden valuables. He felt round it—only cold stone meeting his touch—till his fingers came upon a loose object, and he drew it out. It felt like a small wooden box. His light had expired. With a strange trembling excitement, Clare struck a match and looked at the object he had drawn from the cavity.

A cry broke from him.

"The black box!"

It was an ebony box, with a sliding lid. For a moment forgetful of his peril, Clare lighted another match, and drew back the lid of the box. A roll of papers tied with red tape was inside. He broke the tape and unfastened the papers. Another match, and he read one line: "Last Will and Testament of Francis Glyn——"

The match went out. Clare rose; his heart was beating!

quickly. He had discovered, at last, the black box! A glance at the papers had been sufficient to show him their nature. The will of Francis Glyn, several certificates, and some letters. The secret of his birth was in his hands at last; the secret of his birth!

He gave a groan as he thought of it.

What he had so long sought was in his hands. He had found the black box, and he was shut up between these stone walls to die in the solitude and darkness! The irony of it was horrible. To discover the secret, and to die! He groaned again, and the black box fell from his hands.

Tap, tap, tap!

He started from the lethargy into which he had fallen. Had he dreamed it, or had a sudden sound come to his ears from the weary silence?

It was no dream. As he listened feverishly, it came again.

Tap, tap, tap!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Chums to the Rescue—Brought to Light.

ARTHUR CLARE was missing!

Many of the boys had noticed the troubled expression on Dr. Earle's face that morning, and observed that there seemed to be some topic among the masters which they discussed with unusual interest and very grave faces. But it was not till after morning school that the secret leaked out.

Arthur Clare was missing!

It came out that his bed had not been slept in the previous night. He was gone from St. Cynthia's, and not even the doctor knew whither.

But that the kind old doctor was full of fears as to what had happened was clear, from the anxiety which he could not conceal.

Something had happened to Arthur Clare. What, was a mystery.

Evidently he had left his bed-room of his own accord. But why had he not returned to it? What had happened to prevent him?

The three chums discussed the question with deep interest.—or rather, Langdale and Pat did, for Blake was looking very thoughtful, and hardly spoke.

"What do you think, Blake?" exclaimed Cecil. "Have you got some idea in your noddle?"

"Yes," replied Sidney.

"Get it off your chest, then."

"Sure," said Pat, "if it's in his noddle, how can he get it off his chest, ye gosssoon?"

"Rate! What's your idea, Sid?"

"You remember the night we went to explore the old abbey?" said Sidney.

"Rather!"

"And what happened?"

"Well?"

"Clare was toddling about the vaults, and a chap with a mask on was watching him. We thought it best to give Clare the tip, in case the other fellow meant mischief. Well, suppose he did mean mischief? If Clare had a reason for going to the vaults once, he might have had a reason for going again. And if he went, say, last night, and met that chap—we don't know what might have happened."

Langdale turned a little pale.

"You think he might be in the abbey vaults?"

"I think it's possible."

"Are you game to come to the abbey and hunt for him?"

"It will mean cutting afternoon school."

"Who cares?"

"I don't, if you don't. What do you say, Paddy?"

"Sure, I'm game, if ye are."

"Then it's settled," said Blake; "we'll go. And we'll have some tommy, too, so that we can stay as long as we like. And—Scout! why didn't I think of that before?"

"Of what?"

"Clare had his bicycle lamp with him that night. If he went to the vaults last night, he would have taken it. I know where he keeps it. If it isn't in its place, that shows where he's gone, doesn't it?"

"You're a regular Sherlock Holmes," said Langdale admiringly. "Cut along and see if it's in its place."

Blake was not absent many minutes.

"It's gone," he said, when he returned. "There's no doubt about it now, so let us be gone, too."

And, their preparations quickly completed, the three boys set off, and were speedily in the vaults. Led by Blake, they advanced into the darkness, calling out at intervals in the hope of hearing Clare's voice in return. But only weird echoes answered their calling.

And so they reached the last vault, and paused, looking into the gloomy passage which was the only further path. The halt was only momentary. Blake entered the stone passage, flashing his light to and fro, and his chums followed.

"Clare! Clare! Hallo! hallo!"

Back came the rolling echoes—"Hallo! hallo!"

Forward they went. They flashed their lights into every side opening they passed, but did not leave the main passage. Blake had decided to explore that first. The glare of three lanterns fully lighted the route. And suddenly Blake, with a sharp exclamation, pounced upon something that glittered back the lantern-light.

"Look here, chaps!"

It was a fragment of metal and glass, evidently part of a broken lantern. The boys gazed at it with excited eyes.

"Clare's lantern, sure enough," said Blake, in an awe-struck tone. "You can see that it hasn't been here long, or it would be rusted with the damp."

"But how could it have got smashed up like that?" muttered Langdale.

"And where's the rest of it?" said O'Connor.

"Let's search."

Blake scanned the stone flags.

"Good heavens!"

"What is it?"

"Blood!"

It was a dull red stain on the grey stone—a little blotch of it—and, round that, spots where the blood had dripped.

The boys gazed at each other in horror.

Blake was the first to speak.

"It's blood," he said, in a husky voice—"Clare's blood! And the lantern—that must have been broken in the struggle. And the pieces are gone; they must have been gathered up and taken away so as to leave no sign. That's clear."

"But where is the—the—" stammered Langdale. He could not bring himself to utter the word "body."

"Clare has been hidden somewhere. Don't jump to conclusions; he may not be dead. There is only a trace of blood here. If he had been shot or stabbed there would be a lot of it," said Blake. "Perhaps he got a crack on the head. One thing's certain: he's still in this horrible place somewhere, and we've got to find him."

"They say that there are secret chambers down here. He may be hidden in one of them, perhaps still alive, perhaps— But we won't think of that."

"Let's tap the walls as we go along," suggested Langdale. "I've heard that a tap carries far in a place like this. Miners tap to one another from different tunnels—"

"Right—ho! that's a splendid idea. Come on!"

They advanced along the passage, scanning the flagged floor for further traces, and tapping the stone walls on either side sharply with their sticks. Twice again Blake found upon the damp stone blotches which he believed to be blood-drops. He was sure that Clare, dead or living, had been carried that way.

Tap, tap, tap!

"Hark!" cried Blake suddenly.

They halted and listened feverishly.

Tap, tap, tap!

It was an answering tapping from the left side of the passage.

Blake tapped again sharply on the solid stone.

Tap, tap, tap! came back.

"There's somebody on the other side of the wall," whispered Langdale.

"Sure, it must be Clare!" said Pat breathlessly.

Tap, tap, tap!

"Clare—Arthur Clare!" shouted Blake.

No sound of a voice replied. But from the stone wall came the tap, tap, tap! without ceasing.

"He can't hear a voice through the wall," said Langdale.

Blake tapped again rapidly, as a signal that he heard and

heeded. Then he made a careful examination of the stone. There was no trace of an opening. With the lantern gleaming upon it, he searched the damp surface minutely. At length he observed a depression in the stone, at the height of a man's shoulder from the ground, and, feeling over it, he felt a yielding to his touch.

"Eureka!"

"What have you found?"

"What I expected—a secret door, I think. Yes, by Columbus!"

He had found the cunningly concealed spring which manipulated the secret door. He pressed hard, and a huge block of stone rolled back. The lantern flashed into the black aperture. There was a cry, and a haggard figure staggered out of the darkness.

"Clare! Hurrah!"

Blake's joyous shout rang through the subterranean recesses. It was Clare—haggard and worn, his ghastly face streaked with blood, his looks showing through what a fearful ordeal he had passed—but alive! Alive, and in his hand the black box!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER. A Warning—Too Late!

TRAMP, tramp!

Sir Nevil Glyn started.

The next moment he cursed himself for his nervousness.

Why should the sound of a galloping horse make him tremble? Why, except that every sound now made him start and shiver like a guilty thing fleeing pursuit.

That morning Philip Darke had ridden over from St. Cynthia's to tell him of the disappearance of Arthur Clare. The baronet had received the news with affected indifference. He saw a vague suspicion in his nephew's eyes, but Darke had gone away puzzled and doubtful, unable to decide whether his uncle knew anything of Clare's fate or not. He had promised to ride over again when there was any news to tell.

Alone, Sir Nevil dropped the mask of indifference he had assumed in his nephew's presence. He paced the library of the Manor with restless steps and worn face.

"I am safe," he muttered feverishly. "Clare is dead—or, at all events, doomed to death. Unless the black box is discovered, no one can have a possible motive for connecting me with his disappearance. And ere long the black box will be in my hands—the professor will do his work well, and torture will wring the secret from Gabriel Locke. And then, when the black box is in my possession, and its contents destroyed, who can impute to me a motive for injuring Clare? Who can question my title to the lands of Glynhurst? I am safe!"

Safe! And yet the sound of a rat behind the wainscot was sufficient to make him start, and the sudden tramp, tramp of hoofs on the avenue caused his heart to beat like a hammer.

Who was riding in such desperate haste to the Manor? His nephew—but there could be no news of Clare!

The door was flung hastily open, and Philip Darke rushed into the room. His face was white and wild, and he panted for breath. He flung the door shut in the surprised, curious face of a servant.

"Uncle—uncle!"

"What is the matter?" cried Sir Nevil hoarsely. "Are you mad?"

"Fly!" panted Darke. "There is not a moment to lose. They are coming!"

"Who are coming?"

"The detective—Keene—and the police. I dodged them and rode here breakneck to warn you. Fly! Clare has returned to St. Cynthia's, and—"

It was not necessary to finish. Sir Nevil Glyn reeled back, and caught at a chair for support.

"I found out what had happened! All St. Cynthia's knows that Clare was struck down in the vaults and shut up there to die, in a secret chamber—and that there he discovered a box containing documents relating to his birth!"

"The black box! In the secret chamber!"

"All the school is talking about it—but I suspected this

morning that you—you had—you understand. And so, when I heard what was on, I kept my eyes open. The London detective and two Lonsfield policemen were shut up with Dr. Earle and Clare in the doctor's study. I watched when they came out—and I saw Keene and the two constables take the road to the Manor in the doctor's trap. Then—then I guessed what they meant—and I got my pony out and rode like the devil to reach you first, across the fields. I've beaten them by ten minutes or more, so you have time—"

Sir Nevil Glyn sank into a chair.

"Thank you, Phil," he said, with a ghastly face. "It was good of you. So I have ten minutes?"

"That, or less. For Heaven's sake, don't lose a second!" cried Darke excitedly.

The baronet did not move.

"Uncle—uncle! Fly, while there's time!"

"Whither?" said Sir Nevil. "The charge will be attempted murder, even if nothing comes out as to the past. Do you know what that means, Phil? Penal servitude, my boy, and beggary!" He broke into a bitter laugh. "And if I could escape abroad, the life of a hunted fugitive, a penniless vagabond, has no charms for me. No! The game is up! I've played for a big stake, and I've lost. There is only one thing left."

Darke looked at him in terror.

"Uncle Nevil—"

"You had better, go, Phil. You may get into trouble for warning me." He gave a grim and ghastly smile. "Better make your peace with Arthur Clare. To-morrow he will be master of Glynhurst."

He grasped his nephew's hand for a moment, and then half led, half pushed him from the room, and locked the door. Darke, half guessing his uncle's terrible purpose, knocked at the door, and called to Sir Nevil to reopen it.

There was no reply. He heard the opening of a drawer within. There was a sound of wheels without. Wheels—a knock—voices! Darke staggered away.

There was a louder, sterner knock at the library door. It was given by the hand of the detective.

A savage cry came from within.

"You bloodhound! You are too late!"

The sharp crack of a pistol followed the words—then a dull, heavy thud—a groan—and silence!

"Break in the door!" the detective said, knitting his brows.

The door fell inwards with a crash. Keene sprang into the room. Upon the carpet lay the baronet, a still smoking pistol in his hand, his ghastly face upturned—dead! The hand of justice had reached for him—too late!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER. The Secret Out at Last.

GREAT was the amazement at St. Cynthia's when the whole story came out.

The Secret of the School was revealed at last, and the strange tale was more than a nine days' wonder.

Arthur Clare, captain of St. Cynthia's, the doctor's protégé, was Sir Arthur Glyn, Baronet, and Squire of Lonsfield!

Such was the revelation of the black box, confirmed by Gabriel Locke. For among the dead baronet's papers were found sufficient clues to Locke's place of detention, and speedily he was rescued from the clutches of Professor Gryn, who, finding that damaging details as to the management of his asylum were coming, found it prudent to leave his native land with extreme suddenness. And Locke, taken to St. Cynthia's, and cared for with the tenderest solicitude by his old friend, was soon sufficiently recovered from his maladies, mental and physical, to tell his story.

And then Arthur learned the dark history of the past—of the wreck of the Petrel and the death in the waves of his parents, victims of Nevil Glyn's treachery. Brokenly, and with shudders, Locke told the story. Nevil Glyn had undoubtedly known of old Sir Arthur's death when he came aboard the yacht, but he had said nothing of it. He had not been on good terms with his Cousin Frank, who suspected him of causing the estrangement between himself and his uncle. Nevil had not found it difficult to make bad blood between a proud and obstinate old man and an equally proud nephew, who would not submit the question of his marriage to any man's judgment but his own.

The Secret of the School.

And so Frank had been disowned; but Nevil's plot, which had undoubtedly in the first place been to induce the old baronet to will his money away from the title, had failed. Nevil had come aboard the

yacht with professions of goodwill and friendship, and Frank, always of an unsuspicious nature, had accepted his advances good-naturedly.

Nevil had two friends with him. Locke's voice faltered as he told how, upon a stormy night, the three villains had thrown off the mask. Two of the crew of the yacht, which consisted of four persons, had been treacherously struck down, and then the other two were seized and flung into the sea. And then Nevil Glyn had deliberately run the craft on to the rocks, escaping with his confederates in the only boat.

The Petrel went down, and with her Frank Glyn and his wife, but Gabriel Locke had struggled ashore with the child. But he had come ashore half crazed by the anxiety and terror, and, possessed with the idea that his enemies were pursuing him to complete their work, he had fled, and concealed the black box, containing the proofs of little Arthur's birth and parentage, in the ruined abbey of St. Cynthia's, in a place which he had discovered there when exploring the ruins long years before, a careless schoolboy at St. Cynthia's.

After that, fearing that if he retained the child, it would be murdered by the assassins of his father, he had bethought him of his former friend, Dr. Earle, and had visited him at night, and left the child with him, to remain in safety under an assumed name. And then, half-crazed, haunted by incessant fears, he had fled, but Nevil Glyn, who had somehow learned that all had not perished in the wreck, had hunted him down at last, fearful of what he might disclose, and from that day the asylum of Professor Gryp had been his prison.

But all the time Nevil Glyn had had no suspicion that he had saved the infant heir of Glynhurst from the waves—never dreaming that the boy was still alive, till the day he met him in Darke's study at St. Cynthia's, and read the secret in his features.

And now Arthur could understand what the baronet must have felt at that moment, when he saw before him the face of one he believed to be long dead—rising before him like a face from the grave, to terrify him with fears of the future, and to revive the buried horrors of the past.

It was a strange tale. Arthur's sudden change in fortune created a sensation at St. Cynthia's. But the darker circumstances of the story were kept as far as possible hidden. Nevil Glyn was gone to his last account, and was beyond the justice of men, and it was best to let the dead past bury its dead.

Phillip Darke heard the truth with dismay. For now that Arthur was master of Glynhurst, the prefect, who had been utterly dependent upon his uncle, became dependent upon his cousin—upon the captain of St. Cynthia's, whom he had taunted and injured and plotted against. He had reason to fear, for he knew how he would have acted in Arthur's place. But Arthur was made of different stuff. He sought out the prefect, and frankly offered his hand, delicately hinting that whatever Sir Nevil had promised him would be fulfilled, and telling him in his frank way that he was too glad to find a blood relation, after his long loneliness, to care to remember past dislikes and differences.

And Darke, with something like remorse and the awakening of better feelings in his heart, took his hand gratefully enough, stammering out his thanks.

The discovery of his title and fortune made little difference to Arthur's life at St. Cynthia's. He remained captain of the school, winning golden opinions from seniors and juniors, till the time came to go up to Oxford.

And while he ruled as captain, Sidney Blake and his chums were always pretty sure of as indulgent a view as possible being taken of their endless escapades. For he could never forget how the chums had sought him in the gloomy vaults below the old abbey, and saved him from a terrible death, and brought to light the Secret of the School!"

THE END.

(Next week's grand long, complete story will be entitled "ON THE TRACK," a story of Sexton Blake and the Boatswain. Order in advance in order to make sure of your copies.)

A GRAND NEW STORY!

THE STREETS OF LONDON.

The True Story of a Poor Boy.

By MAX HAMILTON.

(Read this revised introduction first, and then continue the story.)

Falsely Accused!

CHARLIE GUNNING, a poor boy, is about to lose his only friend—his mother. The dying woman tells her son where her private papers are to be found, and that one of those papers contains the name of an uncle of CHARLIE, who has returned from Australia a millionaire. CHARLIE'S stepfather, a rough bully by the name of BILL WADSWORTH, obtains possession of the papers, and turns CHARLIE adrift. The lad one day returns to his old room and discovers his stepfather and another villain named NATTY COLE conversing secretly together over the proceeds of a big robbery, of which they were the perpetrators, at a house of a certain MR. NELSON. The two men are captured by the police, and CHARLIE, although innocent, is sent to a reformatory. Before being sent away, he is offered a position in life as soon as he has served his term, by MR. NELSON. After a little while CHARLIE and a chum named TIM BLAKE escape from the reformatory school and join a circus. At one of the performances, during which our hero recognises MR. NELSON in the audience, a tiger escapes and wrecks the big tent, but is shot before it can do any further harm.

Long after the crowd had been with difficulty persuaded to disperse, Alberto and his men remained hard at work effecting temporary repairs, and it was not till the small hours of the morning that Charlie, utterly worn out by excitement and fatigue, crept into his bunk in the caravan, and fell asleep almost before his head was on the pillow. Worn out though he was, he had gone to bed feeling very happy. Alberto had thanked him warmly, and openly declared that it was owing to Charlie's presence of mind in reminding him to have the gas turned off that had saved a terrible catastrophe. Charlie had said nothing about his share in rescuing the lady who was with Mr. Nelson, and he had been too busy to do more than wonder who she was, and if she was getting on all right. He supposed that she was one of Lord Eastminster's guests, and had been driven back to the Hall, and he was heartily thankful to think that he had seen the last of Mr. Edward Nelson. But in this he was wrong.

Mr. Nelson had by no means forgotten the boy who had rendered such a signal service to the audience in general, and to Lady Eastminster in particular—for it was his hostess who had been Nelson's neighbour in the circus. On his arrival at the Hall he had given the peer a glowing account of the way in which the young groom had behaved.

not have been alive at this moment, but for the plucky "I tell you, Eastminster," he said, "your wife would way in which that boy attacked the brute as it sprang, and he all but lost his own life in saving her, for the tiger rounded on him at once. Not only that, but it was his idea to cut off the gas when he saw the tent was falling. No one thought of it before; but if it hadn't been done, I shudder to think of what would have happened. The lad's as cool-headed as he is plucky. Something ought to be done for him."

"Something shall be done for him," Lord Eastminster rejoined warmly. "Who is he—one of the grooms, you say? Did you find out his name?"

"No he slipped away as soon as we got outside the