SAVING HIS CHUM!

A Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars

The Dreadnought 1d.

WITH WHICH IS AMALGAMATED

"THE BOYS' JOURNAL."

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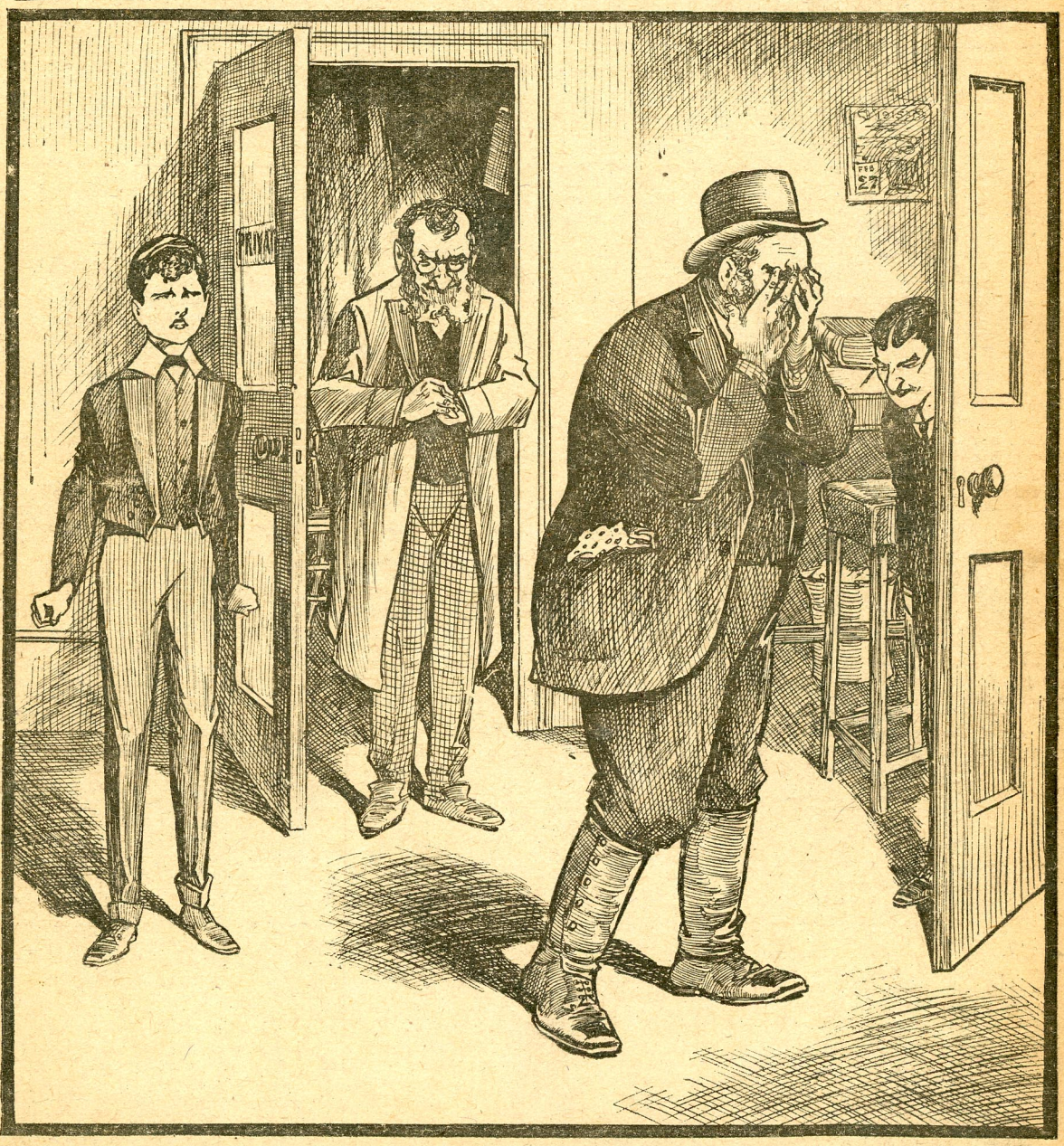
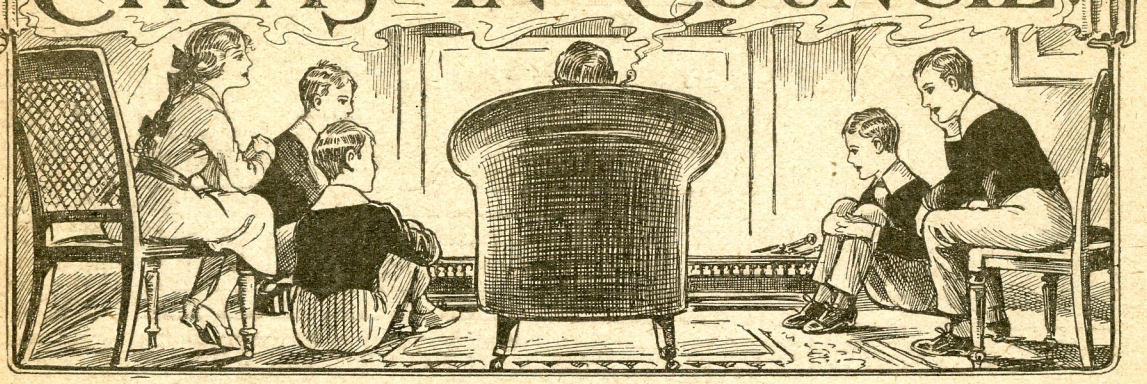


IN THE MONEYLENDER'S GRASP!

(A Dramatic Incident in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale Contained in this Issue.)

CHUMS IN COUNCIL



Whom to write to:
Editor,
"The Dreadnought"
The Fleetway House,
Farringdon St., London, E.C.

FOR NEXT THURSDAY
"FRIENDS AT LAST!"
By Frank Richards.

Our next magnificent, long, complete tale of the boys of Greyfriars marks an important turning-point in the character of Harry Wharton, for an incident occurs which not only rids the handsome Removite of a great deal of his foolish pride, but fills him with good resolutions for the future. Harry's guardian, Colonel James Wharton, pays his nephew a visit; and although Wharton has always treated the colonel with suspicion and contempt, his feelings soon begin to veer round. The stern warrior—himself an old Greyfriars boy—unbends to the extent of securing a half-holiday for Harry and his chums. The "half" is spent by the riverside, and the pleasant afternoon is all but darkened by a grim tragedy. It is at this point, however, that Colonel Wharton proves to the juniors that the old lessons of courage and manliness which he had learned at Greyfriars have not failed him in the time of trial. As a result of the colonel's valour, the estrangement with his nephew becomes a thing of the past, and when he and Harry part from each other at length it is with the pleasant and mutual feeling that they are

"FRIENDS AT LAST!"

A Question of Duty.

One of my Bristol chums, Philip R., is puzzled how to act in the following circumstances. He is a junior clerk in a factory in a small town in Gloucestershire, and it is his duty every morning to enter in a time-book the hour at which each of his fellow-clerks arrive. The principal of this office is a gentleman who does not arrive himself until about ten o'clock, but he insists upon his employees being there at the latest by nine o'clock.

Now, Philip R. has a friend in this office, who, knowing that his chum keeps the time-book, has latterly fallen into the habit of coming in from twenty minutes to half an hour late; and whenever Philip R. protests against this, and tells him that he ought to be there at the correct time, this friend induces him to enter some incorrect time, such as five minutes past nine instead of the actual time at which this delinquent arrives. "This is all very well," says Philip R., "but I feel that my conscience smites me, and that I am not acting honestly towards my employer in thus cheating him, as it were, by mis-stating the time my friend turns up. I feel I cannot carry on this underhand business any longer. What shall I do?"

There is only one course open to Philip R., and I feel sure that all DREADNOUGHT readers will agree with me when I say that he should tell his friend plainly and flatly that he can no longer be a party to the deception which they both have practised towards their employer.

Let Philip R. tell his friend that from to-morrow he will enter in the book the actual time at which he arrives at the office, and throw upon him the responsibility if he comes late.

It is very unmanly on the part of one lad to try and shirk his responsibility, as Philip R.'s friend has done, and my Bristol chum need be under no scruple in thus asserting his right to independent action. Let him follow my advice, and when in the office—as elsewhere—always act on the square. These deceptions often lead to something worse, for they break down all moral feeling and accustom a fellow to unjust and dishonest actions.

These are hard words, but they are none the less true. After all, it is dishonest on the part of Philip R. to rob his employer of twenty-five minutes of his friend's time. His friend is probably paid by the hour, and he himself is guilty of robbing his employer of half an hour's work, which is equivalent to a certain amount of money.

So if Philip R. takes my advice he will have an explanation with his errant chum at once, and if the latter does not turn over a new leaf, then the blame rests entirely with himself.

Praise from a Seaside Chum.

The following letter was taken at random from a sheaf of spontaneous tributes to the DREADNOUGHT, and it is a typical proof of the popularity which the stories of Harry Wharton's early schooldays have attained:

"47, Winstanley Crescent,
"Ramsgate.

"Dear Mr. Editor,—You've given many other readers, as well as myself, the thing which we have wanted for months—e.g., the tales of Harry Wharton's early adventures at Greyfriars School. We unfortunates who have not taken in the 'Magnet' since it first came out, but only during the last year or so, are jolly pleased to have the opportunity of reading our hero's earlier adventures.

"Now, Mr. Editor, I take in all your books, I believe, but I'm not quite sure of one point. The books I have are the 'Magnet,' the 'Gem,' the DREADNOUGHT, the 'Penny Popular,' 'Chuckles,' and—when it appears—the 'Boys' Friend 3d. Library.' Now, you advertise on page ten of this week's DREADNOUGHT 'The Boys' Friend, Every Monday,' as one of your papers. I do not wish to be inquisitive, Mr. Editor, but may I ask if this is a mistake and should read 'Boys' Friend 3d. Library, Every month,' or are you also Editor of 'The Boys' Friend'?

"Before closing this letter I may say, with reference to a recent statement of yours in the 'Gem,' that you can always rely upon my support, for one. Even when I get much older, I sha'n't forget to buy the papers I enjoy reading so much.

"I remain,
"Yours loyally,
"FRED BURTON."

Good for you, Master Burton! Yours is the spirit which gives cheer and encouragement to an Editor, and also a feeling of confidence in his loyal readers.

With regard to your perplexity as to whether I control the "Boys' Friend," I may say that this journal has recently passed into my hands, so that the advertisement in question was quite correct.

I am glad to hear that it is not your intention to give up the papers for many years to come, and hope you will never have cause to go back on this assurance of loyalty.

THE EDITOR.

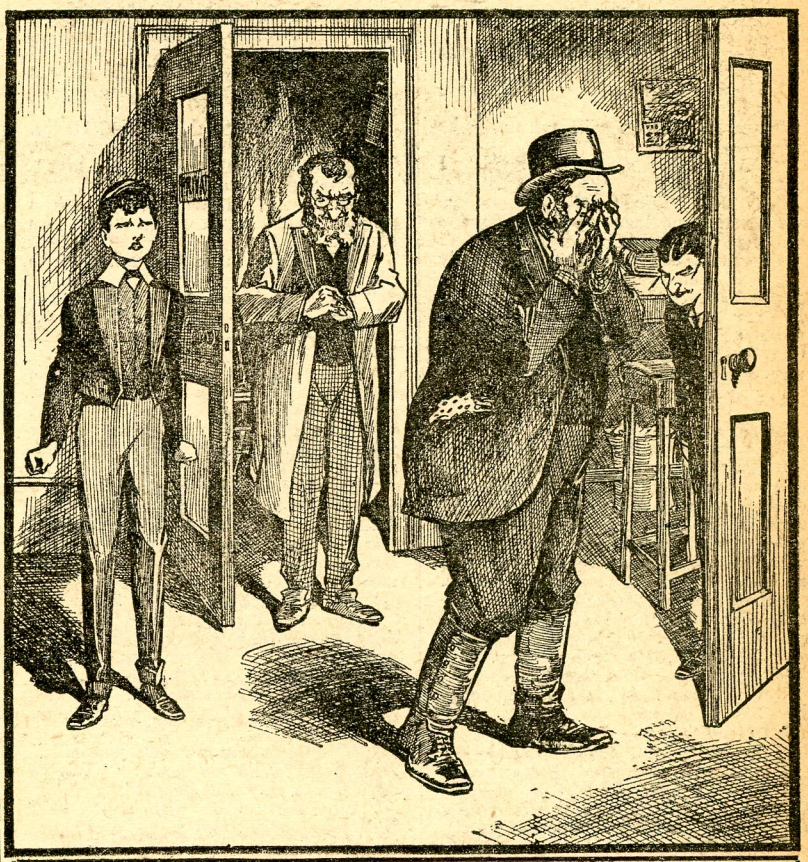
IF YOU ARE WANTING ADVICE WRITE TO YOUR EDITOR. HE WILL DO HIS BEST TO HELP YOU!

THE DREADNOUGHT 1D.

SAVING HIS CHUM!

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS



The door of the inner room opened, and the moneylender ushered his visitor, who had the appearance of a farmer, out. Harry Wharton stood looking at the pitiable scene with clenched fists.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Very Queer Visitor for Hazeldene.

"Young shentleman——"

Harry Wharton looked round.

He was standing near the gates of Greyfriars School, waiting for the chums, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, when the oily, insinuating voice fell upon his ears.

"Young shentleman——"

Wharton glanced with no small disfavour at the speaker. He was a man of middle age, with a greasy, grey beard, a decidedly hooked nose, and two little round, black eyes like a parrot's. His clothes were ancient, and looked very much in want of a brushing, and the old silk hat he wore looked as if it had never been brushed at all.

"Hallo!" said Wharton. "What do you want?"

"Excuse me, young shentleman——"

"Nothing to sell," said Harry. "I don't want to buy anything, either."

And he was about to move away, when the stranger came further within the gates of Greyfriars, and laid an exceedingly dirty finger on his sleeve.

"Stop a moment, young shentleman ——"

Harry jerked his arm away.

"What do you want?"

"I vant to see vun of der Greyfriars poys," said the visitor. "Do you know Master Hazeldene?"

Harry started.

Of course he knew Hazeldene, the cad of the Remove, generally called Vaseline at Greyfriars, on account of his smooth voice and manners. But what this disreputable-looking fellow could want with Hazeldene was a mystery.

"You know him?" asked the stranger, his keen black eyes on Harry Wharton's face.

"Yes," said Harry shortly.

"I vant to see him."

"Well, you can't. Strangers are not admitted into the school grounds. You will have to ask the Head."

"I do not vant to see der Head ——"

"You can't come in."

"Perhaps you are a friend of Hazeldene?" said the other, watching Harry's face.

Wharton hesitated. Certainly he was not a friend of Peter Hazeldene, yet of late he had taken some interest in the cad of the Remove. Hazeldene had shown that his nature was, at all events, not all bad, and his regard for his sister Marjorie was at least a redeeming trait. And that Hazeldene was in trouble of some kind, Wharton more than suspected, and the thought crossed his mind that this visit of the old Jew might have something to do with it.

"Well, I know him," he replied at last. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it will be better for Hazeldene if I see him," said the visitor persuasively. "I must see him, young shentleman."

"What have you to do with a fellow in the Greyfriars Remove?" asked Harry Wharton abruptly.

The Jew smiled.

"Business, mine young friend, business!"

"Does Hazeldene expect you?"

"I told him I should come. It vill be better for him, mine young friend, if I see him—odervise I may have to show him up."

"Show him up! What are you driving at?"

"I have said enough. If you are his friend, you had better tell me where to find him. It is important."

"Follow me," said Wharton shortly. "I will take you to his study, but you run the risk of being kicked out if a prefect spots you."

"I vill risk dat, mine young friend."

"Come on, then."

Harry Wharton led the way, and Hazeldene's disreputable visitor followed him towards the great school buildings. Just as they reached the door three juniors came out. They were all fellows in the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian chum, were three of the best.

They looked at Harry Wharton, and they stared at his companion.

"Hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Who's your friend, Harry?"

Harry Wharton made a grimace.

"He's no friend of mine."

"I come to see Master Hazeldene, young shentlemans——"

"Then I congratulate Hazeldene on his choice of friends," remarked Nugent.

"The congratulatefulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh, in the beautiful English he had learned under the best native instructors in Bengal. "The oilfulness of our esteemed visitor's countenance is only equalled by the exceeding hookfulness of his honourable nose."

"What are you convoying him about for, Harry?"

"I'm taking him to Hazeldene's quarters."

"There will be a row if he's seen there."

"The rowfulness will naturally be great——"

"Very likely; can't be helped. I sha'n't be long."

And Harry Wharton led the strange visitor into the house, followed by the stares of the chums of the Remove.

They ascended the stairs, fortunately without encountering anyone but a junior, who stared curiously at the old Hebrew and said nothing. But in the passage above, they almost walked into Carberry, of the Sixth, and the most unpopular prefect at Greyfriars.

Carberry stopped and stared at them.

"What on earth, Wharton——"

Harry turned red.

It was an unfortunate meeting—especially unfortunate as Carberry was always down upon him, and seeking an excuse to make things warm for him. And it was certainly in a prefect's power to make things warm for a lad who introduced such a person into the school as Wharton's present companion.

But before Carberry could finish, the old Hebrew stepped forward, and greeted the prefect with an oily grin.

"It ish you, Master Carberry?"

The prefect made a step backward.

"Ikey Isaacs! What are you doing here?"

"I come to see——"

"Not me! You haven't dared——"

Isaacs made a deprecating gesture.

"Ach, no, Master Carberry. I come to see anoder poy, and dis young shentleman kindly show me der vay."

"You have no right to come to Greyfriars——"

Isaacs shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"I vant money."

Carberry hesitated a moment. He knew perfectly well that it was his duty to turn the man out of the school, if not, to report his presence to the Head. But, as Wharton could not fail to see, Carberry had evidently had dealings with Isaacs himself. There was not much doubt that Mr. Isaacs, whatever else he might be, was a moneylender, too.

"Well, I suppose it's no business of mine," said the prefect. "Wharton, as you have chosen to introduce Mr. Isaacs into Greyfriars, you take the responsibility."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

He knew that Carberry was afraid to interfere with the Jew, who, in spite of his oily insinuating ways, had a square, determined chin, and could plainly be very obstinate if he chose. Carberry walked on rather quickly, and Harry lost no time in getting his companion to Hazeldene's study.

He knocked at the door and opened it. There were two fellows in the study, Hazeldene and Bulstrode the bully of the Remove. Bulstrode stared at Isaacs in astonishment.

Hazeldene gave a choked cry.

"Isaacs! Ikey Isaacs!"

The old Hebrew grinned.

"Yesh, it ish me, Master Hazeldene."

"Why—how—how dare you come here?"

Isaacs grinned again.

"You have not answered mine letters, Master Hazeldene."

"But I—I——"

"I vant mine monish——"

"Hush!"

"Vy should I hush?" said Isaacs coolly. "I go to der Head if you do not satisfy me——"

"Hold your tongue!" burst out Hazeldene fiercely. "Wharton, you can get out——"

"I don't want to stay!" said Harry.

"And, Bulstrode, will you leave Mr. Isaacs and me in this study for a bit?"

Bulstrode grinned.

"Well, that's rather cool to ask a fellow to get out of his own study!" he exclaimed.

"You might for a few minutes, to oblige me."

"My dear Vaseline, I haven't the slightest desire to oblige you."

"You—you cad! I want to talk business——"

"What did you call me?" asked the Remove bully, with a threatening look.

"I—I didn't mean that. But do let me have the study to myself a few minutes—you might as well, Bulstrode."

"Rats!" said Bulstrode, seating himself on the corner of the table. "I'm rather curious to know what business you can have with this greasy animal. I'm afraid you've been borrowing money, Vaseline."

"Mind your own business!"

"As cock of the Remove, it is my duty to see that you don't bring disgrace upon the Form, Vaseline, my boy. I am going to look into this."

"Young shentleman——"

"You can go ahead, Ikey Whiskers. I'm all attention."

"Why don't you get out, you cad?" said Harry Wharton hotly. "You've no right to stay and listen!"

"What's it to do with you?" said Bulstrode unpleasantly. "Just you travel along, and don't meddle."

"If I were Hazeldene, I'd kick you out," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "I say, Hazeldene, you can take that fellow into my study if you like for a jaw."

"Thank you, Wharton," said Hazeldene, jumping at the offer eagerly "Come this way, Isaacs, will you?"

"Certainly, young shentleman," grinned Isaacs.

Harry Wharton walked away. Bulstrode looked savage and disappointed. Wharton rejoined his chums in the Close. They looked at him curiously.

"That's a queer visitor for Hazeldene," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Jolly queer," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton nodded, with rather a gloomy look upon his face.

"I'm afraid there's trouble," he said. "Hazeldene owes Isaacs money, I believe. The fellow said something about going to the Head."

Nugent whistled.

"That would be serious."

"It would probably mean the expelfulness," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I do not like Hazeldene terrifically, but I should be sorrowful to see even that esteemed rotter expelled from the honourable school."

"So should I," said Bob Cherry. "He has his good points. And—and his sister is a really ripping girl. Nothing like him."

"True enough! Well, let's get down to the footer," said Wharton.

And the chums of the Remove went down to the playing-fields; but Harry Wharton was still thinking of Hazeldene and his unwelcome visitor.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
No Cash.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky and genial Nabob of Bhanipur, put on his jacket, his olive face glowing after the healthy exercise of the footer-field.

Hurree Singh was progressing footerfully, as he would have termed it, and bade fair to become one of the shining lights of the Remove team.

"After the reckoning comes the feast, as your English proverb says," he remarked. "I am somewhat hungerful, and I should be honourably glad to treat my worthy chums feedfully at the tuckshop."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Never shall it be said that I refused an offer of that kind!" he exclaimed. "This way to the tuckshop, Inky!"

"Well, I'm rather peckish," said Nugent. "The worst of it is with me I'm close upon stony, and expect to remain so for a week or more."

"I'm not far off," grinned Bob, "and, as a matter of fact, I owe half-a-sov. in the village."

"Then it is fortunateful that I am wallowing in filthy wealth," said the nabob, with a smile.

"Ha, ha! He means rolling in filthy lucre!" chuckled Nugent.

"The differentiation of the expressfulness seems to me to be infinitesimal," said the nabob. "However, here we are. It is true that of late my guardian has been growing somewhat stingiful. I have drawn upon him terrifically for the money of the pocket, and he has shown objectfulness."

"They all do," said Nugent, with a sigh of great feeling. "We neglect 'em in their youth, you see, and they grow like that."

"It was the loanful cash to our Bunterful chum that really dished the exchequer," said the nabob. "But I have the half-sovereign remaining, and what is a half-sovereign that a nabob should not blue it at the honourable tuckshop?"

"Exactly!" agreed Bob Cherry. "Here's the honourable tuckshop, and where's the honourable half-sovereign?"

The nabob felt in his pockets.

"That is curious," he said, with a puzzled look.

"What is curious? The honourableness of the tuckshop, or the honourableness of the giddy half-sovereign?"

"Neither, my worthy friend. I am amazed by the disappearfulness of the coin."

"Disappeared?"

"Exactfully! I remember bringing it out with me, pocketfully, in anticipation of a feed after the footerful exercise, and it is gone."

"Oh, come!" said Harry Wharton. "Have another look!"

The nabob felt in his pocket again.

"It is gone!" he repeated.

"Feel in your trousers pockets."

"But I pocketed the half-sovereign jacketfully."

"Oh, you never know!" grinned Bob Cherry. "In a moment of absent-mindedness you might have pocketed it trouserfully, you know."

"I will ascertain, but I have little hopefulness of discovering the coin in my trouserful pockets."

The nabob went through every pocket on his person with the same result. The missing half-sovereign did not turn up.

"You must have dropped it when you changed your jacket in the pavilion," said Nugent, struck with a sudden thought.

The nabob looked relieved.

"Yes, that is probably quite correctful, my worthy chum. The dropfulness might be accidental and unnoticed in the honourable pavilion. Let us go and see."

"Come on, then! I'm jolly hungry!"

"I have terrific regretfulness——"

"Never mind the regretfulness now. I want the grubfulness! Let's go and hunt up that half-sov."

The chums of the Remove hurried back to the pavilion on the junior ground.

Hurree Singh looked about the room where he had changed his jacket, and his chums helped him; but there was no sign of the half-sovereign.

"It is seemfully not here," the nabob remarked. "Of course, it may be crackfully hidden in the floorfulness."

"Let's have a jolly good look, anyway."

The jolly good look was thoroughly carried out.

But the missing coin did not come to light. Every crack and cranny was scanned without success.

The chums, somewhat dusty and tired, left off at last, and looked at one another rather curiously.

"You are absolutely sure that you had the half-sovereign in your pocket, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton.

The nabob nodded emphatically.

"The absolute surefulness is terrific," he said. "I have not the slightfullest doubt upon the point, my worthy chum."

"I saw Inky take it from his desk," Nugent remarked.

"And I brought it with me pocketfully."

"It must have dropped out when he was changing his jacket," said Bob Cherry slowly. "Unless—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Well, I hardly like to speak out."

"I expect you are thinking the same as myself," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Unless it was taken out of Inky's pockets, you mean?"

"Yes," said Bob, turning a little red.

It seemed a mean thought, yet there was hardly anything else to be surmised. The coin had disappeared. Even if Hurree Singh had dropped it, it ought to have been in the room somewhere.

The nabob was looking greatly distressed. But suddenly a new thought made his dusky face brighten.

"I think I can guessfully surmise what has happened!" he exclaimed.

"Surmise away, old chap."

"The dropfulness of the half-sovereign was discovered by someone who came into the room after our departfulness, and he has picked up the coin, and is waiting to find the ownerful individual."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Well, that's quite possible," he said. "Before we say anything, we'll just see who has been in the room."

"There's Russell outside," said Nugent. "Let's ask him."

"Good! He has been standing there, and he ought to know."

The four chums left the pavilion.

Russell of the Remove was standing in the doorway with his hands in his pockets looking out over the field watching some fellows at practice. He nodded to the famous four as they stopped.

"Did you go in after we came out, Russell?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No. I've been watching Osborne and Trevor at practice."

"Then you haven't see anything of a half-sovereign Hurree Singh has dropped?"

"No. Ask Hazeldene."

Harry started.

"Hazeldene?"

"Yes. He went into the pavilion while you were at practice, and he may have seen something of it."

"Thanks!" said Harry. "We'll ask him. Come on, kids!"

The famous four walked away.

Their faces were very grave, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was looking deeply distressed.

The same unpleasant thought had forced itself into each mind of the four.

"Vaseline has been there!" murmured Bob Cherry, "and he was just now being hunted by an old Sheeny for some tin."

"It looks queer," said Harry. "Hazeldene may have seen the half-sovereign lying on the floor, and, being in difficulties——"

"Or he may have seen Inky's jacket hanging on the peg," said Bob Cherry drily.

"It is very rotten!" murmured the nabob. "My worthy chums, let not a word be said on the matter, but let us maintain a discreetful mumfulness."

"Mum's the word, at present, at least," agreed Bob Cherry. "Goodness knows, I don't want to be hard on a fellow; but we all know how Vaseline treated Billy Bunter last week."

"He borrowed a half-sovereign of him, knowing that he could not repay it," said Harry Wharton, with darkening brows. "I told him at the time it was little better than stealing; but he looked so rotten about it I hadn't the heart to push the matter. I thought then that he was some beastly fix."

"It looks like it."

"But if he has stolen the nabob's half-sovereign we've got to come down heavily. No difficulty can possibly make an excuse for stealing."

"That's true enough. I think a thief's about the meanest worm that crawls on the earth," Bob Cherry agreed. "But it may not be so bad as that. It's not fair to condemn Vaseline unheard. We know that he has his good points."

"Suppose we seek him, and examine him questionfully on the subject?" suggested Hurree Singh. "We shall be able to decide judgfully from his answerfulness."

"Good idea! He ought to be allowed to speak for himself, anyway."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton shortly. "Let's find him."

And the chums of the Remove entered the house with grave and clouded faces.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Question of Provisions.

"I say, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter met the famous four as they came into the passage upon which the Remove, or Lower Fourth, studies opened.

The Owl of the Remove blinked cheerfully through his spectacles.

Billy Bunter was looking a little less pasty and puffy than of old. Physical culture had improved him lately, although the way he had gone in for it had also furnished a great deal of fun to the Greyfriars juniors.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, Billy! Have you seen Vaseline?"

Billy Bunter grinned.

"Yes, rather. I went into the study to—to look in the cupboard——"

"And eat anything you could lay your hands on," grinned Bob Cherry. "Yes, we know what you went there for, Billy. What else?"

"Well, I found Vaseline there with an old Sheeny."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Wharton hastily. "It was a chap came to see Hazeldene on business, and I told him he might go into the study and talk there."

"Oh, I see! But it's curious——"

"What's curious?"

"There's some mystery about it," said Bunter, shaking his head solemnly. "I rather think that Vaseline has been borrowing money. He borrowed some of me the other day, you know, and never paid up, and you fellows had to pay for my dumbbells."

"Yes, we know," said Bob Cherry, with a grimace.

"Of course, I'm going to settle up when my postal-order comes," said Billy Bunter. "I'm rather surprised that it hasn't come; but it's bound to be here by the first post to-morrow morning. Then I'm going to square up quite a lot of little accounts. I believe I owe each of you fellows a little cash."

"Yes, I believe you do," agreed Bob Cherry. "More than a little perhaps. But never mind that. What's that about Vaseline?"

"Why, the old Sheeny said something about going to the Head as I came into the study," said Billy Bunter. "and Vaseline said, 'Ten shillings today if you'll give me a chance, Isaacs.'"

The chums exchanged glances.

"Are you sure he said that, Billy?"

"Yes, rather," said Bunter. "I suppose I can believe my own ears. He looked towards Inky's desk as he said it, and do you know the idea came into my mind that he was going to borrow it of Inky, and I thought I'd give Inky a tip, you know, because Vaseline would never pay him, and I don't like a chap who borrows and doesn't stump up again."

"No, they are rotters, and no mistake," agreed Bob Cherry. "I should naturally expect you to be down on them, Billy."

"What else do you know about the matter, Billy?"

"Nothing, because Vaseline saw me then, and he gave a jump, and called me a rude name, and left the room with the Sheeny at once."

Harry Wharton's brow was dark with thought.

"Do you know where Hazeldene is now, Billy?"

"He went out into the Close with the Sheeny, and I haven't seen him since. That was a good hour ago."

"I dare say he's in his study," said Bob Cherry. "Come along."

"I say, you fellows, don't you want me to get tea?"

"Certainly, Bill, if you like."

"Well, you know I'm stony," said Bunter reproachfully. "If my postal-order had come I'd stand treat willingly, but at present I'm short of money. And there's nothing in the cupboard, either."

"Oh, come!" said Nugent. "We have a quarter of a ham, and some bread-and-butter, and we can make that do for tea."

"That's all very well, Nugent; but I got hungry after school, and I scoffed that ham."

"Well, the bread-and-butter will do ——"

"But I scoffed that, too."

"Young anaconda!" growled Bob Cherry. "We shall have to put up with the cake, that's all. You can get some tea from Wingate."

"What cake are you talking about, Cherry?"

"Why, the cake! It's rather stale, but it will do."

"There isn't any cake."

"No cake! Why——"

"I got hungry this morning, and I had to scoff the cake."

"You young grub-destroyer! Then there's nothing left but the tin of sardines."

"Well, you see, Cherry——"

"What's the matter with the sardines?"

"Well—er——" stammered Billy Bunter. "You see, I was rather peckish after I finished the ham, and I—I scoffed the sardines."

"Scoffers ought to be sat upon," said Nugent, "and Billy is about the greatest scoffer I ever met. Knock his head against the wall, Bob."

"Certainly!"

Bunter retreated in alarm.

"I say, you fellows, no rotting, you know! You'll knock my spectacles off, and if you break them you will have to pay for them. I'm sincerely sorry there's no grub, but I'll get a ripping tea if you fork out the tin."

"We're all stony!"

"Oh, come now, that won't wash! I know Inky has a half-sovereign, because I saw him put it in his jacket-pocket."

"I have parted with the half-sovereign dropfully, and, I am afraid, lostfully," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Well, you must be an ass!" said Bunter, in great disgust. "Fancy losing a half-sovereign when you think of all the grub it would buy. Still, if Cherry or Nugent can raise the wind——"

"We can't raise the slightest little breeze, Billy."

"Then it's up against Wharton. I know Wharton has thirty bob that his uncle sent him for his new cricket things for the coming season."

"Rats!" said Wharton.

"Now, look here, Wharton, I know you've got it——"

"Well, ass, my uncle sent it to buy my cricket things! Do you think I'm going to spend it on anything else?"

"In a case of necessity——"

"We can have our tea in Hall for once, I suppose?"

"But what about me?" said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone. "I'm rather particular in what I eat, and I can't stand the school tea."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, I suppose it's really a case of terrible necessity. Still, I don't feel inclined to give up my new cricket outfit, even to save you from having your tea in Hall for once, Bunter."

"I think you're rather selfish, Wharton. You won't find me acting meanly when I'm in funds. When my postal-order comes——"

"My dear kid, that thirty bob is locked up in my desk, and it's going to remain there till I buy the things Colonel Wharton told me to buy. That's flat!"

"Oh, very well! I suppose it's up against me to find the tommy," said Bunter, in a tone of resignation. "Only I really don't know how I shall manage it."

"Don't bother. Let's have tea in Hall."

"Well, I would myself, really; only I don't like to think of you fellows going without a good tea when you're used to it," said Bunter. "I'll manage it somehow."

And the Owl scuttled off.

"I wonder what wheeze he's got in his brain?" said Nugent, as the four walked on towards Hazeldene's study.

"I wonder!" said Harry absently. He came to a stop near Hazeldene's door, and looked seriously at his chums. "I say, kids, I've been thinking about this. We shall have to go easy on Hazeldene."

"How do you mean?"

"I'm thinking of his sister Marjorie. You remember how we went for the gipsies that time when they kidnapped her? She's a really ripping girl, and she's fond of that rotten brother of hers. If—if Hazeldene were expelled from Greyfriars, think what it would mean to Marjorie. She's proud of him, you know. She doesn't know him as we do."

Nugent nodded thoughtfully.

"Quite right, Harry. But a thief ——"

"I couldn't stand being the one to let her know that her brother was a thief," said Harry, with a clouded brow.

"That's how I feel about it," Bob Cherry observed. "Vaseline ought to be kicked out of the school if he's a thief, and jumped on into the bargain; but——"

"I have not had the honourable pleasure of meeting the charming and esteemed sister of the honourable rotter," remarked Hurree Singh; "but certainly I ladle out endorsefulness of all that the worthy Wharton says. It is the first duty of a boy to be considerate towards the gentle sex, for reflect, my worthy chums, where should we be without them? We should have no mothers, or sisters, or cooks——"

"Ha, ha! That sounds rather touching, especially the cooks!" said Bob Cherry.

"What I mean to explicate is that we should treat the esteemed rotter as gently as possible, for the sake of the beautiful and honourable Marjorie," said the nabob. "Perhaps a certain amount of lickfulness with a cricket-stump might improve the worthy beast, but let there no talkfulness on the subject."

"Inky's right," said Nugent; "so are you, Harry. Let's keep it all dark, and deal with the matter wholly by ourselves. Come on!"

And the chums of the Remove knocked at the door of Hazeldene's study and entered.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Quality of Mercy.

Hazeldene was sitting at the table in his study. His elbow was on the table, his chin resting on his hand; his face was pale, and his eyes almost haggard. He was staring straight before him—at nothing. He looked like one who had sat down there to think out, if he could, a way of escape from some terrible trouble—and failed!

He did not rise as the chums of the Remove came in. He moved slightly and glanced at them, with such a quiet, crushed look that it was hardly possible to retain a feeling of anger against him, though contempt, if he were a thief, could hardly be dismissed.

"Hazeldene!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

"What do you want?"

Hazeldene's tone was as spiritless as his look.

Was this the cad of the Remove—the insinuating, cunning junior whose oily and subtle ways had earned him the name of Vaseline?

What blow had fallen upon him to crush him so utterly?

"We want to speak to you," said Harry.

Bob Cherry closed the door. The chums came nearer to the table at which the lonely lad was sitting, but he did not move.

"Hazeldene——"

"Oh, I know what you want!"

"Then——"

"Was the half-sovereign yours?"

Harry Wharton started, and so did his companions. They had expected denial and cunning lying; they were met by a blank, bold admission. It was so unlike Hazeldene that they could not know what to make of it.

"Mine?" said Harry. "No. You admit, then, that you——"

"It was Hurree Singh's, I suppose?"

"That is quite correctful," said the nabob.

"Well, you will never see it again."

"We have come here for it," said Nugent.

"Well, you are too late."

"You mean that it is no longer in your possession?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"Ask Ikey Isaacs."

"You gave it to that Sheeny?"

"I paid it to him."

The Removites looked at one another. They were utterly taken aback by Hazeldene's strange manner. Lies, subterfuge, they could have understood, too. But this frankness, and apparent recklessness as to the consequences, took them utterly by surprise.

"Then you do not deny taking the money?" Harry Wharton exclaimed in amazement. "You admit that you took it and gave it to Isaacs?"

"What would be the use of denying it? Russell saw me go into the pavilion, and I knew the coin would be missed."

"Did you go there to take it?"

Hazeldene was silent.

"You had better speak out."

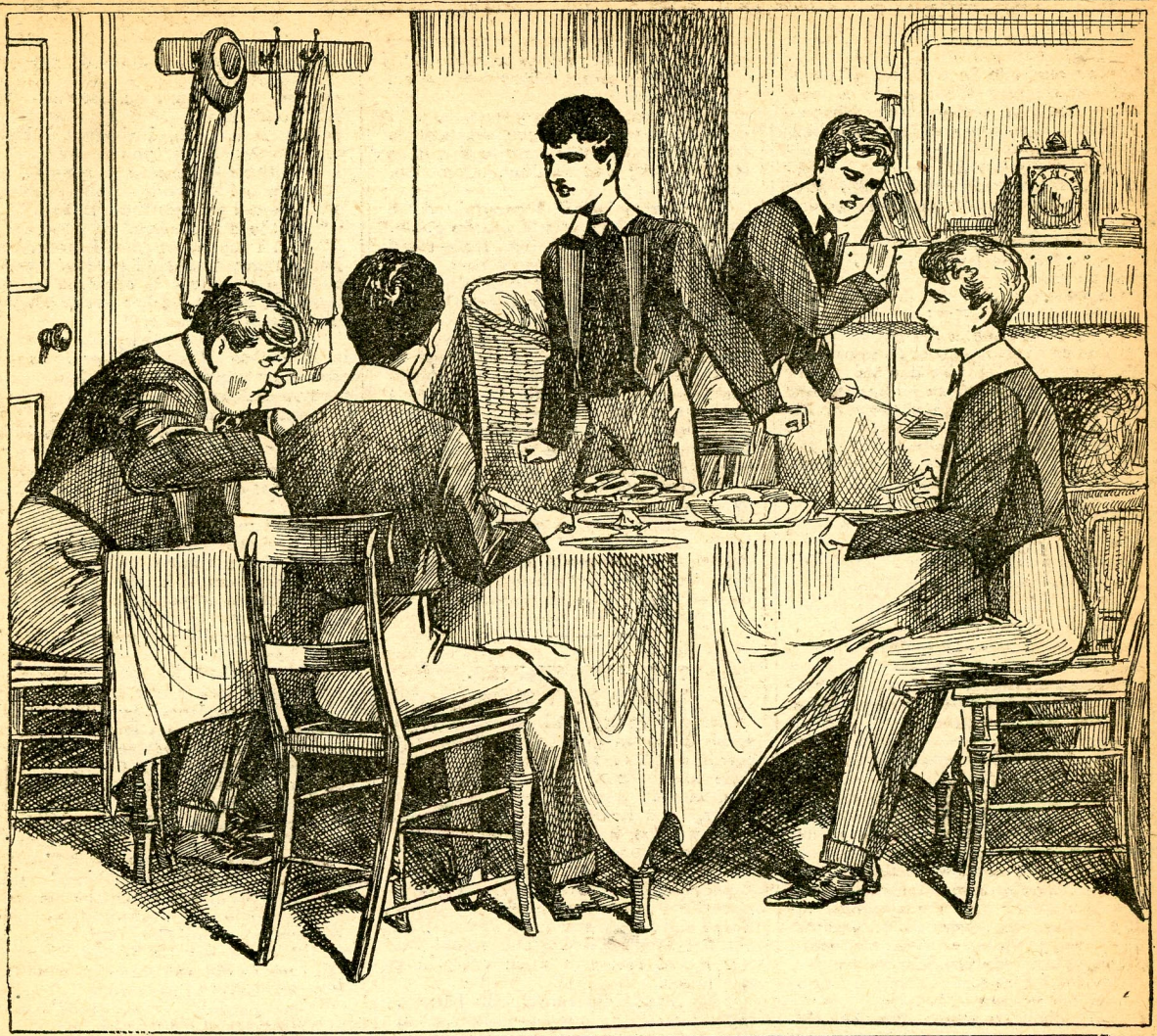
"Well, yes. I knew Inky had a half-sovereign——"

"Then you—you——"

Hazeldene made a restless movement.

"I don't know. I had to find the money or be expelled. Isaacs would have gone straight to the Head, and you know what that would mean."

The chums were silent; they knew well enough. To borrow money of a "Sheeny" moneylender was an offence for which there was little hope of pardon, though Dr. Locke was not a severe man. Another lad might have escaped with a flogging. But Hazeldene's record was not good. There were



Harry Wharton jumped up. "You've sold my bat!" "Now, don't get excited, Wharton," said Bunter. "Excited!" howled Wharton. "You've sold my bat! My bat!"

many black marks against Hazeldene. Like most who followed crooked courses, he had become known in the long run for what he was. This would be the crowning offence of a long series, and there was very little doubt that the Head would expel him from Greyfriars, and be relieved to rid the Remove of a lad whose presence there was not desired by any member of the Form.

"I—I knew Inky had a half-sovereign," said Hazeldene, in a low voice, his eyes still fixed on space before him with that strange set look. "I—I came to the ground to—to see about it. I had some idea of cadging it from Inky. I knew he was a good-natured ass, and might possibly hand it over."

"Thank you terrifically," purred Hurree Singh. "The complimentfulness is great."

"But he was at practice, and—and then I went in, and there was the half-sovereign lying on the floor, shining there. I suppose Inky had dropped it when he took his jacket off."

"The supposefulness is quite correct."

"I didn't know it was Inky's, but I thought very likely it was, or else Wharton's. I didn't care much. I picked it up——"

"And kept it?"

"Yes. I paid it to Isaacs. I sha'n't be expelled now—unless you tell the Head."

Harry Wharton's brow was very stern.

"You expect us to shield you?"

"No, I don't."

"If we go to the Head——"

"Go if you like."

"I don't quite understand you, Hazeldene. You know you ought to be expelled. You picked up the coin, but to keep what you find is as much stealing as to take it from a fellow's pocket. Finding and keeping is theft."

"I know it is."

"And yet you——"

"It staved it off," said Hazeldene. "It was a chance. If you fellows hold your tongues, I shall be all right. If you blab, I can't be more than expelled."

"Something in that," said Nugent. "We don't want to get anybody into a fearful row. But to let a thief remain in the school——"

"If you knew how I was placed——"

"You had better explain," said Wharton.

"I owe Isaacs money. He is a blood-sucker; you know the way the money-lenders pile up the interest. I've been paying interest for weeks, and haven't touched the principal yet. He is a swindler, of course."

"You are not bound to pay him—you are under age."

"I know that; but he has my paper. He can take it to the Head."

"That's where he has his hold," said Bob Cherry, with a nod. "As a matter of fact, it's sheer blackmail on Isaacs' part. The rotter is trading on Hazeldene's fear of being expelled, and he had no right to lend him money in the first place."

Hazeldene dropped his face into his hands with a groan.

"I don't care what happens. I'm sick of it all. I'd be glad to be expelled, and have it all over if it weren't for——"

He did not finish.

But the chums of the Remove knew of whom he was thinking. Before their eyes seemed to rise the sweet, innocent face of Marjorie Hazeldene. What look would that face wear when Hazeldene

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND HARRY WHARTON STORY IS ENTITLED: "FRIENDS AT LAST!"

came home—expelled, disgraced, as a thief?

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Harry Wharton, in a low, hard voice. "When you were borrowing this money, why couldn't you think of your sister then?"

Hazeldene groaned.

"You don't understand."

"What did you borrow the money of Isaacs at all for?"

Hazeldene was silent.

"Some betting, I suppose?" Wharton went on scornfully.

"It wasn't."

"Then what was it?"

The wretched junior did not speak.

"You can hardly expect us to believe you, Hazeldene, if you don't explain. If you wanted the money for any decent purpose, it would be a shadow of an excuse."

Still Hazeldene was silent.

"We'll keep the secret if you like," said Harry Wharton. "But, look here, Hazeldene, if we keep silent over this affair, you have got to run on a new course, do you hear?"

Hazeldene raised his head hopefully.

"Are you going to keep silent?"

"We shall say nothing," said Harry—"at least, I can speak for myself. I suppose you others say the same."

"Rather," said Bob Cherry.

"Mum's the word," assented Nugent.

"The mumfulness on my part will be terrific," said the nabob. "I should be sorry to see the esteemed cad subjected to the ignominious kickfulness of the honourable school."

"You hear that, Hazeldene? We are going to keep quiet about the matter. But there has got to be a change on your part. Some time ago I found you looking into my desk, when I was keeping the nabob's diamond there. Last week you borrowed ten shillings of Billy Bunter, and never paid him. Now you have practically stolen a half-sovereign from Hurree Singh. There's only one way that sort of thing can end. You've got to stop it."

"You don't suppose I've exactly enjoyed myself lately, do you?" said Hazeldene.

"Well, no," said Harry, looking at the worn, miserable face of the wretched lad; "I don't. But it was all your own fault. You were a cad before you borrowed this money of Isaacs, and this is only one thing more. If we are going to keep the secret, we shall expect you to run straight in future. That's all. Come on, chaps."

"Just a moment," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, taking a step nearer to Hazeldene. "I am aware that this rotter is an esteemed cad, and has always been so, but I gather that he dislikes the position of being an honourable thief. Now, I cannot alterate the fact that he is a worthy cad, but I can prevent him from being a thief by making the bestowfulness of the half-sovereign of the free heart."

"By giving him the half-sovereign, do you mean?"

"Exactfully. Hazeldene, my worthy rotter, I give you freely the half-sovereign which you obtained purloinfully, and it is your own property, and therefore, you are no longer a measly thief."

Hazeldene smiled a sickly smile.

"Thank you, Inky. I quite understand."

"If you could part with the cadfulness as well as the thieffulness," said the nabob, "the improvefulness of your esteemed character would be terrific. I hope to see you change over the new page, as your English expression is."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "Inky is treating you well, Hazeldene, and I hope it won't be lost on you. I don't want to preach, goodness knows, but I think the worst rotter ought to stop at lying and stealing. Come on, chaps."

The chums of the Remove quitted the study. Hazeldene was left alone again. There was relief in his face—relief mingled with shame.

"What a fool—what a mad fool I have been!" he muttered. "Oh, for the chance to make a fresh start, with a clean record! What a fool I have been! I thought it so beastly clever to be sharper than other kids, and to get the better of them; and it has landed me in this! Those chaps would raise the money to help me out if they could trust me, but they can't. They know I might be imposing on them, and getting the money for something else. What a fool I have been! But if I get clear of this—only of this, I'll make a fresh start."

The door opened, and Bulstrode came in. Hazeldene's face clouded, and he rose from his seat at the table.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Tea in No. 1 Study.

Harry Wharton and his companions were silent as they went down the corridor. The interview with Hazeldene had been a decidedly unpleasant one, and it left a cloud upon their brows. But it was past tea-time, and boys will be boys, and healthy boys have good appetites. They headed for the study, in the hope that Billy Bunter might have kept his word, and discovered some resource for tea. Bread-and-butter and weak tea in Hall did not tempt them. The school tea was a last resource, when everything else failed.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, sniffing as they neared the study. "If that isn't bacon and sausages frying, I'm a Dutchman."

Hurree Singh sniffed.

"You are quite correctful, my worthy chum. Although I do not myself eat either baconfully or sausagefully, I am truly glad to know that you have a feedful treat. But where did the esteemed Bunter raise the necessary fundfulness?"

"I wonder," said Nugent. "He was broke, and there wasn't any tin in the housekeeping-box. He could bone some tea from Wingate's caddy; but as for bacon and sausages—well, I can't understand it."

"We don't know how he came by them," Bob Cherry remarked; "so we'd better eat them first, and inquire afterwards. Come in."

The chums of the Remove entered the study. A bright and cheery scene greeted them. The table was laid for tea, and the firelight glimmered on a white cloth and clean crockery. The kettle was singing away on the hob, and Billy Bunter was frying bacon and sausages in a frying-pan. Butter and jam and marmalade, and bread—brown and white—were on the table.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in amazement. "Have you picked up Aladdin's lamp by any chance, Bunty?"

"Eh?" said Bunter, looking round and blinking through his big glasses. "Is that you, Bulstrode? You can get out. If you take any of those things I'll tell Wharton, and he'll give you another licking."

"Ass! It isn't Bulstrode, it's Wharton."

"Oh, is it? Oh, I thought I knew your voice! I say, you fellows, what do you think of that for a spread?"

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "Where did you get these things?"

"At the school shop."

"Yes, I suppose so; but I mean, how did you get them? The dame won't chalk up any more to our credit; and, besides, I've warned her not to let you run bills in our names."

"Yes; and I regard that as rather inconsiderate of you, Cherry. It has caused me to go short of grub on a good many occasions."

"Hard cheese, Billy."

"I consider it very hard. I should be perfectly willing to run bills in my own name, only, somehow, the old lady seems to think that the money wouldn't be safe."

"Some people are so distrustful."

"They are; and I'm afraid you are one of them, Cherry. But I haven't got this lot on tick, though I should have done so if you had not crabbed it."

"Then how did you get the grub?"

"I bought it."

"What with?"

"Money."

Bob Cherry glanced over the spread. It was really a decent one for a junior study, such as was only seen there when the Removites were in funds.

"This little lot must have run into four bob, Billy."

"Four shillings and threepence-halfpenny."

"Then where did you get it?"

"The sausages are done," said Bunter. "Will you make the tea, one of you, while I'm turning them out, and then we can all start fair?"

"I'll make the tea," said Nugent. "But where did you raise the wind for this feed, Billy? I'm curious."

"The bacon's done, too," said Bunter. "Hand me that big plate, will you, Wharton?"

"Certainly. Here it is. But where did you get the tin?"

"I can't talk while I'm working. Don't the sausages look prime? I say, Hurree Singh, I hope you will have some sausages?"

The nabob shook his head smilingly.

"I do not eat the sausageful grub," he explained. "But I shall be happy to come out strongfully with the brown bread, and the marmalade, and the bananas."

"I really think you're an ass, Hurree Singh. Still, there will be all the more left for us, so perhaps you're right. I got the bananas specially in case you did not eat sausages. There are some nuts, too."

"You are a thoughtful little bounder, and I am esteemfully obliged. But where did you raise the breeze, as your English saying is?"

"Fill up the pot, Nugent," said Billy Bunter, apparently not hearing the question. "I shall want a second cup. There are enough teacups, as I bought two new ones with what was left of the five bob."

"The five bob! What five bob?"

Billy Bunter coloured a little.

"Oh, that was the cash I had in hand, you see."

"You don't mean to say that your postal-order has arrived?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Well, no; it has not exactly arrived," admitted Bunter. "I am expecting it by the first post to-morrow morning, though."

"Well, it's a mystery," said Bob Cherry. "Still, it's a jolly good feed. You can help me to sausage and bacon, Billy. You are a good cook, and I'll say that much for you anywhere."

"The cookfulness equals the extreme smellfulness," said Hurree Singh. "Let us pass a vote of thankfulness to the esteemed Bunter."

"I'd rather you passed the butter," said Bunter. "I think this is a really good feed, and I don't mind saying so. There are few fellows in the Remove who can cook as I cook. Fellows in the Sixth have competed to have me for their fag. I think when I grow up I should like to run a large hotel and do my own cooking. How do you like the bacon, Wharton?"

"Ripping!" said Harry, who was doing full justice to it.

"Rather!" said Bob Cherry. "My hat, Billy is a treasure! And if he gets into the habit of standing feeds like this without wanting any tin to pay for them, why I think we ought to encourage him."

"Under such circumstantialfulness, the encouragement ought to be terrific," agreed Hurree Singh, who was making a milder meal of brown bread and bananas.

"Well, I'm glad to have my efforts appreciated, of course," said Bunter modestly. "A fellow likes to be appreciated. I think perhaps I had better drop physical culture, and take up cooking seriously. But there's something to be said for physical culture, though. It gives you a jolly good appetite. Since I took it up I have been able to work in, on an average, one extra meal a day."

"No wonder the ham disappeared!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Never mind; we owe Billy our thanks, as founder of the feast."

"No, you don't exactly," said Bunter. "It was really Wharton who stood this feed."

Harry looked over his teacup at the Owl in surprise.

"I! How do you make that out, Billy?"

"You see, I had to raise the money for the feed."

"Yes, and I wonder how you did it!"

"Well, you see, you told me you were getting a new cricket set, your uncle having sent you the tin to get them."

"What has that to do with it?" asked Wharton in amazement.

"Why, you see, if you're having a new bat, you couldn't want your old one, and so I——"

"My bat!" said Wharton apprehensively. "What have you done with my bat?"

"Oh, nothing. I've only sold it to Skinner."

Harry Wharton jumped up.

"You've sold my bat!"

"Now, don't get excited, Wharton."

"Excited!" howled Wharton. "You've sold my bat! My bat!"

"Well, as you are getting a new one——"

"My bat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "It's lucky he didn't sell your spring overcoat, or your desk, Wharton. But of all the cheek!"

"I don't see where the cheek comes in," said Billy Bunter in an aggrieved tone. "What could Wharton possibly want with two bats?"

"I was fond of the old bat, you young owl, and I haven't got the new one yet, either."

"Well, of course, I'm not responsible for your dawdling in getting the new one," said Bunter. "I don't see how you can blame me for your own carelessness."

"You—you—you——"

"I've taken the trouble to sell your old bat, and for a pretty good figure, too, considering," said Billy Bunter. "If these are all the thanks I get, I'm blessed if I provide a feed in a time of necessity again. Pass the sausages, Cherry."

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were laughing heartily. Bunter's innocent coolness struck them as funny. Harry, who had lost his bat, did not see the matter in quite so humorous a light.

"Of course, you could have the bat back by paying Skinner the five shillings," suggested Billy Bunter. "I didn't know you were fond of a piece of wood, or I'd have sold Cherry's new bicycle-lamp instead."

"Would you?" howled Bob. "Let me catch you selling my new bicycle-lamp, you young villain, that's all!"

"Well, there was Nugent's new lexicon, that would have fetched a couple of bob!"

"You young rascal! It cost my governor a guinea, and if it was lost there would be no end of a row!" exclaimed Nugent wrathfully.

"Well, you could always get it back by repaying the purchase-money, and if the fellow didn't want to give it up, you could punch his head," said Bunter.

"I know whose head I shall punch if anything happens to my lexicon!" growled Nugent. "It is bad enough selling Wharton's bat without permission, but when it comes to my lexicon the thing's past a joke!"

"And my new bicycle-lamp, too! If anything happens to that there will be a dead Bunter picked up in this study!" said Bob Cherry darkly.

"Oh, come, Cherry! I say, Wharton, I hope you're not annoyed?"

Harry could not help laughing.

"Oh, of course not," he said. "I'm pleased."

"I'm glad you're pleased," said Billy Bunter, beaming. "Of course, it was the only thing to be done; but I thought afterwards that you might be annoyed. It has been a jolly good feed, hasn't it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry, filling his cup a third time. "Here's good luck to the founder of the feast—Wharton's old cricket-bat!"

And the chums of the Remove laughed and drank the toast in weak tea.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Bulstrode's Offer.

Meanwhile, the cad of the Remove was having a far less enjoyable time in his study. Hazeldene had been alone a few minutes after the chums left him, when Bulstrode came in. The bully of the Form was not in a pleasant humour, as could be seen by the expression of his face.

"What have those rotters been doing in here?" he asked.

"What rotters?"

"Those rotters from No. 1 study. I saw them going out as I came along the passage."

"Why shouldn't they come in here if they want to?"

"It's my study, that's why."

"Well, it's mine as well."

"If you are going to set up as master of the house, you had better say so," sneered Bulstrode. "Then I'll jam your head against the wall for a lesson, and we shall get on better."

"I don't want to do anything of the kind."

"Then shut up, and tell me what those fellows wanted in here."

It was rather a contradictory order, but Bulstrode waited for a reply, with the evident intention of getting one.

"They came in to speak to me," faltered Hazeldene.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, you are such a nice fellow that they would be bound to do that," he said. "You are so popular, so liked for your open, frank, and candid ways."

Hazeldene winced.

"Well, I don't know that I'm much more unpopular in the Remove than you are, if you come to that," he replied.

"But I can stand up for myself, and you can't," said Bulstrode contemptuously. "You are a coward, you see."

"You didn't make much of a show against Wharton, anyway."

Bulstrode's brow darkened. Any allusion to his defeat at the hands of Harry Wharton was gall and wormwood to him. He took a step towards Hazeldene, his hands clenching, his lips tightening ominously.

Hazeldene caught up a heavy ebony ruler from the table. He did not speak, but his eyes gleamed savagely. Bulstrode paused, in spite of himself.

"What do you think you are going to do with that ruler?" he said between his teeth.

"Brain you with it, perhaps," said Hazeldene recklessly. "At any rate, I'll give you a blow as hard as I can if you lay a finger on me."

"Put that ruler down!"

"I won't!"

Bulstrode looked inclined to spring upon him. But the thick, heavy ruler looked dangerous. He broke into a laugh that was partly good-natured.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "You're coming out strong. What has come over you, Vaseline? Fancy the oily sneak of the Remove setting up as a fighting-man!"

"I'm in a humour to brain you if you touch me, that's all!" said Hazeldene bitterly. "I don't care what happens."

Bulstrode looked at him curiously.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't come in here for a row," he said. "You can put that ruler down, Vaseline. I'm not going to touch you. I think I know what has put your back up. You know you are going to be expelled."

Hazeldene started.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed hastily. "You were not in the pavilion——" And then he broke off hastily, feeling inclined to bite his tongue out, for Bulstrode's look of amazement showed him that he was on the wrong tack.

"Eh? What's that about the pavilion?"

"Nothing. You were saying——"

"But you said——"

"I said nothing. At all events, I'm going to say nothing. You can tell me what you were going to say or not, just as you choose," said Hazeldene sullenly.

"Oh, very well. I have had a talk with Isaacs, the moneylender."

Hazeldene turned pale.

"You rotten, spying hound!" he said thickly.

Bulstrode laughed.

"I was curious," he said. "And, as I told you, it was my duty as cock of the Remove to see that you brought no disgrace upon the Form."

"What has Isaacs told you?"

"Everything."

"You lie! You lie! Isaacs did not know——"

"What he didn't tell me I could guess for myself," said Bulstrode coolly. "He lent you the money to buy——"

"You—you cur!"

"To buy a watch bracelet!" grinned Bulstrode. "A lady's watch bracelet! Ha, ha!"

Hazeldene turned crimson.

"Well, why shouldn't I buy it, if I liked?" he exclaimed fiercely.

"No reason why you shouldn't, if you could pay for it," said Bulstrode; and Hazeldene winced. "No reason at all. Isaacs sold you the thing himself, and I should rather imagine you were done over it, too. Did Marjorie like it?"

"What—what do you mean?"

The bully of the Remove gave a scoffing laugh.

"Do you think I don't know whom it was for?"

Hazeldene trembled with rage, but he did not speak.

"You bought it for your sister on her birthday," said Bulstrode coolly. "I knew something about it before, but I didn't know you had bought it of Isaacs, or that you had paid him only half the money for it."

"You spying cur!"

"Isaacs charged you four pounds ten," said Bulstrode. "A nice, expensive thing for a fellow in the Lower Fourth to buy, and no mistake!"

"That was my business, not yours!"

"Isaacs thought it was my business," chuckled Bulstrode. "He supposed from my talking about it that I was going to pay the money for you, and he'd rather have the money than show you up."

"And he told you——"

"He told me the whole story. He doesn't know whom the bracelet was for, that's all. I know jolly well, though."

"Supposing it was so——"

"No supposing about it; it is so."

"Well, then, there's no need to go chattering about it," said Hazeldene savagely. "You had no right to inquire into my affairs, and Isaacs had no right to tell you——"

"As I said, he supposed that I was going to pay the money."

"You don't mean——"

"You know I have plenty of tin," said Bulstrode, jingling the money in his trousers pocket. "I might pay it for you."

Hazeldene brightened up considerably.

"If you'd lend me the money, Bulstrode, and shut up——"

"Well, that's a polite way of putting it, at all events!" grinned the bully of the Remove.

"What I mean is——"

"In the first place, how much do you owe Isaacs?"

"Didn't he tell you that?"

"Yes. He made it come to two pounds."

"That's it. I gave him two pounds ten down——"

"But haven't you paid him any since?"

"Yes; over thirty bob."

"Then how——"

"It's interest."

"My hat! He's a regular Shylock!" said Bulstrode, in amazement. "Talk about cent. per cent.! But, of course, he knows he's got you, so long as he's got your paper for the amount, to show to the doctor."

"That's it!" groaned Hazeldene.

"If it wasn't for that I'd snap my fingers at him. It isn't so much the show-up I mind, either. But I couldn't bear Marjorie to know about it."

"I quite understand that. Well, two pounds is a lot of money; it's the amount young Bunter wanted me to lend him the other day, and I refused. I don't know that I should refuse you if you asked me."

"What do you mean, Bulstrode? What are you getting at? I know jolly well that you don't mean to let me have the two pounds for nothing."

"Well, you could hardly expect that, could you?" said Bulstrode.

"What do you want in return?"

"Suppose I wanted to come down to your place to spend the holiday?" said Bulstrode, looking at him out of the corners of his eyes.

Hazeldene stared.

"Why should you want anything of the sort? Your people are richer than mine, and you'd have a much better time at home."

"Perhaps; perhaps not."

"You don't mean——" Hazeldene's eyes gleamed. "You don't mean that you'd like to come to my place because of—of——"

"Marjorie!" said Bulstrode, nodding coolly. "Supposing I do? I like Marjorie, and why shouldn't I improve the acquaintance if I want to?"

"Because—because—well, I won't tell you why."

"Oh, yes, do; I'm curious."

"Well, you're not fit to breathe the same air as my sister Marjorie!" said Hazeldene savagely. "That's why. I wouldn't have you home to chum with Marjorie for anything you could offer me, and that's flat. Marjorie shall never speak to you if I can help it."

A very ugly look came over Bulstrode's face.

"Well, that's plain English, anyway," he said.

"You asked for it."

"And so you think my society isn't good enough for dear Marjorie—you think it's worse than her brother's?" sneered Bulstrode.

Hazeldene flushed.

"I know I'm not all I ought to be, if that's what you mean, and if I get a chance I'm going to strike out a new line, too. I'm not going to begin, either, by acting like a rotten cad!"

"I don't see why I shouldn't chum with Marjorie if I like. I——"

"Well, I do."

"In plain language, you won't have me down?"

"No, I won't."

"You cheeky young rotter! And for half the term you've been touting for an invitation to my place for the holidays!" exclaimed Bulstrode angrily.

"Well, I don't want it now, anyway."

"You are going to set up in the independent line, I suppose? No more cadging or sponging?" said Bulstrode, with a bitter sneer.

Hazeldene was silent.

Bulstrode looked at him bitterly for a moment or two. Then he drew a handful of money from his pocket. There was a heap of silver, and several gold coins gleamed among it.

"Look at that, Vaseline!"

Hazeldene was looking at it with hungry eyes. There was more than enough money there to relieve him of all the difficulties that beset him. Bulstrode selected two sovereigns from the rest, and slipped the other coins back into his pocket.

"There's the two quid, Vaseline!"

Hazeldene made no movement to take it.

"You won't accept my offer?"

"Not on the terms you named."

Bulstrode jingled the money back into his pocket.

"Very well; keep on as you are, and get expelled, you cheeky young rotter!"

Hazeldene's face involuntarily fell as the gold disappeared from sight. The Remove bully saw it, and broke into a scoffing laugh.

"Come, it's not too late, Hazeldene," he said, jingling the money. "Don't be a silly ass! There's the cash if you want it——"

"I won't touch your money!" said Hazeldene; and he turned and walked to the door.

Bulstrode's eyes followed him with a savage expression. But the cad of the Remove meant what he said, and he walked out of the study, and Bulstrode was left alone.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton Speaks to the Point.

"Coming down to the gym., Harry?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Oh, come along, kid!" said Bob Cherry. "We're all going down, and even Billy Bunter is going to shake down his tea on the parallel bars!"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort, Cherry," said Bunter. "After a really good meal I don't feel inclined for physical culture, and I am not going to perform any monkey tricks on parallel bars. I don't mind watching you fellows play the giddy goat, and I'll show you some exercises with the Indian clubs, if you like——"

"That you won't!" said Nugent. "You're not going to brain me with an Indian club, you Owl!"

"I don't suppose for a moment that it would actually brain you if I hit you, Nugent, and I'm not really likely to hit you with the clubs——"

"No, you're not, for I see you go near them I shall chuck you out of the nearest window!" Nugent promised.

"The chuckfulness would be preferable to the brainfulness," said Hurree Singh, "and our Bunterful chum is certainly dangerous with the clubful exercise."

"I'm afraid there's a lot of jealousy in this study," said Billy Bunter, with a shake of the head.

"We—let's get down to the gym.!" said Bob Cherry. "I say, why aren't you coming along, Harry? No need to start on the prep, for an hour yet."

"I wasn't thinking of the prep."

"I hope you are not thinking of your old cricket bat," said Bunter anxiously. "Of course, I could not possibly know that you would mind. If you like, I will redeem it from Skinner to-morrow morning when my postal-order comes."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'm not thinking about the old bat, Bunter; and I think it would be a very

old bat by the time you redeemed it, anyway. It's all right, kids; run along and leave me alone. There's something I want to think out."

"Right you are!" said Bob Cherry. "Wish I could lend you my brain; it would make it easier for you. Come on, kids!"

The Removites quitted the study, and Harry Wharton was left alone.

There was a thoughtful shade upon Harry's brow as he stood leaning on the mantelpiece in the study. He was thinking deeply. With all Harry's faults—and he had many, though of late they had not been so much in evidence as of old—he had never been selfish, and he was just the kind of boy to take another fellow's troubles on his shoulders. That, to some extent, was what he was doing now.

His chums considered that Hazeldene had got off lightly, as indeed he had. But Harry Wharton could not dismiss the white, miserable face from his memory; neither could he quite banish the sweet, girlish features of Marjorie Hazeldene, whose eyes seemed to plead to him to save her brother.

It was no business of his; and Hazeldene might not be worth saving, for that matter. Yet Harry Wharton could not dismiss the matter so lightly from his mind. If only for Marjorie Hazeldene's sake, he would try to save the cad of the Remove.

But what could he do? That was the question. He more than suspected Hazeldene of bad and reckless habits, such as card-playing and even betting on horses. That was in all probability the cause of his difficulty. If the difficulty were taken away, and the cause continued, what would be achieved? Nothing! The situation would arise again, and Harry's trouble would be simply wasted. It was reform in the breast of Hazeldene himself that was wanted. And yet——

It would want thinking out. Harry turned down the gas in the study, and went out to take a quiet stroll in the Close to think over matters. In the passage he came face to face with Bulstrode. The latter was grinning.

"Hallo, Wharton!" he said, stopping the captain of the Remove, though Harry would have passed on. "You were in my study a while back."

"I went there to speak to Hazeldene——"

"Oh it's all right. I suppose you know he's in difficulties with a Sheeny moneylender, don't you?"

"I know something about it."

"You brought the Sheeny into his study, I remember." Bulstrode looked at Wharton very keenly. "Have you offered to lend him the money to get him out of his fix?"

Wharton started.

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, you have, then! I wondered why he was so deuced independent. Well, I can only say you're a fool for your pains. Two pounds doesn't grow on every bush, my boy. But perhaps it's on Marjorie Hazeldene's account?"

"I don't quite understand you, Bulstrode."

"I mean that I offered to lend Vaseline the money to fix things with the Sheeny, and he refused. It occurred to me afterwards that he was going to get it from somebody else. I hear Inky is broke; so it must be you. You're the only other fellow in the Remove, I believe, who's likely to be ass enough to pay another fellow's debts."

To show their supreme contempt of German marksmanship, a party of British soldiers who were suddenly subjected to a heavy fire calmly continued playing "shots at goal." The Tommy who has just headed the ball is a well-known professional, who smilingly assured his comrades that these impromptu games kept him very fit, the contant bursting of shells only adding to the excitement. He hopes to turn out with his old club next season.

"Thank you! But you say you offered him the money yourself?"

"That was on conditions, and he refused. He wouldn't have refused if he hadn't been sure of the tin from another quarter. I see how it is. You were mighty chummy with Marjorie Hazeldene when she was here, and you don't want her to know the true story of the bracelet."

"The bracelet?"

"Oh, don't put that on, Wharton! I know you know all about it, and I'll jolly soon show you that I know! I got it from Isaacs direct, and Vaseline has admitted it, and so there's no good beating about the bush. Vaseline owes the Sheeny money for a bracelet he bought for his sister on her birthday."

Harry Wharton started again.

"Are you quite sure of that, Bulstrode?" he exclaimed.

The bully of the Remove looked at him searchingly.

"Do you mean to say that you didn't know, Wharton?" he demanded.

"I certainly did not know."

"Then why are you going to lend him the money to pay Ikey Isaacs?"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort. At all events, I haven't offered to do it. As a matter of fact, I haven't two pounds in the world at the present moment."

"Then who is it Vaseline expects to get the money from?"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You had better ask him."

"It must be Inky."

"Hurree Singh is stony. As a matter of fact, we're all stony in No. 1 Study, or practically so," said Harry cheerfully. "Perhaps, after all, Hazeldene doesn't expect to get the money."

"But he refused my offer."

"The conditions might account for that."

"I never believed he had spirit enough to refuse any conditions," said Bulstrode distrustfully. "I suppose you are telling the truth?"

"You had better not suppose anything else aloud, at all events, Bulstrode," said Harry. "I am not accustomed to having my word doubted."

"Oh, keep your wool on. I can't understand it about Hazeldene, that's all. He seems to be going on a fresh tack entirely."

Bulstrode moved to pass on. Harry Wharton stepped quietly into his way, and the bully of the Remove stopped again.

"Does anybody else know this story besides yourself and me?" asked Harry.

"Probably not."

"Then it ought to be kept quiet."

"Why?" asked Bulstrode sneeringly.

"It's not a pleasant story. Marjorie Hazeldene may be down at the school again some time. It would be rotten if this story were generally known in the Remove. Vaseline has acted badly, but not so badly as a fellow who made a girl's name the talk of the common-room."

Bulstrode laughed mockingly.

"My hat, you are setting up as a Chevalier Bayard, and no mistake, Wharton! I suppose you will be going in for amateur theatricals next."

"I am setting up to be a decent fellow!" flashed out Harry. "And if

you were the same, you wouldn't think of saying a word about this affair of the bracelet."

"Rats! It's too good a story to keep."

"Then you mean to make it the joke of the Form?"

"Why not? If Vaseline had accepted my offer, I should have shut up. He threw it in my teeth, and I'm under no obligation to keep his secret."

"You are under an obligation not to say anything that would make a girl unhappy if she came to hear of it."

"I'm afraid I haven't any time to listen to sermons, Wharton," said Bulstrode, with a yawn. "Will you stand aside and let me pass?"

Harry gritted his teeth.

"No, I won't!"

"Oh, very well; I can wait," grinned Bulstrode, leaning his shoulder against the wall of the passage. "You are not going to stand there all the evening, I presume?"

"No. You intend to tell that story to the whole Form?"

"I intend to tell it to the first fellow that comes along if you keep me standing here," said Bulstrode, with evident relish.

"Very well. Now listen to me——"

"Oh, go ahead with the sermon! It's your innings. Why don't you begin 'dearly beloved brethren'?" sneered the bully of the Remove.

"I'm not going to preach to you," said Harry quietly, but with a dangerous glint in his eyes. "I don't suppose preaching would have much effect on a cad like you, and I'm not much of a hand at it, anyway. I'm going to talk plain English. When I first came to Greyfriars you licked me once——"

"More than once," grinned the other.

"Very well; more than once. But I stood up to you till the tables were turned, and I licked you, Bulstrode."

"You had rather the best of it last time, I suppose," said Bulstrode savagely. "What are you getting at? What about it?"

"I don't want to throw my victory in your face," said Harry Wharton. "You know how you used your victory over me when you had the best of it. You were such a bullying brute that I had no choice, even if I had wanted, but to go in again and keep it up till I got the best of it. When I licked you you cannot say that I ever tried to master, and I never taunted you as you did me many a time."

"You are making enough of it now."

"That's for a purpose I want you to understand how the matter stands. I can lick you, and since I last did so I've improved both in boxing and in physical strength. I had a hard fight last time. I could give you twice the licking now, with half the trouble."

"What are you driving at?" demanded Bulstrode uneasily.

"This! If you say a word to a single soul about this bracelet story, I'll give you such a licking that you'll hardly be able to crawl for a week!" said Harry Wharton, with flashing eyes.

A bitter sneer came upon Bulstrode's face.

"So you are setting up as a bully, are you?"

"It's the last thing in the world I want to do, but you've driven me to it. Mind, I won't have a word said about Marjorie Hazeldene or this affair at all. If you are going to make me play the bully, I'll play it right through. If you say a word—and if anything is said I shall know it came from you, as no one else knows the story—I say, if you utter a single word that might cause Marjorie Hazeldene pain if she knew it, I will thrash you within an inch of your life."

Harry's face was dark, his eyes blazing. He meant every word he said; and the one-time bully of the Remove knew it.

There was a momentary silence.

Bulstrode broke it.

"You can keep your wool on," he said, with an effort. "I really had no intention of telling the story except to a few fellows."

"That would amount to telling the whole Form at once."

"Well, if you make such a point of it, I don't mind keeping mum. You might have been a little more civil about it."

"If civility would have been of any use, I'm sorry I was uncivil," said Harry. "But it's understood, Bulstrode—not a word!"

"Oh, all right!" snarled Bulstrode.

Harry Wharton stood aside, and the other passed on. He passed on with a glare of savage rage in his eyes, but there was more fear than rage. Bulstrode was not likely to tattle. Harry Wharton strolled slowly out into the dusky Close. There, in the gloom under the old elms, he thought out his problem.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Harry's Mission.

"The man who invented half-holidays," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully, "ought to have a tin medal."

Bob Cherry made that remark in the Remove class-room the next day, just before the Lower Fourth were dismissed. The day was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the weather was fine for the time of year. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, glanced towards the form where the chums sat in a row. Whenever there was any buzz in class, Mr. Quelch instinctively looked towards the form occupied by the famous four.

"I think I heard someone speak," said Mr. Quelch.

"Did you, sahib?" said Hurree Singh, upon whom the Remove master's eyes had fallen suspiciously. "The earfulness of the instructor sahib is very acute."

"Perhaps you spoke, Hurree Singh?"

"Yes, sir—I just spoke to you," said the nabob innocently.

"I mean before that!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Did you speak before you addressed me in reply to my remark, Hurree Singh?"

"Yes, sir——"

"Then take fifty lines."

"But, my respected and revered sahib——"

"Take a hundred lines."

"But allow me to enter upon the worthy explanativeness——"

"Two hundred lines."

"I shall have great pleasure in receiving all the lines you have the generosity to bestow upon me," said the nabob. "But it seems to me unreasonable to punish me for speaking to Wharton before we came into class. But no doubt the instructor sahib knows best. As an Oriental, I am ignorant of the home-grown ways."

"When you said you spoke before you addressed me, did you mean that it was also before you came into the class-room, Hurree Singh?"

"Certainfully, respected sahib."

"Then you—— But no matter. You need not take the lines."

"The thankfulness is terrific."

"I really wish, Hurree Singh," said the Remove master snappishly, "that you would pay more attention to the instruction you receive, and would cease to speak in that absurd travesty of the English language."

"The attention to the instructiveness is great, most worthy and ludicrous sahib," said the nabob meekly. "But the instructful lessons I receive at Greyfriars are not samefully alike with those I received under the tuitional care of the worthy moonshee who taught me English in Bengal."

"You must speak the English of England, not the English of Bengal."

"The worthy moonshee was a learned man, and greatly respected for his knowledge of the language of the English," said the nabob. "I myself heard an English sahib tell him that his English was most picturesque."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Well, well, we will not talk about it now; we will find another opportunity. It is time for the class to——"

"But truly, most respected sahib, I am crammed with eagerness to learn the differentiation of the English speechfulness," said Hurree Singh. "If I have any small and unnoticeable errorfulness in my rendering of the great language of Shakespeare and the great poets, Milton and Dan Leno, I am sorrowful, and seek the improvefulness. It is the resultfulness of early training. As your English proverb says, 'As the twig is inclined to grow, so the honourable tree is bent.'"

"The class is dismissed."

Bob Cherry hugged the nabob as they reached the passage in the crowd of the Remove.

"You inky bounder, how much of your piffle is real, and how much humbug?" he demanded. "I'm blessed if I can tell t'other from which."

The dusky nabob smiled serenely.

"Perhaps I yielded slightfully to the temptation to pull the august leg of the instructor sahib," he purred. "I am really looking forwardfully towards the discussion on English when Mr. Quelch finds his opportunity to give me private hintfulness on that language. There are many strangefulnesses in English to which I am not accustomed even after all the studyfulnesses I have bestowed on the tongue. For instance, in your great Shakespeare's honourable play, 'The Rivals'——"

"That's not Shakespeare," grinned Nugent, "that's Sheridan."

Hurree Singh shook his head gently.

"I fear that you are slightfully mistaken, my worthy chum. Sheridan was the honourable author of the 'School for Candles'——"

"Ha, ha! Do you mean the 'School for Scandal?'"

"Possibly that is the more correctful designation. But as I was saying, Shakespeare, in 'The Rivals'——"

"Sheridan."

"Shakespeare."

"Sheridan, you inky ass! Sheridan!"

"I must really insist that it was Shakespeare, because my esteemed native instructor in Bengal informed me so with his own tongue," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with quiet and polite obstinacy. "But as that great poet says, in 'The Rivals'—'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown——"

"Ha, ha! That's Shakespeare, right

enough, but it's in 'King Henry IV.'"

"I am afraid you are wrong, Nugent. But to take that sentence, it is not what we English-speakers in Bengal consider sensible."

"What's the matter with it, Inky?"

"In the first place, every head has a crown, unless the person has been scalped by Red Indians. In the——"

"Ha, ha! It's not that kind of a crown."

"Besides, if the crown of the head were removed, by scalping or otherwise, the person thus crownfully scalped would lie more uneasily than a person still possessing the crown of his honourable head."

"But it's not that kind of a crown——"

"There are, of course, other kinds of crowns, such is the prolific verbosity of your honourable English language; but all the same it is not senseful. For if the crown intended by the poet is the common crown of commerce, is it not absurdful to declare that, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a five-shilling piece?'"

"Ha, ha! This tame lunatic will be the death of me if he doesn't leave off talking English," giggled Bob Cherry. "There's still another kind of crown, Inky—the kind a king wears."

The nabob shook his head.

"It was not that kind of a crown that the honourable Shakespeare meant, Bob Cherry."

"Ha, ha! Wasn't it? Why not?"

"The reasonfulness is perfectly clearful. The poet says with distinctfulness, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,' meaning that the person concerned is lying down, perhaps, taking an afternoon napful snooze."

"Well, what about it?"

The nabob smiled pityingly.

"It is clearful to me, my Cherryful friend, that you do not habitually use the thinking apparatus in your brainful box," he remarked. "Surely it is evident to the most stupidful of asses that a king, or anybody else, would take his crown off before going to bed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In the first place, there might be burglars, and unless the crown was insured prudentially, there would be a great riskfulness. In the second place, a crown is made of hard material, and would certainly give a king a headache if he went to sleep in it. Under those circumstances, truly, you might say that 'uneasy lies a head that wears a crown.' It would be assuredly uneasy. In India I have met several princes, but not one who goes to bed in his crown."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a figure of a speech, Inky, if you know what that is. It's a poetical way of putting it."

"I think you are slightfully mistaken, my worthy chum. I cannot regard the line as being worthy of the great Shakespeare, whose works I esteem. I could quote you some hundreds of other lines——"

"Please don't, Inky."

"Oh, just a dozen or two to show you——"

"There will be an inky corpse in this passage if you start."

"Oh, very well, my esteemed Cherry! Let us take the little runfulness into the august quadrangle."

The Removites went out into the March sunshine. After dinner Bob Cherry, Nugent, and the nabob prepared for footer practice. But Harry Wharton had other plans in his head.

"Aren't you going to get into your footer togs, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Not just now."

"But we've got on a scratch match, and we want you."

"Let another chap have a chance of showing what he can do. I want to run down to the village."

"Oh, I don't know that we're set on footer," said Bob Cherry, who would have changed his plans at any moment to please a chum. "We'll come for a stroll if you'd rather."

Harry Wharton turned red.

"Well, to be quite frank, it's a matter of business I want to see into,' he said. "I shall have to go down alone. I'll join you on the field later."

"Oh, all right!" said Nugent. "If there's a giddy mystery, we don't want to understudy Sherlock Holmes and start solving it. Come along to the footer my infants, and leave his highness to get on with the mystification."

"Don't be ratty, Nugent——"

Nugent laughed good-naturedly.

"I'm not, Harry. But I'm blessed if I see what's in the wind. But I'm not curious. Go for your little run, and see us later. Ta-ta!"

The three Removites strolled off. Harry Wharton went down slowly towards the gates, with a thoughtful expression upon his brow. He did not like putting off his chums, but there was nothing else to be done.

"I say, Wharton——"

Billy Bunter was sidling after him. Harry glanced at him. There was an extremely knowing grin upon Bunter's face which rather puzzled Harry.

"What is it, Bunter? What are you grimacing about?" he asked.

"You didn't want the fellows to come to the village with you?"

"No; but that's no business of yours, is it?"

"N—no, not exactly; but you'd like me to come, wouldn't you?"

"Not in the least!"

"Now, don't be mean, Wharton."

"Mean! What on earth are you driving at?" exclaimed Harry, somewhat irritably. "How is there anything mean in not wanting a fat little barrel to roll down to the village with me?"

"Of course, I know very well what you are going to the village for."

Wharton gave a start.

"I don't believe it. What do you mean?"

"I saw you take the money from your desk and put it in your pocket. I think you might take me even if you don't want the others."

"And what do you think I am going out for?" asked Harry curiously.

"To have a feed all by yourself, of course."

"You young pig!" said Harry, in disgust.

"It seems to me that you're the pig, when you won't let me have a snack, after the feed I stood last night," said Billy Bunter indignantly. "I'm really surprised at you, Wharton. I didn't think this of you—I didn't really."

Harry burst into a laugh. It was impossible to be angry long with Billy Bunter.

"Look here, you young cormorant," he exclaimed, "I'm not going out for a feed. I'm going on business. There's nothing to eat, and so you don't want to come. So-long!"

And Harry walked out of the gates of Greyfriars, leaving Billy Bunter looking extremely disappointed.

Harry Wharton strode down the lane with a moody shade upon his brow. He had thought the matter out, and had decided to do what he could to save Hazeldene, for his sister's sake—and perhaps for his own sake, too. What he had learned from Bulstrode had caused a change in his feelings towards the cad of the Remove.

He had known that Hazeldene sometimes betted, and he had naturally concluded that this bad and foolish conduct had placed him in the clutches of Ikey Isaacs. In that case Hazeldene would have deserved a licking rather than sympathy. But now the case was altered. Hazeldene had been wrong to purchase an article he could not pay for, and trust to good fortune to find the money. It was foolish and reckless, but the motive was good, and the case was very different from what it would have been had Hazeldene lost the money on cards or the races. Harry was sorry for him. He had before determined to do what he could. Now he had made up his mind to see Hazeldene through at whatever cost to himself.

The cost was likely to be a serious one, to a schoolboy at all events. It was a case of money, and Harry had no money excepting that which the colonel had sent him for his new cricket things. His chums were short of cash, and could not help him. If Harry parted with the only money he possessed, it might be weeks before he could obtain the articles he required—he might be without them all the summer. Billy Bunter, too, had sold his old bat. For an enthusiastic young cricketer to be left without a bat of his own all through the cricket season was a sacrifice a schoolboy will easily understand. But, if necessary, Harry was prepared to make the sacrifice. That was one reason why he was now going out alone. His proud, sensitive nature shrank from anything in the nature of display. If he saved Hazeldene, no one should know it—not a soul at Greyfriars should have a hint of the sacrifice he had made.

While the chums of the Remove were busy on the footer field that March afternoon, Harry Wharton strode down the lane with a determined mind—to seek Ikey Isaacs, and deal with him!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
The Spider's Web.

"Can I see Mr. Isaacs?"

It was a dusty, dingy little office, in the dingiest part of the High Street of the market town of Dale, a couple of miles from Greyfriars. Harry Wharton had caught the train from the village station, and got out at Dale, where he knew that the moneylender had his office. It had taken him some time to find the dingy little place, but he had found it at last. A strange, unpleasant feeling, as of a fly getting entangled in a spider's web, came over Harry Wharton as he entered the little office, descending by a step from the street.

A youth with a large nose and a shiny complexion was seated upon a high stool there, busily engaged in scanning columns of figures in a financial paper. He looked up in a leisurely way as Harry spoke, and looked him over with a pair of very bright, black eyes, that reminded the Greyfriars boy of a spiteful parrot.

"Mr. Isaacs is engaged at present."

Harry made a gesture of impatience. He had come over specially to see

Ikey Isaacs, and he did not care to linger in the dingy precincts of the moneylender's office, but there was evidently no help for it.

"I suppose I can wait?"

"Yeth," said the shiny youth. "I suppose you can."

"Is Mr. Isaacs likely to be long?"

"That's according to the time he's engaged."

The shiny youth evidently seemed to regard this reply as a pretty good specimen of real humour, for he chuckled as he returned to his paper.

Harry flushed a little.

The office clerk evidently did not regard him as a very valuable visitor, perhaps seeing at a glance that he was not the kind of fellow to want to borrow money, and setting him down as someone who had come to intercede for a friend.

But rudeness, especially from such an unpleasant little shrimp of a fellow, was hard to bear, and Harry was greatly inclined to take him by the shoulders and fling him out into the street. The fellow was five or six years older than himself, but the athletic, healthy schoolboy could have done it easily.

"Cannot you tell me how long Mr. Isaacs is likely to be engaged?"

"No," said the shiny youth, without looking up from the paper.

"Is it any use my waiting?"

"Yeth, if you like."

Harry made a quick step towards the youth, so quick that the latter laid down his paper and hurriedly slipped off the stool.

"Here, what yer at?" he exclaimed. "Do you want to be chucked neck and crop into the street, you imp?" said Harry.

"I—I—— Hands off!"

"Then be civil." Harry caught hold of the paper and threw it across the office. "Now, you're put here to answer questions, I suppose? Do you know how long Mr. Isaacs will be engaged? If it's a long time, I'll go round for a walk and come back again. I don't want to stay here longer than I can help."

The shiny youth scowled sullenly.

But he was evidently afraid of the stalwart schoolboy, and his tone was unwillingly civil as he replied:

"Mr. Isaacs may be free any moment now."

"Thank you. Then I will wait."

Harry sat down upon an uncomfortable wooden chair. The shiny youth blinked at him, and then crossed the little office and picked up his paper. But he did not read it. He sat staring at Harry and blinking. He apparently did not quite know what to make of the rather unusual visitor to the office of Ikey Isaacs.

There was a murmur of voices from behind a dirty green baize door which led to the inner office of Ikey Isaacs. The word "Private," in large letters, showed that that room was the moneylender's sanctum. Once or twice a voice was raised in the inner room, and a word came faintly through. Then the shiny youth grinned as if he thought a good joke was going on. Harry Wharton easily guessed that the moneylender was being interviewed by some unhappy victim.

The door of the inner room opened at last. As it opened, it partly shut off from view the spot where Harry was sitting, and he was unseen by the moneylender as he ushered his visitor out.

Mr. Isaacs was as small, and greasy, and suave as ever. His visitor looked like a farmer, and there was an expression of helpless misery on his face that went straight to Harry Wharton's heart.

"Goot-day, my friend—goot-day," said Mr. Isaacs.

"One word more, Mr. Isaacs," exclaimed the visitor, turning towards him appealingly. "Can't you go just a little easier——"

Isaacs waved his greasy hand deprecatingly.

"I have been too easy alretty, Mr. Fairlegh."

"Ye-e-es, I know, but——"

"Goot-afternoon."

"It was only forty pounds at first that I borrowed," said Mr. Fairlegh miserably. "I've paid you fifty-five in all, and I still owe you thirty."

"Interesh, my friend—interesh," grinned Mr. Isaacs, rubbing his oily hands together. "How can an honest man live without interesh?"

"Yes, but——"

"Show the shentleman out, Jacob."

"But pray listen, Mr. Isaacs—one word. I cannot possibly meet this, and—and I can't bear the thought of—of—— Oh, Mr. Isaacs, if you could only give me another few weeks——"

"Why don't you show the shentleman out, Jacob?"

The farmer looked helplessly at the moneylender and the grinning Jacob, and then jammed his hat tightly on his head and strode unsteadily out of the office.

Mr. Isaacs rubbed his hands again.

"Jacob, mine poy, do you—— Hallo, who is dis?"

The moneylender stared at Harry, just becoming aware of his presence in the office. Harry rose to his feet. It was with difficulty that he kept back the look of loathing and scorn that he felt was coming over his face. He would not improve Hazeldene's position by telling Mr. Isaacs what he thought of him, that was certain.

The moneylender recognised him at the second glance.

"Ah, it is der young shentleman I saw at der school," he exclaimed. "I tink we do piziness togetter, mine young friend—eh? Come into mine office."

"I came to see you——"

"Yeth. Come into mine office."

Harry Wharton followed the moneylender into his den, and Mr. Isaacs closed the door. He waved the boy to a seat.

"I am glad to see you, mine poy," he said affably. "Vy don't you sit down?"

"Thank you, I will stand."

"You showed me der vay at Greyfriars School, to see mine young friend Hazeldene. You have come to me from him, perhaps? He is going to pay my monish."

Harry hesitated for a moment.

"I have come to see about that," he said abruptly. "I suppose it doesn't matter to you where the money comes from, so long as the debt is paid?"

Mr. Isaacs grinned.

"Not in the least, young shentleman."

"How much does Hazeldene owe you, Mr. Isaacs?"

"I vill look at der bapers——"

"Cannot you tell me the figure?"

"It is about two pounds."

Harry Wharton nodded slightly. Bulstrode had told him the truth. In Harry Wharton's pocket there were thirty shillings, and he had no more money in the world.

"I want to speak to you about that, Mr. Isaacs," he said. "Hazeldene is in a bad way over this. He is getting desperate."

Mr. Isaacs smiled and rubbed his hands.

"Den he should pay der monish."

"He hasn't it."

"Den he should persuade some friend to pay it," grinned Mr. Isaacs. "If I do not have my monish, I go to der Head."

"You would not get a penny of it in that case, as you must know. Hazeldene is under age, and you have no right to claim anything from him."

"It would be cheaper for him to pay dan to be expelled."

"Yes, I knew you were trading on that——" Harry Wharton checked himself. "Now, look here, Mr. Isaacs, I believe you have had your principal back, and it is only a question of interest."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Isaacs cautiously.

"You put the figure at two pounds."

"Dat is der figure, young shentleman, roughly speaking."

"And you have Hazeldene's paper?"

"Yeth."

"Will you give it up for thirty shillings?"

The moneylender stared at him.

"Vy should I give you a paper worth two pounds for dirty shillings, young shentleman?"

Harry Wharton controlled his temper with difficulty.

"Hazeldene's promise is not worth the paper it is written on, Mr. Isaacs."

The moneylender shrugged his shoulders.

"Excepting by——" Harry was going to say "blackmail," but he checked himself. It was useless, worse than useless, to quarrel with the oily little scoundrel.

"Where is the dirty shillings to come from?" asked Mr. Isaacs, with a cunning leer.

"That could be paid."

"Den vy not two pound?"

"Because that would be impossible."

Mr. Isaacs grinned. He evidently thought that if a friend of Hazeldene's could raise thirty shillings he could raise the other ten.

"My due is two pounds, young shentleman," he said. "Piziness is piziness. Two pounds is der figure. Can you settle dat?"

"No."

"Den I vish you a goot afternoon."

Mr. Isaacs opened the door leading into the inner office, and stood aside for Harry Wharton to pass him.

"Jacob, show te young shentleman out."

Jacob grinned and opened the street door. Harry Wharton hesitated a moment. But he knew, by what he had witnessed in that office, how useless an appeal to the moneylender would be. And to make an appeal under the sneering, grinning eyes of the shiny youth was too hard a pill to swallow. The lad turned away with a sickening feeling at his heart, and strode from the place, and Jacob shut the door after him. And Ikey Isaacs rubbed his greasy hands and grinned a greasy grin.

"Der young shentleman has dirty shillings, Jacob," he remarked. "I tink mineself dat he come back presently mit two pound. Ha, ha!"

And Jacob laughed, too.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Harry Finds a Way.

Harry Wharton strode away from the dingy office of the moneylender with a cloud upon his brow and fierce anger in his heart.

His feelings cooled down somewhat, however, as he walked on in the fresh air and the sunshine. He had seemed choked while he was in Ikey Isaac's office. Now he breathed again freely and deeply.

But what was to be done?

That the moneylender would accept thirty shillings for a worthless piece of paper had seemed very probable to him. The man would lose and not gain by ruining Hazeldene, for revenge could not be supposed to enter into the calculations of a business man like Ikey Isaacs. Harry did not know that the moneylender felt certain that the boy, if he could raise part of the sum, could with another effort raise the whole of it, and so was determined not to abate a jot of his pound of flesh.

At any other time the required half-sovereign could easily have been raised among the chums of the Remove. But it was now an unfortunate time. The money was not to be had there now. Harry Wharton had only himself to depend upon. He was used to depending upon himself; but now it really seemed that he was in a fix there was no escaping from.

He stopped by the railings of the Green. A number of people were standing by the railings, looking on at a game of football that was being played by lads on the Green. Harry looked on with interest, too.

He watched the game for some time. He thought of the chums of the Remove, on the junior ground at Greyfriars, and sighed. Leaving the Green behind, he walked on down the High Street into the town again. A wide, high shop-window—a window the Greyfriars lads knew well—attracted him, and he stopped.

It was the shop of the athletic outfitter's of the district, where the Greyfriars fellows mostly dealt. Many a time had Harry Wharton looked into that window, and looked over the stock in the shop, and wished himself the possessor of limitless pocket-money.

He stood looking into the window now, with a heavy weight at his heart. There was the very bat he had made up his mind to buy—and he had the money in his pocket to pay for it, if he chose.

His hand slid into his pocket, and he jingled the coins. It was his own money; it had been sent to him to lay out as he chose, and he had promised himself that cricket outfit for a long time. He had no bat at all now, either. The inclination to go into the shop and carry out his original intention was strong.

After all, why should he not? He had tried to settle with the moneylender, and the man had refused his offer! He had no more money to offer; surely he was free now to do as he liked with it?

But it was only for a moment. Harry Wharton turned firmly away and walked on. He had undertaken to save Hazeldene, and he would save him. But how? Where was the rest of the money to come from?

A glare of gold and silver in a shop window caught his eye; then a notice on the glass, "Money Lent." He started. He was standing outside a pawnbroker's shop, and it had brought a new thought into his mind. His hand went to his watch-pocket. His watch was a silver one, a solid and serviceable timekeeper, and he was sure he could get at least the amount he required if he chose to take it into the pawnbroker's shop.

Involuntarily he coloured, and cast a quick glance about him. He had passed that shop, and even glanced into the window, many a time before, careless whether he was seen there or not. But at the thought of pawning an article a strangely guilty feeling came over him, and a strange nervousness, lest eyes that knew him should see him there.

He entered the shop quickly. It did not take him long to make up his mind. Fortunately the shop was empty, save for the man behind the counter.

"Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

Harry's face was crimson; he could not help it. He fumbled with the watch in his pocket.

"If—if you please——"

"You want your watch repaired?"

"N-no I—I want you to lend me some money on this."

"Oh, other door, please."

Harry Wharton looked round him.

"Which door?"

The man behind the counter smiled slightly.

"There's another entrance for pledging," he said. "But never mind; come in this way," he added, kindly enough. "Come into this room."

"Thank you very much."

Harry Wharton, with his heart beating, followed the man into a room behind the shop. The man was looking at him keenly, but not unkindly.

"You wish to pledge your watch?"

"Yes," stammered Harry. "I—I—for a short time."

"Very good, sir. Let me see it, please."

The man's business-like tone pulled Harry together. He unfastened the watch from the chain and laid it upon the table. The man picked it up and looked it over.

"Fifteen shillings," he said.

"Thank you; that will be quite enough."

The pawnbroker smiled.

"I could lend you more but for the monogram," he said. "If I have to sell the watch, you see——"

"I shall come for it very soon," said Harry, going scarlet again.

"Yes, I suppose you will. Wait a minute, and I will make out the ticket. There you are—fourteen shillings and elevenpence-halfpenny. I have to charge you for the ticket, you know."

"Thank you very much," said Harry.

He put the money into his pocket, said good-day to the pawnbroker, and left the place. The man had been kind and considerate, but Harry breathed more freely when he was out of doors again. He turned his steps in the direction of the office of Ikey Isaacs. He had more than enough money in his possession now to satisfy the moneylender. His heart was light. It did not take him long to reach the office, and Jacob grinned as he came in.

Harry's face was hard and unrelaxing. There was something irritating in the grin of the shiny youth.

"I want to see Mr. Isaacs," he said abruptly.

The shiny youth tapped at the inner door and opened it.

"He's back again, Mr. Isaacs," he murmured.

Ikey Isaacs grinned like a gnome.

"Show the young shentleman in, Jacob."

Harry was shown into the inner office. Ikey Isaacs greeted him with a bow, rubbing his greasy hands.

"I am glad to see you again, young shentleman."

"I have come to settle Hazeldene's account," said Wharton shortly. "You said it was two pounds, did you not?"

"I have looked it over. It comes to two pounds three shillings and sixpence, young shentleman," said the oily Mr. Isaacs

Harry Wharton said nothing. He had not come there to haggle with the usurer. So long as he had enough money to satisfy the rascal's demands, he had nothing to say. He drew the money from his pocket, and counted out two pounds three shillings and sixpence.

"There is the money, Mr. Isaacs. Now give me Hazeldene's paper, please."

Mr. Isaacs smiled.

"I am a piziness man," he remarked. "Piziness is piziness. Dere is the paper, young shentleman."

Harry examined the paper carefully. He knew Hazeldene's signature well. It was genuine enough, and his distrust caused a twinkle of amusement to leap into Isaacs' eyes.

"You will receipt that, Mr. Isaacs."

"Certainly, young shentleman."

Mr. Isaacs dipped a pen in ink and wrote a receipt across the paper. Harry took it and placed it in his pocket-book. Mr. Isaacs collected up the money from the table.

"If I can do any piziness mit you at any time, I am always at your service, young shentleman," he remarked. "My terms are very moderate. I always try to do justice to mine clients. You tink not? Ah, you never know."

And Harry Wharton was shown out of the moneylender's office, with the paper safe in his pocket.

The lad's heart was light as he strode away. He had made his sacrifice, and he had carried out his purpose. Hazeldene was saved; and if quiet and kindly help could save him from future pitfalls he should be saved. The sacrifice had not been a light one, but Harry Wharton did not regret that he had made it.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Fresh Start for Vaseline.

The Remove practice was over when Harry Wharton re-entered the gates of Greyfriars. He entered the schoolhouse and went upstairs to his study. His chums were not there, rather to his relief. He did not wish to have to explain to them about the afternoon's excursion. He took the paper out of his pocket, and examined it afresh in the study. It was all right. Hazeldene was out of the clutches of the usurer. Harry Wharton enclosed the paper in an envelope and sealed it. His intention was to take it into Hazeldene's study and leave it there, without a word as to whom it had come from. His relations with the cad of the Remove had been strained, and he did not desire Hazeldene to know whom he was under obligations to.

But as he sealed the envelope there was a sound of footsteps outside the study, and the door was thrown open, and Bob Cherry, Nugent, and the Nabob of Bhanipur came in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here you are, then. I

thought I spotted you in the Close. You've got back!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Harry, with a smile.

"The lookfulness is correct," Hurree Singh. "We are glad to gaze upon your beautiful and esteemed countenance once more. But the pressing question of the moment is, have you succeeded in raising any cashfulness?"

"That's it," said Nugent. "We've had some jolly good practice, and we're hungry. We're all stony, and unless we sell Bob Cherry's new bicycle-lamp ——"

"No fear! I've locked it up, away from that young demon Bunter."

"Ha, ha! Well, have you succeeded in robbing anybody, Harry?"

"The robfulness would be very welcome in the critical moment such as has now heretofore arriven," said the nabob. "We are all in the grip of the hungerfulness, and the tuckshop invites us with the alluring charm of the grubful refreshment."

Harry Wharton laughed.

He drew from his pocket the remnant of the sum he had received from the pawnbroker in Dale. It amounted to one shilling and fivepence-halfpenny.

"Corn in Egypt!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "This will save us from the horrors of famine, at all events. Where did you get it?"

"Oh, there it is, anyway!"

"Mustn't ask him," said Nugent. "He may be able to get some more in the same place. We shall miss him when he is arrested."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Harry, laughing. "If you want to know, I ——"

"We don't want to know. Come and help us blue this at the school shop. One-and-fivepence-ha'penny will go far if it's laid out with great care."

"The carefulness will be terrific."

"Come along, Harry!" said Nugent, linking his arm in Harry's "I say, after we've done this little lot in, we'll come along with you to buy your bat and things."

Wharton coloured a little.

"I'm not going to buy a new bat," he said awkwardly.

Nugent stared.

"Not going to buy a new bat!"

"No; I've changed my mind."

"But your old one's gone."

"I know it is."

"But what are you going to do without a bat?"

"Oh, I shall manage somehow. I'll get my old one back from Skinner as soon as I can raise the tin."

"But if you're not going to buy the things, you've plenty of tin," said Nugent. "There's the thirty bob your uncle sent you."

"As a matter of fact, Nugent, I've spent it."

"Spent it! You've been out and blued thirty bob without asking a fellow to come along and help!" exclaimed Nugent in amazement.

"Well, yes. And I can't very well explain, old chap. It—it wasn't pleasant to do it, either, but I did—and there's an end."

Nugent squeezed his arm as they left the study.

"All right, Harry, old fellow. I think I can guess; and I won't ask any questions. Come along—and mum's the word."

As the chums of the Remove went down the passage they passed Hazeldene. The latter gave them a glance, and strode on. He stopped at the top of the stairs, and watched the famous four go out into the Close. Then he glanced up and down the passage.

His face was going red and white, and his breath came thick and fast. There was no one in sight; on a fine half-holiday few Greyfriars fellows remained indoors. The house was very silent and deserted.

Hazeldene turned, and went along the passage towards No. 1 study. His footfalls were very light. As he reached the door he glanced in cautiously. He had seen the four chums leave the house, but he did not know where Billy Bunter was. But, wherever Bunter was, he was not in the study. The room was empty.

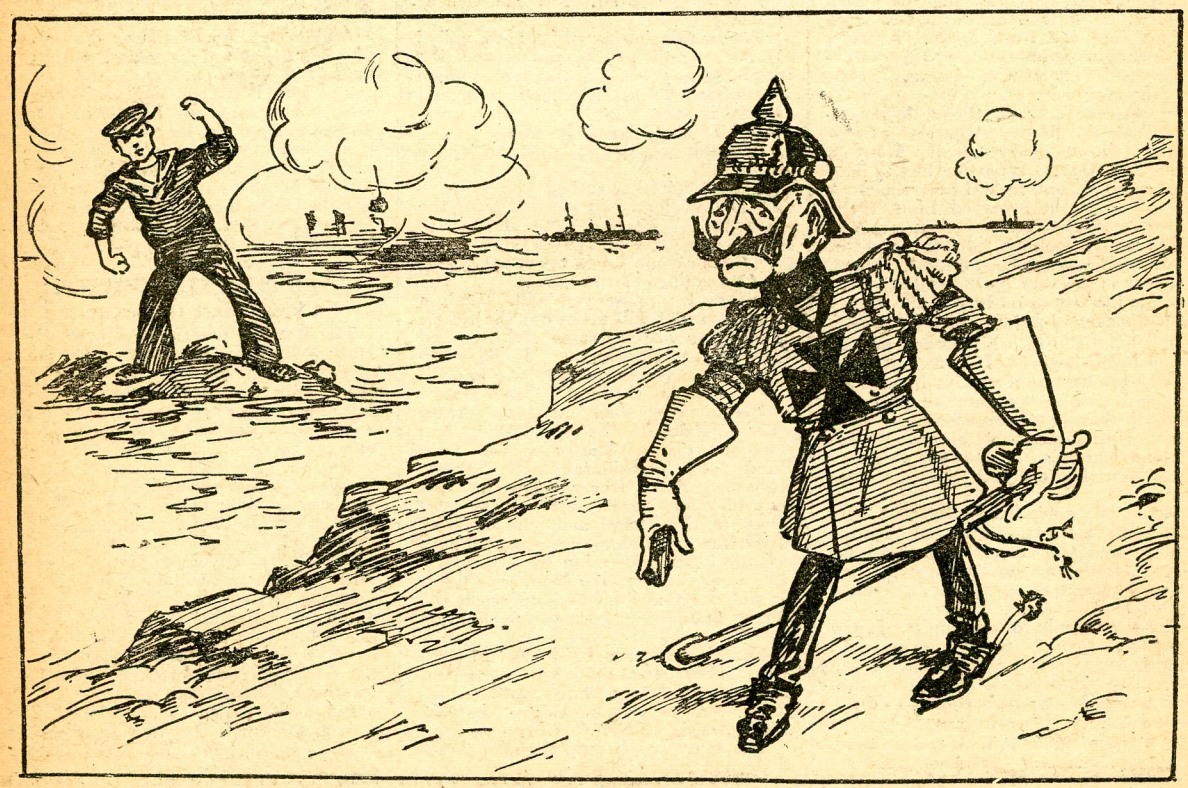
Hazeldene entered. His heart was beating faster. He glanced round the room. There was Harry Wharton's desk, where once the nabob's diamond had been kept. The diamond was not there now. Yet Hazeldene's eyes lingered on the desk.

Then his glance fell upon the envelope lying upon the table. He stepped towards it and picked it up, and turned it over in his hands, looking at it curiously. The envelope had not been carefully fastened, and the gum was not yet set. The flap came open in Hazeldene's hands.

He drew out the contents. A sheet of paper, folded. Had he hoped to find money there? Possibly, probably, for a look of keen disappointment came over his face as he saw that the envelope contained nothing but a folded sheet of paper.

He unfolded the paper carelessly enough, and then he gave a violent start. His own signature was the first

(*Continued on page* 22.)



SONGS FOR THE KAISER: "Somewhere a Voice is Calling!"

A RACE AGAINST TIME!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story dealing with the further Thrilling Adventures of

BILL STUBBS, OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

The German touched a certain section of the wall, and a strange sight was revealed to Bill Stubbs. Three men looked up from a table at which they were playing cards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bill Stubbs's Honeymoon—The Signal-lights—The Special Constable—An Ugly Shock—The Spies at Work.

Bill Stubbs lit a very fat-looking cigar and grinned through the smoke at Lil. For once in a way his round face was quite free of the stains of motor-oil, his bristling hair had been smoothed down as close as oil could make it go to his scalp, and his moustache had been recently trimmed. As for the brass buttons on his coat, they positively seemed to be vieing one with the other in the matter of brightness. In brief, Bill Stubbs was on his honeymoon, having used his seven days' leave from the front—no one could have earned them better—for the purpose of being married.

Lil, who was sitting before the fire in the modest apartment that Bill Stubbs had engaged, also smiled happily; and not without reason. The little cockney ex-'bus-driver might not be exactly an Adonis to look at, but the stripes of a sergeant were on his arm, and the ribbon of the Victoria Cross showed on the chest of his khaki jacket. What was more, his portrait, very smudgy, but in each case with a broad grin of the mouth, had been printed in a number of papers. Those papers were already stowed away at the bottom of Lil's new trunk.

"Sha'n't be long, ole girl!" Bill Stubbs said cheerfully. "I can do with a bit of fresh air before turnin' in."

"Right, Bill!" Lil answered readily, her decidedly pretty face wearing a smile. "You'll go straight along the front and up the hill to the upper parade?"

"Yes."

"Then I may come after you when I've seen Mrs. Hall about the meals for to-morrow. It'll be our last day together for a bit"—the girl could not help a sigh escaping her—"and I'm going to make something special of it."

Bill Stubbs's face clouded, and he crossed to the girl and laid his hands on her shoulders, looking down earnestly into her eyes

"You ain't wantin' me not to go back?" he asked slowly.

"Not to go back!" the girl repeated, the blood flushing up into her cheeks. "It feels a bit hard, Bill, but I'd rather be the widow of a hero than the wife of a coward!"

Bill Stubbs bent and kissed her, then grinned reassuringly.

"You ain't goin' to be no widow," he said. "I'm not the sort of chap

what gets shot. I'm the kind what comes back to live 'appily ever after." His face set hard, and he drew himself up to the extreme limit of his not very impressive height.

"And I'll tell you one thing, old girl," he added. "If you asked me to stop, and they'd let me, I wouldn't do it. You remember some of the things I've told you, what I've seen over there." He waved a hand vaguely in the direction of where he believed France and Belgium to lie, but the action was none the less impressive. "I couldn't tell you all of them, and I wouldn't now, but it's made me so mad that if I was the biggest coward on this 'ere earth I'd 'ave to go back an' do my bit. It's chaps like me what 'ave got to see that the bounders don't come over 'ere."

For a moment the veins stood out harshly on the little cockney's temples, and his broad, work-stained hands clenched. Then his face relaxed, and once more he bent and kissed Lil.

"I'll be off," he said lightly, "an' none of your Hotel Savoy tricks for the grub for ter-morrer. I don't want ter ferget what the food in the trenches is like. S'long!"

Bill Stubbs swung out of the small house with his rather swaggering walk, which was quite unintentional, and, after a stroll of five minutes or so, reached the sea-front of Tarmouth, the town that was honoured by being the scene of his honeymoon.

Tarmouth was a big place, which in the ordinary way was alive with people even at ten o'clock at night, but on this night a short-sighted man could almost have convinced himself that he was the sole inhabitant of it. The shops that Bill Stubbs passed were in absolute darkness so far as their window were concerned, for it was only a few weeks back that two Zeppelins had flown over the town and dropped their death-dealing bombs. What they had done once they might do again, and on the second occasion the affair might be more serious.

Four dead had been the first death-levy of the Huns of the War Lord of Germany; but the next might be forty—four hundred—anything.

"Rotten!" Bill Stubbs muttered, as he reached the front. "If it wasn't for Lil I'd go off my chump down 'ere. Makes you want to strike matches to look cheerful, though I suppose if a chap did light one he'd be 'avin' the perlice on him, accusin' him of bein' a spy signallin' to the henemy!"

Despite that idea, Bill Stubbs paused to relight his cigar, which had gone out, then he walked slowly up the slant of the parade until he reached that part of it where the houses stood a clear hundred-and-fifty feet above the level of the sea.

The little cockney stopped at the top of the rise, leant his back against the railings, and smoked away contentedly at a cigar that would have made the average smoker sick. He sighed a little as he remembered that his leave was up bar twenty-four hours, yet he knew that nothing would have stopped him from going back. It was possibly the damage that Tarmouth had suffered at the hands of the enemy that had made him choose the place for his honeymoon. It would remind him, even in his happiness, of the things that he had seen abroad.

Bill Stubbs stood smoking thoughtfully, apparently the one and only occupant of the promenade. His eyes were a little narrowed, and he smiled again as he thought of the cheque that had been sent him from a very great person in Great Britain, and which was to furnish a little home in a manner that he and Lil had never dared to dream of until he had saved the life of that personage.

"Dunno about the Turkey carpet," the little cockney mused. "All right fer Lil to gas to 'er friends with, but it'll be me fer takin' me boots orf every time I comes in. The ole lino's what I've always been used to, an' I'll 'ave to see if I can't bring the ole girl round to it.

"Then there's the bathroom." Bill Stubbs shuddered as he thought of the trenches, half-filled with freezing cold water. "That's all right so long as the 'ot's laid on. As for——"

The little cockney stopped abruptly, and of a sudden his eyes had narrowed and all the dreamy expression had gone out of his face.

The light in the window of the house opposite had flickered and gone out, flickered into being, and gone out again.

"'Allo!" Bill Stubbs muttered; and his quick brain was full of thoughts of the last raid upon the town, when bombs had been aimed in a manner that proved that their throwers were not acting blindly.

Spies! There could be no doubt that that type of man had been at work.

The little cockney's back stiffened and no longer leant heavily against the railing, while, in a mechanical kind of way, he threw away the rest of his cigar. It was the instinct of a man who has been called back to duty.

The lights went out again, flashing and darkening, sometimes with a short interval between the flashes, sometimes with a long. It was possible that it was someone in the room making sure that the switch of the light was in perfect order; in peace time that would have been the natural conclusion, but it was very different now. Somewhere on the other side of the "narrow silver streak" the great airships of Germany were waiting to make the raid that they believed would strike terror into the hearts of the British, and some day—none could tell when—that raid would take place. Probably the majority of the airships would never get back again, but that would not compensate for the lives of innocent women and children who would be bound to suffer.

"Four to one it's signalling," the little cockney muttered. "Wish to blazes I could read the Morse Code. 'Allo, there it goes again."

Bill Stubbs was right. Through the slats of the venetian blind came the flashes of the electric light—short and long, long and short—and the little cockney turned round to see whether there was anyone else to see them.

Again, however, it seemed as if he was the solitary occupant of the parade that had no attraction for people now that the great lights had been extinguished by order of the authorities.

Mechanically Bill Stubbs turned and looked out to sea, and for the fraction of a second—it was no more—he would have sworn that he would have seen the flash of a red light, then of a green, in quick succession. After that the sea was as dark as pitch, and save for the beating of the waves on the shingle it would have been impossible to tell that it was there at all.

"The dirty tyke!" Bill Stubbs snapped, and spat on his hands. "This is where one of 'em goes through it, anyway!"

The little cockney took a step forward, even as the light behind the drawn blind began to work again; but he had not reached the edge of the kerb before a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned sharply, to find a tall man, the badge of a special constable on his arm, facing him.

The special constable was not only tall, but broad in proportion, so that he fairly towered above the ex-'bus-driver, and there was a very eager expression on his face as he looked down at Bill Stubbs. Eventually the latter was to know the reason for it.

"You saw the signals?" the man asked in a quick tone.

"Not 'alf!" Bill Stubbs assured him savagely, his eyes on the badge of the special constable. "I'm goin' along to the police, to give 'em the office."

The special constable shot a glance across at the house opposite; but, for the time being at least, the light in the room was normal.

"We might do better than that, my friend," he suggested. "There's no glory in giving any information to the police, so why not do the trick by ourselves, if you think it's worth while?"

"Worth while!" There was a snarl in the voice of the little cockney that had never been there before the commencement of the war. "You ain't seen what I have on the other side, or you'd say that anything was worth while to do in so much as one of the tykes! I'm ready."

Bill Stubbs started off across the road, though for all he knew there might have been a dozen men in the house from which the signalling had come; and close behind him followed the special constable. It was a pity that the little cockney did not turn, for then he would have seen an expression on the face of the other man that would have at least made him suspicious. The man's eyes were gleaming, his lips were set into a thin straight line, and his right hand gripped the truncheon that he had in his pocket.

"Knock at the door," he ordered, when Bill Stubbs stood before the house. "I've got my whistle ready, if there's trouble."

"And I've got me 'ands," the ex-'bus-driver answered with a grin, as he set to work on the knocker. "I reckon we could settle a dozen of the bounders between us if——"

That was as far as Bill Stubbs got. The special constable's right hand came out of his pocket, and as the door opened the little cockney was sent flying inwards by a thrust in the back. The next moment the door had closed with a bang, and Bill Stubbs had swung round with a cry of amazement mingled with anger. The little man's hands went up mechanically into a defensive attitude, but he was too late. The truncheon of the special constable swished through the air, and Bill Stubbs sagged at the knees, wilted as if the very backbone had been taken out of him, and fell into a limp heap on the ground.

"Himmel, but it was a near thing!" the man who had struck the blow said hoarsely, wiping the sweat from his brow as he looked at the thick-set man who had opened the door. "It was well that I was on duty to-night, Fritz."

The man addressed as Fritz shrugged his shoulders, an expression of doubt in his pale-blue eyes.

"It seems to me that we have done enough for the Fatherland," he answered, in as perfect English as that of the other man. "It is always possible that the authorities will suspect. Remember that they have had their eyes open since that last raid—and that would mean our backs against the wall, and—death!"

"Had their eyes open?" The tall man laughed as he looked down at Bill Stubbs. "It looks like it, doesn't it? Here am I, Max Hegler, in the pay of the German Government, now known as Henry Tench, a wealthy gentleman who has come to spend his retirement in Tarmouth, who is a member of the local council, and who has, out of sheer patriotism, joined the ranks of the special constables! If you are afraid, say so."

The short man looked down at Bill Stubbs, too, and at a nod from Mr. Henry Tench, alias Max Hegler, he turned out the contents of the little cockney's pockets. At first the search revealed nothing of importance, but it was not long before an exclamation of surprise escaped the searcher, and he thrust a letter out towards Max Hegler.

"Look!" he gasped. "Look!"

Max Hegler looked, and a grin of triumph curled his thin lips.

"We have killed two birds with one stone," he said eagerly; "we have stopped the signalling being reported, and we have got the man who very nearly captured the Kaiser."

"There is a reward for him," the short man put in.

"In money—yes," Max Hegler agreed; "but the reward that awaits us will be much greater than that. You and I, my friend, will be able to command almost what we will of the Kaiser. There is the Crown Prince, too."

"Ach, but it will be hard with this little man," the other German chuckled; "the Kaiser—sometimes he will see justice, but the other—well, his pride has been wounded."

"What do you mean to do with the prisoner?"

Max Hegler rubbed thoughtfully at his chin, but it was not for long that he hesitated.

"You know what is to happen to-morrow, if it is dark," he answered. "The one airship is to come over to make sure that the right bearings have been taken for the Zeppelins. Three miles inland it is to pick us up and take us back to the Fatherland. What is more simple than to take this prisoner with us? The airship will stand the weight besides our two comrades downstairs. Nothing can prevent us being successful. Now I must go on duty again."

"Your king and country need you," the other man chuckled, but he would not have been so pleased with himself could he have been out on the parade during the past five minutes.

The figure of a woman had been coming along through the darkness, and she had seen the figure of Bill Stubbs as the door of the house had been opened and the light had shone upon him. For some minutes she had waited, until she had convinced herself that it could not have been Bill Stubbs that she saw, but for all that, her mind had been uneasy as she had made her way back towards the humble lodgings that Bill had taken.

Lil Stubbs—for Lil it was—had scarcely been swallowed up by the gloom of the parade, before Max Hegler, alias Henry Tench, the special constable, was once more at his post of duty, an ugly grin of triumph on his lips.

* * * * * *

Bill Stubbs stirred uneasily, opened his eyes, then stared round the room with an expression of blank amazement upon his face. His first glance showed him that he was in some sort of cellar, the walls of which dripped with the damp of the past season. To his right were bins that had possibly at some time been filled with wine bottles, but they were empty now. The bricks of the floor were wet, too, and Bill Stubbs shuddered as the cold of them came through his khaki coat.

"What the blazes am I doin' here?" he muttered weakly, his brain still dim with the blow that he had received. "These ain't the rooms that I took for me an' Lil."

He tried to move an arm to raise himself from the wet floor, then he lay still, with an expression of blank amazement in his eyes.

"'Oo's bin actin' the giddy goat?" he growled at last. "'Ere, take these cords orf, or I'll give you the biggest 'idin' that——"

Bill Stubbs stopped abruptly, something of his memory coming back to him, possibly helped by the intense cold that chilled him through and through.

"Bound," he muttered. "'Oo's got me? 'Oo's——"

Then the little cockney's brain cleared still more, and he remembered all that had happened; at least, he remembered having seen what he had believed to be signals being flashed out to sea, the special constable who had suggested that they should take action without going to the regular police, and then a blow that had stunned him as he had entered the suspected house.

What did it mean? Who had struck him? he asked himself. One conclusion only could he come to, and that was that both he and the special constable had been overpowered. But if that were so where was the other man?

Bill Stubbs looked round the damp cellar, for the time being not wondering at the brilliant electric-light that hung from the ceiling, and one look was enough to show him that he was the sole occupant of it. That started him wondering again, but his wonderings were soon altered to surprise as the door opened and Max Hegler entered, still wearing his badge of a special constable.

"Fairly comfortable, I hope?" he asked, with a grin. "I was sorry to inconvenience you until I found out who you are, but it had to be done. I wonder how you will like meeting the Kaiser again?"

"I'd like to meet him without cords round me wrists, an' the pup of a Clown Prince, too," the little cockney answered savagely, for the moment forgetting his own predicament. "What's the game that you're playin' at, with your badge an'——"

Max Hegler held up his hand for silence, and somehow Bill Stubbs found himself obeying, for the man was so like an officer in his manner.

"Precisely," Max Hegler agreed. "I thought that you would want to know that, and I have not the slightest objection to telling you. I believe that my story will be as interesting to you as it would be to the military authorities and the police."

The German drew a cigar from his pocket, lit it carefully, and looked down at his prisoner.

"It must be twenty years ago that I left Germany," he said, "though I had lived in England before, which accounts for my English, which, if you will pardon my saying so, is better than your own. I may add that I did not officially come from Germany, but from Australia, and the question of my being a British subject of the name of Henry Tench has never been questioned.

"Twenty years ago—more than that, if you like—Germany knew that this war for the dominance of the world was bound to come, and those in power sought round even then for the men who would best serve their ends as agents—men who were to work secretly, making their plans and maps, marking every little change in this country—and I was one of them. From being Uber-lieutenant Max Hegler, I became Henry Tench."

"Oh, the tykes," Bill Stubbs snarled between his teeth, but the German smiled as if he had received a compliment.

"We know our work," the German continued, "because we are thorough. For twenty years my country has been content to pay me for the sake of this day, and now they are learning that their price has not been in vain."

"It's a pity that you haven't been pinched," the little cockney growled savagely.

"It would make no difference," Max Hegler assured him. "As luck will have it, I am left free to complete my work, and when the right day comes I shall send the signal that will tell Germany that certain parts of this country are not prepared for the Zeppelins. Then they will come, not like this last time when a few people were killed, but a hundred or more strong. Then Great Britain will know what culture has done for Germany."

"I've seen some of that culture," Bill Stubbs said between his teeth, and once more he was in a certain part of Belgium and in a certain house—men, women, and children in it were dead, even a baby who was scarcely old enough to know the meaning of life. Perhaps it was the one that had suffered least in consequence. "You think that you'll bring this plan of yours off, but you'll be pinched, and——"

"And if I am it will make no difference," Max Hegler assured him. "In twenty years one can make one's plans complete. Look!"

The German touched a certain section of the wall, and the next moment a part as large as a door swung open, revealing as strange a sight as Bill Stubbs had ever seen. Three men looked up from a table at which they were playing cards, cigars between their teeth, bottles of wine before them. All that was plain under the glare of the electric-light, but it was not the men that held the attention of the little cockney for long, it was the thing against the further wall that interested him most.

Whatever education Bill Stubbs had had he had given himself, and it is often the brain of such a man that is quickest to learn. Anyway, it was the case with the ex-'bus-driver from the Lewisham to London Bridge route. When he had gone to the continent as a transport driver he could not have

given you the slightest idea of what a wireless telegraph apparatus was like, but in the course of his adventures he had seen more than one, and not a solitary detail of them had escaped him.

That was why Bill Stubbs knew that the strange-looking apparatus over against the wall was a wireless.

"Oh, the tykes!" he snarled again.

"You see," Max Hegler chuckled, and his right boot kicked savagely into his prisoner's ribs "the signalling above is well enough in its way, but we have other means of communicating with our friends."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Lil Gets Alarmed—Her Fears Laughed At.

Lil's face was as grey as the dawn as the light of early morning came through the window, and she started up from the armchair in which she had been sleeping uneasily. Hour after hour of the previous night she had waited for the return of Bill after she had convinced herself that it could not have been he she had seen going into the house on the front. Hour after hour she had waited, from time to time feeling that she must go to the police, yet hating the idea so much that at last she had dropped into a fitful sleep out of which she had not properly wakened until now.

Lil looked at the clock on the mantelpiece, ticking away as if nothing had happened, and her face went whiter than ever as she saw that it was close upon eight o'clock—and Bill had not come home.

Was he dead—the girl's heart felt like a stone as she asked herself the question—for, if not, what was there that could have kept him away from her on the last night when she would see him before his return to the front?

With trembling fingers Lil put on her hat and coat, at last determined that she must take action. Something was wrong with her husband—there could no longer be any doubt about that—and she must do what she could to find out what it was.

Lil hurried along the street, remembering that the police-station lay towards the centre of the town; she hesitated as she caught sight of a policeman lounging on a corner, then decided that he would not answer her purpose. It was headquarters that she must go to.

Panting for breath, Lil Stubbs reached the police-station and managed to tell the man on duty at the door that she wanted to see the officer in charge.

"All right, my dear," the man answered lightly; "you just sit down on the bench there, and I'll tell Inspector Frame when I know that he's not busy. Fact is, the King is expected down here in a day or two to see the wounded soldiers, and it's giving us a lot to do."

The constable twirled his moustache and looked as if the whole affair was in his hands, though he did not care to brag about it, but Lil was not troubling about that kind of thing just now.

"I can't wait," she pleaded; "it's a question of life and death, and I must see the inspector at once."

Still the constable looked doubtful, but it may have been the pretty white face of the girl that decided him to act as she suggested.

"I'll do my best," he said slowly; "but I warn you that you may get your head snapped off—the inspector's a howling terror when he's annoyed. You wait on the bench."

The policeman strolled off, but there was no resting on a bench for Lil. Up and down the stone-flagged passage she walked, not ceasing until the constable returned with the announcement that his chief would see her.

"And I don't envy you, miss," he added, "if it ain't something important that you're seeing him about. Come this way."

With shaking limbs Lil followed the constable down the passage and into a room that was furnished like an office.

"The young woman, sir," the constable announced, then stepped into the passage and closed the door behind him. He was not in the least anxious to be present at the interview with his chief.

Inspector Frame, chief officer at Tarmouth, was a very large man, who might have been said to have gained his present position through sheer weight. He was still a young man to be an inspector, though a certain stoutness that had come to his large body made him look older than he really was. His hair was black, save for a little grey at the temples, and there was more than one person prepared to swear, possibly through sheer envy, that the greyness was painted in to give the inspector an older and more dignified look.

Anyway, Inspector Frame had pushed his large person up from the ranks of the Force until he was chief inspector at Tarmouth, and that is all that concerns us, for as far as we know there will be nothing in him to interest us when this story has been finished.

"You wished to see me?" he snapped. "What about?"

"My husband," Lil answered, in a husky voice. "He went out last night for a walk, and he has not come back. I am afraid that he has been killed."

"Humph!" The inspector nibbled at the end of the penholder, and looked from under his brows at the girl.

"Tell me the circumstances," he said pompously.

As clearly as possible—and the girl's nerve was coming back to her—she told the tale of the previous night, and at the conclusion the inspector grinned sarcastically.

"I'm afraid that there is one obvious conclusion," he said, with the air of a man who could not possibly make a mistake. "You say that your husband was due to leave for the front again to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

Inspector Frame rose to his feet, as if to point out that the interview was at an end.

"I am afraid that I can come to only one conclusion, madam," he said in his big voice. "Your husband was not anxious to return to the front, and he has—er—deserted."

For a moment Lil stood as if she did not understand, her lips a little apart, her eyes wide with amazement; then the colour suddenly flooded up into her cheeks.

"You lie!" she cried angrily. "Do they give the V.C. to a coward? My Bill had it given to him by the King himself! I tell you something happened to him at the house that I saw him go into."

Inspector Frame lost a certain amount of his confident manner as he rubbed away at his bearded chin.

"You should have told me about the V.C. before," he said angrily.

"Bill never liked it talked about," Lil explained—"or that several times he's been mentioned in despatches." She threw out her hands imploringly. "You will go to the house and ask for my Bill, sir?"

"I will make inquiries if you are certain that you can point it out to me," the inspector answered. "I am very busy, but under the circumstances I must spare the time."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Lil excitedly. "I can show you the house all right."

"You will have to wait a minute or two," continued the inspector, as he went on with the writing he had been doing.

Lil tried to smother her impatience as she listened to the monotonous scratching of the inspector's pen and the ticking of the clock on the wall. She was rewarded at last, and she breathed a sigh of relief as she saw Inspector Frame put down his pen and stretch out his hand towards the 'phone.

"You'll be all right in a minute," he said, as he put the receiver to his ear. "We'll soon get on the track of that Bill of yours."

"Are you there?" he snapped into the 'phone. "Ask Sergeant Baxter to speak, will you? Ah, that you, Baxter? How many men can you spare for to-night? What? Yes, they'll do; send 'em up at once, and come yourself, too."

He slammed the receiver down on its rest, and confronted Lil, who had never taken her eyes off him since she entered the room.

"I'm sending some men to investigate. I hope they won't be going on a fool's errand, for your sake. I suppose you're quite sure of what you say?" he said snappishly.

"Of course—quite sure," said Lil, flushing.

"You say your husband is a V.C. man? What did he do to win it? Something daring—eh?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Lil, with a proud light shining in her eyes. And she proceeded to tell Inspector Frame of the gallant deed of heroism that had gained for her Bill the coveted distinction.

She had just reached the end of her story when a tap was heard at the door, and Sergeant Baxter entered, followed by four stalwart constables in plain clothes, who lined up at one side of the room.

"Ah!" ejaculated Inspector Frame. "I want you to see if there's anything in this—er—girl's story. It seems rather a suspicious affair, sergeant, on the face of it. I think you will want these four men if there's any truth in it at all. She will tell you all about it as you go along. 'Phone me if you want any assistance, or if any developments arise."

And he waved his hand towards the door, and he straightway bent down over the writing he had been doing, while Lil and the constables shuffled from the room.

"You must excuse the inspector, miss," said the sergeant, when they had reached the street. "He's a bit gruff, you know. Now tell us all about your trouble."

Lil proceeded to narrate what she knew, and by the time she had finished her tale they were nearing their des-

tination, with the plain-clothes men following unobtrusively in the rear.

"The house where my Bill was taken isn't very far now," said Lil at last. "But we ought to hurry, all the same. Where have your men got to? I can't see any of them."

"They're following all right," the police-sergeant assured her. "It's their business to be as invisible as they can; but they'll be around when they're wanted, you see."

After walking a few minutes, Lil stopped and plucked the sergeant by the coat-sleeve.

"That's the house!" she exclaimed, pointing excitedly.

"What, the one with the venetian blinds?" said the sergeant in astonishment.

"Yes, yes; that's the one."

"Haw, haw, haw! You're wrong this time, blow me if you ain't!" laughed Sergeant Baxter. "That 'ouse belongs to one of our most respected citizens. 'Enery Tench is 'is name, an', wot's more, 'e's a speshul constable. Haw, haw, haw! Your Bill's not in there, you can take it from me!"

"I tell you it is the house!" exclaimed Lil fiercely. "I'm quite sure of it. There—look!"

As she spoke, one of the front windows was illuminated by a sudden light, which disappeared just as suddenly.

The sergeant's laughter died away as he gaped open-mouthed at the window. Without any warning the light appeared once more. Flash, flash—flash—flash, and then all was dark again.

But the darkness was punctuated by a sound which, though muffled by distance, was easily recognisable. The rasping crackle of a wireless sender!

"'Ere, we must see into this!" growled the sergeant, and, making a sign with his hand, was soon surrounded by his comrades, who mysteriously strolled up, one by one, from the darkness.

He gave a few hasty directions, and his men vanished in the gloom as mysteriously as they had appeared.

"You wait 'ere," said the sergeant to Lil, in a kindly tone. "It looks as if there is something in your tale, after all." And, crossing the road, he mounted the steps of the house with the venetian blinds.

* * * *

Max Hegler, the traitorous German spy, looked down on his helpless victim with a mocking smile on his lips.

"Well, what do you think of our little wireless apparatus?" he asked pleasantly, as he gave the prostrate Bill Stubbs a gentle kick in the ribs.

"Oh, you rotten tyke!" returned the cockney. "You can laugh when you've got me like this. Let me get on me feet and use me 'ands to yer!" And Bill spun round on his side, bound as he was, and launched a clumsy kick with both legs at the German, which was, however, dodged quite easily.

"What shall we do with him till the airship comes, Fritz?" said Hegler to one of the men in the recess in the wall where the wireless installation was kept. "I'm afraid he'll be rather a nuisance."

"I bet I will!" chimed in Bill from the floor. "I'll show yer wot a tough 'andful Bill Stubbs can be when 'e tries. I'll be in time to upset yer little game yet, blow me if I ain't!"

"Our bulldog friend is very courageous," said Hegler with a sneer. "Let him save his courage for the time he is on board the airship, and bound for Germany. He will want it then!"

Bill gulped with inarticulate rage, and made another kick with his bound legs at the traitorous German, and met with better success this time.

Hegler rubbed his shin and limped out of reach of Bill's boots, after bestowing another kick on his victim's ribs.

He snarled at the man he had addressed as Fritz.

"You and Karl," he said, "will go upstairs at once and signal the airship to come over. Use the ordinary code, and don't be long about it. We will then get this troublesome pig-Britisher on board."

The two underlings at once departed on their mission, while Max Hegler, after gloating over the ex-'bus-driver for a minute or two, during which time Bill treated him to a few typical cockney expletives, stepped over to the wireless, and commenced working the key.

He had not been seated at the instrument for more than half a minute when Fritz and his companion came tumbling down the stairs in a state of great excitement.

"Our signals haf been seen!" gasped the former. "Ve haf der poliss on our drack! Ve must get avay! Now—at vunce!"

"Be calm," ordered Hegler, holding up his hand. "What is the trouble?"

"Der poliss! Deir men see our flash-signals! Some haf gone down the passage-vay to der back of der 'ouse. Dere is more in frundt. Dey vill trap us! Ve are surrounded! Vat shall ve do?"

"Calm, you fool!" thundered the chief. "How many men are there?"

"Six, I tink," answered the trembling Fritz. "Und I belief a woman is wid dem as vell."

"Good ole Lil!" cried Bill Stubbs, who seemed to have been overlooked in the excitement. "That's 'er, I bet! She's a trump! I knew she'd do you rotters in the eye, for all she's a woman. Trust an Englishwoman to ——"

"Be quiet, pig!" snarled Hegler, kicking at Bill savagely, and, turning to his assistants: "We must get this dog of an Englisher on the roof, ready for the airship," said the chief. "You two go and light the flare on the roof to guide the airship, and Karl and I will follow you with this Englisher."

The two men instantly darted off to obey their master's order, and Max Hegler motioned to Karl to hold Bill's legs, while he himself approached his head.

The cockney ex-'bus-driver let out a terrific kick preparatory to commencing a strong resistance, but ere the Germans could touch him they were both startled by the sound of the heavy door-knocker reverberating through the silent house.

Bang! Bang!

A moment's silence, and Hegler spoke.

"Quick, Karl, you fool—up with him!"

The sound that had terrified the Germans had filled Bill Stubbs with a wild hope, and he struggled twice as much as he had done before. He squirmed and twisted and kicked. The two spies no sooner seemed to get a grip on him than he had wormed himself free again. He was as slippery as an eel, and he threw himself about, bound as he was, in a manner that surprised his captors.

Bang! Bang!

The knocker sounded again, this time louder and more imperative, and was followed by the sound of a blow on glass and a musical tinkle as the fragments fell. The next thing the listeners in the cellar heard was the sound of a latch being drawn back, and a quick thudding of feet in the hall.

"Quick," gasped Hegler, "or we are cornered! We must run for it! This way!"

They retreated with great haste up a private staircase, which had no doubt been constructed by themselves with a view to such an emergency as the present one, while Bill Stubbs, whom they left behind on the floor, made the best use of his time by yelling alternate directions to his rescuers and epithets to the retreating Germans at the top of his voice.

His cries soon brought Sergeant Baxter on the scene, closely followed by Lil and two of the plain-clothes men.

"Oh, Bill!" cried his faithful Lil, as she took his head in her hands and gently kissed him. "How glad I am they haven't killed you!"

"It'd take more than a few measly Germans to do that, my dear," answered Bill. "I'm not dead yet, not by a long way. But cut me cords, quick, or the tykes will git away yet! Go steady; I'm stiff."

In short, rapid, cockney sentences he explained to the wondering and somewhat dull-witted sergeant what the Germans had done, and where they were making for, and as the last cord was severed he rose painfully to his feet and stretched himself carefully.

"This is the way they went!" he exclaimed, as he ran stiffly to the foot of the private staircase. "Come on—no time to lose! I only 'ope the rotters 'aven't been taken off by their airship yet!" he muttered to himself.

Sergeant Baxter and the plain-clothes men followed closely on his heels, while Lil ran to the back door to admit the constables, who had approached the house from the rear, and soon two more men were climbing up the steep stairs in the wake of Bill Stubbs.

The Germans had lost no time in effecting their retreat, and were now massed together on the roof, waiting anxiously for the airship, which they could dimly see some way out to sea, gradually getting larger as it approached them.

Some of the townspeople, attracted by the flare which the spies had lighted, and seeing moving figures on the roof, at once raised a cry of: "Germans! Spies!"

They certainly had little evidence to go upon, but in these troublous times it doesn't take very much to make a scare. It happened, though, that the people were quite right, and as several of the crowd caught sight of the approaching airship, their suspicions were confirmed. The shouting grew in volume, and from several points came the sharp reports of rifles.

The owners of these rifles must have known their business, for before the Germans could seek cover, two were seen to fall, and the mob raised a triumphant cry.

Meanwhile, Bill Stubbs and the constables had reached the top of the stairs, but found their progress barred by a closed trapdoor.

"'Ere, this isn't a-goin' ter stop Bill Stubbs," said that individual. "Gimme that step-ladder."

He placed the ladder in position underneath the trapdoor, and with the five constables, clutching it wherever they could, raised the improvised battering-ram with a crash against the obstacle.

Two or three blows soon did their work, and in a short time the trapdoor was hanging by one hinge. Rearing the steps against the opening, Bill Stubbs swarmed cautiously up, with the police in his wake.

A cry of dismay burst from his lips at what he beheld on the roof. He was just too late!

The airship had arrived, but was high above the clouds, and out of sight and range of the riflemen below. It had, however, let down a steel box arrangement such as is extensively used for observation purposes in the German Army. Into this box the two Germans had clambered, and were soon being drawn up to the airship itself, looking for all the world like a spider swinging at the end of its invisible thread, and were far out of reach of anything below.

Black rage filled the heart of Bill Stubbs as he saw the easy escape of the spies, and as he stood gazing at the receding airship, he clenched his hands and ground his teeth in impotent fury.

Gradually, however, his rage turned to astonishment as he noticed that the airship did not turn back and make for the sea, but kept on its course, heading inland.

The brain of the man who had once had nothing more brain-racking than to drive a 'bus over the Lewisham-London Bridge route had been accustomed to act with lightning swiftness since the beginning of the war. "Why," he wondered to himself, "should the tykes keep on that course—eh? Wot's the game?"

In a flash the thought occurred to him: "Woolverley Arsenal! That's where the rotters are bound for!"

Without a second's loss of time Bill Stubbs turned and made swiftly for the open trapdoor. Inside half a minute he was out of the house, and racing down the parade. Without slackening his headlong flight, he dashed into the post-office, which, as it happened, was one that kept open all night, and in a series of gasps managed to get out:

"Woolverley, miss—get through on the 'phone—at once—German airship making for arsenal!"

The girl behind the counter smiled at him calmly.

"I know," she said. "We've just heard. You're too late!"

"Oh, good!" said Bill, relieved. "You've 'phoned the noos, then?"

"No."

"Not 'phoned it—'ow's that?"

"The wires are cut!"

Bill Stubbs was taken aback for once, but almost immediately recovered himself.

"Cut! Then telegrarf through. You must let 'em know some'ow!"

"The telegraph wires are cut, too!"

The ex-'bus-driver lost no time in words. He rushed out of the post-office, and in a very short space of time had succeeded in inducing a motor-hirer to let him have a fine car. Supervising the backing of it into the road, he asked the way to Woolverley.

"I wonder where Lil is now," he mused. "S'pose she's all right, though, wherever she is. Plucky little woman! Bloomin' fine 'oneymoon I'm givin' 'er, racin' round like this 'ere. Oughter be ashamed o' meself, I did! On 'oliday, too, I am, an' goin' back termorrer. By rights I oughter let someone else see ter this 'ere job, and give Lil a chance of seein' me mug a bit before I git back. Kimmup!"

About twenty-two miles separate Tarmouth from Woolverley, and the little cockney had some doubts as to his ability to reach his destination before the airship could arrive.

He was reassured, however, by catching sight of his quarry when about five miles from the arsenal, and prepared for a final desperate spurt.

The airship was still making for Woolverley, and Bill Stubbs realised what would happen if the Germans arrived and started dropping bombs there without warning being received by the defenders of the armament works beforehand.

Bill Stubbs set his teeth and put all he knew into those last few miles. He noted, with a fierce gleam in his eye, that he had left the German dirigible behind some minutes ago.

Neither did it recover the lost distance by the time Bill reached the arsenal gates, and it was with a thankful gasp of relief that he brought the motor to a sudden stop.

"Want to see the boss," he said to a sentry, wiping his forehead at the same time with the back of an oily hand. "Important noos; German airship comin'!"

The sentry grinned.

"Yes. We're ready for 'em!" he said.

"Wot!" yelled Bill Stubbs.

"Fact," replied the guardian of the gate. "We got the noos by 'phone about five minutes ago. Come by a roundabout way, it did. The reg'lar wires 'ave been cut."

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped the little cockney. "If that don't take it! And 'ere am I, a-sweatin' away to bring the noos, and all fer nix!"

"Oh, I don't know about 'all for nix,'" said the sentry. "You're just in time to see the show. We've got some fine 'igh-angle aircraft guns waiting for 'em. You see!"

He was quite right. When the dirigible arrived and commenced operations by dropping two bombs, the British guns—four of them—opened fire almost simultaneously. Three of the shots missed, but the fourth had better luck, and took effect in the under framework, sweeping away the forward engine and one propeller.

The first volley was quickly followed up by another, and the second was more fortunate, the British gunners having got the range.

The great gas-bag was seen to collapse slowly at one end, and slide towards the ground, but ere it could reach the earth the whole fabric of the machine was shattered by a terrific explosion. When the arsenal workmen reached the spot all that remained of the German dirigible was a mass of twisted girders. The bodies of its crew were nowhere to be seen.

Max Hegler and his accomplices had paid for their treachery with their lives.

"Well," said Bill Stubbs to himself as he drove back over the road that had been the scene of his thrilling, but unnecessary, race against time, "I'm glad it's turned out all right after all, and I suppose that Lil'll think so, too; but I expecks if she could 'ave 'ad 'er way, she'd 'ave chosen a quieter way of spendin' a 'oneymoon!"

THE END.

(Another splendid story of Bill Stubbs next week.)

SAVING HIS CHUM!

(Continued from page 16.)

thing that caught his eye, and then the signature of Ikey Isaacs scrawled across a penny stamp.

Hazeldene stood with the paper in his hand, looking at it like one in a dream, feeling, indeed, as though he were in a dream, from which he must wake.

The long terror was over! Here was his paper! He was safe—saved! Who had paid the money, for certainly the money had been paid?

It did not take Hazeldene, as he thought over the matter, long to guess who. He knew that Harry Wharton had been absent by himself that afternoon while his chums were on the cricket-field. Harry Wharton had saved him!

A change came over Hazeldene's face. A strange warm gush came to his eyes, and a hot tear fell upon the paper in his hand.

"God bless him!" he muttered.

Strange words from the lips of the cad of the Greyfriars Remove. But Hazeldene had learned his lesson. From that day forward a new course was marked out before him.

He crumpled the paper into his pocket and left the study.

The chums of the Remove came out of the school shop. Hazeldene tapped Harry upon the arm.

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Wharton?"

"Certainly."

The three juniors strolled on; and Harry Wharton remained behind with Hazeldene. The latter drew the paper from his pocket.

"I found this is your study," he said. "It was lying on the table."

Wharton gave a start.

"Don't ask me why I went there," said Hazeldene. "Don't ask me what thoughts have been in my mind lately. You know what I have done—you know enough. You paid this money for me?"

Harry nodded.

"I am going to burn this paper. I have been a fool, but that's over. If you knew all the circumstances, you wouldn't think so badly of me as you do now."

"I do know all the circumstances," said Harry quietly. "I learned them from Bulstrode. No one else will know; Bulstrode has agreed to keep the secret."

"Thank you. I wondered why he was silent; I understand now. You have saved me, Harry Wharton, from being expelled, and from—from bringing trouble on those at home." Hazeldene's voice quivered a little, but he went on quietly: "I shall repay you this money in time, as soon as I can; but I can't repay the service you have done me. But I'm going to run straight in future. That's all."

Harry held out his hand.

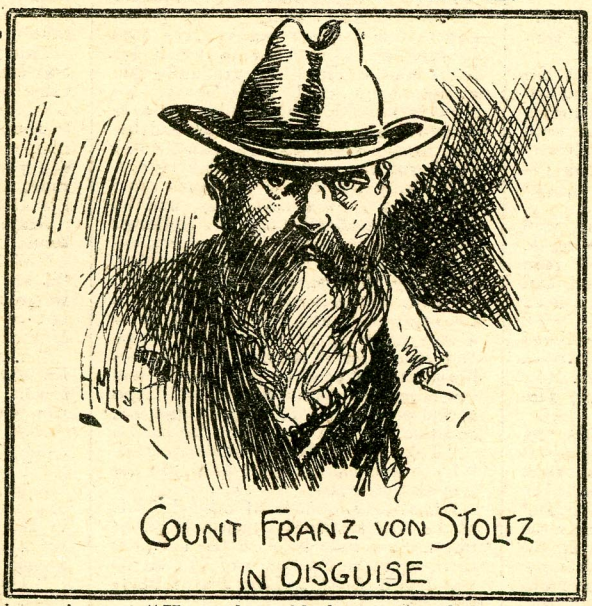
"And I'll help you," he said. "There was a time, and not so long ago either, when I badly needed a friend to stand by me in making a fresh start—and I found one. And as Nugent helped me I'll help you—if you'll let me."

Hazeldene did not speak, but he gripped Wharton's hand hard; and Harry Wharton knew that his sacrifice had not been made in vain.

THE END.

The Merchant's Secret!

The Opening Chapters of Our Powerful New Serial Story, Introducing SEXTON BLAKE, The World-Famous Detective, EZRA Q. MAITLAND, and BROADWAY KATE.



COUNT FRANZ VON STOLTZ IN DISGUISE

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

SEXTON BLAKE, the famous detective, is notified by Fenlock Fawn, of the New York Police, that Count Franz von Stoltz, a German Secret Service agent, is leaving America for England. Tinker tracks the German on his arrival to a house in Poplar, which nearly proves the boy's death-trap. Through Blake's timely intervention he is rescued, but Von Stoltz escapes to Newcastle. Here he falls in with Ezra Q. Maitland, the notorious New York crook, and his wife, Broadway Kate. Germany being very short of iron and steel, owing to the wastage caused by the war, Von Stoltz suggests to Maitland a scheme whereby the British consignments can be diplomatically transferred to Germany. Broadway Kate objects, but Maitland falls in with the scheme in face of his wife's opposition, hoping to out-manœuvre Von Stoltz and effect a big coup for himself.

Jack McFarlane, a partner in the engineering firm which is to assist the plotters in their shady work, tells his father that he cannot be a traitor and trade with the enemy. Taking a solitary stroll across the cliffs, he overhears a conversation between Maitland, alias Silwater, and Von Stoltz. His presence is discovered, and Maitland, whipping a heavy automatic revolver from his hip-pocket, brings the butt down upon the young partner's unprotected head.

Jack McFarlane flings up his arms, and disappears over the edge of the cliff.

(Now Read On.)

The Men in the Boat—Sexton Blake Scents a Mystery.

A boat, in which were seated two men and a lad, nosed its way through the whispering waves towards the white cliffs marking St. Peter's Head.

The burly, deep-chested individual who was plying the oars in company with the lad was Detective-Inspector Martin, of Scotland Yard, and when we have said that the quietly-dressed man with the pale, clever face, who was steering whilst he puffed slowly at a cigar, was Sexton Blake, it is hardly necessary to state that the third occupant of the boat was his assistant, Tinker.

Inspector Martin suddenly ceased rowing, with the result that Tinker, who was pulling steadily, struck himself violently between the shoulder-blades upon the ends of the official's oars.

"Hang the cold, hang spies, hang everything!" Martin growled, banging his brawny hands violently together to restore the circulation to his numbed fingers. "I believe the man we caught here was the only German for miles around!"

"If there aren't any beastly Germans, there's a fellow who doesn't jolly well know the first thing about rowing!" Tinker growled, rubbing his back gingerly. "Bust it, I'm hurt!"

"What's the matter, my lad?" Inspector Martin asked innocently, for he had no idea of what had happened. "Ugh! Here, steady with that water! You've sent about a pint down my neck!"

"What's the matter, sir?" Tinker queried, stifling a chuckle and looking round in feigned surprise.

Inspector Martin glared at him as he mopped at his neck and face with his handkerchief.

"Matter be hanged!" he snarled. "You deliberately flung that water at me, you idiotic young scoundrel!"

"As if I should do such a thing!" Tinker protested, with beautiful indignation. "You see, I discovered you had left off rowing, and thought I'd row a bit faster to make up for it. I must have raised my oar too high, sir, and skimmed the top of the tranquil waters."

"Oh, shut up!" Martin growled. "I don't know how your master tolerates such an irresponsible jackanapes! I declare the beastly stuff has frozen my beard stiff! Do you think we are doing much good here, Blake?"

Sexton Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, we certainly have not been so successful as we were last night," said he. "We know, however, that more than one spy has been at work signalling to German vessels from this part of the coast, and by keeping a strict look-out I imagine we are likely to drop across more gentry of the kidney of the man Rodzburg."

The detective was referring to the arrest of an alien enemy he and his companions had brought about upon the previous night.

During the months that had dragged by since the famous criminologist of Baker Street had made his vow to do his utmost to crush out the spy evil menacing Britain, he had accomplished an amount of work that was little short of marvellous.

To Inspector Martin, who had gained special leave from the Yard to accompany his colleague upon his exploits, and to Tinker, it had seemed that Sexton Blake had scarcely allowed himself time to rest or sleep. He had tirelessly pushed home his inquiries, seeming positively to invent clues when a more than usually difficult case confronted him, and making arrest after arrest.

Yet, even the energies of such a man as Sexton Blake had not prevented the murderous Huns from carrying out a portion of their schemes. Scarborough, Whitby and the Hartlepools had been ruthlessly shelled from the seas, and hundreds of innocent persons had been brutally done to death and cruelly maimed.

When Sexton Blake had read the news of the barbarous onslaught against all the laws of humanity and civilisation, it had acted as a stimulus to his overtaxed nerves, and if it were possible he had redoubled his efforts to wipe out the spies upon our coasts.

The detective's wound had rapidly healed, seeming to be less serious than the opinion of the medical man who had examined it had indicated it to be, and he was now quite well again.

The investigations of the Baker Street detective had eventually brought himself and his companions to this portion of the Scottish coast, and for the past three nights they had glided through the waves in the boat in which they were now seated. It was their custom to carry no light and to muffle their oars, and just after eleven o'clock upon the preceding night Sexton Blake's sharp eyes had discerned a twinkling light from the cliffs.

With the utmost possible speed, the boat had been propelled to a quiet stretch of beach lying a couple of hundred yards past St. Peter's Head, and the detectives had hastened to the summit of the cliffs in time to spring a complete surprise upon the spy, who had been making use of a powerful

signalling-lamp. He had been promptly overpowered and handcuffed and then taken to Berwick, where he had been handed over to the care of the police authorities. It had subsequently been discovered that he was a German who had become a naturalised British subject some few weeks prior to the outbreak of the war.

"Humph!" Martin grunted discontentedly, in response to his colleague's remarks. "I wish the beggars would look sharp and show themselves. I'm getting nearly frozen, and I'm so hungry that—— By George, Blake, look—look! The men on the cliffs!"

He sprang up so suddenly that the boat all but capsized, and pointed excitedly towards the shore. His action was unnecessary, however, for both Sexton Blake and Tinker had already seen the three dark figures upon the summit of the cliffs, silhouetted against the sky.

The three detectives saw one man strike out and send another to earth, but almost instantly the third man had attacked the first from behind, and they were reeling about in each other's embrace.

"Quick!" Sexton Blake ordered sharply. "There's some foul work here, or I'm very much mistaken. Row for the shore! Lend me an oar, Tinker!"

He sent his cigar hissing into the sea, and, grasping an oar, he dipped it hastily and pulled. The boat spun round slightly, but it righted itself the next moment, for both Martin and Tinker had bent to their oars, and now the boat shot through the waves in the direction of the strip of beach upon which they had landed on the previous night.

They were not, however, destined to land to take any part in the uneven contest which was taking place upon the cliffs. The two figures who had been locked in each other's grip went down in the snow, and the man who had been struck down regained his feet. Sexton Blake, looking backwards over his shoulder as he plied his oar, saw the man who was upright strike down heavily at one of the combatants, with the consequence that the latter rolled over, pitched precipitously over the cliff, and disappeared beneath the waves with a dull splash.

"Bring her round!" Sexton Blake exclaimed. "We must row to the man who has fallen into the sea. Let her rip, Tinker. Seconds may count if we are to save his life!"

The boat was brought round smartly, and swiftly sent towards the spot at which the man who had been so treacherously attacked had disappeared. As they neared the cliffs, Sexton Blake suddenly released his hold from his oar and leant over the side of the boat, for he had seen a deathly-white face slowly sinking beneath the surface. He made a frantic grab at the unfortunate man's hair, but he was a fraction of a second too late, and his fingers merely brushed the top of the drowning man's head.

Sexton Blake was not one to hesitate when a human life was at stake, and he proved his dogged pluck and disregard for personal discomfort upon the present occasion.

"I am going in," he announced quietly, flinging off his overcoat and jacket, and commencing to tug at his bootlaces. "Be ready to give me a hand."

"Perhaps he'll come up again, Blake," Inspector Martin urged.

"Wait for a moment and see. The waters are like ice, and——"

"We must not take the risk, my friend," the Baker Street detective interrupted, kicking off his boots. "The man was unconscious, and I imagine he was sinking for the second time. Look out, and steady the boat!"

With a quick, neat dive Sexton Blake disappeared beneath the waters, and Tinker and the burly official from the Yard prepared to help him the moment he again rose to the surface.

The detective went down, down, down into the icy waters, the first freezing shock seeming to numb his limbs and brain; then gradually the overpowering chill wore away, his senses cleared, and he sent himself ever downwards, his hands outstretched before him, groping for the man he was seeking to rescue from a watery grave.

Suddenly the detective's hands came in contact with a cold body, and he clutched frantically at its clothing; then the next second his arm was encircling the drowning man's shoulder, and they were shooting surfacewards.

As his head emerged once again into the crisp night air, Sexton Blake drew a long, reviving breath into his lungs, and swam for a moment to take his bearings, the head of the man he had saved resting against his breast. Then a welcome shout fell upon his ears, and the boat was brought to his side.

"Take him!" Sexton Blake panted. "I can hang on all right until you get him safely aboard."

Inspector Martin leant over the side of the boat and took a firm hold of the unconscious man beneath the armpits; then, with the assistance of Tinker, he was drawn aboard, whilst Sexton Blake trod water and waited his turn.

Martin laid the rescued man between the thwarts, then he stretched out his hands to the detective, who quickly clambered aboard and rolled on to a seat.

He quickly recovered his breath, and stretched out his hand for one of the oars Tinker was using.

"Let me take a turn, my lad," he ordered, trying to keep his teeth from chattering. "The exercise will put some warmth into me. Make for the shore as quickly as you can. We must get this poor fellow to some cottage where he can have proper attention. I wonder who he can be, and why the others attempted his life? I am afraid there is not much chance of getting on their track, for they made off as soon as they had done their evil work."

A few minutes later the boat's nose ground upon the beach, and Sexton Blake and his companions sprang out and drew her beyond the reach of the waves. Then Inspector Martin picked the unconscious man up in his muscular arms, and the little party started off at a sharp pace toward's St. Peter's Head.

* * *

With a steaming cup of coffee conveniently near to hand, and enveloped in an ill-fitting though welcomely dry suit, Sexton Blake was seated before the fire in a fisherman's cottage in the tiny village. The man the famous detective had rescued had been rendered first aid by Inspector Martin and their host, a bluff old fisherman with a tanned, weather-beaten face, who rejoiced in the name of Jock McTavish, had now been placed snugly between the blankets in an upper room.

The door opened, and Tinker appeared.

"He's recovered consciousness, sir," the lad announced.

Sexton Blake gulped down his coffee, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and rose to his feet. Accompanied by the lad, he ascended to the bedroom, where he found the man he had saved sitting up in bed conversing with Inspector Martin and the fisherman.

"This is Mr. Sexton Blake, who managed to fish you out, Mr. McFarlane," Inspector Martin informed the man in the bed. "But for his promptitude you would not be here to tell the tale."

The young man extended his hand, and his fingers closed warmly about those of his rescuer.

"I can scarcely find words in which to thank you, Mr. Blake," the young man said. "I fear nothing I could say would adequately express my gratitude, for you undoubtedly saved my life at the risk of your own."

Sexton Blake made a protesting gesture.

"Well, hardly that," he demurred. "I am really as much at home in the water as upon land, so after all I was not so very valiant. Your name is McFarlane, I understand?"

"Yes, sir—Jack McFarlane, of McFarlane & Co., the engineers of Moortown. Am I right in thinking that you are the great detective of Baker Street, about whom I have read so much?"

"I appear to be getting quite famous," Sexton Blake said, with one of his rare smiles. "I certainly reside in Baker Street, and by profession I am a detective. Why did these men attack you, Mr. McFarlane?"

"They——" Jack began; then he stopped suddenly, checking the words he had been about to utter.

He knew now that the motor-lorries ordered from his firm were intended for Germany, but he decided he would not make his knowledge public until he had given the matter careful thought. With him, his country's welfare came first, but his sense of duty to his father forbade him to disclose the truth, for the time being at least.

"They may have been trying to rob me," Jack said; but his eyes left the detective's face—a fact that was not lost upon the latter. "They suddenly sprang upon me from the darkness."

"Indeed!" Sexton Blake murmured drily. "You did not, then, know your attackers?"

"No, Mr. Blake," Jack McFarlane answered, telling the white lie after a moment's pause. "They were probably footpads, and had I not have been sent hurtling into the sea there is little doubt they would have robbed me."

Sexton Blake's eyes narrowed for a second; then he turned away.

"I am pleased that I was able to be of service to you, Mr. McFarlane," he said, a trifle coldly. "I trust you will feel no ill-effects from your unpleasant experience."

"I hope not, Mr. Blake. I am pretty tough, and I imagine a cold will be the worst that will come of it. Can you lend me some clothes, McTavish?"

"Weel, sur, I have some odd garmints ye might be able to wear, but——"

"Then I will get you to let me have the loan of them," Jack replied, as he threw the bedclothes aside and stiffly left the bed. "I"—he reeled and clutched at the bedrail for support—"must get back to Moortown to-night."

"Hoots, mon!" the old fisherman protested. "It's your death of cauld

you'll be getting. You're nae fit tae mak' th' journey th' nicht."

"Fit or not fit, I must manage it somehow," the young man returned, and Sexton Blake regarded him curiously. "What is the time?"

Inspector Martin produced a huge watch that always strongly reminded Tinker of a silver turnip.

"Just after eight," the official announced. "But, if you'll be advised by me, sir, you will pass the night here and make an early start in the morning. If you contracted a chill——"

"I must risk it," Jack interrupted resolutely. "Will it be possible for me to secure any kind of conveyance, McTavish?"

"Weel, sur, ye might be able to hire a horse frae The Lobster Pot, the inn a mile alon' th' road."

"That is what I must endeavour to do," Jack said, bracing himself up and moving his stiffened limbs about to restore their suppleness. "My firm are engaged upon a certain piece of business about which I must speak to my father to-night. The issues at stake are too great to admit of one moment's unnecessary delay!"

. . . . .

Twenty minutes later Jack McFarlane quitted the cottage attired in a jersey and an ancient pair of trousers borrowed from the old fisherman and staggered off down the road, whilst Sexton Blake stood watching him from the window of the tiny, sanded kitchen.

"Guv'nor, it seems to be our luck to stumble across mysteries," a voice said at the detective's back, and, turning, Sexton Blake found Tinker by his elbow.

"What do you mean, my lad?" he asked.

"That Mr. McFarlane was lying, sir," Tinker said, with conviction. "He was about to tell you the truth, then checked himself and made up his tale as he went along."

"I imagine you are correct, Tinker," his master admitted, with a careless lifting of his shoulders; "but it is useless to worry ourselves over the matter, as I do not expect we shall ever meet Mr. McFarlane again."

And Sexton Blake little dreamed how wrong he was in saying this, for he could not foresee the grim tragedy which was to transpire ere a few short hours had passed—a tragedy in which he and his companions were to be involved.

The Parting of Father and Son—The Love of a Girl—"Is it Murder?"

The dark clouds that had hidden the silvery face of the moon had passed away and the night was almost as light as day as Jack McFarlane, still looking a trifle pale and haggard, rode into the spacious drive leading to his home.

The residence of the McFarlanes was situated about a quarter of a mile from the great engineering works, and was a rambling old mansion that had belonged to a noble family in the early Victorian period. For many years prior to its having been taken over by its present owner the house had stood empty and untenanted, for it had been the scene of a very mysterious murder, and a rumour had got afloat that it was haunted. Two families who, attracted by a low rental, had taken up their residence within its walls, had left hurriedly, declaring that they had heard weird noises during the night, although how much truth there was in their assertions it is hard to say, as certainly no member of John McFarlane's household had ever heard anything worse than the shrieking and groaning of the wind about the chimney-pots and gables.

John McFarlane was a hard-headed Scotsman, with none of the usual superstitions of his race, and seeing a bargain in the old mansion, he had purchased it for cash and lived in it for the last ten years, in company with his son, Jack, and his charming ward, Edna Trevour, the daughter of an old friend and schoolfellow.

After Jack had taken his steed round to the stables and left it in charge of the groom, he was admitted by Symes, the aged butler, who had passed practically all his working days in the family, and the old servant's face expressed his surprise as he took in the bizarre garb of his young master.

"My father is at home, Symes?" Jack asked, as he stepped into the gloomy, rambling hall.

"Yes, Mr. Jack. He is in his study."

The young man nodded and entered a room at the extreme end of the hall, where he found his father seated before the table. He appeared to have just partaken of a light meal, and a glass of sherry was still before him.

"Great Heavens, Jack," the old merchant cried, his brows elevating in amazement. "Why are you dressed like this? What has happened?"

Jack closed the door before he replied.

"I have been the victim of foul play, father," he said then. "A deliberate attempt has been made upon my life."

"An attempt upon your life?" John McFarlane started. "What do you mean? Why should anyone wish to kill you?"

"To silence me," Jack returned quietly. "Father, I know that the motor-lorries ordered by Swaans' of Holland are in reality intended for the use of Germany!"

The elderly merchant's always-stern face set even more harshly.

"Tell me everything," he urged, and the manner in which he spoke suggested that it cost him much to keep his voice from trembling. "You—you have discovered definite proof of this?"

"Yes," Jack replied. "I was attacked at St. Peter's Head to-night and sent over the cliffs into the sea. Perhaps you will see daylight when I tell you that my attacker—or, at least, one of them, was the man we know as Silwater!"

"Silwater! He attacked you?"

"Yes, because he knew that I had discovered his secret and would seek to thwart him. He met a German, whom he called Von Stoltz, upon the cliffs to-night, and I overheard this man say that the lorries were to be shipped to Hamburg instead of to Rotterdam, as we have been led to believe.

"When they discovered my presence, the American and his companion made a savage attack upon me, and, although I put up a struggle, it was two to one, and an unlucky blow sent me to what might have been death. I was saved by a Mr. Sexton Blake, who was in a boat, with another man and a lad, near the spot at which I fell into the sea, knocked out and unconscious."

"Sexton Blake!" John McFarlane caught at the name. "The great detective?" he exclaimed quickly.

"The same," Jack admitted. "He pluckily dived after me and brought me out in the nick of time."

"Jack, you—you did not tell him of what you had learnt?" the merchant inquired, in low, eager tones, as he clutched at his son's wrist with obvious agitation. "If he knew he——"

"I told him nothing, father," Jack assured him; "but even had I done so, it could make little difference. This transaction cannot be completed!"

"Nonsense!" the elder man cried angrily. "Are you mad? To stop the shipment now would mean——"

"I tell you that we must cancel, though it means ruin!" Jack exclaimed sternly, looking his father full in the eyes. "Surely the British War Office would make some arrangement to take the lorries off our hands?"

"Yes, but not at the price we are to receive from Holland."

"Germany," Jack corrected coldly.

The old man flushed angrily.

"Don't interrupt me!" he ordered sharply. "I say we should lose money by selling to Britain. We are to receive £1700 per lorry from Swaans', and we should not get a penny more than £1,200 each from Britain. I have, as a matter of fact, already made guarded inquiries of the authorities."

"Why?" Jack asked bluntly.

Old McFarlane hesitated, then he raised his head sharply, defiantly.

"Because from the very first I have suspected the whereabouts of the consignment's ultimate destination," he said harshly.

Jack recoiled as though he had been struck, his eyes filling with horror.

"You suspected from the first!" he gasped. "And yet you accepted the business without question and even attempted to allay my doubts when I grew suspicious? Oh, why have you practised this foul deceit?"

"For the sake of the firm!" John McFarlane returned in a hard voice. "For the sake of the business to which I have devoted my whole life. For the welfare, too, of yourself and Edna, the girl I have grown to love as a daughter! The great business I had spent all my energies in building up was about to topple about my ears. I was faced with ruin, from which there seemed no escape, when I saw salvation in the order from Holland, and I snapped it up and asked no questions. Bah, what does it matter to where the lorries ultimately go, so long as the old firm once again flourishes! But for your meddling and prying into what does not concern you, we need never have known that Messrs. Swaans were not what they at first appeared!"

Jack's eyes blazed with anger. He was patriotic to his finger-tips, and he forgot for the moment that it was his father who stood before him.

"You traitor!" he rasped, his breath coming pantingly through his lips, his hands clenching threateningly as he advanced upon the other. "You are acting as an enemy to Britain, the country of your birth. You, who have always prided yourself upon being an honest man!"

"Traitor!" The merchant's face went black with anger. "Traitor!" he gasped. "You call me that? Confound you, sir, this is my answer to such an insult!"

Quivering with passion, he darted to the table, snatched up the glass of sherry, and sent the wine full in the face of his son.

"By heavens," the young man cried,

beside himself with rage, "I am tempted to——"

He took two quick strides forward, his hands clenched, and in his righteous indignation and anger the veins upon his forehead stood out like whipcord.

"Stop! Oh, Jack, for the love of Heaven, stop!" a girlish voice cried, as the door was flung open. "Remember that he is your father!"

"Go!" the old man thundered threateningly, advancing with upraised hand. "Go, before I so far forget myself as to strike you! Henceforth I will never own you as my son. Begone, and never darken my doors again. Journey to Holland. Seek your proofs, and do with them what you will, but your labours shall be in vain. I will spare neither my plant nor men—the works shall be kept going day and night to complete the order for shipment. We shall see who wins. Now go!"

Jack swung round upon his heel, to find himself confronted by Edna Trevour, his father's ward. She was a very beautiful girl, possessing that frail, pure loveliness that reminds one of some delicate flower just opening its petals to the glory of the early sunlight. Usually her face was tinted like the wild rose and her tiny mouth alluringly scarlet, but just now she was pale to the lips, and her seriously-wise blue eyes were filled with agitation and dread.

"Jack!" she pleaded again. "Oh, stop—please stop!"

The young man's hands dropped to his sides, then he dashed the wine from his eyes.

"Edna," he said, "I am sorry that you have witnessed this scene. I——"

"Girl, how much have you heard?" Old John McFarlane rasped, seizing his ward roughly by the wrist. "There—there," he cried contritely, seeing the sudden pain that was depicted upon the girl's pale face, "I did not mean to hurt you, or to speak unkindly. Have you been listening outside the door?"

"No, guardian!" the girl answered, with a touch of indignation. "Do you imagine I should play the part of eavesdropper? I was merely passing, and heard you quarrelling. I—I was afraid you were about to come to blows!" And she left them together again.

The old man heaved a sigh of relief.

"Jack," he said, addressing his son. "I command you to tell Edna nothing of what you have learnt. Do you understand me?"

"I do," Jack McFarlane answered, his jaw setting grimly. "Edna shall not know of your intended wickedness!"

"How dare you, sir!" the elder man blazed. "How dare you speak to me—your father—in such a manner!"

"I would dare much for the sake of honour!" Jack retorted. "I intend leaving you for ever, unless you consent to act as a loyal British subject in this matter!"

"Bah, you are too scrupulous! Do you realise that unless this order is carried through we shall be reduced to beggary?"

"Better that than I should be a traitor to my country!" the young man retorted hotly. "I intend crossing to Holland to obtain proofs of the treacherous business that is being transacted. When I have obtained them I shall lay them before the British War Office. You shall be saved from yourself. One day, father, you will see reason!"

The old man did not answer.

Jack shrugged again and strode to the door. When he reached it he paused for a moment to look back at his father.

"Dad, you will not relent and reconsider your decision?" he asked huskily. "Think of your duty to your country and King!"

"You have heard my decision," the merchant answered coldly. "You have chosen to insult me and dispute my authority, and I never wish to look upon your face again!"

The young man bit his lip, paused for a second or two, then flung open the door and passed out into the corridor, to pull up sharply to avoid colliding with Symes, the butler.

"Symes!" Jack exclaimed. "You have been listening?"

"Forgive me, Mr. Jack," the old servant pleaded, "but I—I heard that something was wrong, and——"

"Wrong!" Jack closed the door of the room he had just vacated and smiled bitterly. "Yes, it is very much wrong, Symes, old friend," he said. "I am leaving the old home for good."

"I—I heard, sir," the servant admitted, genuine sorrow in his voice. "I hope such a thing will never come to pass, sir."

"I fear my father will not readily alter the resolution to which he has come, Symes," the young man replied. "I propose catching the last train to London. Will you see that a bag is packed with a change of linen and anything you may think it likely I shall require?"

"I will, sir; but perhaps the master——"

"Please do as I ask, Symes," the young man interrupted. "There will not be a great deal of time to spare, for it is some distance to Berwick, and I propose walking."

The servant shook his head regretfully, then he shuffled off to do his young master's bidding, whilst Jack made his way to his room to collect a few personal belongings he wished to take with him upon his journey.

It was some twenty minutes later that he descended the stairs, carrying in his hand a portmanteau which the faithful Symes had packed for him.

As Jack reached the hall, Edna emerged from the shadows and laid her hand lightly upon his arm.

"You are taking your father seriously, Jack?" the girl asked wistfully.

"Yes, Edna," the man said huskily, as he swallowed the lump that would persist in rising in his throat. "I could never force myself to agree with him upon the matter of—er—the matter upon which we have quarrelled."

"Tell me in confidence what the trouble is about," Edna pleaded. "Perhaps I could advise you."

"I fear you couldn't, little woman," he returned, shaking his head. "Besides, I have given my father my word that you should not know of—of the thing he premeditates."

Edna's fingers tightened upon his arm.

"Go to him before you leave, Jack," she urged earnestly. "Try to turn him from his purpose, whatever it may be."

"It would be useless to argue with him, Edna," the young merchant answered, with conviction. "He has ordered me from his house, and my pride will not allow of my disobeying him. Edna"—he suddenly caught both her hands in his—"you do not realise how my heart will be torn with suffering at leaving the old homestead—and you. When I can no longer look upon your sweet face my life will be empty—colourless!"

"Then why go, dear?" the girl whispered softly. "In the morning your father may relent, and——"

The next moment she was crushed to his breast and was quietly sobbing with mingled joy and sorrow. Sorrow, yes, for was he not upon the point of leaving her for an indefinite period?

He opened the door, then after a few tender words he again caught her in his arms and pressed a last, long, lingering kiss upon her lips.

"Jack," the girl said gently, detaining him by a pressure of her hand, "listen to what I have to say. I want you to think well over what you are about to do as you commence your walk to Berwick. I will leave open the windows of the sitting-room adjoining my guardian's study. If you can bring yourself to return and seek to mend matters, you will be able to enter the house by this way."

"I promise you that I will do as you wish, dear," Jack said gravely. "Good-bye, dear heart. I will write to you at the first opportunity."

"Good-bye," Edna murmured simply, for she dared not trust herself to say more.

. . . . . .

Soon after Jack McFarlane had left his home his father was seated dejectedly before his roll-top desk in his study. The old merchant's eyes were curiously moist, and he sat gazing unseeingly before him, the fingers of one of his hands toying abstractedly with a paper-knife. Presently he roused himself, and an expression of sudden determination had come to his haggard face.

"I will not do it!" he exclaimed aloud. "Sink or swim, I will not help the enemies of the country of my birth. In the morning I will write to Jack, in care of Messrs. Swaans' office, and ask his forgiveness for the harsh treatment I have meted out to him to-night. Heaven help me, it will mean ruin, but better that than I should prove myself a traitor and a treacherous cur!"

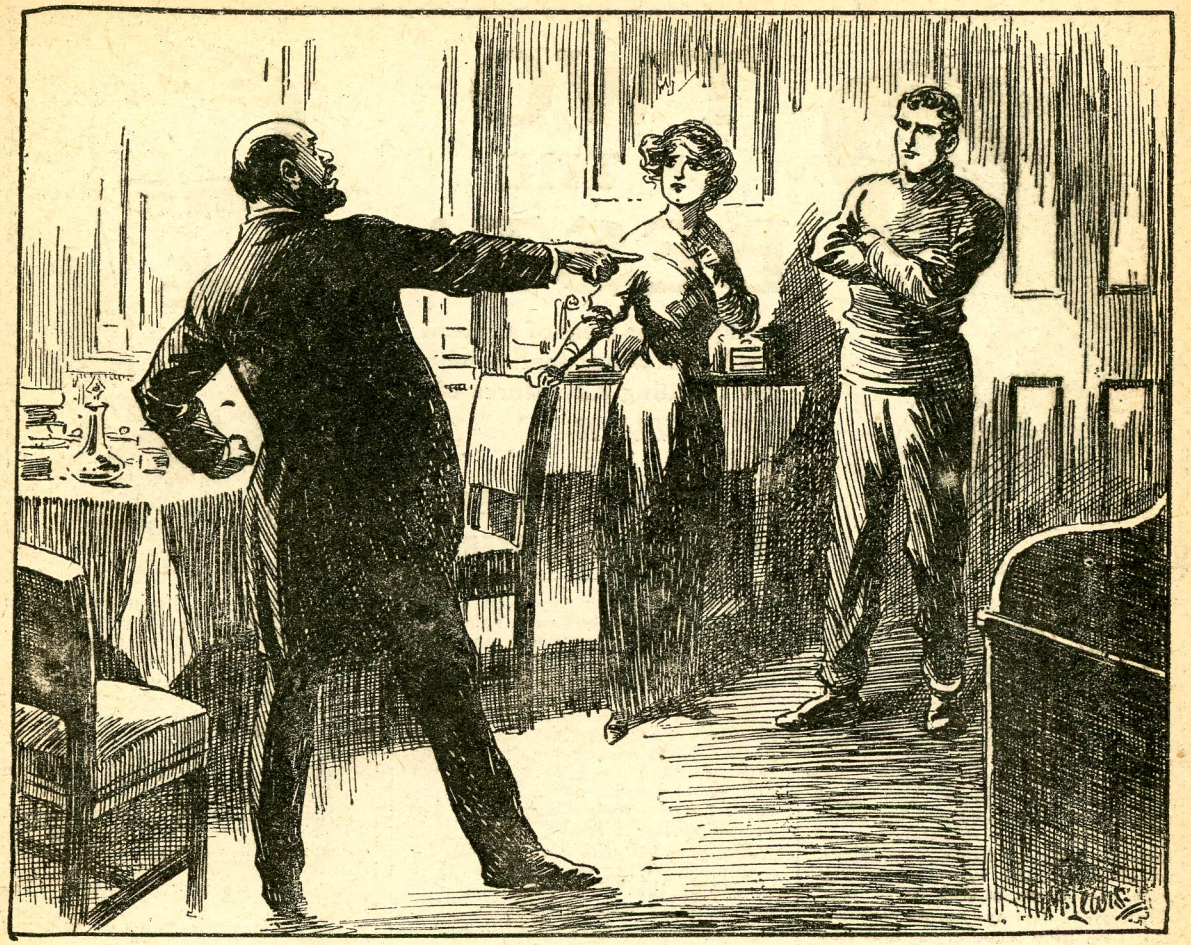
Ringing up The North British Hotel, at Berwick-on-Tweed, he asked to speak with Mr. Silwater.

"Is that Mr. Silwater?" he asked at length. "It is? This is McFarlane speaking. It is imperative that I see you as early as possible. I beg pardon. Yes, to-night."

. . . . . .

Edna Trevour faithfully carried out her promise to open the French windows of the little sitting-room adjoining her guardian's study, with which it communicated by means of folding-doors. She crept in and out of the apartment noiselessly, as the murmuring of voices in the study told her that her guardian had not yet retired, then, hoping against hope that her lover would return to make reconciliation, she crept up to bed.

It seemed to Edna that she had scarcely fallen asleep when she was awakened by a sudden noise from below. What could be its cause the girl could not determine, but somehow a strange premonition of evil gripped at her heart, and although she tried to banish her fears and court repose she found the task an impossibility. At last she rose from her bed and consulted her watch. To her surprise she



"Go!" the old man thundered threateningly, advancing with upraised hand—"go, before I so far forget myself as to strike you! Henceforth I will never own you as my son."

found that, after all, she had been asleep for a considerable time, for it wanted but a few minutes to the midnight hour. For the space of a few seconds Edna stood fighting against the impulse that urged her to descend below stairs to see if her guardian had retired and if all was well with him, and at last, with a quick making up of her mind, she flung a dressing-gown over her night attire and crossed to the door, which she noiselessly opened.

Save for the steady ticking of a grandfather's clock in the gloomy hall, the house was wrapped in the silence of the grave, and although she was never troubled by idle superstitions, an icy hand seemed to clutch at Edna's heart, and the weird stories attaching to the house would persist in crowding into her brain.

Edna shivered, then she took a firm hold upon her nerves, and noiselessly descended the stairs, traversing the hall until she was within a few feet of her guardian's study.

"Ah!" Edna started, and a half-stifled cry left her lips, but a moment later she reproached herself for her nervousness, for the sudden noise that had frightened her was merely the sonorous voice of the clock as it commenced striking the midnight hour.

As the last note died away the study door slowly opened, and Edna crouched in the shadows with dilated eyes, wondering what or who was about to emerge. It was only with difficulty that she suppressed a scream as a figure enveloped in a sombre-looking cloak appeared; then, to her surprise, she took in the fact that the form possessed a disfiguring hump upon its back, and she recognised it as belonging to Mr. Silwater, the American representing Messrs. Swaan, of Holland.

As Samuel P Silwater, alias Ezra Q. Maitland, caught sight of the girl he started badly, and hesitated for a moment, afterwards turning back towards the study and speaking over his shoulder.

"Guess I'll bring the particulars you want in the morning, Mr. McFarlane," he drawled. "It was a real pity I forgot them to-night."

"It was certainly unfortunate," Edna heard the voice of her guardian reply; "but it will cause very little delay. Good-night, Mr. Silwater."

"Good-night," Maitland answered. "Say, your ward is in the hall. Do you wish to see her?"

"No; tell her I do not wish to be disturbed. I am very busy and have an hour's work before me before I can think of retiring," came the old merchant's response. "Good-night, again, Silwater."

"Good-night to you," Maitland responded, closing the door. "Say, Miss Trevour, guess you're out of bed rather late," he continued banteringly. "You'll be losing your beauty sleep, you know, which would never do."

"I thank you for your advice, Mr. Silwater," the girl returned coldly, for she had never liked the man, and had always experienced a curious feeling of repulsion when in his presence. "I shall retire immediately I have seen you to the door. "Good-night."

Edna found repose impossible for considerably over an hour, for still in her mind was that inexplicable sensation that evil was in the air, but at last she fell into a troubled sleep.

"Miss Edna! Miss Edna! For Heaven's sake wake up!" the voice of the aged butler shrieked wildly, hysterically. "The master—oh, the poor master!"

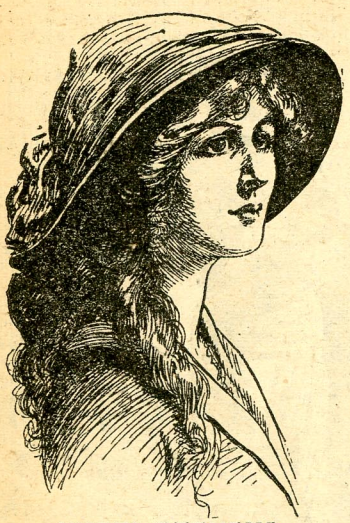
Edna sprang from her bed, and again slipping on the dressing-gown, she flung open the door, to find Symes, wild-eyed and ghastly of face, madly gesticulating without.

"My guardian!" Edna exclaimed anxiously. "Symes, what is wrong with him?"

"Dead, miss!" the half-demented old man moaned, tearing at his silvery locks. "Dead on the study floor, miss—murdered!

(To be continued.)

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND HARRY WHARTON STORY IS ENTITLED: "FRIENDS AT LAST!"



VIVVY STEVENS.

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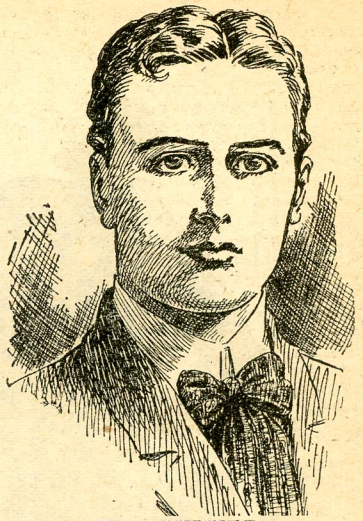

JIM CULVER.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

JIM CULVER and VIVVY STEVENS are fellow-clerks in the employ of Crarper & Son, paper merchants. The junior partner in the concern is a despicable cur, with no notions of chivalry, and Jim has occasion to thrash him for insulting Vivvy. The sequel to this scene is that both Jim and Vivvy are sacked, and find they have to face the world together. Their wanderings bring them into Cambridgeshire, where they make the acquaintance of Montague Beagle, a broken-down actor, and his wife, and with this strange couple they throw in their lot.

Meanwhile, Jeremy Crarper conspires with Lavington Crooks, a theatrical agent, to get Jim out of the way, as they have every reason to believe that Vivvy is an heiress. Jim, however, is impervious alike to threats and bribes, and the plotters are—for a time, at least—baffled.

The Beagles, with Jim and Vivvy, join a travelling company controlled by Cæsar de Snooke, and great consternation ensues when it is discovered that the wild man of the show has escaped. Jim, rushing out to give chase, is met by the village constable, who tells an alarming story:

"I saw a gentleman rush by just now, with a little black demon sittin' on his back. They went past like the wind, yellin' and screamin' 'blue murder!'"

(*Read on from here.*)

The Wild Man Returns.

"It was the wild man, then," Jim said. "It's all right, constable; it's only a little dwarf savage escaped from the show. I don't know who the other man was, though. Did they go this way?"

He pointed in the direction in which he had been going, and the policeman nodded feebly. Jim thanked him, and continued on his way, breaking into a quick trot.

He had not gone many yards when something lying on the ground in the moonlight attracted his attention. He stooped and picked it up. It was a piece of new cloth which had the appearance of being ripped off a coat by a pair of terribly strong hands. It was a light brown tweed, and Jim recognised in it the pattern of the suit that Jeremy Crarper had been wearing.

He gave vent to his feelings with a long-drawn whistle. So that was it, was it? So it was Jeremy Crarper who had, against his will, been giving the wild man a pick-a-back. Was it, by any chance, Jeremy Crarper who had let the wild man loose?

Jim wrestled with the problem for a moment. What would Crarper gain by loosing the wild man? Besides, it was a pretty dangerous undertaking, and Jeremy was not fond of danger.

But Jim had very little time to give to the puzzle. He wanted to find the wild man, and ran on for another two or three hundred yards, at the end of which the road ran straight down into a river, and reappeared again on the further bank. A ferry plied to and fro during the day, but at night there was no means of crossing, except by wading or swimming.

There was dead silence everywhere. Neither the wild man nor his 'steed' was in sight. For a moment Jim feared they had both been drowned, and his blood ran cold. Then he remembered crossing the ferry with the show earlier in the day, and how he had noticed at the time that the water was quite shallow.

He halloed, but received no answer, and lingered a while on the bank without seeing or hearing anything.

Then it dawned on him that there was nothing for it but to turn back. He did so, and arrived at the field to find Cæsar de Snooke and the members of his company all up and waiting.

"Any news?" the showman asked anxiously.

"Yes," said Jim. "The wild man was seen riding pick-a-back on a man, who was frightened to death and running like the wind. I followed the way they went, which was towards the river. I got to the bank, but saw no signs of either of them."

De Snooke breathed a little sigh of relief.

"That's all right, then," he said. "The wild man hates water, and he wouldn't go into the river for anything. If the man he jumped on ran into the river, he's all right."

"Do you think the man he jumped on is the same man that let him out?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Why?"

"Because I believe he's Jeremy Crarper, one of our enemies—one of the men that upset your show to-night."

Cæsar de Snooke stared, and then his face fell.

"Crikey, though!" he exclaimed. "If we can't prove that he opened the caravan, he'll come down on me for damages for the mauling he's had. Oh, lor', what rotten luck I'm having!"

"And I'm afraid we've brought you the bad luck," Jim muttered.

The showman made no response, but sat moodily smoking a cigarette. Suddenly he sprang up and pointed.

"There he is!" he cried. "He's come back on his own. Thank goodness for that!"

The wild man had just entered the field, and was slinking along towards his caravan, like a dog that knew it had done wrong in going out alone.

Cæsar de Snooke sprang up and advanced towards him, and the wild man ran like the wind, and fled into his caravan. For no reason that anybody could find out, Cæsar de Snooke was the only thing in the world that the wild man was afraid of.

The showman, key in hand, stalked up to the caravan, and locked the door behind the returned truant. Jim followed, and the two stood talking by the steps.

"It's a pity he can't talk English," Jim said. "We might be able to get something out of him. Well, he's back, and that's the main thing."

"I dunno so much," the showman answered gloomily. "I shall have all the people around here saying they've lost chickens, and coming down on me for damages. I can't pretend he's a vegetarian, because it's part of his show to eat raw things on the stage. And what Mr. Jeremy Crarper'll want out of me to-morrow, I don't like to think of. Well, there, what's the use of worrying? Let's turn in again."

"Wait a minute, sir!" Jim cried sharply. "What's this?"

He stepped forward, and picked up

from under the steps of the caravan a gold watch and chain.

"This must have been the one that the village grocer lost," he said.

Cæsar de Snooke literally goggled at the sight.

"Well, that beats me!" he exclaimed. "It's the first time I've ever known the wild man to pinch jewellery. Now if it had been a joint of meat, I could have understood it."

"He couldn't have taken it, sir," im exclaimed. "He was safely locked up in his caravan when the theft happened. It was during the show."

"Then how—then how did it get there?"

"The person who unlocked the door of the caravan may have had it, and dropped it in surprise when the wild man sprang out."

The showman nodded.

"You're a wonder for thinking of things," he said. "But I don't understand even now. It's all a mystery to me."

"It's a mystery to me, too, sir. But I dare say we shall be able to clear some of it up to-morrow. It rather looks to me as if the man who opened the door of the caravan didn't know that the wild man was sleeping there. That might account for a great deal."

"Then who could he have expected to find?" the showman demanded puzzled.

He turned and scowled at Oswald, who was diffidently approaching them.

"Hallo!" he added. "Ain't you gone to bed again, yet? It's all right, the wild man's back."

"I know he is, sir," Oswald answered. "And I thought I'd better tell you, sir, it was my fault, in a way, that he got out."

The showman stared. Then he licked his hands and beckoned menacingly.

"Oh, it was, was it?" he said. "Just you come here, my lad."

But Oswald hung back.

"I didn't let him out, sir!" he cried quickly. "I didn't really. And I didn't know he was going to be let out."

"Then what did you do?"

"Well, sir, it was like this. After the show a man came up to me and started talking. He gave me sixpence, and then wanted to know what caravan Mr. Jim Culver slept in. I was just going to tell him, when I thought p'r'aps he didn't mean Mr. Culver any good. And I couldn't say I didn't know, because he wouldn't believe me, and very likely ask somebody else. So I pointed to the wild man's caravan, and said Mr. Culver slept there."

The showman started, and muttered something under his breath. He turned, and stared at Jim who was equally taken aback.

"Golly!" Jim cried. "That, and the gold watch and chain! I'm beginning to see light!"

Jim and Vivvy Leave the Show

Next morning early Jeremy Crarper and Lavington Crooks came swaggering into the field and demanded to see Cæsar de Snooke.

The showman was in the act of shaving when they were announced, and he knew what they had come about. Hastily wiping the lather off his chin he went out at once to see them. They both looked very indignant, but whether this was real or feigned it was difficult to see. Jeremy Crarper was certainly a sorry spectacle, looking very pale and ill and battered.

"Look here," snapped Lavington Crooks, "we want to see you, Mr. de Snooke, or whatever you call yourself."

"Well, you're seeing me, aren't you?" the showman retorted. "And I do call myself Mr. de Snooke, and if you value your skin don't you call me anything else."

Crooks faced him without flinching, however. He knew that he had the showman in a tight corner.

"Look here," he said, "you're a public nuisance—you and your show. First of all one of your bears escapes and nearly kills a man. Then you give your rotten show, and there's an awful disturbance, a free fight, and somebody gets robbed of a gold watch and chain. Then you——"

De Snooke interrupted with a loud snort.

"Look here!" he cried. "What do you mean by coming here and badgering me? Who are you, I want to know? You don't look like a policeman, except for your feet, but if you are, say so, and I shall know how to talk to you."

Crooks flushed a warm red.

"You will gain nothing by insolence," he said. "I have come to tell you——"

"You've come to tell me a lot of things that aren't your business. I admit that I was in the wrong about the bear. Well, I am very sorry, and I must meet any bill for damages. As to the disturbance at the show last night, I shouldn't wonder if I had you to thank for that. And it wouldn't surprise me to hear that it was one of you who stole the watch. What are you doing in the village, anyway?"

Jim, hearing the altercation, strolled up.

"That's right, sir," he said. "Give it to 'em. Shall I chuck 'em out, sir? They're afraid of me."

He grinned provocatively at the pair of conspirators, who writhed uncomfortably.

Crooks went on to address Cæsar de Snooke.

"That's slander," he said. "You've slandered us before witnesses. It's no use asking you to be careful. Do you know your wild man escaped last night?"

"I know he did," Cæsar de Snooke admitted.

"And do you know who let him out?" Jim asked casually.

Jeremy Crarper turned angrily upon the showman.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "we came to talk to you and lodge a complaint. I think you might have the decency to send your servants away, or, at least, not let them interrupt the conversation."

"Jim Culver's all right," the showman retorted. "He stops here at my wish. And as to being a servant of mine, he's a gentleman, which is more than can be said for any of us. Now what's your trouble? Let's hear it quick, for I'm about tired of the sight of your faces."

"It's just this," Jeremy Crarper exclaimed. "Last night I couldn't sleep, so I went out for a walk. I was just passing this field when something flew at me, howling, and jumped on my back. It gibbered and howled, and pulled my hair and kicked me until I ran. Every time I tried to stop it pulled my hair all the harder or nibbled my ears. It was as strong as a gorilla, and ripped great pieces out of my coat. I had the greatest shock of my life. I didn't realise for a long time that it was the wild man out of your show. Look at my face!"

"We can't," said Jim; "it dazzles us."

The distracted Jeremy swung round on his tormentor.

"I don't want any of your sauce!" he snarled.

"Still," said Jim, "you've got to have it, haven't you? Let's see, you got into a blue funk—as usual—and ran. Well, what happened then? Go on with the tale of valour."

Jeremy Crarper went on with it, without deigning to retort.

"I don't know what would have happened," he said, "if I hadn't come to a stream when I was nearly at my last gasp. I jumped in, and the animal that was on my back jumped off and ran away. It was your wild man, right enough."

"I won't dispute that," the showman said. "And it was lucky for you that he was only in a playful mood. If he'd been on the ramp, as he is sometimes, there wouldn't have been much of you to send home. Well, now, what do you want?"

"Damages," said Jeremy Crarper shortly.

Jim burst out laughing.

"Well, to look at you I should say that you'd got 'em," he said.

"I mean money to recompense me for the shock injuries, damage to my clothes, and so on. Also an apology."

The showman thrust his hands in his pockets, and stared at them.

"In any ordinary case," he said, "you should have had the apology long ago, Mr. Crarper. As it is, I shall first of all ask you how the wild man got out."

"That's your affair," was the answer. "Gross carelessness I call it, and you deserve to be punished."

"No. The wild man was locked in a caravan by himself. Somebody came in the night with a skeleton-key and released him. Finding himself released, he naturally went for the first man he saw—which must have been the man who let him out. What have you to say to that?"

"We have to say," Crooks retorted quickly, speaking for his friend, "that it is a piece of gross impertinence on your part to hint at such a thing, and that it will tell against you when the case is heard in court."

For the first time the showman flinched a little. The precious pair noticed this, and were quick to follow up their advantage.

"Do you think," Jeremy Crarper cried, "that I'd risk my life in letting the brute loose, go through what I've gone through, and all to get a few miserable pounds out of you. Not likely!"

The showman was taken aback by this speech. He glanced uneasily at Jim, who straightway came to the rescue.

"I don't think for a moment," he said, "that you knew you were letting the wild man loose, Mr. Crarper. You're too big a funk to do that, even in the hope of getting hold of a little money. You thought it was my caravan you were opening with that skeleton-key."

"What?"

"Yes. It's all very simple and obvious. You want to get rid of me. You want to separate me from Miss

Stevens. You said so yesterday, and tried to bribe me. Last night a watch and chain were stolen at the show. Afterwards a man asked a boy here what caravan I slept in. The boy didn't like to tell him, so he pointed out the wild man's caravan. After the wild man had been let out, a gold watch and chain were found under the caravan steps."

Jeremy Crarper raised his eyebrows. He looked sheepish, but kept his countenance tolerably well.

"I don't see what you're driving at," he said slowly.

"No? It pays to be stupid sometimes, doesn't it? Well, I'll tell you straight out. You got possession of that watch and chain somehow, and wanted to foist the theft on to me, and so get me sent to prison and out of the way. So you tried to find out where I slept, and came in the dead of night to put that watch and chain in my pocket. You dropped it in your fright when you found out that you had opened not my caravan but the one where the wild man——"

Jeremy Crarper interrupted him with a loud cry.

"This is monstrous!" he exclaimed.

"It is," Jim agreed. "It's about the dirtiest bit of work I've ever heard of."

"How dare you say that?" Crooks roared. "I defy you to prove a single word of it. You flatter yourself a lot too much to think that we should take so much trouble to get rid of you."

Jim shrugged his shoulders, and at that moment Oswald appeared in the distance. Cæsar de Snooke shouted to him, and the boy trotted up.

"I want you to tell the truth," the showman said to him impressively.

Oswald touched his battered cap and grinned.

"You know you told us last night that a man asked you which was Mr. Culver's caravan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, was it one of these gentlemen?"

Oswald stared blankly at Crarper and Crooks. They did not flinch under his scrutiny.

"No," he answered decidedly; "it wasn't either of these gentlemen, sir."

"All right. You can go."

Oswald went, and the precious pair smiled. It was as if they were saying: "I told you so!"

"Now you've been good enough to insult us after being the cause of a great shock and injury to Mr. Crarper, here," Crooks observed, "perhaps you'll be ready to listen to what we've got to say about compensation?"

"Look here!" Jim interrupted. "Of course, you weren't fools enough to ask that boy where I slept. You sent somebody else."

"That's your view," said Crooks, grinning evilly. "I wonder if this showman fellow agrees with it. If he does he'll prefer to have the case heard in court."

But Cæsar de Snooke was beaten, and he knew it. He could not afford to have a law action, after what had already passed. He knew that in the absence of conclusive proof all his theories and Jim's would fall to the ground, and that he would have to pay the heavier damages for his insinuations

"How much do you want?" he growled.

"Forty pounds," said Crarper.

The showman took a leather case from his breast-pocket.

"I'll give you ten," he said, "and be glad to see the last of you."

"I should think you would! We might consider thirty."

Cæsar de Snooke took out a bunch of greasy notes.

"Here's twenty," he said. "Take it or leave it."

Jeremy Crarper took it. He had meant to stand out for more, but the sight of the ready money tempted him. He tucked the notes into his pocket and turned away.

Jim turned longingly towards the showman.

"About how much would it cost if I were to bash one of them, sir?" he asked longingly.

"Don't do it, Jim," the other said wearily. "Another time, if you like, but give it a rest now. I've had enough of rows to last me for a bit."

Jim's demeanour altered at once. Poor old Cæsar de Snooke had lost much more money than he could afford, and all through him and Vivvy.

Vivvy came out of her caravan, and tripped lightly towards them, smiling and wishing them a "Good-morning." De Snooke smiled at her in spite of himself, but the sight of Jim's glum face arrested her attention, and she asked what had happened.

Jim told her in a few terse words. Then he turned to Cæsar de Snooke.

"We don't want to leave you, sir," he said, "but don't you think we ought to go, for your sake. This would never have happened to you if it hadn't been for us, and nor would last night's rumpus."

The old showman laid a hand on the arm of both of them.

"You're the two nicest kids I've ever struck in all my natural," he said. "You're a bonny dancer, my lass, and that boy friend of yours can sing more than a little. But—you're a bit too expensive for me, I'm afraid. Heaven knows I don't want to lose you, and I wish you both well, but——"

"But you can't keep us on," Vivvy said, to help him out.

The old showman said nothing for a little while. He was not far from the verge of tears, and Vivvy, who stole a quick glance at him, averred afterwards that she saw them shining in his eyes.

"Well, let's see what there is for breakfast," he said suddenly, and they went to the open space where it was being prepared.

During the meal Montague Beagle sidled over to where Jim and Vivvy were sitting side by side.

"It is a pity, my dear young friends," he said, "that we have reached the parting of the ways again. Poor old Cæsar. It is not his fault. A soft-hearted man if ever there was one. He is as distressed as we are. His tears will flow in a very river of grief."

"I hope not," Vivvy laughed.

"Mrs. Beagle and I are rent with the prospect of parting from him again. We thought we had found a nice little haven, where——"

"But you and Mrs. Beagle aren't leaving, too?" Jim gasped.

Montague Beagle smiled and his eyes shone.

"My dear young children," he said—"I know I may call you that—my dear young children, do you think my dear wife and I could allow you to face the hard world alone. Perish the thought! We are made of different stuff than that. No, the bargain we made the night before last holds good. We will see you started on the road to fame before we leave you, and then we will wave our hands to you and lose ourselves among the byways once more."

Jim was on the point of begging the Beagles not to come. It was hardly fair to them. But suddenly he realised that the companionship of Mrs. Beagle would be very pleasant for Vivvy, and he gave way, making an oath to himself that if ever they did well, the Beagles should pass the rest of their lives in comfort.

"I say, it's awfully good of both of you!" he exclaimed.

It was not much to say, but all that he had left unsaid rang in his voice, and old Beagle understood.

"'Tis well!" said he, in his stagiest manner. "After all, my dear wife and I are used to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, as Shakespeare has it. And we are in clover now, compared with when we first met you the other night. Cæsar de Snooke has behaved with the greatest generosity—bless his old heart!"

During breakfast it got known amongst the company that Jim and Vivvy were leaving, and they all came round in turns to wish the pair good-bye and good luck. Rough people they were for the most part, but their hearts were good, as Jim and Vivvy could tell by the few words they said and the way they said them. Only the wild man, who was sitting alone in his caravan amusing himself by sticking pins into his legs, failed to express sorrow that they were going.

"We'd better start directly after breakfast, if you don't mind," Jim said.

The show was moving on, and as they were no longer members of the company he felt that they would be in the way.

After the meal, Cæsar de Snooke got up and made a little speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "we live a life that is full of 'good-byes,' and this morning we have to say another. Mr. Culver and Miss Stevens haven't been with us long, but we've all got to like them. They're sorry to go, and we're sorry to lose them, but needs must. They've made real friends here, and if ever they need friends they'll know where to look for them. I ain't must of a hand at making speeches, so perhaps they'll excuse me if I don't say any more, particularly as my throat seems a bit 'usky this morning—I don't know why.

"But before they go we'll all take off our hats to Miss Stevens as a genius, and cheer Mr. Jim Culver as a jolly good fellow. Are you ready?"

They were ready, and they did not forget to cheer. Like schoolboys they were. Vivvy discovered that she had a tight feeling in her throat, and Jim caught himself blushing, and afterwards blushed all the more.

When the noise died down they said their "good-byes"—a few brief words, for farewells are best said quickly. Then Cæsar de Snooke interrupted them again to say a few words—in a very thick voice—about his old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Montague Beagle, who were going, too.

Five minutes later the quartette slipped away, and the company followed them to the gate and out into the road, where they lingered, waving hats and coloured handkerchiefs.

Jim and Vivvy waved back, then they linked arms. Once more they faced the world together, with the Beagles trudging beside them.

London Bound.

Before setting out on their journey in earnest, or making any plans, Jim, Vivvy, and the Beagles called at the cottage hospital to inquire after Stelland.

The matron interviewed them, and told them that the condition of the patient remained absolutely unchanged.

It was not good news for them, but, as Jim said afterwards, it might have been worse.

"Now that he isn't any worse it'll be all right," he said. "He was a tough-looking man and he ought to pull through. I hope so, anyhow!"

"So do I," said Vivvy with a sigh.

Outside the hospital Montague Beagle called them all around him.

"My friends," he said, "far be it from me to suggest anything. But before we go any further might it not be as well to decide where we are going, and what we are going to do? What do you say, Jim?"

"Vivvy and I vote for London," Jim answered.

Old Beagle nodded.

"The city of adventure—of joy and sorrow," he murmured. "Well, you're young, and I don't blame you, and Miss Stevens is certainly a genius. The people may throw stones at you or scatter flowers in front of you. They threw stones at us, but you may have the luck."

"Not stones, dear, cabbages," corrected Mrs. Beagle.

"I was speaking metaphorically," the old actor answered with an airy wave of the hand. "A cabbage becomes a stone when you translate it into poetical language. Well, so be it, London then. And how do you propose to get there?"

"Train," Jim said laconically.

"My dears," hastily interposed Mrs. Beagle," have you thought of the expense? We have not very much money, and the railway fares would cost nearly a pound for the four of us. We shall probably need that pound. Now, if we walk——"

"We shall all be tired to death," said Vivvy, "wear out our shoes, and we should have to spend as much on food and lodgings on the way."

Montague Beagle shook his head.

"We can give select little performances on the way," he observed. "In villages, outside large houses. Eventually we shall arrive at the great metropolis with more money than we have now. Trust us, we are used to this life."

"Perhaps, my dear," Mrs. Beagle murmured, "they are too proud to——"

Vivvy interrupted with a laugh.

"Too proud!" she cried. "What nonsense, Mrs. Beagle. It'll be awful fun. Won't it, Jim?"

"Rather!" said Jim, ever ready to fall in with her wishes. "Let's get started."

Fortunately they were all good walkers, and reached Cambridge by one o'clock. There they had a meal in a cheap eating-house that Montague Beagle knew of, and afterwards gave a performance in one of the main streets near the University.

Jim sang, and sang well despite his nervousness, old Beagle played his fiddle, and Vivvy danced. Mrs. Beagle wandered amongst the crowd that had collected with a little bag that filled in a very short space of time.

Vivvy's dancing was greatly admired, and at the end she received quite a little ovation. A number of men from the colleges were standing around, and they swelled the collection considerably with coppers and small silver. Afterwards, when Mrs. Beagle had counted up, she announced gleefully that the takings amounted to eight and fivepence.

"My dear," cried old Beagle, "that is our record, except for the ten and a penny we took once; and we always agreed that the half-a-sovereign was put into the bag in mistake for a tiddleywink. Yes, I think we may call this our record, and we must thank Miss Stevens for it."

"Then we can afford to have some tea," said Jim. "I'll stand treat."

"We will certainly celebrate this event by having a cup of tea," said old Beagle; "but I must insist that we share the expenses. Share and share alike—isn't that our motto, Miranda?"

"Oh, decidedly so," said Mrs. Beagle.

So they had tea at a little pastrycook's, and afterwards, while they were still seated at the table, old Beagle fumbled with something in his waistcoat pockets.

"Jim," he said, "and you, Miss Stevens, I dare say you thought it strange that old Cæsar de Snooke, con-

(*Continued on next page*)

sidering what a fine man you know he is, didn't offer you any salary in lieu of notice?"

"We didn't expect it, did we, Vivvy?" Jim said hastily. "We only gave one show, and he'd suffered some heavy losses all through us. If he'd offered us anything we shouldn't have taken it."

"Of course not," Vivvy agreed. "How could we expect anything?"

"Ah, now!" exclaimed old Beagle. "That shows the wonderful man he is. He knew you wouldn't take it. So he gave it to me to give to you. 'Montague, old boy,' he said to me, 'don't give it to 'em this side of Cambridge or they'll come running back with it.' Here you are—two golden sovereigns each! Isn't he a man?"

Jim took the money, not very readily. He could find no words to say at first. And as for Vivvy—she was closer to tears than she would have cared to admit.

"We must pay him back sometime," Jim murmured. "But you can't pay back a thing like this—not even with thousands. He's one of the best men that ever breathed."

"I should like to hug him," Vivvy said. "And he didn't even want to be thanked."

"The best-hearted man that ever lived!" old Beagle murmured. "He's nothing to look at. He's rough in his ways. He wouldn't look at his best inside a drawing-room—but there he is. Well, p'raps he'll need your help one of these days when you're both making your fortunes and Mrs. Beagle and I are dead and gone!"

"Well," said Jim, "he won't have to ask for it—eh, Vivvy?"

After tea they pushed on along the London road, and gave another performance in a little village. This brought them in one and threepence, a considerable drop after Cambridge, but better than nothing.

Montague Beagle suggested walking on to the next village, giving a show there, and finding beds for the night.

The others agreed. Vivvy was now very tired, but she did not say so. They went on again, shoulder to shoulder, Jim whistling for them to walk to.

They had left Cambridge many miles behind them, and it had been dark for some time, when old Beagle pointed to a big house that stood a little way back from the road on the right-hand side. There were lights burning brightly in the windows

"They may be the kind of people who set the dog on you," Beagle observed. "On the other hand, they may be the other kind that ask you in to supper. Shall we take the chance in our hands, go in, and give them a show?"

"Let's!" said Jim.

There was something sporting about the suggestion that appealed to him.

Montague Beagle turned and addressed his wife.

"Miranda," he said, "remember that I have my fiddle. With that as a weapon I do not fear a pack of hounds. Keep well behind me, and you will be safe."

They entered the wide gate, and walked up the short drive towards the house, halting eventually on the stretch of gravel outside the front door.

Montague Beagle then announced their presence by playing an overture on his violin, and as faces appeared at one of the windows he branched off suddenly into the accompaniment to a song. Jim began to sing, and went right through the song without interruption.

When he had finished slight sounds were audible behind the window. Evidently the people were applauding. Old Beagle smiled gleefully and motioned to Vivvy.

Tired as she was she stepped forward, determined to do her best. The music stirred her so that she forgot her weariness, and danced as well as she had ever danced before. In the dim light she must have seen like a fairy to those who watched—some spirit of the woods and the moonlight.

The fiddle hastened her on, and just when the dance was coming to an end the front door opened and a butler appeared on the steps, and beckoned to them to enter.

"Mr. Donnell has told me to ask you to come inside," he said when the music had stopped.

Mr. and Mrs. Beagle bowed towards the window where the faces were, and the four moved in the direction of the steps.

Jim entered last of all, and the butler was closing the door behind him, when a big, pleasant-faced man of forty came out into the hall.

"Oh, will you come in here," he said. "Thanks very much for your show. We have all enjoyed it very much."

They followed him into a large and pretty drawing-room, where the strong light made them blink after the darkness outside. Jim was vaguely aware of a pretty woman fussing over Mrs. Beagle and Vivvy, and of two little boys who stared open-eyed and open-mouthed at them.

Donnell seated himself and offered his cigarette-case to Montague Beagle.

"You've come a long way?" he said. "You look tired. Well, I'm afraid I inveigled you in here to talk business. You're not too tired for that, I hope?"

"Sir," he answered, "I am never too tired to talk business."

"That young lady is a very wonderful dancer."

"She is a very wonderful young lady altogether," old Beagle replied.

"You are simply splendid," Mrs. Donnell said to the blushing Vivvy.

"And that young man hasn't a bad idea of singing," Donnell went on with his jolly smile. "Are they your children—those two young people?"

Old Beagle made a slight movement of the head.

"I am afraid," he said, "that my wife and I cannot claim any relationship with them. We are but flotsam, washed on to the same shore by the tide of misfortune."

At that moment the butler re-entered the room with wine and sandwiches on a tray—a huge mountain of sandwiches.

During the hiatus that occurred while the servant was in the room, Donnell ascertained from Montague Beagle the names of the little party of four.

Afterwards, while they were all munching the sandwiches, he drew nearer to Vivvy.

"Have you ever been on the stage, Miss Stevens?" he asked.

"Only once," she answered, "and that was last night, at a little travelling show."

"You know you have a great gift?"

Vivvy blushed again.

"People say I can dance a little," she said.

Donnell laughed.

"I wonder what you would call a lot," he said. "Have you heard of the 'Forum Music Hall?'"

"In London?" said Vivvy quickly. "Oh, yes!"

"Well, I am the proprietor. I can offer you an engagement at once if you like. Would you care to have a chat with me about it now?"

"I don't know whether I could accept an engagement," Vivvy murmured. "You see, Jim here, and I have promised that we won't leave each other."

"Leave me out of it, Vivvy!" Jim cried. "You've got your chance now!"

"Oh, we'll find something for him!" Donnell laughed. "Don't you fear."

"And then," said Vivvy, "we've thrown in our lot with Mr. and Mrs. Beagle, and we can't very well leave them."

"Well," said Mrs. Donnell, "if you're going on the stage you'll want a companion, and I'm sure Mrs. Beagle would be very pleased to act in that capacity. As for Mr. Beagle——"

"I can look after myself," said Montague Beagle. "I'm an old campaigner."

"Excuse me," put in Donnell; "a man of education I should say by your voice,"

"A graduate of Cambridge University, sir."

"Excellent! I want a tutor for those two young sons of mine. What do you say?"

The four stared at each other. They could scarcely believe their luck. Vivvy smiled gleefully, although she could scarcely keep her eyes open. Mrs. Donnell saw how tired she was, and suggested that they should retire to rest.

Jim was glad to get to bed that night. Even the excitement of this novel situation could not keep him awake.

But for some reason he slept lightly. Possibly the first two hours' sleep took the edge off his fatigue, and then his busy brain, stimulated by this new excitement, urged him towards wakefulness. It was only a very slight noise that aroused him.

It went on, with little pauses in between whiles, and slowly Jim realised what it was. Somebody was filing the catch of the French windows in the library.

In a very short time he pulled on trousers, socks, shoes, and overcoat. Thus attired he slipped downstairs.

The carpet of the stairs was soft, and he made not the least sound in descending. And his progress along the hall to the library door was just as silent.

He threw open the door with a shout, and rushed inside.

Another shout answered him—a shout of surprise and terror.

He saw between him and the window the figure of a man dimly outlined.

The figure sprang at him, and Jim, landing out with his left fist, struck with all his force. The blow went home on the burglar's jaw. The man collapsed, fell with a thud, and lay still.

He stirred as Jim bent over him, and groaned. He was wearing a crape mask which obliterated nearly all his face. Jim laid a hand on his shoulder and ripped the mask away. Then he stepped back in amazement, staring at the face that was revealed.

"Ruff!" he cried. "Robert Ruff!"

(To be continued.)

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