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IN DEADLY PERIL!

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A Magnificent
New Long
Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton
& Co. at Grey-
friars School.

HIS FATHER'S HONOUR!

By
Frank
Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Upstart!

"KILL the fatted calf!" said Bob Cherry, as he helped to lay the table.

"And welcome the esteemed stranger within the gatefulness!" said Hurree Singh.

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Frank Nugent. "We'll give the new chap a rousing reception!"

That evening the Remove Form at Greyfriars was to be reinforced by Bernard B. Tracey, an American boy, and Mr. Quelch had impressed upon his pupils that they were to be friendly—even affectionate—towards the newcomer.

Some people, Mr. Quelch observed, were inclined to sneer at America for her attitude in the world war, and Tracey might perhaps feel a trifle awkward and uncomfortable in coming to an English school. So it was understood that Tracey was not to be howled down as a neutral, or scoffed at as a non-combatant. And the Famous Five were making it their duty to see that the new boy was made at home, and not treated like a stranger in a strange land.

The juniors had combined forces financially, and the result was a study spread of unusual dimensions. All sorts and conditions of good things graced the festive board; and if Tracey failed to take the hint and enjoy himself to the full the fault would be entirely his own.

"He ought to be here pretty soon," said Johnny Bull, looking at his watch. "Train in at seven, and it's a quarter past."

There was a sharp knock at the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed five voices, in unison.

Mark Linley looked into the study.

"Are you fellows expecting the new kid from America?" he asked.

"Rather!"

"Well, he's here—mooning about the passages like a lost sheep. Shall I trot him along?"

"Do!" said Harry Wharton. "What's he like?"

Linley smiled.

"Well, to judge by the brief conversation I had with him, he's a holy terror!" he said. "I don't think you'll find it a very cheap job taking him to your bosoms!"

And the Lancashire lad retreated down the passage.

He returned a moment later, and in his wake strutted Bernard B. Tracey.

Harry Wharton & Co. were not favourably impressed by their first sight of the stranger. Tracey would have passed in a crowd as being fairly good-looking; but there was a nasty gleam in his eyes which suggested that his temper was not of the best.

"Come right in!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully.

Tracey swept his eye round the well-laden table. Then he sneered.

"I guess I don't want to start in by making a beast of myself!" he said.

The faces of the Famous Five fell. This was far from a promising opening.

"But—but surely you don't object to a feed?" gasped Harry Wharton, at length.

"Yep! I hate the sight of all that indigestible trash!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in amazement. "Are there any more at home like you? If so, the restaurant proprietors in New York must have a pretty thin time!"

It seemed incomprehensible to a sturdy, healthy fellow like Bob that any sane person of his own age should fail to be attracted by the sight of a feed.

Bernard Tracey lounged up against the mantelpiece, extracted a cigarette from a lavishly-engraved case, and coolly lighted it.

The juniors watched him with growing disfavour.

"I'd rather choke myself with wholesome food than with tobacco!" said Harry Wharton. "Chuck that weed away! You shan't smoke in this study!"

Tracey threw back his head, and laughed.

"I shall do exactly as I like!" he said. "My father told me it was the custom at English schools to sit on new boys and make 'em sing small, but I guess that sort of game cuts no ice with me!"

Johnny Bull rose to his feet, and advanced towards the speaker. It didn't take a great deal to rouse Johnny.

"Look here!" he said heatedly. "We got this spread ready for your benefit, and now you've got the cheek to turn up your nose at it! Get out of this study, before I mistake you for a football!"

Tracey was no fool. He knew when a fellow was in earnest; and, darting a black look at the Famous Five, he swung out of the study, leaving a white cloud of smoke behind him.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at each other.

"What a cad!" said Nugent.

"Cad's not the word for him!" growled Bob Cherry. "Thank goodness all Americans aren't like him! There are a lot of decent kids in the States, but the specimens we get at Greyfriars wouldn't make you think so."

"We did our best to follow out Quelch's wishes," said Wharton. "We were all out for peace and brotherly love, and all the rest of it. But I'm afraid it means war."

That was the general opinion. Bernard B. Tracey had not only been rude, but he had shown himself to be an utter cad. His contempt for an English school, his cigarettes, and his cool bluster, were not likely to win him a place in the good graces of the Famous Five.

"And we went out of our way to stand him a stunning feed!" said Nugent. "That's where it cuts! I'm almost sorry we didn't wipe up the ground with the beast!"

"Never mind!" said Bob Cherry. "The grub's not wasted! We can do justice to it all right. And Tracey can go and eat coke!"

"He'll have a rude awakening before many days are over!" said Harry Whar-

ton. "He hasn't a spark of decency in him, and, personally, I sha'n't be sorry to see him run his head up against a brick wall. It's rotten to make enemies, but who could be chummy with an outsider like that?"

"He's not worth worrying about," said Nugent, pouring out the tea. "Pile in, you fellows! We won't bother our heads about Tracey any more!"

The words were lightly spoken; but if only Frank Nugent could have peered into the future he would have proceeded to far more vigorous measures.

For Bernard B. Tracey had not come to Greyfriars with the intention of knuckling under to the powers that be. He meant to make his mark in the Remove, by fair means or foul, and it was pretty obvious that there were breakers ahead!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Shadow from the Past!

"I WANT to see Vernon-Smith. Take me to his study at once!"

Billy Bunter, who had been ambling along the Remove passage, one side of his face distorted by a huge chunk of toffee, gave a startled cry as Bernard Tracey's hand descended upon his shoulder with a vicelike grip.

"Ow! Leggo, you beast!"

"Sure! I'll let go when you've directed me to Vernon-Smith. And look sharp about it!"

Billy Bunter was at the new boy's mercy. He sped along the passage as fast as his fat legs could carry him, and Tracey, still retaining his grip, ran lightly in his wake.

The procession stopped outside the door of Study No. 4, and Tracey at once entered without knocking.

Vernon-Smith was sprawled at full length on the couch, reading. He had spent a strenuous afternoon on Little Side, and was feeling very lazy and very comfortable when Tracey swung into the room.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed suddenly, sitting bolt upright, and staring hard at the intruder. "Who are you, and where have you sprung from?"

"My name's Tracey. You've heard the name before, I reckon?"

Vernon-Smith stroked his chin in thought.

"Dare say I have," he said. "It's not an uncommon name. Now I come to think of it, my pater's secretary was called Tracey. He was sacked not long ago for dishonesty."

Tracey winced. The look he darted at Vernon-Smith was by no means friendly.

"I s'pose you've got a pretty exalted opinion of your pater?" he said.

"He's one of the best!" said Vernon-Smith loyally.

"Really! I guess I'll soon prove to you that he's one of the worst!"

"What d'you mean?"

Vernon-Smith was on his feet now. His eyes were blazing.

"I mean this," said Tracey coolly.

"It's in my power to get your pater put in prison to-morrow!"

Vernon Smith choked. "You cad!" he rapped out. "Explain yourself at once, or, by thunder, I'll pitch you neck-and-crop out of this study!"

Bernard Tracey took possession of the armchair, in the cosy depths of which he sank back, thrusting a cigarette between his lips as he did so. His careless insolence made the Bounder thunderstruck.

"I'll explain, all serene," he said. "Your pater killed a man two years ago—a prominent New York citizen!"

"M-m-my hat! Are you polly? Have you mistaken Greyfriars for the lunatic asylum?"

"Guess I'm as sane as you are, kid. I can prove what I say—right up to the hilt. Two years ago your pater was touring the States in his car, and he deliberately ran down a man named Rumford—a big stockbroker. One word from me, and he could be had up on a charge of manslaughter—p'raps murder!"

"Murder!"

Vernon-Smith's face was very white. The new boy was not pulling his leg; he knew that now. There was confidence, as well as coolness, in Tracey's manner. However wild and improbable his story might seem, he appeared to be ready to back it up with facts.

"If—if this is true," stammered Vernon-Smith, "how did it come to your knowledge?"

"Through my pater. He was traveling with yours at the time of the tragedy, and he is prepared to swear in a court of law that Mr. Vernon-Smith wilfully ran his victim down. I have asked him not to—"

A sigh of relief escaped the Bounder.

"But," said Tracey grimly, "I shall not scruple to expose the whole thing if you give me the slightest provocation."

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands hard. He was at the new boy's mercy, and his father's reputation was at stake. He must keep Tracey's mouth closed at all costs, he reflected.

"Is it money you want?" he asked at length.

"I guess not!"

Vernon-Smith looked surprised.

"Then why do you come to me and threaten to expose this motor affair?"

Tracey laughed harshly.

"There are other things you can do for me, apart from doling out dollars," he said. "You've got a good grip on things here—plenty of influence with the other fellows, I take it?"

"More or less," said the Bounder.

"Then you're just the man I want! I guess you'll suit me down to the ground!"

Tracey puffed vigorously at his cigarette for some moments. Then he burst out, with startling suddenness:

"Say! It's my intention to rule the roost in this cock-eyed show!"

Vernon-Smith gasped.

"You mean that you want to be captain of the Remove?"

"That about hits it. But I'm no gonoph. I know it's not a bit of use trying to do that fellow Wharton in the eye unless I'm well backed up. To try and bag the captaincy on my own would be a mug's game; but with you behind me—pushing me all the time—I guess I could win the day."

The Bounder drew a deep breath.

"I see," he said slowly. "You want me to back you up tooth and nail in this business, and in return you'll keep mum about my pater?"

"Guess that sums it up quite slick. Is there anything doing?"

It was some time before Vernon-Smith spoke. He was face to face with no light problem. His father was in grave danger of being brought to dishonour; and Tracey's story, if told, would be



Bunter strikes while the iron is hot. (See Chapter 4.)

eagerly pounced upon by these who delighted in ugly rumours.

Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, as a prominent member of plutocratic society, would have a most unpleasant time of it, even if a charge of manslaughter were not preferred against him.

On the other hand, so long as the Bounder chose to back up Bernard Tracey, the latter would keep silent. It was a distasteful thing to have to fight against such topping fellows as the Famous Five, especially as only recently he had taken a firm stand for Harry Wharton when the latter looked like being deprived of the captaincy; but of the two evils this was the lesser, and the Bounder's mind was made up.

He held out his hand to Tracey.

"I'm game!" he said quietly. "Rely on me to back you up through thick and thin. It's going to be an uphill business. But I'll help you all I know, so long as you keep dark about my father!"

Tracey rose from the armchair, and hurled the stump of his cigarette into the fireplace. He was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"Gee! I guess you know which side your bread is buttered!" he exclaimed. "I'll keep my part of the bargain, and you've got to keep yours. If I see any signs of weakness or wavering, I sha'n't hesitate to speak out. Got that? Very well! I guess I'll quit."

And Bernard B. Tracey, his blackmailing efforts having ended in triumph, took his departure.

When the new boy's footsteps had died away, the Bounder sank wearily back on to the couch. The shock of his father's offence was, for the first time, fully

brought home to him. His father, whom he had honoured and respected, had killed a fellow-man! And, if Tracey's story were true, he had killed him intentionally.

"Poor old pater!" muttered Vernon-Smith. "I can't think whatever possessed him to do a thing like that. It's awful!"

For over an hour the Bounder sat there, his face pale and haggard. And had anyone chanced to look into the study during that time they would have seen a sight which would have filled them with surprise and wonder.

For there were tears—genuine tears of distress—on the cheeks of the one-time reckless, nerve-hardened Bounder of Greyfriars!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Bounder Intervenes!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were not in the best of spirits when they trooped up to the Remove dormitory that evening.

Tracey's insult had nettled them. It was no joke to make elaborate preparations for a gorgeous study feed and then to be sneered at by the prospective guest.

Mr. Quelch had undoubtedly meant well when he advised them to be specially considerate towards the American junior; but he had evidently not had an insight into Tracey's nature.

"Phew! I can smell something burning!" said Squiff while the juniors were undressing.

"It's that new bouncer smoking again!" growled Johnny Bull. "I s'pose he comes from some one-horse town out West where the kids learn to smoke fat cigars before they can walk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"If you want to steer to windward of trouble, Tracey," said Harry Wharton, "I should advise you to chuck that silly game! Smoking in the dormitory's unheard-of!"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Tracey.

"It is my business, as skipper of the Remove, to put my foot down on things of this sort!" said Harry warily. "This is a dormitory, not a saloon bar!"

Tracey laughed.
"I guess you want reforming, Wharton," he said. "You're some prig! Sinless Samuel and Virtuous Victor have to take back seats when you're on the premises. I guess—"

"Do you want a thick ear?" chimed in Bob Cherry.

"I'd like all the thick ears you could give me! Think I'm funky of a touse-headed object like you? Not much!"

Things were warming up, and the Removites looked on breathlessly. It seemed as if Bernard B. Tracey would finish his first day at Greyfriars on his back blinking at masses of stars.

Bob Cherry clenched his big fists, and was about to hurl himself in neck-or-nothing fashion at the new boy, when he was roughly pushed aside, and an angry voice exclaimed:

"What's all this? Smoking, by gad! And a new kid, too!"

There was a sudden hush, and the Removites glanced with startled faces at the intruder. It was Loder of the Sixth.

Tracey looked Loder up and down as if the prefect were a new species of snake just imported to the Zoo.

"Who are you?" he said.

Loder was staggered.

"I—I'll jolly soon show you!" he gasped at length. "I'm Loder—a prefect! Do you understand me? Come to my study first thing in the morning, you cheeky young cub, and I'll give you the licking of your life! It's as much as I can do to keep my hands off you now! Throw that cigarette away at once! You hear me?"

Tracey reluctantly obeyed.

"Now get into bed, and don't forget to report to me first thing to-morrow!"

As Loder left the dormitory, with the thunderclouds black on his brow, Vernon-Smith ran out and confronted him.

"Let the new kid off Loder," he whispered.

"Why?" began Loder angrily.

"Shush! Let him off, I tell you, and you'll find me good for the loan of a quid or so whenever you want it. 'Twig?"

Loder smiled.

"All serene," he said. Then, raising his voice, he added: "You needn't report to me to-morrow, Tracey."

"Very good of you," drawled the Yankee junior, with a cynical smile.

Vernon-Smith returned to his bedside, and continued to undress; but the recent incident had not passed unnoticed.

"Smithy," said Harry Wharton, in amazement, "what does this mean? You begged the new kid off!"

"I did," answered the Bouncer quietly.

"And why?"

"Because he's my pal."

"My hat! I don't admire your choice, then. You're as unlike him as chalk is to cheese!"

"We're pals, all the same," said Vernon-Smith. "And it's a habit of

mine to stand by my pals. I'm backing Tracey up all along the line!"

A chorus of astonished exclamations arose from all sides. What had come over the Bouncer that he should commit himself to the cause of a rank outsider like Tracey? He must be stark, staring mad!

Johnny Bull sniffed—partly at Vernon-Smith's recent remark, and partly because there was really something to sniff for.

"Blessed if that smoky bouncer hasn't started again!" said Johnny. "Did you ever?"

Tracey was reclining on his back in bed, and the odour of a Turkish cigarette spread through the dormitory.

Harry Wharton strode forward.

"That's enough, Tracey!" he said sharply. "We're not going to let you kick over the traces like this! Throw that thing away, or—"

"Or what?"

"We'll give you such a bumping that you'll never want to touch a cigarette again!"

Tracey chuckled, and continued to smoke.

"Come on, you fellows!" rapped out Wharton. "Give the bouncer beans!"

There was a concerted rush to Tracey's bed, and the new boy looked like going through the mill. His face changed colour, and he half started up in bed; but he need have had no fear, for the next instant Vernon-Smith had intervened between him and the avengers.

"Stand back," he said warningly, "all of you!"

"Smithy," gasped Bob Cherry, "are you mad? Get out of the way, you duffer!"

The Bouncer stood his ground without flinching.

"Before you touch Tracey you've got to reckon with me!" he said.

"Very well," said Wharton quietly.

"I won't start scrapping with you, Smithy. You've proved too good a pal for that. But there are limits to our endurance, and Tracey won't be able to go on doing as he likes. He'll have to knuckle under to law and order!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry. "And the sooner the better! I'm surprised at you, Smithy!"

The rest of the fellows were surprised, too. They had thought that the Bouncer had dropped all this sort of thing, yet he had chummed up with a fellow who almost out-Skinnered Skinner for sheer caddishness.

And why?

That was one of those riddles which only the turn of future events could solve.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Money Talks!

THE days that followed were black and bitter ones for the Bouncer.

He had still nursed a hope that the charge against his father might be false, and had written to the millionaire, inquiring if there was any truth in Tracey's story.

His hopes were at once shattered when he received the following reply:

"My dear Herbert,—I regret to say that Tracey's version of the motor tragedy is true, with one exception.

"I did not run Mr. Rumford down intentionally. It was late at night that the catastrophe occurred, and the unfortunate man crossed the road directly in front of the car before I could avert the disaster.

"I did not make the facts known, for the world would think that the deed had been done deliberately. Mr. Harvey Rumford was a wealthy man of high

social standing, and had I stated the facts it would have appeared that I deliberately compassed his death. Such was not the case.

"The only person to whom the truth was known was John Tracey, who was my secretary at the time, and whom I have since had to dismiss for dishonesty. Doubtless, by way of revenge, he has informed his son, who will expose the facts if he is given the slightest provocation to do so.

"In the circumstances, therefore, I want you to play up to young Tracey, and be as thick with him as you possibly can. Keep his mouth closed at all hazards. It would mean absolute ruin to me if he mentioned what happened two years ago, so promise me, Herbert, that you will keep on the right side of him. If money would assist you, just say the word.—Your affectionate father,
"SAMUEL VERNON-SMITH."

The Bouncer bit his lip, and paced up and down in his study. Then, it was true! Tracey was not lying! He had not come to the school with a cock-and-bull story which he could not substantiate with facts. It was correct that Mr. Vernon-Smith had killed a man! And if that fact came to light there would be no end to the scandal! The millionaire's reputation would be dragged in the dust; he might even be called upon to face the penalty of imprisonment! And there were those who would wilfully confuse manslaughter with murder.

"It's terrible!" muttered the Bouncer.

He seated himself on the couch once more, and covered his face with his hands. Usually hard as nails, he had been thrown right off his balance by Tracey's story, which had now been borne out by Mr. Vernon-Smith himself.

The study door opened, and Tracey came in. He was looking as if he found the world a very pleasant place to live in.

"Say, Smith," he said, "I guess you've started well! You're helping me keep my end up in this cock-eyed show, and I want to know if you're willing to see the thing through."

The Bouncer glanced at his father's letter, which lay on the table, and nodded.

"I'm on your side, Tracey," he said. "I don't care what you want me to do, or how risky it is, it shall be done—provided, of course, you keep mum about my pater."

"Gee! I guess you know a good bargain when you see one! Waal, it's like this. I'm going to start right now to make a bid for the captaincy of the Remove. I shall want heaps of support. How do you suggest I should go about it?"

"Stand a big feed to all the fellows who care to come," said the Bouncer. "That'll put 'em in a good humour. Got much brass to chuck about?"

"I should say so!"

"Then you might hand out a few loans, and say you're not particular when they're paid back."

Tracey's eyes sparkled.

"It's a great stunt!" he said. "You're a useful sort of ally to have, Smith!"

The Bouncer laughed dubiously.

"Don't imagine," he said, "that it's going to be as easy as falling off a form. It isn't. I've had several shots at the captaincy myself in the past but none of 'em ever came off. The Famous Five are fellows who can stand any amount of hard grueling, and come up smiling for more. This is not going to be anything in the nature of a walk-over for you."

"All the better. I prefer having a run for my money," said Tracey.

"And you'll get it. Now, what about that feed?"

"Come down to your comic tuckshop," said Tracey, "and we'll lay in supplies."

Mrs. Mumble was accustomed to lavish orders, but she nearly swooned when Tracey started rapping out his commands.

Money was no object with the Yankee junior. If he saw anything tempting, he took it, and made no demur at the cost.

Half an hour later an announcement of more than usual interest was posted on the notice-board:

"A FREE FEED FOR EVERYBODY!"

"Bernard B. Tracey, of the Remove, will preside at a first-class, gilt-edged, double-barrelled spread, to take place in the Rag at eight sharp. All are invited.

"Anyone who thinks his leg is being pulled should come along and see for himself.

"Roll up in your thousands!"

It was a tempting bait, and at least twenty juniors were lined up in a queue outside the Rag long before eight o'clock.

But Harry Wharton & Co. merely sniffed at the Yankee's offer. They were fed-up with Tracey. His ways were not their ways. Had he been a decent fellow, they would willingly have rallied round and helped him make the feed a stunning success. But they could not help thinking that his sudden burst of generosity was merely a cloak to cover some underhand design. And they were right.

Punctually to time the feed com-

menced, and certainly those who were present had nothing to find fault with. Everything was excellent.

"Tracey, old man, you're a topper!" said Skinner, as he lounged back in his chair and accepted one of the new boy's Turkish cigarettes.

"Hear, hear!" said Bolsover major. "You're what I call a real sport, and there's a scarcity of 'em nowadays! My hat! How ripping it would be if you skippered the Remove in place of that prig Wharton!"

"Oh, no!" said Tracey modestly. "I should be a hopeless wash-out."

"Not a bit of it!" said Stott. "You'd fill the bill better than anybody--wouldn't he, Smithy?"

"Rather!" said the Bounder, lighting a cigarette for the first time in many weeks.

"It's awfully good of you fellows to say such nice things about me," said Tracey, delightedly. "Perhaps, now I come to think of it, I shouldn't make such a bad skipper. If I were in Wharton's place things would be free and easy, and all these silly restrictions about smoking, and that sort of thing, would go to pot. I really think I shall have to have a shot at ruling the roost. Of course, you fellows will back me up?"

"Rely on us!" said Bolsover heartily.

"Good! There's just one thing more. I expect some of you often know the misery of being stony-broke. Well, you needn't experience it again. When you want to raise the wind, just come to me, and I'll stump up—provided the amount's reasonable."

Tracey's princely offer did not fall on deaf ears. Indeed, Billy Bunter sprang to his feet at once with a request for five shillings, and, what was more, he got it.

The feasters trooped out of the Rag in

great spirits, and as Tracey retired to his study he became aware of a rousing chorus behind him. His newly-found friends were singing at the top of their voices:

"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

"Yes," muttered Tracey, as he settled down to his prep, "I'm a jolly good fellow, right enough, so long as the captaincy business comes off! If it doesn't, then I guess they'll sing to another tune. They'll find me a perfect Tartar!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

In Peril on the Sea!

"IT'S finished!"

Skinner of the Remove stood in the doorway of the woodshed, and gazed with pride and pleasure at his handiwork.

It was not like Skinner to occupy his time in following a respectable hobby; but he had done so during the past two weeks. Most of his spare time—and a great deal that was not spare—had been devoted to the construction of a boat—a double-seater affair, which Skinner avowed would take the world by storm.

Bolsover major, who was looking over Skinner's shoulder, gave a doubtful sort of grunt.

"She'll sink like a stone the minute she's shoved off from the shore!" he said.

"Rats! Just you wait, my son. This boat—the Mermaid, I think I'll call her—is going to astonish the natives. The people of Pegg will stand gazing at her afar off, lost in rapture!"

"While we're lost in the bed of the ocean!" growled Bolsover. "I'm afraid you weren't cut out for a boat-builder,

NATURE'S REMEDY FOR OBESITY

WHY BE TOO STOUT WHEN YOU MAY BE PERMANENTLY SLIM?

When you meet an old friend, whom you have looked upon for years as being hopelessly stout, all at once getting slender again, and looking exceedingly healthy and bright into the bargain, you must be naturally curious to know what has wrought the marvellous change. Ask your friend, and he (or she) will most certainly tell you that the surprisingly altered condition of body is the result of the Antipon treatment. There is no other remedy or method that can possibly bring about such a wonderful transformation. Sheer gratitude makes thousands of advocates for Antipon, and in this way it has triumphed all along the line. Antipon roots out the most stubborn tendency to obesity. No change of diet is necessary.

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FROM ALL CHEMISTS, 3/- & 5/- per Bottle.

Skinney. There's a one-sided look about that boat that I don't quite relish. And the paint's still wet, too. You're not going to launch her this afternoon?"

"Yes, rather! It's a half-holiday, and we must make hay while the sun shines. If we don't take her on her maiden trip this afternoon we mightn't get a chance again for a whole week. Are you game, old man?"

"I don't fancy it," said Bolsover bluntly.

"That's another way of saying you're a funk."

Bolsover clenched his big fists, and made a threatening movement towards Skinner; but the latter hastened to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"Don't get huffy," he said. "We don't want to dissolve partnership just yet. Will you row out a little way with me?"

"Oh, all serene!" said Bolsover, in tones of resignation. "Half a jiffy, though. How are we going to shift this confounded thing down to the shore? We shall want a labour party, I'm thinking."

"That's all right," said Skinner easily. "The other fellows are awfully interested in this venture. They'll lend a hand willingly enough."

He stepped out of the woodshed, and whistled to the Famous Five, who were standing in a group discussing the Removite's footer prospects for the coming season.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the trouble, Skinney?"

"I'm going to launch the Mermaid this afternoon. Will you help us cart her down to the shore?"

"What ho!" said Johnny Bull. "I'm an expert at carrying mermaids. Where's this one sprung from?"

"It's a boat, you silly ass!"

"Home-made?" grinned Nugent.

"It is—it are! And Bolsover and I are going to break it in."

"Bravo!"

The Famous Five lent a hand at once. They scented fun, and were curious to see what sort of a show the craft would put up against the seething waves. Bob Cherry was already singing, "Here, a sheer hulk, lies poor Tom Bowling!" in anticipation of coming disaster.

As the procession of juniors made their way down to the gates, bearing the boat on their shoulders, other fellows joined up, and formed a sort of bodyguard to the main party. Among them were Vernon-Smith and Tracey.

Straight along the sandy road to Pegg the procession passed, and did not pause until the bay was reached.

The sea was moderately calm, and it looked as if the Mermaid, unless she sprang a leak early on, would be able to keep her end up.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh handed over the oars they had been carrying, and then Skinner and Bolsover got in.

"Heave-ho, my hearties!" sang out Bob Cherry.

Willing hands shoved the boat off from the shore, and Bolsover's knees were knocking together.

Vague forebodings flashed through his mind. Why had he been such a fool as to risk his life—for that was what it amounted to—to suit a silly whim of Skinner's? It was extremely doubtful if the boat was seaworthy; and if a storm arose—

Bolsover shuddered. But his moody reflections were suddenly cut short by the arrival of an old boot, hurled at his head by the humorous Bob Cherry.

"Ow!"

Bolsover gave a jump which nearly capsized the boat.

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"Steady, fathead!" yelled Skinner. "You'll land us in the soup!"

Roars of laughter arose from the crowd on the shore. The Mermaid certainly looked a one-sided sort of tub, totally unfitted to plough the seas; but, as there was little or no wind, the danger was slight.

Bolsover major soon recovered from his nervousness, and began to ply his oars vigorously, with the result that the Mermaid, making good headway, soon became a mere speck on the horizon.

The Greyfriars juniors dispersed. They had no desire to kick their heels by the water's edge until the boat returned.

Harry Wharton & Co. went off to Greyfriars, chuckling over the Mermaid's maiden voyage; and Vernon-Smith and Tracey took a stroll towards the cliffs. There were lots of things they wanted to talk about concerning the future.

As for Skinner and Bolsover, they went gaily ahead, and the splash of their oars made merry music.

"This is great!" said Skinner. "I'd have knocked a boat together ages ago if I thought it would give us all this sport."

"It's topping!" agreed Bolsover. "Slow up for a bit now, Skinney, and hand over a fag, there's a good fellow. We can enjoy a smoke here without fear of being bowled out."

"Rather!"

Each of the juniors lighted a cigarette, and rested awhile on his oars.

And then a strange and startling thing happened.

Although the afternoon was still at an early stage, everything grew suddenly dark, and presently an ominous, rumbling sound was heard.

"What the merry dickens is that?" asked Bolsover, with a forced attempt at jocularity. "Another Jutland battle?"

"No, you ass! It's thunder! Hark! There it goes again. My hat! We're booked for a fearful storm!"

The boat rocked perilously from side to side; the wavelets joined forces, and became waves; and a fierce wind arose, increasing in fury with every minute.

"Let's get back!" muttered Bolsover. His bravado had gone now, and his teeth were chattering.

"That's the ticket!" said Skinner, hurling his half-smoked cigarette overboard. "Row like the very dickens!"

But the fury of the storm, coupled with the darkness, which was now intense, made progress difficult, almost impossible. The shore seemed to be miles away.

The Mermaid, which had not been fashioned by expert hands, behaved very badly. Every now and then a seething wave dashed against her, and the salt spray speedily drenched the two occupants.

"Oh, crumbs!" panted Skinner. "This is awful! I doubt if we shall come through it alive! We haven't the ghost of a chance!"

"And I'm nearly whacked!" said Bolsover, with a sharp, sobbing breath.

The burly Removite had been rowing like a Trojan, and the strain was beginning to tell.

"I'll keep going," said Skinner. "You'd better begin baling her out, old man. She needs it."

Considering the gravity of the situation, Skinner kept his head very well. Cad and outsider though he undoubtedly was, there were times when he rose to the occasion, and this was one of them.

The Mermaid was obstinate. For every capful of water that Bolsover baled out, twice the quantity rushed in. It was fast becoming a forlorn hope.

Vivid streaks of lightning darted

across the lowering sky. Old scenes and old memories flashed before the two juniors, who seemed to be approaching the Great Unseen. They were smitten with regret and remorse for a past which had been far from stainless; and the bitter thought was driven home to each of them that they might never be given another chance to redeem it.

"I'm done!" muttered Bolsover, at length. "It's no good going on. What's the use of fighting against a storm like this? It's heartbreaking!"

And he rolled over in the bottom of the boat, completely broken down.

"Heaven help us!" said Skinner fervently. "Is there nothing that can save us? Help! Help!"

But the only reply was the deep growl of the thunder and the fierce booming of the giant breakers, which seemed to rise up in savage determination to make the Mermaid their prey.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Under False Colours!

SKINNER and Bolsover had been in a good many tight corners in the course of their school career; but this did not make them relish their present situation the more.

On one occasion Skinner had fallen from a lofty beam in the school chapel, and had hovered between life and death in the sanatorium; but he felt that even that terrible experience did not compare with the juniors' present plight.

"Where are we?" groaned Bolsover. All his brag and bluster had evaporated in the face of such grave peril, and he was scared out of his wits.

"Goodness knows!" replied Skinner, who still pulled spasmodically at the oars. "We may be near the shore—we may have been carried miles away! I can't keep on much longer. I——"

There was a sudden grating sound, and water poured in from all sides.

The Mermaid began to founder.

"We've struck a rock!" said Skinner. "Hop out, old man! Quick! There's a sporting chance yet!"

The two juniors leapt wildly from the sinking vessel, and the next instant they were groping their way up a large, black rock, a jagged edge of which had made a hole in the boat.

"Just in time!" panted Skinner, when they sat side by side, shivering, on the top of the rock. "The Mermaid's gone!"

"And we're safe!" exclaimed Bolsover.

"I'm not so sure," said Skinner.

His face was very white as he clutched his companion by the arm.

"When the tide comes in," he said slowly, "this rock will be under water!"

"What!"

"It's a fact. I know where we are now. I've bathed near this rock heaps of times. It's not a great way from the shore; but it's impossible to swim in a sea like this!"

"But—but what can we do?"

"Simply hang on, and wait for the end."

It was an appalling prospect, which would have struck terror into the hearts of many braver fellows than Skinner and Bolsover. To cling for hours to a rock in a blinding storm, and to see the water gradually rising higher and higher, would be sheer torture.

The juniors were glad enough to be quit of the ill-fated Mermaid; but they had merely stepped out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Still the storm raged; and the thunder-claps boomed in the juniors' ears like death-knells. The waves came leaping

up against the sides of the rock with angry violence; and the hearts of the marooned juniors grew sick with the hopelessness of the situation.

Presently the darkness became very real, for night had fallen.

The juniors strained their eyes towards the shore, and peered out over the surging sea in the faint hope of sighting some friendly vessel. But their luck was out.

The water was up to their knees now; and very soon they must be swept off into the seething waves, and nothing would remain for them but death.

Skinner thrust out his hand.

"It's all up, old fellow," he said hoarsely. "There doesn't seem to be any of the eleventh-hour rescue bizney about this. Well, I s'pose we mustn't whine. What's the matter, old man? Why don't you speak?"

No reply came from Bolsover's lips. He had fainted.

Skinner set his teeth tightly together. "Heaven help me!" he muttered. "Help me to die like—like a decent chap!"

A mighty wave, bigger than all the rest, leapt up the side of the rock. Skinner watched it with fascinated eyes. Was this the end?

And then, blinking through the blinding spray, Skinner discerned what looked like a little black speck bobbing up and down on the waves.

His heart gave a jump, and he shouted for sheer joy. For the black speck, coming closer at every moment, revealed itself as the lifeboat from Pegg!

"Hurrah!" yelled Skinner. "Hip, hip, hip—"

The next instant he was literally swept from his perch. He struggled wildly in the lashing foam. But strong hands seized him, and he found himself being hauled up into the lifeboat.

"There's Bolsover!" he managed to splutter. "I left him on the rock, and he's fainted."

"Bolsover's here," said a familiar voice.

And, looking up, Skinner caught sight of Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, Smithy!" he exclaimed. "How on earth did you manage this? You've saved us from certain death!"

"It's nothing to go into heroics about," said the Bounder carelessly. "I commandeered the lifeboat from the bay, and these men volunteered to help me. It was touch-and-go, though. We only just got you in time."

"But how did you know—"

"That you were in danger? Why, Tracey and I were taking a stroll along the cliffs, and we saw you overtaken by the storm. I guessed you'd struck a rock. But you must excuse me now, Skinner. We've got to row for dear life."

The hardy fishermen who had volunteered to man the lifeboat put heart and soul into their efforts to regain the shore. Their task was lightened by reason of the fact that the tide was coming in. And in a few moments they were safe and sound.

"Good!" said Vernon-Smith. "That'll be a quid a-piece for you fellows. You took your lives in your hands to-night, and it was ripping of you!"

"What about this chap, sir?" asked one of the men, indicating Bolsover. "Shall we bring him along to the cottage?"

"Yes, rather!"

Bolsover soon rallied. It took him some time to realise where he was, and he was amazed to find himself in a warm, cosy room, shielded from the storm which raged without.

"How—how did it happen?" he murmured.

Skinner hastened to explain.

"It was the Bounder," he said. "He set out in the lifeboat, and got several of the fishermen to help him. Some performance—what?"

Bolsover put out his hand.

"Thank you, Smithy!" he said. "I shall never be able to repay this debt!"

"Oh, yes, you will!" said the Bounder. "I want you to do me a favour, both of you."

"All serene!" said Skinner.

"You'll give me your word of honour you'll do what I wish?"

"Yes."

"Same here!" said Bolsover.

"Right! Everybody at Greyfriars will be burning with curiosity to know how you were saved; and you must tell them"—the Bounder's tone was almost fierce—"you must tell them that it was Tracey who rescued you."

"Tracey!" gasped Skinner.

"Yes. I don't want my name mentioned in connection with this affair at all. When they ask you all about it, you must describe, in your best thrilling style, how Tracey braved the elements and brought you back to safety. Will you do that?"

"Of course," said Bolsover. "But—but I don't understand you, Smithy! Why do you want all the credit to go to the new kid?"

"I've a jolly good reason!" answered the Bounder.

And with that Skinner and Bolsover had to be content.

Warm blankets and hot coffee soon restored Bolsover to a fit condition; and then, through the raging storm, the juniors set their faces towards Greyfriars.

A junior in a raincoat joined them as they tramped through Pegg. It was Bernard Tracey.

"Did it work?" he asked the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"It's all serene," he said. "You're the blushing hero. It ought to get you a good following for the captaincy."

Tracey grinned.

"I guess that's great!" he said. "I shall be in the limelight now, and no mistake!"

The Bounder gritted his teeth, and murmured, as he tramped on through the darkness:

"What a thundering cad! I'd give him the licking of his life, and make Greyfriars too hot to hold him—if it wasn't for my father's honour!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Tracey's Triumph!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were looking very ill at ease as they sat round a roaring fire in the Rag discussing the possible fate of the Mermaid.

What had happened to Skinner and Bolsover?

When the Famous Five had left them, the sea had been wonderfully calm; but within half an hour a fierce tempest had arisen. And the Mermaid, the work of a novice in the boat-building art, could scarcely be expected to live in such a sea.

The juniors had already gone down once to the shore, but had failed to discover anything, and had been reluctantly compelled to return empty-handed to the school, where the story of the voyage made by Skinner and Bolsover was received with alarm and anxiety.

Wingate had already got together a search-party, armed with lanterns; and the Sixth-Formers were about to start on their quest when Skinner and Bolsover turned up, accompanied by Vernon-Smith and Tracey. They encountered the seniors in the Close.

"Oh, good!" said Wingate, in great relief. "We thought we were going to make some ugly discoveries to-night. It's a treat to see you safe and sound!"

"What happened?" asked Courtney.

Skinner proceeded to explain.

"We were overtaken by the storm," he said. "It came on without warning, and we were caught like rats in a trap! It was awful! We were clucked about at the mercy of the waves till goodness knows how long; and then we struck a rock, and managed to clamber up it."

"That was a stroke of luck, if you like!" said Walker.

"I don't know so much," chimed in Bolsover. "The tide began to come in, and if we'd been there another five minutes we'd have been food for fishes."

"Then how, in the name of all that's wonderful, did you work the oar?" exclaimed Wingate.

Skinner indicated Tracey with a wave of the hand.

"There's the giddy-hero!" he said. "He collared the lifeboat, and came out to us at the risk of his life."

"My hat!"

"It was touch-and-go, I can tell you," said Skinner. "We'd given up hope, absolutely. And then Tracey came along in the nick of time, got us into the boat, and pulled us back to the shore."

"It was risky work," said Tracey. "I've saved people's lives before this, but I never had such a narrow squeak of losing my own as I did to-day."

Wingate stared at the Yankee junior in amazement.

"This beats the band!" he exclaimed.

"Are you one of those fellows one reads of in books, who goes round making a practice of hauling people out of burning buildings, and saving 'em from watery graves, and all that sort of thing?"

Tracey laughed good-humouredly.

"Don't make a song about it!" he said. "Some people are better cut out for heroes than others, and I s'pose I'm one of 'em."

"You're a plucky kid, anyway," said Courtney. "I should like to shake hands with you. May I?"

"Sure!"

The four Removites then went off to the Rag, where they were greeted with a chorus of eager questions.

"You're still in the land of the living, then, Skinner?" said Bob Cherry. "What happened to you when that beastly storm came on? Tell us all about it!"

The Rag was crowded, and fellows came up from all sides to hear the news.

Skinner raised his voice.

"I've seen some pretty gallant deeds done before now," he said, "but nothing could beat Tracey's star turn this afternoon. It was great!"

A murmur of surprise and approval arose. Bernard B. Tracey did not look the sort of fellow for gallant deeds.

"Explainfully, describe what happened," said Hurree Singh. "We are on the tender-hooks."

"Well," said Skinner, now sure of his audience, "it was this way. Bolsover and I got stranded on a beastly rock, which would have jolly soon been under water, and we should both have been drowned if Tracey hadn't come out to us in the lifeboat."

"The lifeboat!" gasped Wharton. "How on earth could one fellow manage the lifeboat single-handed?"

"Well, Tracey did, anyhow," said Bolsover doggedly. "Twice the waves nearly dashed him to smithereens, but—"

"Steady on, fathead!" muttered Vernon-Smith, in an undertone. "You're getting too romantic!"

"Well, to cut a long story short," said Bolsover, "Tracey got us both into the boat just when we were beginning to chuck up the sponge; and I reckon he's the best and bravest fellow in the Remove, bar none!"

"Hear, hear!" said Skinner.

"I've got a certain amount of nerve myself," said the Bounder, "but it isn't equal to doing what Tracey did to-day. Three cheers for Tracey!"

The response was by no means half-hearted. Loud cheers went up from nearly everybody present; and even the Famous Five joined in, though they could not credit Bolsover's highly-coloured description of the rescue.

"Tracey's our man," said Snoop. "We're not going to let a giddy hero like that hide his light under a bushel any longer. He's going to skipper the Remove!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Do the decent thing, Wharton, and stand down!"

"Make way for a better man!"

Harry Wharton flushed, and faced the clamorous crowd.

"I haven't the slightest intention of relinquishing the captaincy," he said. "Because a fellow happens to do something plucky, as Tracey has done, it doesn't follow that he's entitled to become skipper of his Form!"

"Rats!"

"Tracey's worth two of you!"

Feeling ran very high among the unruly spirits of the Remove. There had been many attempts to deprive Harry Wharton of the captaincy in the past, and most of them had come to nothing; but Tracey was a rival whose claims were not to be treated lightly. He had power and popularity, and Wharton would have need of all his courage and fortitude to keep the doors of the captaincy closed against the Yankee junior who had come to Greyfriars with so strange a secret!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Tracey's Night Out!

"GEE! I guess this is getting tame!"

Tracey was sprawling at full length on the couch in Vernon-Smith's study, looking extremely bored.

"What's getting tame?" asked the Bounder patiently.

In his heart of hearts he detested Tracey. It was only his loyal regard for his father's welfare that kept him from hitting out straight from the shoulder very often.

"I'm fed-up with this slab-sided show!" growled Tracey. "If this is a sample of life at an English school, then the sooner I skim across the herring-pond again the better. There's no excitement of any sort to be had here."

"I reckon we've had a fair dose since you came," observed the Bounder.

"Oh, shucks! I don't mean that sort of excitement. What I'm driving at is this. Isn't there any chance of having a night on the tiles, or painting the town red?"

"It's a risky game," said Vernon-Smith. "Take the advice of an old hand, and give that sort of thing a wide berth."

"Ugh! You make me tired. You English galoots haven't any spirit."

"I don't know so much about that. I used to go on the razzle pretty nearly every night, and never lost an opportunity of painting the town red, as you call it. Thank goodness, I had the sense to pull up in time! Better be a sportsman than a blade, any day!"

"Go easy," advised Tracey, "or we shall quarrel. And when I get my mad up I have a habit of blurting out awk-

ward things. I might mention, f'rinstance, that your pater——"

The Bounder started.

"Remember our bargain!" he said.

"I will, so long as you keep in with me, all along the line. But don't start the goody-goody game, or I shall get dangerous. See here. I mean to have a little flutter to-night. How can it be done?"

"There's the Cross Keys, down in the village," said the Bounder. "You can go the pace there, if you like. There's cards——"

"Guess I don't shine in that direction."

"Or billiards——"

"Ah! Now you're talking! I learnt how to play billiards from the cradle, and there aren't many coves in this sleepy old country who could give me best. Is there any good sportsman down at this tinpot public-house—a chap who would play me a hundred up for a good round sum?"

The Bounder nodded.

"Banks will be there to-night," he said.

"He reckons he's hot stuff at the game, and you won't have much difficulty in persuading him to play."

"Good!"

"But, look here," said the Bounder seriously. "You'll have to tread warily. There's short shrift for fellows who are caught breaking bounds. The Head comes down on 'em like a thousand of bricks."

"It's all in the game," said Tracey carelessly. "I'll cotton on to this merchant Banks, and see if I can't relieve him of some of his filthy lucre. If I can't have a bit of a spree to-night I shall go potty!"

"You want a lot for your money," said the Bounder. "I reckon you've got precious little cause to feel fed-up. Not every fellow can manage to get well in the running for the captaincy within a week of his arrival at Greyfriars."

Tracey grinned.

"Yep. I do seem to be going great guns, don't I?" he observed. "That was a dashed acute wheeze of yours to make me shine as a hero of the lifeboat. Half the fellows in the Form worship the ground I walk on."

"I shouldn't harp too much on that lifeboat incident, if I were you," said the Bounder. "Some of the fellows might start tying you into knots with awkward questions."

And Vernon-Smith strolled out of the study. He found it unpleasant to breathe the same air as an outsider like Tracey. The Bounder had come to realise the wholesome pleasure of clean-living straightness, and it was repugnant to him to have to put up with a cad, and, what was worse, to be thought a cad by those round about him.

If only his father had not had that mischance two years before! And, having had it, why had he not played the man, and stood his trial, if necessary, for what was a sheer accident? It was inexplicable to the Bounder; but the grim fact remained all the same.

The future was appalling. He would always be under the thumb of Tracey. Freedom of thought and action would no longer be his. For his father's sake, he must continue to back up a fellow whom he detested from his very soul.

As for Tracey, that sweet specimen remained propped up on the pillows that night until eleven chimed out from the old clock in the tower. Then he slipped stealthily from his bed, and left the dormitory undetected.

Vernon-Smith—who was an authority on the gentle art of breaking bounds—had given the Yankee junior full directions, and within half an hour Tracey was in the company of Mr. Banks, the

rascally bookmaker, who had assisted many a Greyfriars fellow downhill.

Mr. Banks was delighted when Tracey suggested a billiard match. He considered that there was only one man in England who could play a game of billiards as it should be played, and the name of that man was Alfred Banks.

"A hundred up, for five quid?" said Tracey.

Mr. Banks rubbed his fat hands together, and chuckled.

"That'll suit me down to the ground!" he said, rejoicing in the happy thought that ere long he would be the possessor of a five-pound note.

Tracey grinned, and began to chalk his cue. Then the game started.

Mr. Banks might have been a star turn at billiards, as he himself expressed it; but Bernard B. Tracey went one better. He had not practised with the crack players of New York night after night for the mere fun of the thing. He was out to win, and the calm, confident manner in which he overhauled Mr. Banks made that gentleman gasp and stare.

Tracey reached the hundred with Mr. Banks still floundering in the sixties, and the bookmaker paid over the five pounds with a very ill grace.

"I'm out of form to-night," he observed. "Let's have a hand at cards!"

But Tracey was not to be drawn. The gambling spirit was strong in him, but he knew where to draw the line.

"That was a short game and a gay one, I guess," he said, putting on his coat. "Good-night, Banks! We shall meet again!"

"If it's goin' to cost me five quid a time, I sincerely hope as 'ow we don't!" grunted Mr. Banks.

Tracey smiled blandly; then, with an ironical wave of his hand, he disappeared.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Morning After!

THE shrill notes of the rising-bell clanged through the dormitories and corridors of Greyfriars.

In the Remove dormitory the juniors turned out of bed a shade less cheery than usual. Some of them had a sort of feeling that a storm was brewing, and when Wingate strode into the room with a grave face their fears were confirmed.

"You kids will assemble in Big Hall when dressed," said Wingate.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry.

"What's on, Wingate, old man?"

"I don't know any more than you do. I'm simply acting on the Head's instructions!"

And the captain of Greyfriars passed on.

Vernon-Smith darted a keen look at Tracey.

"Did you get collared last night?" he muttered.

"I guess not! I'm too downy a bird to walk into any police-traps!"

The Bounder said nothing more, but he looked pale and troubled as the fellows filed into Big Hall half an hour later.

Mr. Quelch was the first person of importance to appear. He was closely followed by the Head, who lost no time in getting to the point.

"I regret to announce," he began, "that it has come to my knowledge that a junior broke bounds last night, to visit a notorious inn in the neighbourhood!"

Tracey gave a violent start.

How had the discovery come about? He had not met a soul on the way to the village, or on his return to the school.

Someone must have seen him without his being aware of it.

"Gee!" he muttered. "Guess I'll sit tight, and be ready to roll out whoppers by the dozen!"

The Head continued his unwelcome speech.

"I will give the culprit an opportunity to come forward and confess honourably," he said. "By so doing he may lessen his punishment!"

A long pause followed.

Among the juniors there was a general craning of necks, and the fellows expected to see Skinner, or some other bold, bad blade, step forward and face the music.

But Harold Skinner was smiling a genuine smile of innocence for once. It was obvious that he was not the offender.

The Head pursed up his lips.

"Let me warn the culprit," he said, "that it will not be so difficult to prove his identity as he may imagine. Unless he comes forward at once, I shall be compelled to commence a cross-examination which he will not be able to evade!"

Tracey's knees trembled; but he stood his ground, and tried to look as if the proceedings had no interest for him.

Dr. Locke allowed another minute to elapse, during which time the whole school remained stationary.

"Very well. I shall have to make known the evidence I have collected. Mr. Quelch, on looking into the Remove dormitory shortly before midnight, discovered an empty bed!"

"That's done it!" muttered Tracey, clenching his hands hard.

"The junior who should have been sleeping in the bed referred to," the Head went on, "is Tracey!"

All eyes were on the Yankee junior. The latter was quaking inwardly, though outwardly he was calm. With the news that his vacant bed had been discovered, his hopes of wriggling out of his tight corner were shattered.

"I want an explanation from you, Tracey!" said the Head sternly. "Stand out at once, sir, and tell me why you failed to confess in the first instance!"

Tracey looked round wildly. He was driven to the wall now! He had set out the night before with a reckless disregard of the consequences; and now that the consequences had to be faced he could not nerve himself to meet them.

But he need not have worried. There was a sudden movement behind him, and then, with the astonished glances of the school turned upon him, Vernon-Smith walked slowly but firmly down the centre of the hall.

"Well, Vernon-Smith?" rapped out the Head. "I wish you would not interrupt—"

"I must, sir," said the Bounder. "I can't keep silent any longer, and see another fellow punished in my place!"

"In your place! What do you mean, boy?"

"Simply this, sir. It was I who broke bounds last night, not Tracey!"

"What! Then how do you account for the fact that Tracey's bed was empty?"

The Bounder had a ready answer.

"We had changed beds, sir," he said; "and when Mr. Quelch saw Tracey's bed vacant I don't suppose it occurred to him that Tracey was sleeping in mine!"

"Indeed, it did not!" said Mr. Quelch.

The Head looked very grave.

"I am sorry to see you before me again on so serious a charge, Vernon-Smith," he said. "Breaking bounds was a misdemeanour of which you were often guilty in the past, but I concluded that you had desisted from such practices long ago. In what manner did you spend

your period of absence from the dormitory?"

"I merely had a game of billiards, sir, in the village."

"You neither smoked nor gambled?"

"No, sir."

There was such a genuine ring about the Bounder's reply that the Head accepted it as truth.

"That is very fortunate, so far as you are concerned," said Dr. Locke. "If I thought for one moment that you had been indulging in dissipation, as you did formerly, I should not hesitate to expel you from Greyfriars forthwith. As it is, the only point on which you are convicted is that of breaking bounds, since we can prove nothing further!"

The Bounder looked relieved.

"Your punishment, Vernon-Smith, shall be severe! I shall not flog you. Such a nature as yours is not amenable to a flogging, and the gravity of your offence would not be brought home to you with sufficient force. Instead, you will be gated for the rest of the term!"

The rest of the term! And the present term was still in its infancy! It was the severest punishment which could possibly have befallen the Bounder, who valued his freedom far above all else.

But he took it well. With head erect, heedless of the varying glances, scornful and sympathetic, of his schoolfellows, he turned and went back to his place.

And, after taking the full burden of another's guilt upon his own shoulders, all the thanks the Bounder got from Tracey when the school was dismissed was as follows:

"You just chipped in in time! And thank your lucky stars you did, or all Greyfriars would jolly soon have known what your father is—a murderer!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER. Civil War!

EVER since Bernard B. Tracey had set feet in Greyfriars School a wave of unrest had been sweeping over the Remove.

Harry Wharton was a splendid skipper—fearless and unwavering; but he ruled a trifle too severely to suit the majority of the Removites. They would have preferred Tracey, because he would give them plenty of rope.

Then, again, Tracey's supposed gallantry in rescuing Skinner and Bolsover from a watery grave still lingered in the minds of many of the fellows, who were inclined to regard the American junior as a hero in consequence.

The atmosphere was very strained during the next few days; and then, with dramatic suddenness, civil war broke out in the Remove.

It started with the wrecking of Study No. 1.

When the Famous Five returned from an afternoon's outing on the next half-holiday, they found the study looking as if the Crown Prince had been a recent visitor. The legs were twisted off the chairs, the table looked as if it had borne the full force of a Zeppelin raid, and the ornaments which had stood in neat array on the mantelpiece were now shivered into a thousand fragments on the floor.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, the joint owners of the study, were furious.

They were fond of their den. It was a snug little haven of rest after a strenuous afternoon on the playing-fields; and now—now it resembled a wrecked German dug-out!

And on the wall were placards, printed in an unknown hand:

"DOWN WITH WHARTON!"

"TRACEY'S THE MAN!"

"PACK ALL THE PRIGS TO PRUSSIA!"

"WE WANT A REAL SPORT FOR SKIPPER!"

These, and similar phrases, were proof enough to the Famous Five that the fellows were ripe for rebellion. They had thrown down the gauntlet by wrecking Study No. 1, and that meant war. Harry Wharton was not the sort of fellow to waste time in making out peace notes.

"The cads!" exclaimed Bob Cherry hotly. "They've gone too far this time, and we can't let 'em go on doing this sort of thing. They must be stopped!"

"With a series of straight lefts!" said Johnny Bull, clenching his big fists in warlike fashion.

"But who are the ringleaders?" said Nugent.

"Can't you guess? Bolsover and Skinner, for certain, and—it's a nasty pill to swallow—the Bounder."

"That's what I can't understand," said Harry Wharton. "I can't think what's come over him that he should turn so bitter against us, and side with that Yankee upstart. And it wasn't so very long ago that he stood up for me like any of you chaps!"

"Perhaps," said Nugent thoughtfully, "Tracey's got some sort of hold over him."

"I shouldn't think so. Smithy's played the game straight during the last term of two, and I can't see what Tracey can have up against him."

"Let's punish the ludicrous rotters bumpfully," suggested Hurree Singh.

"That's the ticket!" said Bob Cherry. "Come on!"

The Famous Five were not long in discovering the whereabouts of the foe. As they passed out into the Close they were greeted with a chorus of groans.

Bolsover, Skinner, and Vernon-Smith, with a dozen other malcontents, were pacing up and down on the flagstones, their attitude suggesting that they were simply spoiling for a fight.

Harry Wharton strode straight up to the Bounder.

"Are you responsible for wrecking our study, Smith?" he asked.

The Bounder met Harry's gaze fearlessly.

"I am," he said.

There was no bombast in his manner. He was quiet and calm.

The frank admission almost took Wharton's breath away.

"But why?" he gasped.

"Oh, don't ask me! I did it, and there you are!"

"And all these rotters had a finger in the pie?"

"They can speak for themselves," said the Bounder.

Bolsover major came forward.

"Yes," he said; "we were all in it—every man jack of us! We're backing up Tracey through thick and thin, and the best thing you can do, Wharton, is to hand over the reins to him at once. If you don't do it of your own accord, we shall force you. So you'd better put your pride in your pocket and toe the line!"

"That's it!" said Skinner. "We're fed-up with you and your goody-goody pals! Of all the precious humbugs and hypocrites—"

Smack!

Harry Wharton's open palm came with a sounding report against Skinner's cheek.

That blow was the signal for the bad blood to give itself full vent. The next

instant a strenuous hand-to-hand conflict was raging in the Close.

Fellows came pouring upon the scene from all sorts of odd corners and hurled themselves into the fray.

The spirit of discord, which had been growing in the ranks of the Remove since Tracey's arrival, had now come to a head; and the respective champions of Wharton and Tracey seemed to be doing their best to wipe their opponents off the face of the earth.

Harry Wharton, although he had recently lost ground from the standpoint of popularity, was loyally supported. Russell and Squiff, Mark Linley and Tom Brown, Dick Penfold and Monty Newland, rose to the occasion, and manfully assisted the Famous Five.

The rebels were strongly represented, too. Vernon-Smith was a host in himself, and the burly Bolsover soon got busy with his smashing drives.

Tracey himself hovered in the background. He urged his followers on again and again, but he didn't go near the danger-zone himself. The yellow streak was very prominent in Tracey. He didn't care who got hurt so long as his own skin was safe.

"Put the beggars through it!" roared Bob Cherry, smiting Skinner in the chest and bowling him over like a nine-pin.

"Sweep them off their ludicrous bow-legs!" chortled Hurree Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Which side would have won can never be known, for, just as the strife was at its hottest, Wingate of the Sixth came striding on the scene, backed up by Courtney and Walker.

The Sixth-Formers were all armed with canes, and they didn't hesitate about bringing them into play.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Stoppit!"

"Grooh! I'm hurt!"

The canes did great execution, and the desire to go on fighting was eclipsed by the desire to avoid those stinging cuts.

"Now, you young rascals!" exclaimed Wingate. "What in thunder d'you mean by it? Scrapping in front of the Head's windows, by Jove!"

"I've noticed for some time that a storm was brewing in the Remove," said Courtney. "Seems to be a question affecting the captaincy."

"The fact of the matter is this," said Bolsover, tenderly caressing his nose, which had undergone drastic treatment at the fist of Bob Cherry. "We're sick and tired of Wharton! He's not the sort of skipper we can look to to lead us."

"Who's the alternative, then?" asked Wingate.

"Tracey."

"But—but he's a new kid!"

"He's proved his worth, anyway. Look at that affair the other day, when he risked his life to save Skinner's and mine! Tracey would be the right man in the right place!"

"Are there many others of the same opinion?"

"We are!" came in a unanimous chorus from Tracey's followers.

"Then this business had better be settled once and for all. We can't have this eternal scrapping. I've got a proposal to make."

"Get it off your chest, Wingate!" said Bob Cherry.

"Well, it's this! The Remove is split up, it seems, into two divisions. One lot are crazy on Tracey, the other prefers to stick to the old firm. Supposing Tracey's chief supporter meets Wharton's right-hand man in a good, stand-up bout with

the gloves? Then, if Wharton's man wins, Wharton is to remain captain. Should the other fellow win, then Tracey fills the post. It's not exactly a delicate way of settling things; but it's a lot better than these open hostilities. Now, if this fight is arranged, I want an undertaking from all you kids that you'll abide by the result."

"Rather!"

"Rely on us, Wingate!"

The reception given to Wingate's proposal was unanimous. It had the full support of both parties.

"Very good!" said Wingate. "Wharton and Tracey will hand me in the names of their respective champions by to-morrow midday, and the contest will take place to-morrow night in the gym. I'll be there to referee."

"Hurrah!"

"Meanwhile, let there be no more of this horseplay, or you'll hear from me!"

And Wingate, with Courtney and Walker in his wake, strode back into the building.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Last Rally!

BERNARD B. TRACEY marched into No. 4 Study without knocking.

He had made No. 4 his home. Vernon-Smith and Skinner were the rightful occupants, and Skinner, naturally, had no objection to Tracey's frequent intrusions.

The cad of the Remove was not in when Tracey entered. He was in the bath-room, bathing his face, which needed it.

But the Bounder was in the study. He was leaning against the mantelpiece, looking pale and worried.

He had fallen upon hard times. It was no joke, after steering a straight course for several months, to have to pose as a cad, and to play a part which went sorely against the grain.

His life at Greyfriars had settled into a straight and not unpleasant groove. Then Tracey had come, and with his coming the whole turn of events had been changed, and the Bounder had been compelled to break with Harry Wharton & Co., whose friendship he had learned to care for.

He had been tempted to waver sometimes, and to let Tracey do his worst. But the realisation of the heavy blow which would blight his father's life—perhaps his own also—made him shudder, and he felt that he must stick to his guns at all costs.

How he hated Tracey! He would have given a term's pocket-money to be able to plant his fist into that sneering face, and to show the unscrupulous Yankee up in his true colours.

"Waal," drawled Tracey, "I guess things have come to a climax! I've fought the issue pretty well up to now—"

"I've fought it for you, you mean!" said Vernon-Smith.

"All right! Don't get your wool off! I'm the first to admit that you've stood me right through. The lifeboat dodge was one of the cutest I've ever struck. I really began to think I was a hero!"

"And what do you want now?" asked the Bounder.

"I guess you can answer that question well enough. It's up to you now, and you alone, to push me into the captaincy. You've got to face Bob Cherry in the ring. He's the man Wharton's putting up."

The Bounder nodded.

"Have you ever seen Bob Cherry box?" he asked.

"Nope!"

"That's a pity. If you had, you'd realise that I'm up against a brick wall. I'm no weakling, and could lick nine fellows out of ten, I reckon; but Bob Cherry's the tenth man!"

"Oh, don't get funky!" said Tracey scornfully.

"I'm not getting funky!" Vernon-Smith was hard put to it to keep his temper in rein. "I'm merely stating facts! If you think I can go skipping into the ring, and knock Cherry's napper off in the first minute, you'd better get rid of the idea at once!"

Tracey came a step closer.

"See here, Smith," he said anxiously, "you won't let me down, will you?"

"Not if I can help it. I'll fight till I haven't a bit of breath left in my body! But you can't expect miracles to happen. I've tackled Bob Cherry before, and been licked for my pains, and he'll have to be very much off colour if I'm going to get my revenge."

Tracey looked thoughtful.

"Can't we concoct some sort of wheeze?" he said. "I once knew a galoot in New York who doctored his boxing-gloves with something hard—something that hurt. One blow between the eyes, and the fellow who received it hadn't a cent's worth of fight left in him."

The Bounder's eyes blazed.

"I see what you're driving at!" he said. "You want me to resort to foul play. Well, it's not in my interests to go against your wishes, Tracey, but I shall have to in this case. Things have gone far enough. I can act the blackguard up to a certain stage, and there I draw the line. I'll meet Bob Cherry in a fair fight, and do my level best to lick him. I can't say more than that!"

"Very well," said Tracey. "If you're jay enough to get knocked out, you'll know what to expect! I sha'n't stand on ceremony, I can tell you. The Head shall know all about your precious father before you've had time to pick yourself up from the mat!"

"You needn't keep ramming that threat down my throat. I'm going all out to win, and there's nothing more to be said."

The excitement attendant upon the great fight was, of course, terrific.

Bob Cherry, by reason of his brilliant slogging powers, had many supporters; and so had Vernon-Smith, who possessed the true British characteristic of never knowing when he was beaten.

But it was seldom that two such champions came together, for Bob Cherry and the Bounder had been on terms of friendship for quite a long time.

And vast issues depended on the result of the encounter. If Bob Cherry won—and he was a hot favourite among "the neutrals" in other Forms—the flag of Bernard B. Tracey would be lowered for ever. He would no longer be a big power in the ranks of the Remove, and Harry Wharton's position as a leader would be considerably strengthened.

But if the Bounder won?

The thought opened up endless possibilities. With Tracey holding the reins of office, things would be conducted on a totally different system. Card-parties and similar relaxations would flourish, and football and cricket would slump, as being tame and old-fashioned sports.

From all points of view the bout would be an historical one.

The gymnasium was packed long before the hour fixed for the contest. Coker & Co. had helped themselves to reserved seats on the parallel-bars, Temple & Co. of the Fourth had commandeered the box-horse, and Indian clubs had been hurled down from the



Before the Head! (See Chapter 13.)

racks to make room for some of the smaller fry.

There was a cheer when Vernon-Smith came into the gym with Tracey, who was his second. It was not a very hearty cheer, neither was it very prolonged. But when Bob Cherry, arm-in-arm with Harry Wharton, showed his smiling face in the doorway, there was a noise like muffled thunder.

Wingate did his best to calm the crowd. It was no easy matter; but after a time, in their eagerness for the fight to commence, the spectators became more or less orderly.

Wingate said a few words by way of introduction.

"There are times," he said, "when these affairs are jolly necessary. They clear away a lot of bad blood. Vernon-Smith and Cherry are meeting as representatives of rival sides, and I take it you will all abide by the issue?"

"Yes, Wingate!"

"Very well, then. We'll get to business. Seconds out of the ring. Time!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Fortune of War!

VERNON-SMITH started strongly. In many encounters a good beginning is half the battle; and the Bounder well knew that he could not afford to trifle with Bob Cherry. It was a case of going all out, and never relaxing for a single instant.

The Bounder wasn't in good form for a fight just then. He had become out of condition through lack of regular exercise; and the harrowing trouble which

had weighed upon his mind since Tracey's arrival had knocked a good deal of the old energy and sprightliness out of him.

But he knew how essential it was that he should win, and put every ounce of ginger into those first fierce blows.

"Bravo!" boomed Bolsover major's voice. "That's the style, Smithy! Put it across him!"

Most of the blows were promptly parried by the ever-watchful Bob Cherry; and those which got home took little effect, but glanced off the burly Bob like water from a duck's back.

At the end of the first round Vernon-Smith had done the lion's share of the attacking; but he was very scant of breath, and had secured little material gain. As he sat heavily on Tracey's knee, pale and panting, he contrasted curiously with the flushed, jovial-looking Bob Cherry.

"I guess you're going the right way to get licked," said Tracey to the Bounder.

"Oh, dry up!" Vernon-Smith's tone was harsh and irritable. "I'm doing my level best, and you'll gain nothing by putting me off my stroke. If I lick Bob Cherry at all, I prefer to do it without your confounded jaw!"

Tracey scowled; but, as the realisation of what was at stake swept over him, he decided not to upset the Bounder any further.

"Time!" came in a curt command from Wingate.

Still smiling, Bob Cherry advanced into the ring. The cheers of a large section of the crowd urged him on.

But the Bounder wasn't smiling. The expression on his face was one of desperate determination. He must win, at all hazards. If he were to lose—

The thought appalled him, and he struck out more fiercely than ever. One of the blows crashed through Bob Cherry's guard, and temporarily threw him off his balance. But he recovered before the Bounder could inflict any further damage.

To outward appearances Bob Cherry didn't seem to be making a great bid for victory. But those who knew his pre-arranged plan of campaign were aware that he was merely lying low in the early rounds, and that when he struck he would strike hard.

Meanwhile, Vernon-Smith continued to expend his energy to very little purpose, and by the sixth round the fight had settled down into a steady game of punch and parry, with Vernon-Smith doing all the punching, and Bob Cherry the parrying.

"Buck up, there!" roared the restless crowd.

"Don't go to sleep, Bob Cherry!"

"This is a scrap, not a game of kites-in-the-ring!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Bob Cherry refused to be drawn until Wingate called the combatants up for the eighth round. Then he suddenly hurled himself in neck-or-nothing fashion at the Bounder, and fairly peppered him with blows.

"Hurrah!"

"Finish him off, Bob!" yelled the other members of the Famous Five.

But the Bounder, driven to the wall though he was, had no desire to be finished off. He stuck manfully to his guns, and survived that round and the next, though his brow became dank with perspiration, and the light of battle was fading from his eyes.

Tracey was quivering from head to foot with rage.

"You're slow!" he said scornfully.

"Miles too slow! Can't you realise what you're fighting for?"

The Bounder realised it only too well, but he couldn't perform the impossible. He would have need of all his courage and skill and endurance to avoid defeat, let alone to be the victor.

"I've told you once," he said fiercely, "that I'm doing my best! I defy you, or anyone else, to take my place and do better. I'm going on till I drop, and you ought to have sense enough to know that I mean what I say!"

"I hope you do," said Tracey grimly. "You've come to the last lap now, and if you get licked you know what's in store for you!"

The Bounder bit his lip, and, without another word to the enraged Yankee, went up for the next round.

Those of the crowd who had been inclined to regard the combat as tame and listless had plenty to enthuse over now. Bob Cherry continued his hurricane attack; but the Bounder resisted it, and put in a spell of fierce fighting himself.

It was a ding-dong struggle, and appealed strongly to the sporting instincts of the majority of the onlookers.

But it didn't appeal to George Wingate. He saw, if nobody else saw, that Bob Cherry and the Bounder were going for each other in a way that meant real damage, even with padded boxing-gloves.

When the round ended, amid thunderous applause and the collapse of the box-horse—the weight of Temple & Co. having veered to one side of it—Bob Cherry's right eye was closed, and the Bounder reeled unsteadily on his feet.

Wingate took in these details, and addressed himself to the crowd.

"The next round," he said, "is to be the last. This is much too hot to be the correct thing."

A volley of protests arose.

"Oh, come off it, Wingate!"

"Let 'em have it out!"

"The Bounder's beaten already!"

"Beaten be blowed!" came Bolsover major's voice above the uproar. There's life in the old dog yet! Stick it out, Smithy!"

"The next round is to be the last," repeated Wingate firmly. "I'm not going to have any nonsense. If you don't like my decision, you can lump it. Are you fit, you two? Very well, then. Time!"

Tracey's heart was hammering against his ribs.

This was to be the final stage of that stern struggle. It would be the deciding factor; and the success of his selfish schemes swung in the balance.

He hissed a few words of threatening advice to the Bounder.

"It's your last chance! Play up all you know, and come out top dog, or it's ruin for your father—and you!"

With this callous counsel ringing in his ears, Vernon-Smith went up for the last time.

He saw Bob Cherry dimly, as through a mist. His head was throbbing, his legs were like leaden weights. He had a burning desire to lie down like a tired child and sleep for hours on end.

Somehow—he scarcely knew how—he contrived to pull himself together, and he struck out with all his strength.

Bob Cherry, who, despite his closed eye and other injuries, still had plenty of fight left in him, easily parried the blow, and sought carefully for an opening.

He didn't have long to wait.

The Bounder dropped his guard for a brief instant—merely for a second—but it was all Bob Cherry wanted. He sailed in, and sent his opponent reeling with a straight left.

It was a knock-out blow; but,

although the spectators knew it, Bob Cherry was a little uncertain, and, to make assurance doubly sure, he got in a terrific upper-cut.

Vernon-Smith gave one quick, sharp gasp, and fell like a log.

Solemnly Wingate commenced to count.

"Get up, you fool!" yelled Tracey. "You're not done yet! Get up, I say!"

But there was not a movement from the Bounder.

"He's clean done—knocked right out!" said Bolsover major, in awed tones.

And the bully was right. Vernon-Smith had put up a game and determined fight, but the champion boxer of the Remove was not dethroned from his high estate. He was still champion—still the finest fighting-man in the Form!

The scene which followed was one to be long remembered.

The cheering of Harry Wharton's loyal army of supporters drowned every other form of demonstration.

When the din had subsided, and Vernon-Smith had risen slowly and wearily to his feet, Wingate summed up the situation.

"Cherry has won," he said. "I hold you all to your promise to stand by the result, and to back up Harry Wharton as the authorised captain of the Remove."

"Hurrah!"

The applause broke out afresh, and while it was at its height Bernard B. Tracey darted one savage look of spite at the Bounder and swung out of the gym.

Vernon-Smith stood stunned, his hand pressed tightly against his forehead.

The game was up! He had fought long and bitterly for his father's sake; but he had only put off the evil day.

For Tracey had gone to the Head, to make known his strange and startling story, and to place the Vernon-Smiths, senior and junior, under the dark shadow of shame!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner Speaks Out!

HALF an hour later Harry Wharton & Co., who were strolling in the dusky Close, discussing the recent boxing-match, encountered Bernard B. Tracey.

The Yankee junior had just emerged from the Head's study, and he looked strangely and strongly excited.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's on, Tracey? Been giving the Head a first-hand description of the fight?"

Tracey stopped short.

"Nope! I've told him another little story—far more thrilling."

The Famous Five looked curious.

"What's the game?" asked Johnny Bull bluntly.

"Just this. Vernon-Smith's father is a murderer!"

If the speaker had suddenly exploded a bomb in the Close the effect could not have been more startling.

"Are you mad?" gasped Wharton, at length. "Do you know what you're drivelling about?"

"I guess it ain't drivell. It's a fact. Ask Smith himself, if you like. His father ran down a great business rival of his two years ago in his car, and killed him."

"Great Scott!"

The juniors were silent for some moments. A tale like Tracey's took some getting accustomed to.

At last Bob Cherry spoke. His tone was fierce and indignant.

"My hat!" he said. "I'm beginning to see daylight now! I can understand why the Bounder's seemed such a cad just lately. This rotter's been black-mailing him!"

"How?" asked Wharton, in amazement.

"Why, don't you see? He told Smithy that unless he backed him up right through he'd go and expose this story to the Head. And he's done it, just because Smithy got licked just now!"

"It serves him right," said Tracey

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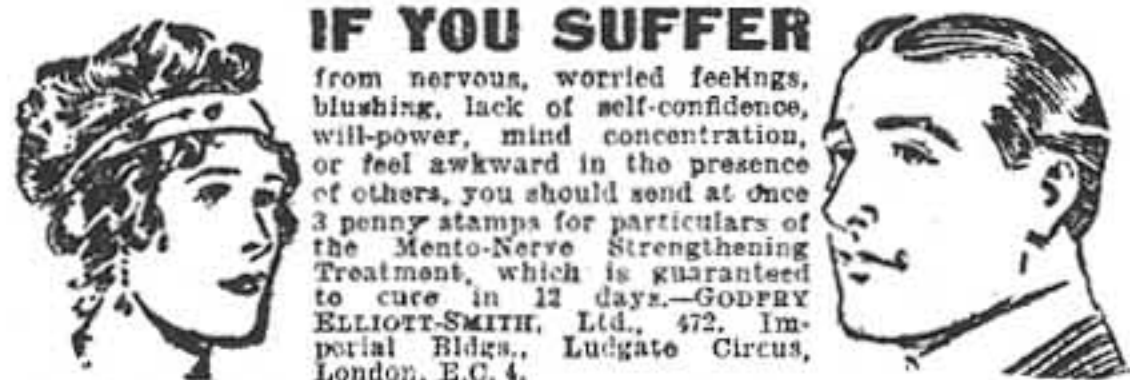
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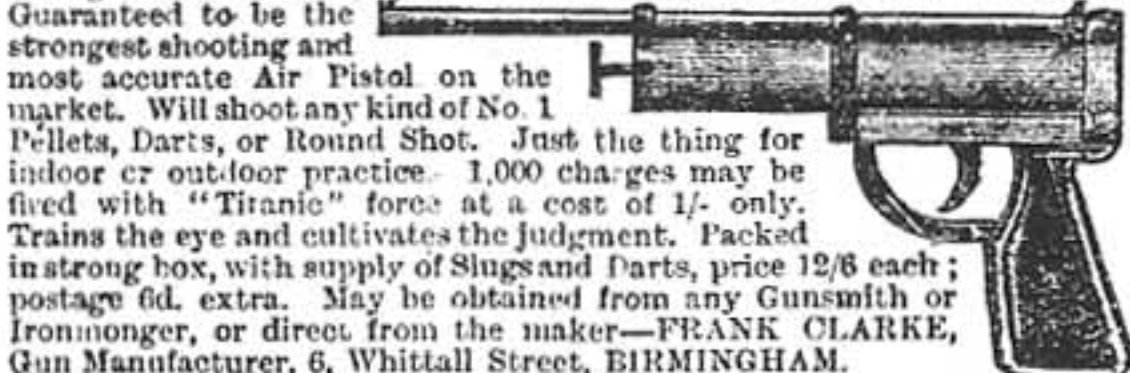
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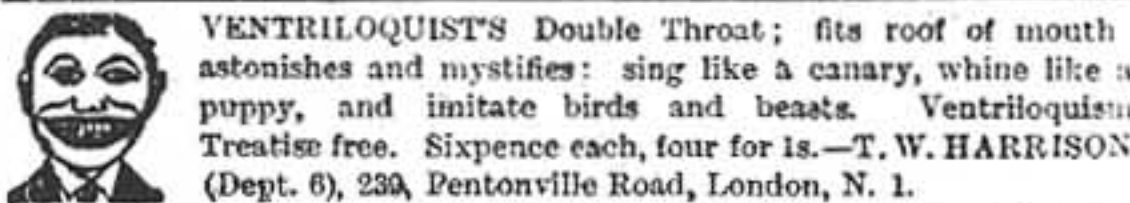
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sullenly. "He had his chances—plenty of 'em—and he gave 'em the go-by. Now he'll have to face the music. It means expulsion for him!"

"But he's done nothing to be expelled for, you cad!" protested Wharton.

Tracey grinned.

"The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children," he said. "You don't think the Head's going to turn Greyfriars into a school for the sons of murderers, do you?"

"Oh, you rotter!"

"Bump him!" roared Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five hurled themselves upon Tracey like a pack of hounds upon a fox. The Bounder hadn't shown up very well of late, one way and another, but they weren't going to stand by and hear him slandered like that.

Tracey yelled and kicked and struggled; but all to no purpose. Harry Wharton & Co. were in grim earnest, and they bumped him upon the hard flagstones till he scarcely had a breath in his body.

"Get out of our sight," growled Bob Cherry, "before we dribble you across the Close like a footer!"

Tracey took the hint. He limped away into the building, in search of Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder was refreshing his heated face in one of the bath-rooms. He looked round on Tracey's approach.

"Well," he said quietly, "I s'pose you've done your worst?"

"You gave me no alternative," said Tracey drily. "Your game is up now, old pard! The Head wants you!"

For an instant, the Bounder's eyes blazed. He looked as if he would strike Tracey to the floor; but he regained the mastery over himself, and said wearily:

"Very well, you cad! I'd give you the hiding of your life, but I'm feeling too sick for revenge just now!"

Vernon-Smith put on his jacket, and made his way to the Head's study.

It all seemed up now; and the future would be black with disgrace and dishonour.

It was not the Bounder's fault. He had fought like a tiger, sacrificed his friendships, and forfeited his self-respect, for the sake of avoiding a scandal; but the game had gone against him, and there was nothing for it but to keep a stiff upper lip and face the music.

The Head's manner was kind, but firm.

"Tracey has been to me with an extraordinary story, Vernon-Smith," he said. "He tells me that your father is responsible for the murder of a prominent citizen of New York."

"Murder's a hard word, sir," said the Bounder.

"Is it true?"

"It is true that my father ran a man down in the United States a couple of years ago, sir; but it wasn't done deliberately."

"Then why was the occurrence hushed up by your father?"

"That's his business, sir. I suppose he thought it would cause a scandal if the affair leaked out."

Dr. Locke looked grave.

"I must wire for your father," he said, "and get an explanation from his own lips. You may go, Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder passed out of the study without a word. He knew now that the scandal he had feared was inevitable. In an hour or two his father would arrive from London, and there would be a scene between the millionaire and the Head.

Not often had the Bounder's fiery spirit been completely crushed. Not often had any seen him so utterly down and out as this. The expression on Vernon-Smith's face, when he entered No. 4 Study, touched even Skinner, who usually had a heart of stone.

"Smithy, old man, what ever's the matter?" exclaimed the cad of the Remove.

Wearily Vernon-Smith told his story. He related what a hold Tracey had had upon him, and how the Yankee junior had served him at the finish.

Skinner was furious.

It was seldom he was roused by the wrongs of others, but this was an exception to the rule.

"My hat!" he muttered. "What an utter cad! Look here, Smithy. I'm jolly well going to the Head, and I shall tell him the whole business from beginning to end! No, it's no use your jumping up and saying no! The Head shall hear how the beast has blackmailed you, and how he took the credit for that life-saving affair! By Jove! It fairly makes my blood boil to think that he's treated you like this!"

And, before Vernon-Smith could stretch out a hand to stop him, Skinner had whisked out of the study.

And he kept his word. From first to last he unravelled the full story of Tracey's caddishness.

The Head sat spellbound, scarcely able to believe his ears.

"You say that Tracey has been continually threatening Vernon-Smith with exposure?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

"And that he falsely posed as a hero before the rest of the boys?"

"That's so, sir."

"But why did you not tell the truth about the lifeboat affair, Skinner? Why did you let your schoolfellows believe that Tracey was the rescuer?"

"Vernon-Smith made me swear it was Tracey, sir," said Skinner. "You see, he had to back up Tracey tooth and nail, or this business about his father would have come out long ago."

"Do I also understand that it was Tracey, and not Vernon-Smith, who broke bounds the other evening?"

Skinner nodded.

"Tracey practically forced Vernon-Smith to stand out and take the blame, sir," he said.

"Bless my soul! I can scarcely bring myself to realise that Greyfriars holds a boy so utterly unprincipled as Tracey! Send him to this study—at once, Skinner!"

"Very good, sir!"

Five minutes later Tracey appeared.

He swaggered jauntily into the study, and Skinner followed.

Little did the Yankee junior guess what was in the air, for Skinner had told him nothing save that the Head wished to see him.

"Tracey," began Dr. Locke, in thunderous tones, "it has been brought

to my notice that during the short time you have been at Greyfriars you have played a most base and unworthy part. I understand that you have held over Vernon-Smith's head the story concerning his father, which you

came to me with this afternoon, and that you have blackmailed him into supporting your schemes. This is a very grave charge, Tracey. I trust you can answer it."

The usually sharp-witted son of the States was fairly floored. He saw now that Skinner had given evidence against him. Whatever excuses he might make, whatever provocations he might plead, they would avail him nothing.

"I am waiting, Tracey," said the Head ominously.

"I—I guess I've nothing to say, sir."

"Then your silence only serves to emphasise your guilt. You have acted in a most infamous manner, Tracey, and in the circumstances I do not feel justified in allowing you to remain at the school."

Tracey started back as if he had been struck.

"But—but the story about Mr. Vernon-Smith is true, sir!" he stammered.

"That may be so. But you should have told me in the first instance, and not employed Vernon-Smith as a cat's-paw to serve your own selfish ends. Skinner has done right in exposing you in your true colours. You will pack your belongings at once, Tracey, and leave Greyfriars as soon as arrangements can be made!"

Then Tracey behaved like the coward he was. He almost flung himself at the Head's feet in a wild appeal for mercy.

But Dr. Locke was firm.

"You showed no mercy to Vernon-Smith," he said, "and I therefore do not feel called upon to show any to you. It is of no use grovelling and whining, Tracey. Yours is a very black record, and you must pay the penalty."

Tracey crawled miserably away from the Head's study, looking and feeling as if life were not worth living.

The tables were turned now with a vengeance! He had congratulated himself that he had sent Vernon-Smith speeding headlong to ruin; but his blackguardly scheme had recoiled upon his own head.

It was Skinner who put the finishing touch to Tracey's bitter humiliation.

"There's a little quotation from Shakespeare that Quelchy was trying to drive into our heads the other day," he said sweetly. "P'raps you remember it? It went something like this: 'Heat not a furnace for your foe so hot that it do singe yourself!'"

Tracey passed on, with a muttered imprecation.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Saved From Dishonour!

EXCITEMENT ran high at Greyfriars on that memorable evening. The news that Tracey was to be expelled spread through the school like wildfire, and all sorts of rumours were set on foot in connection with the affair.

The Removites were furious when they learned from Skinner how Tracey had duped them into believing that he was the hero of the lifeboat. They were furious, too, to think that Vernon-Smith should have suffered for Tracey's midnight escapade, and the Bounder came in for a good deal of sympathy.

The Famous Five hurried along to Vernon-Smith's study shortly after the news of Tracey's expulsion had become common knowledge.

"Smithy, you old duffer," said Bob Bob Cherry, "why in thunder didn't you tell us that you were in that cad's clutches? You made us imagine all sorts

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of awful things about you. We thought you were going to the dogs, and you were true blue all the time!"

The Bounder smiled faintly. "It's very decent of you to say that," he said. "You won't have an opportunity of saying many more nice things to me. I shall be sent packing to-morrow, I expect!"

"What!"

"The order of the bootfulness applies to the ludicrous Tracey, and not to your esteemed self!" said Hurree Singh.

"Don't you believe it! The Head couldn't possibly keep me here, knowing that my father is liable to be convicted on a charge of manslaughter, or even murder! He'll be forced to expel me!"

"Then we'll jolly well raise a protest!" declared Johnny Bull. "Fair play's a jewel. Why should you be made to suffer for some silly thing your pater did in the Middle Ages?"

"Give it up? It's Fate, I s'pose!"

At that moment Skinner appeared in the doorway.

"The Head wants you, Smithy," he said.

Vernon-Smith turned to the Famous Five with a wry face.

"Time for the execution," he said. "My pater's turned up, you bet. This is where I go down!"

"Make a fight for it," said Harry Wharton. "Don't take it tamely if the Head says you've got to go. It's up to you to raise Cain about it!"

"Yes, rather!" said Johnny Bull.

When Vernon-Smith entered the Head's study he was rather surprised to see, not only his father, but a complete stranger—a keen-eyed man of about fifty.

Matters were rendered more surprising still by reason of the fact that his father was smiling.

The Bounder had expected to see storm-clouds on the paternal brow—had anticipated finding the millionaire in the midst of a heated argument with the Head.

What did this mean? What was the stranger doing here?

These were questions which Dr. Locke speedily answered.

"I am happy to say, Vernon-Smith," he began, "that the motor-car incident, about which so much has been made by Tracey, was attended with far less serious results than we thought. This gentleman—the Head indicated the stranger—is Mr. Harvey Rumford!"

The Bounder was staggered.

"But—but surely there's some mistake, sir!" he gasped. "Mr. Harvey Rumford is dead!"

"No such luck!" drawled Mr. Rumford. "I guess my rivals on the New York Stock Exchange will tell you that I'm very much alive!"

Vernon-Smith looked mystified.

"I—I don't understand—" he began.

"I'll explain what happened, Herbert," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "When I

bowled Mr. Rumford over in the car, two years back, and thought him dead, I was under a delusion. It was dark at the time, and I at once jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Rumford had been killed. That conclusion proved happily incorrect!"

"I was knocked about some," said Mr. Rumford, smiling painfully at the recollection. "But it was my own fault, and if I'd been sent West I should have been entirely to blame. You see, I was returning from a ball in New York, and the good red wine had flowed rather freely. I guess I was going a bit crooked in my bearings when Mr. Vernon-Smith's car came along. The horn was sounded twice, but I was too dazed to heed it, with the result that I was run down!"

"Then you were in no way to blame, dad!" exclaimed the Bounder.

"No, my boy. Mr. Rumford's timely explanation has quite exonerated me. It was a happy moment when we ran into each other at the club the other evening!"

Vernon-Smith drew a deep breath of relief.

It was all over now. All the strain of the past few weeks had terminated, not in disaster, but in joy.

The millionaire's name was cleared, the power of Tracey and his father was squashed, and the timely appearance of Mr. Harvey Rumford had changed the whole outlook of things.

It was with a light step, and a light heart, too, that Vernon-Smith left the Head's study with his father and Mr. Rumford, who were entertained forthwith in No. 4.

Harry Wharton & Co. were delighted when they learned what had transpired, and joy and gladness reigned in every heart at Greyfriars that evening, save one.

The exception was Tracey. That wretched youth was doomed to spend the night in the punishment-room, prior to leaving Greyfriars for ever; and his feelings, especially when he discovered that Mr. Harvey Rumford was still in the land of the living, were altogether too deep for words.

His shady schemes had come to naught, and everyone knew now that the Bounder of old had only been induced to share in them by the threat held over his head.

But the touching of pitch means defilement, and it may be that Herbert Vernon-Smith had not come out of all this quite the same fellow he had been in recent days. The Famous Five were still his friends; but there was a difference in their relations, slight but unmistakable, and perhaps the defeat at Bob Cherry's hands rankled just a little.

(Don't miss "TWO OF THE SIXTH!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

"TWO OF THE SIXTH!"

By Frank Richards.

Gwynne and Carne are the two. Gwynne is a decent fellow—one of the best, indeed. Carne is—well, you all know what Carne is! The Famous Five find out something by accident, and make a mistake. Even the Famous Five make mistakes at times, you know! And Skinner finds out something—or thinks he does—and makes a bigger mistake, though for a time he looks like having his own way. A capital story, this!

TWO OF A NAME!

A reader—J. Boyd, of 53, Clover Hill Road, Nelson, Lancs—asks me to state in these columns that he is not the J. Boyd who lately wrote, in conjunction with one H. Fisher, a silly and impertinent letter to which I gave in the MAGNET publicity that possibly it did not deserve. I am pleased to give my Nelson reader's repudiation a place in these columns. I can quite understand and sympathise with his objection to being chipped by his chums about a folly of which he was not guilty. And I may say that to the best of my knowledge and belief the Fisher-Boyd letter did not come from Nelson at all. Anyway, before our Boyd is accused of being the Fisher-Boyd, Fisher ought to be accounted for in the neighbourhood.

A GREAT STORY!

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"LIGHTS OUT!"

By Martin Clifford,

the splendid story of St. Jim's which appears in one of the June issues of the "BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. LIBRARY.

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Your Editor

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(Signed)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 20.—HORACE COKER.

SOME of our readers say they don't like Coker!

It is very difficult to imagine anyone not liking Coker—at least, it is very difficult to us. Perhaps a very young reader, with his sympathies naturally enlisted on behalf of the fags, may be pardoned for disliking the great Coker, for we all know that Horace has rather a heavy hand with the fags. But by the fags he usually means the Remove; and he certainly does not get much change out of them! And it is not on record that Coker ever did any real gross bullying.

There is more than one kind of bullying; but the real bully is the fellow who bullies out of sheer cruelty, who gives pain because to him giving it affords pleasure. That sort of a bully is usually, though not invariably, a coward. The other kind—apt to be confused with him—is very rarely a coward. He is thick-skinned and bumptious. His vast notion of his own importance leads him astray. But he has no intention at all of being cruel; when he hurts—and he often hurts!—he does not realise the fact fully.

That is Coker's sort. In that sense, and in that sense only, is he a bully.

Admitted that he is also a swanker—that he is a duffer—that he is every kind of an ass!

Well, if swank were made a capital offence, I fear there would be a terrible mortality among just the very class to whom we are looking for the men of the future—that is, among the boys of to-day! One sees a lot of it about. Not among boys alone, of course, but among older people, too. But really, you know, swank is not a crime. It is doubtless a fault; but it is a fault that the years often remove. In short, though often annoying, it is never exactly wicked, and seldom dangerous.

As for being a duffer, that is a state to be sympathised with rather than to be despised. Most of us are duffers in one way or another, though few of us may be so blissfully unaware of our shortcomings as Horace is of his!

Set against Coker's heavy hand, his swanking and his duffing, the very real good qualities he possesses, and you must admit that the scale bumps heavily on the right side.

He is as generous as a fellow can be. He has the heart of a lion. He would not do a dirty trick. Leave out the swank and the duffing, and really he would not be half a bad hero!

When we first come upon Coker he is a big fellow in the Shell, too big for the Form, but too ignorant to get moved up. (It is to be admitted, by the way, that Coker's spelling is really atrocious; but bad spelling is an amiable weakness, and Shakespeare is fabled not to have known how to spell his own name. That is the only resemblance one knows of between the greatest of the Bards and the burly Horace.) He is rather by way of being a chum of Hobson, the Shell skipper, and the two invite themselves to a spread in No. 14 Study on the Remove passage, then in the joint tenancy of Billy Bunter, Wun Lung, and Alonzo Todd. But the Remove settle the bill on that occasion, and Coker and Hobson rather wish they had stayed away!

It was Coker's Aunt Judith who got him into the Fifth. Aunt Judith is rather a terrible old lady. Even the Head quails before her; and the legend at Grey-



Horace Coker.

friars is that she scared him into promoting Horace. It was not quite so bad as that; but Horace would scarcely have got promotion had not Aunt Judith been one of those sticklers to whom argument is useless, because they cannot, or will not, follow it. Horace is the very apple of Aunt Judith's eye; moreover, she is the one person who takes him at his own valuation. Once, when she had been watching, with Reggie Coker—Coker minor—a footer-match between the Fifth and the Remove, in which Horace was allowed to play just because she was to be an onlooker, and as the match was considered by Blundell a certainty for his side, her inquiry at the end was: "Has Horace won?" But Reggie had to tell her that Horace's side had lost—and he might have added, but he did not, that it was all through Horace they had lost!

Aunt Judy has a lavish notion as to the scale on which tips should be given, and, in consequence, Horace is often in funds. Then, who more ready than he to "whack out"—in the poetical language of the bountiful Bunter? A specially big tip at the time of his step up into the Fifth made him very welcome indeed in the senior ranks. Blundell and Bland took him into their study. Loder and Carne tried to rope him in. But, however many kinds of an ass Coker may be, he has no taste for black-sheep pursuits. He may swank around in riding-breeches, to be taken for a horseman; he does not put money on "also rans" in order to be accepted as a sport. He may have done it once or twice, just as he has done other silly things, but his tastes do not lie in that direction.

Hobson & Co. were sore with Coker because he pretended not to know them after he had received promotion, and was strutting around with the leaders of the Fifth. They tried a raid on the senior Form, but were repulsed. But Coker did not long keep his exalted station. Aunt Judy's tip came to an end; and a little later we find Horace occupying a study with Potter and Greene—cast out of the high companionship of Blundell and Bland.

It is no good attempting to tell here one-tenth of the things Coker has done and suffered. But who that has read of them can ever forget them? The comedy

of the Coker Cup, which Horace presented, to be competed for at footer by Greyfriars generally, Horace making the rules as he went on, and so wangling them that he was always eligible for a place on one side or the other; his blundering attempts then and, at other times to prove himself the fine footballer he is not; Coker in love; Coker engaged; his pretty cousin, and the advertisement which brought the young women of Courtfield to tea in his study; his picnic, when two young ladies expressed themselves very strongly on the subject of the viands, supplied by Fisher T. Fish; his poetic attempts; his dramatic attempts; "Red Ruin," and Ponsonby's mighty spoof, and the weird performance at Eastwood House; his collection for the shipwrecked; his special-constable activities; his Canadian cousin, played by a broken-down actor engaged by Skinner; his championship of the oppressed, when he protected Bunter, and gave Loder a well-deserved thrashing; his horsemanship, when, at the races at Friardale, he got his restive steed into a state of mind which suggested a possible start at the moment when the race was over; Coker accused of theft, but that was absurd; playing the detective; catching Huns; rounding up a conscript; lectured by Mr. Capper, by Mr. Quetch, by his own Form-master, Mr. Prout, for horseplay, when what he really means to be about is discipline; told again and again what an absurd fellow he is, but never able to see it, and going on his blundering, good-natured, high-handed, Cokerish way through all!

Coker as captain, too—well, he was at least preferable to Loder. He was found impossible, it is true; but Loder as skipper of Greyfriars is almost unthinkable!

Coker's occupation of the captaincy was something of a fluke. Wingate had been deposed by the Head, through scheming on the part of Loder. Wingate's friends refused to stand for election in the circumstances, and the Lower School put Coker at the head of the poll because at no price would the Lower School have Loder. It was like Coker's check to stand at all; but he has a big notion of the importance of the Fifth—as being Coker's Form. And when he chose the school footer team he gave places to only two Sixth-Formers—whereof came a licking!

But Coker shows at his best in the story which tells how his Aunt Judith came near to total ruin through the defalcations of an absconding solicitor. Coker is really fond of good, eccentric Aunt Judy, you know; and it was a different Horace the Remove chums saw when the old lady's luck was so badly out. The Famous Five helped very largely to save her; but she gave all the credit to Horace, of course!

The Remove and Coker are in constant collision. In a sense, they are sworn foes. But Harry Wharton & Co. know what a really good fellow old Coker is at heart—know that he would do them a good turn at any time—and certainly would never shy at doing him one—not even though it should take the drastic form of showing him what an ass he really is.

And, in fact, it generally does take that form!

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IN A LAND OF PERIL!

By BEVERLEY KENT,

Author of "Officer and Trooper," "Cornstalk Bob," "A Son of the Sea," etc., etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Bob Masters and Ted O'Brien, an Irish boy, escape from the clutches of Faik, a rascally adventurer who is in pursuit of a secret treasure in the African wilds. Faik is working in collusion with Jasper Orme, Bob's cousin, at Cape Town. The two lads are captured by the natives of the Iurobi tribe, who also surround Faik's party. Faik has done the chief of the tribe a bad turn in the old days, and tries to place the guilt on Bob; but, thanks to a Scotchman named MacGregor, and a friendly native—Mendi—he fails in his plot. Bob is acclaimed chief on the death of Kazna, the former leader. The comrades save Faik from the vengeance of the tribe, then push on after the treasure, but are waylaid by Mopo and a strong force. Mopo, who is Bob's deadly rival, is beaten off, with his braves, and Galza, a messenger from the Iurobi, comes to their camp.

He brings tidings of Mopo, who is in pursuit. By a desperate dive into the waters of the lake the little band elude their pursuers, and find themselves in a strange underground realm. MacGregor, who has made the venturesome journey before, explains to them how he came to make it.

(Now Read On.)

A Strange People!

"I was always throwing things into the water, just to see what would happen. I shot birds, and flung them in. I dropped in wood weighted with a bit of metal. There was no end to what I tried. And I came to a spot where anything I threw in never came up, and I knew that what had been written in the book was true, and that if we dived down we would be carried to safety, as we were to-day. So we dived."

"That was no end plucky!" Bob said.

"Hold on!" MacGregor replied, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder. "Didna ye trust me, and take the same risk to-day?"

"But you were leading us to treasure which already you had seen."

"Well, well! Still, it was mighty plucky of ye! And I'm not the first to risk life to prove the soundness of a scientific theory. Nansen, the great explorer, for instance, after deep thought, came to the conclusion that there was an ice current round the North Pole. He went there in a ship, and stayed on the ship, waiting for the ice current to drift him to the spot he wanted, and so it did. If he had been wrong in his theory, he would have perished for certain."

"But can you explain why the water should drag us down?" Bob asked.

"I can, and I will, too, but not now. For, look here, and for the moment you'll forget all about the lake!"

They had gone on walking, whilst MacGregor talked; and now, at a sudden turn in the tunnel, they came within a few yards of the opening.

Never in their dreams had the lads pictured such a scene as they saw! They

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stood spellbound in delighted awe. No scene in a theatre ever looked so beautiful.

As MacGregor had said, it was as if they were gazing at a fairy land. The atmosphere was quivering with translucent, glorious colours, all more or less interwoven. There was no sunlight, yet they could see the tiniest object distinctly. There was no sky. Overhead all seemed a beautiful green, tinged occasionally with red. And a very slight mist gave a veil of magic to everything.

They gasped and gazed.

There were shrubs and grass and trees, small, but of perfect symmetry, with leaves, and apparently luscious fruit.

They could hear the music of a waterfall in the distance, and a murmuring like the chanting of a song. And, grazing peacefully, were many kinds of animals. Some they recognised, but many they did not know.

And the scene stretched out as far as they could gaze. Also, the ground was laid out as if like a garden—flat here for a space, and then rising to a not over-large tumulus, covered with ferns, out of which small creatures peeped and vanished, and peeped again. And on the tree-branches monkeys swayed and chattered, and birds flew from branch to branch, and, far away, there was a rhythmic stroke, as if someone was felling a tree. And once, for some seconds, they felt certain they heard the tinkling of a mellow bell.

"Glorious!" Bob murmured at last. "No transformation in a pantomime was ever half like this! And to think that this is real!"

"Africa is the land of mystery, but even in Africa there is naething else like unto this!" MacGregor murmured. "And no one kens o't save ourselves, for none others who hae seen it are still in the land o' the living!"

"And how can you explain it?" Bob asked.

"Easily enough," the old Scotsman answered. "The light comes from the sun, but the sun's rays come through myriad holes in the dome roof above, and in their descent they meet with different geological strata, thus giving the various lights. If you let the light fall through a blue glass, for instance, what do you see?"

"But these trees and these animals?" Ted asked.

"Ah! Wherever there is light, there Nature will develop according to the light," MacGregor answered. "And Nature is an unco' thing, here as elsewhere, as ye'll find out before long."

"You mean——" Ted began.

"I mean that——"

Then MacGregor stopped. And, for the first time since they had known him, he began to show a touch of fear.

"They're coming!" he muttered hoarsely.

In the distance the single, rhythmic stroke had stopped, and at once had been followed by a rolling noise, like far-off thunder or the tapping of a drum. And the tinkling of the bell grew in volume of sound till it was like a hundred cymbals keeping time together.

"Who is coming?" Bob asked.

"Look yonder!" the old man said. "I might hae warned you before, but I didna expect them so soon. They know already we are here; they seem to know everything."

From far away figures were moving forward—apparently the figures of men. From behind bushes, from out behind the tumuli, they came, running and meeting one another. And soft voices arose as they gathered like bees into swarms, and they moved directly towards the tunnel as they formed into platoons.

Mendi and Galza trembled, and gave cries of fear.

MacGregor turned on them.

"Peace, fools, or death is on the way!" he said sternly.

Nearer and nearer the strange creatures advanced, all marching like drilled men. Every gesture was like that of a man. And they were all of a light colour, too, but not exactly white. They were very strong in frame, and a trifle awkward-looking.

On a loud call they halted.

"Now for it!" MacGregor said. "They are about to make a rush! Take your courage in both hands! If one of us shows the least fear, they will rend us to pieces!"

The Gold!

The strange people stood in their hundreds close to the mouth of the tunnel. The music had died away. So intense was the silence that the adventurers could hear a bird in the distance chirruping. And with startled eyes they gazed in the deepest interest and amazement at the crowd.

It was impossible to decide what they were. Now that they were so very close their faces were plainly discernible.

Bob remembered once having seen a man who had lost his memory completely, and each of these creatures had a look something like his. They had human features and good eyes; but a look of contraction was in their eyes, as if they were trying to think hard, and the foreheads of all were deeply furrowed.

But their expression was constantly changing. Sometimes they scowled; on the next instant they looked calm and gentle. Their hands were very large and strong, and they kept opening and closing their fingers continually. All were very muscular.

Suddenly a murmuring arose. It grew louder, and rose to an immense pitch. Mendi and Galza, in the rear, had dropped to the ground, dumb with fear. Bob and Ted gave themselves up for lost. If these folk rushed at them, to fight would be useless. And now it looked as if the strange beings were seething with rage.

Then the hoarse noise died down with surprising abruptness.

At once MacGregor moved forward. He walked towards the enemy, and the lads could see that, despite his great self-control, he was nervous. He went to one of the creatures, and stroked his chest and his shoulders and patted his head. A look of great complacency came

into the odd being's face. To another and another moved the Scot, and all he touched seemed pleased.

They crowded around him. Before long he was in the middle of an immense throng. Like dogs they pushed and jostled to be patted out of their turns. Not until all had been thus conciliated did MacGregor desist. Then he turned, and his face was bright.

"Ye can follow now," he said. "The danger is over for the present. But walk warily, and dinna talk loud."

He moved away. The crowd followed at his heels. Without once looking back, he strode straight along, the strange folk keeping close behind him. The lads lifted up Mendi and Galza, and bade them keep silent. They had to be helped along, so fearful were they. Thus the procession advanced.

When he had gone half a mile, MacGregor sat down on a rock, and the strange creatures dropped to the ground, and gazed up at him wistfully. After a while he arose. A tree was over his head, and he plucked some fruit. He threw it here and there, and there was a scramble for it. Before long he had stripped the tree bare, and the strange creatures were eating with relish. Now he walked coolly through them, and rejoined his companions.

"I've mastered them," he said. "They won't give us any more trouble, I'm thinkin'. The one thing they can't do is to climb or raise their arms above their heads. So they have to wait for a' the juicy fruit growing here until it falls to the ground. They know now that I can feed them, and they'll look to me in future. But it was an anxious time at first."

"What are they?" Ted asked, with awe. "They don't look quite like men, and yet they're not like baboons either."

"They're not human; but they're the nearest approach to men in the animal kingdom," MacGregor replied. "And it is their environment that has made them what they are. It's this strange light that has caused their particular development. Blacks, for instance, are only to be found in tropical countries, and white men in cooler latitudes. Some plants want strong light, and ferns grow in the shade. And in this abnormal light you must expect abnormal development. Everything here is out of the common, even the gold. You may remember I told you that it was different to that usually found. Now, you lads, go and pluck fruit for them. Then they will look to you as they are doing to me. Gie them plenty, and, having satisfied their hunger, they will sleep, and we will be able to get about."

Bob and Ted made haste to carry out this suggestion, and in half an hour the strange folk had curled themselves up contentedly, and their eyes were closed. Then the Britishers ate some fruit themselves, and found it both sustaining and pleasant to the taste. Refreshed, they walked on.

Everywhere the scenery was much the same, and as they crossed every hillock, at intervals they saw others ahead.

"How large is this place?" Bob asked.

"I've been thirty miles ilka way, and I didna come to the end of it," the old Scot replied. "And noo, lads, I'm going to tell you something which isn't pleasant, but it's best you should know the danger. A man can't live here very long. So we had better set to work to get the gold we want."

"What happens to prevent him living here?" Ted asked.

"It's the nature of the place," MacGregor explained. "The want of sunlight for one thing, I suppose, and also, I think this strange, luminous atmosphere affects his lungs. For the

first few days we were quite happy here. Then we began to become lethargic. Hadna we cleared out we would before long have lost the use of our limbs. So you see what we're up against."

"But we've time to get what we want?" Ted asked.

"Yes, I reckon we have, and then will come the difficulty of clearing out with it, but we winna think about that yet. Get what you want first, and then hand on to it. That's sound advice. Bear away to the right there, Bob. We've about three miles to go."

They walked on, and at last came to a big excavation. Steps led down to it. Descending them, they found themselves in a tunnel carefully hewed out.

"Great Scott! Did you do all this?" Ted asked.

MacGregor shook his head.

"It's thousands o' years old, and the work of the old Phœnicians," he answered. "But they hadna started on it long, I'm thinkin', before the volcano emptied. There's a deal o' gold here, lads. You can pick it out bit by bit with a tool. The work will be laborious, but it's here, anyhow."

Bob and Ted looked blankly at one another.

"All we had in the way of tools was in the mule-cart," Ted said.

MacGregor smiled.

"Ye forgot that I didna get down here with a mining rig-out," he said. "Yet I got the gold. Now, if these creatures haven't been fiddling about, we're richt eno'. Just shove these big stones to one side."

A group of rocks, like a cairn, stood a few yards away, and the lads soon lifted them all. Beneath were half a dozen oddly shaped metal tools. They picked up a couple, and gazed at them. MacGregor was stroking his beard.

"Ay, ay!" he murmured. "The sight of these sends my thoughts back to the time I spent here. I remember as if it was yesterday when we laid them there, and covered them up, and how we laughed and chatted. And I'm the last o' a' that band. A' gane! A' gane! And little did I think I would come back wi' two mere lads. Weel, get on, and let us do some work. I'll show you how to use them."

The tools were perfectly adapted to the purpose for which they were needed; but a little practice was needed before they could be employed effectively. The work was done chiefly from the wrist. MacGregor explained that they had been invented by the Phœnicians; that he and his companions had found them, and that it was only after some difficulty that they had required the necessary knack.

Having this, anyone could chip out bits of gold pretty rapidly. Sometimes a good-sized piece fell from the granite; but most was very small. They toiled for three hours, and then the old Scot calculated that they had gathered about four hundred pounds' worth of the precious metal.

The luminous light was now decreasing—a sign that, high above the lofty dome, the sun was sinking. A murmuring sound came to their ears, and MacGregor at once advised a return.

"These creatures have woken up, and are looking for us," he said. "They want an evening meal from the fruit-trees. If they were let go hungry for long they wad turn savage. That's a matter about which we must be unco' careful."

They hurried back, and found the crowd growing very restive. Quickly plucking the fruit, they threw it to the creatures, and at once they grew calm. Then they supped themselves, and prepared to settle for the night. Mendi

and Galza had never left them, but were still terrified.

"What would happen if the fruit gave out?" Ted asked.

"It would be the end for us," MacGregor answered. "Let us hope that won't occur."

The night was cold, and they had not the time to build a hut or make any protection. Neither could they light a fire, for, of course, the few matches they had had been ruined in the water when they had taken the daring dive. Yet they managed to get some sleep.

Early next morning they set to work again. All day they toiled, and for days thereafter. Nothing exciting happened. The gold heap was gradually increasing. MacGregor calculated that, in another ten days they would have sufficient to give each a large fortune.

"And, of course, if we dinna find this place beginning to affect our health, we will keep on," he said. "But on the first hint o' that we maun clear oot."

Their spirits had become very buoyant. They had built themselves a comfortable hut. The fruit nourished them well, and they trusted to the old Scot to get them away. The prospect, after all they had gone through, was full of hope.

On the eleventh morning they rose earlier even than usual, determined to do the longest day's work yet. And as they walked to the mine they chatted merrily.

"Doesn't it all seem like a dream?" Ted asked. "Our tramp from Cape Town, our dealings with the savages and old Faik! Ah! I wonder what he's doing now? How wild he would be if he knew of our success!"

Bob laughed.

"He's far enough away, anyhow," he said. "We needn't bother about him."

MacGregor was fifty yards behind. A great hush was everywhere down in these translucent depths. They were far from the human race.

And as Bob stopped everything changed. The world they had left came back in a flash, and they were in touch with their enemies again!

For a single rifle-shot rang out, echoing far and wide. It was followed by another and yet another.

With a sharp cry, MacGregor flung up his arms and fell!

An Amazing Discovery.

The rifle-shot echoed and re-echoed in that strange underground land like peal after peal of thunder, and after, when it seemed to have died away, it came again like distant mutterings.

For an instant Bob and Ted stopped, in dismay. MacGregor had flung up his arms and had fallen on his face. And behind him the strange creatures, neither men nor baboons, stood, their faces convulsed.

Then Bob dashed back. He bent over the old Scotsman, saw that he was wounded in the head, and gently turned him on his back. His wrinkled face was pallid, and his eyes were closed.

"He has been shot!" he gasped. "I believe he's dying! Ted, we must get him to the hut."

"We daren't move him yet," Ted replied; and his voice was a trifle unsteady. "Look behind!"

Bob turned, and a new alarm seized him. A restless movement had spread among the strange folk. They had drawn together. They scowled as they slowly advanced. They looked like wild animals which had tasted blood for the first time.

"What can have changed them?" he muttered. "They mean mischief. Who

would have thought that rifle-shot would have made them like this?"

"Look!" Ted urged. "Look at that chap dancing!"

One of the creatures, a few paces away from the rest, was going through the wildest gymnastics, jumping and falling, rolling round and round, and springing to his feet again. He was brandishing something in his hand, but so quick were his movements that to see what it was was difficult. He seemed in a frenzy of delight.

For a moment he paused.

"The rifle!" Bob cried. "He's got it! It must have been he who fired the shot!"

"How could he have got hold of a rifle?"

"I don't know, but he's got it! And that's what's changed them," Bob said. "They want to polish us off now. Stand your ground here, and face them! There's just a chance left to us yet."

He dashed straight at the creature holding the rifle. So swift was his rush that he caught his opponent napping. He tripped him up, and together they fell. Next instant Bob was on his feet, the rifle in his hand.

He fired low, and one of the strange creatures, with an inhuman shriek, fell, and rolled over and over, gnashing his teeth. Terrified by his dismal howls, the others crowded around him. A second time Bob fired, and another fell. They turned, scattered, and fled.

Bob came back, flushed and panting.

"That's saved us for the present, anyhow," he said, and his young face was very grave. "Now let us lift up Mr. MacGregor, and carry him back to the hut. If they attack again, we'll have a better chance of putting up a fight there."

They carried the old Scotsman to the hut and laid him down. Ted ran to fetch some water, and they sprinkled his face. Bob had examined the wound, and had found that the skull was not fractured: the bullet had passed across the top of the head.

For several minutes the old man lay with his eyes closed, and they began to fear that he would succumb to the shock. But, to their great relief, his eyelids at last flickered, and after a few more anxious moments he opened his eyes.

"How are you feeling?" Bob asked.

"Very weak. What's happened?" MacGregor asked.

Bob told him. He did not seem so surprised as they had expected. After a while he spoke again.

"I had forgotten about that rifle!" he murmured. "We lost it here, I remember. These poor creatures didn't ken the use o' it, and it was the merest accident that one pulled the trigger and hit me. After that, of course, they were all agog to see you fall, too, like children wi' a game that pleases them. They winna attack us again, but this is bad—verra bad!"

He sighed, and closed his eyes. Bob beckoned to Ted to follow him out of the hut.

"He's falling asleep, and he'll be stronger when he awakes," he said. "We must keep watch here."

Ted nodded.

"He'll come round, but at his age he won't pick up quickly," he replied. "It may be some weeks before he is able to stir."

They looked at one another, and their faces fell. The same thought was in both their minds. MacGregor had told them that it was impossible for a white man to live in that atmosphere for long. What lay before them now? All

depended on the old Scotsman's recovery. If he picked up quickly they could escape, they believed. If he did not, then any morning they might awake to find that their strength was waning, as MacGregor had foretold.

The situation was appalling. Nothing but courage could pull them through. Bob squared his shoulders.

"We must hope that he will soon be all right again," he said as cheerily as he could. "It's a mercy that he escaped. Things might be much worse, and after coming through so much I have a feeling that luck is not going to desert us at the finish."

"You're right," said Ted. "Things might be very much worse, and we've a great deal to be thankful for. There's not a warmer-hearted or pluckier man than Mr. MacGregor. When you think of his age and all he's faced, our troubles seem very light. I reckon we owe him a lot, and I would go through anything for him!"

"Same here," Bob said. "And between us we'll get him round all right. And now you go and pick some fruit for the lot of us. And you might prospect a bit around, and see what those beauties are doing. But don't go far. Double back here if you scent mischief."

At the first alarm of danger Mendi and Galza had fallen flat behind a hillock, and only now did they emerge. Their teeth were chattering. Bob did not chide them for their cowardice. Out in the upper world, he knew, they would have been brave enough. But in this uncanny, subterranean place, with its mystic lights and its extraordinary inhabitants, the two black boys, full of superstition at all times, thought they were in the clutches of some dread power. Yet Mendi was ashamed that he had not shown more courage.

"O, master," he said, "if thou canst read signs and portents, tell us what is the meaning of all this? For, lo! we leave the evil white man alone, and yet he is on our track. For how else did the iron stick spit fire, and thus bring the great Barelegs to the ground?"

"Barelegs has been here before, and he left his rifle here," Bob explained.

Mendi shook his head.

"And did Barelegs have a mule when he was here before, and was that mule the same as pulled the cart with our provisions?" he asked. "For if that be so, then Barelegs could stay the clouds in their flight, did he so wish?"

Bob stared.

"Mendi, have thy brains gone, and art thou as the goats and the owls, that thus thou talkest?" he asked. "Did we not leave the mule and the cart behind when we took the great dive that brought us here?"

"That we did, O master, and therefore it is that I question thee," Mendi replied. "For how else can it be explained?"

"What is there to explain?"

"That the mule should be here!" Mendi replied. "And have I not laid my whip on to him not once, but many times, and would I not know him? And the cart is here also."

At first Bob was inclined to rate the black boy soundly, thinking that his nerves must have gone to pieces, and that only severe measures could pull him together. But, noticing that Galza was nodding his head every few seconds whilst Mendi was speaking, he turned to him.

"Thou hast heard," he said. "Is this true talk?"

For answer Galza took something from under his cloak and held it forward. It was a rifle cartridge.

"Where did you get this?" Bob asked.

Galza put his hand under his cloak and drew out a small chisel. Bob at once recognised it, and a look of amazement spread over his face. He was still turning it round in his fingers when Galza held forward a pocket-case. Opening it, the lad saw Faik's name on a dirty card inside the flap! There were some papers in the case and several coins.

The lad was completely taken aback. From out of the world above Faik had sent this hint. He knew where they were. He was on their track still. Doggedly he was waiting for them to come up to the surface with the treasure they were amassing.

"Galza, where found you these things?" Bob asked.

Galza pointed away to the left.

"Many miles from here, O master," he replied. "For do I not dread this abode of big apes that walk as men, and have I not therefore often sought the way whereby we may escape? And Mendi, too, has toiled to that end, whilst thou and the other palefaces have been chipping at the rocks for the yellow dirt."

"Miles from here?" Bob repeated.

"And was it there you saw the mule?"

"Nay, farther yet we saw the mule," Galza explained. "But no more will he fear the whip."

With a frown on his forehead, Bob stood in deep thought. He did not see Ted returning, and was aroused from his reverie by his cheery voice.

"It's all serene!" Ted cried. "Those poor creatures have been lurking behind rocks till now, scared out of their lives. They're coming together again, and jabbering a bit, but all the fight's knocked out of them."

Bob held forward the things Galza had handed him.

"Hallo! Where did you get these?" Ted gasped.

Galza has found them. It's more strange than if they had dropped from the clouds, for there's a thick wall of granite between us and the world above," Bob replied. "I haven't the least idea how they got here. And there's a stranger thing even than this. The mule and cart are here, too!"

Ted looked thoroughly scared for once.

"I say, old chap, don't start talking in this way!" he protested. "It's quite bad enough for these black fellows to do that. The next you'll tell me is that that old Faik has come down here in the cart!"

"That's his pocket-case, anyhow," Bob remarked.

Ted took the case very gingerly, and turned it round in his fingers. His face was a study in expressions.

"Maskelyne & Cook—eh?" he suggested. "There's some very funny genius round here! The three-card trick ain't in it! Well, if you're puzzled, I'm not."

"Then how do you explain it?" Bob demanded.

"A conjuror up above can't say 'heigh presto!' to a mule and cart, and shoot them down through a hundred feet of granite, can he?" Ted asked. "Any way, if he can, he's wasting his time out here. If that mule and cart are here, then we can go up the way they came down—eh? That's what I mean."

"It looks as if you're right," Bob commented. "But—"

A voice hailed them.

(Continued on page 19.)

MacGregor was standing at the door of the hut.

At once they hurried to him.

The Plan of Campaign!

The old Scot, despite his injury and the shock he had sustained, looked fairly well, and his voice was quite cheerful.

"I'm a' richt again, lads," he began, "and there's nae need for you to worry! Get on wi' the work, and we'll be able to clear out shortly."

"But we've just had extraordinary news," Bob began. "A lot of things have come down here from above. Here are some, and the mule and cart are down here, too!"

MacGregor for a moment looked puzzled. He took the articles and examined them. Then he smiled.

"Faik will be sorry to have lost this," he said, holding up the pocket-case.

"But how did it get here?" Bob asked.

"It's been in the wet, but it's dry again," MacGregor said. "It came down wi' the current, the same as we did."

"But Galza did not find it in the tunnel. He found it some miles away," Bob explained.

"Even so, that is the way it got here," MacGregor persisted. "Faik maun hae been standing or sitting on the bank by the lake, and this dropped out of his hand into the water. And these coins acted as a weight, and it sank. Then it got into the current, and was whisked along just as we were."

"And the mule and cart?"

"The mule pulled the cart too near the edge, I'm thinkin'. One wheel went over, and the cart dragged the mule into the water. The rifle-cartridge and chisel were in the cart, you remember. There's a lot more, I fancy, that has come down, too."

"And then?"

"The creatures here found them, and carried them off, juist as monkeys would. One of ye might take Galza, and gang to the spot, and fetch all else you can find. The mule, of course, is dead, but if anything is left of the cart—"

"The wheels are all right," Bob explained.

"That's grand! Then we will be able to make a hand-cart, and on that we can haul the gold along. That will save us the trouble and delay of constant journeys to and fro. I winna be able to help for three or four days, but by that time, wi' hard work by you two fellows, we ought to be able to start. Meanwhile, I'll e'en put on my considering-cap. There's a lot to be thocht out. And search thoroughly for cartridges, noo we hae a rifle again."

A dull murmuring arose in the distance, and the old Scotchman looked across the hillocks.

"They're getting hungry. Pluck a wheen of fruit for them," he suggested. "That will keep them quiet. And we had better have a meal, too. After that, Ted, ye might get to work on the gold quartz, Bob can go for the things with Galza, and Mendi can stay here with me."

So it was arranged, and before long Bob had started on his errand. The strange creatures were asleep. They had all this underground world to themselves. And very novel and awe-inspiring it was. They walked amidst a mild haze of exquisite colours, shifting and blending, as if shaken in a kaleidoscope. The grass beneath their feet was soft as moss. The ground ran in quaint, irregular patterns, with small gullies here and there. Sometimes they came to a tiny waterfall. There was a quivering music, as if some-

one was playing a zither in the distance; and when Galza spoke his voice echoed like a soft laugh taken up and carried along for several seconds.

Despite his anxiety, the lad was deeply interested. Often he stopped and looked around. Thus they tramped for quite five miles before they came to the spot where the mule lay dead. They spent some hours searching, and found much of value. The cart-axle was not broken, and they constructed out of the shattered woodwork a rough box, in which they stored their spoils. Then, with Galza carrying the box and Bob rolling along the cart-wheels, they started for the hut.

They got there just before dark, -tired and hungry, and found suppey awaiting them. MacGregor had had a good sleep, and was picking up well. He and Ted were chatting when they entered.

"Mr. MacGregor has been telling me a lot," Ted said. "That pocket-case Faik lost is more valuable than we thought at first."

"That's good news," Bob remarked. "For by that I suppose you mean that it gives us an inkling as to the game he's trying to play."

"It does; and I hope you found some cartridges," the old Scotchman remarked drily.

"Yes; we've got fifty, at least."

"Then we'll need to dry the powder very carefully, for it's only a dose of lead that will stop oor dear freend Faik, I'm thinking," MacGregor continued. "But I've been waiting for you to return so that we can fix up our plans."

"You have decided on what we should do?"

"There's nae muckle choice," the old Scot explained; "for there's only the one way we can get out of here. But we hae much to do before we will be ready. I didna tell you yet how we got oot last time, for it's a ticklish job, and we had quite enough trouble on hand. But as we have to build a boat—"

"A boat!" Ted gasped.

"A stout raft might do; but the gold wouldn't be safe on it," MacGregor went on. "As we came here by water, so we have to escape by water. It was a lang time before I puzzled oot that the first time, and it was an unco relief to my mind when I did. But it stands to reason, doesna it?"

"Tell us about it," Bob asked.

For the old man had fallen into a reverie.

"Where does the rush of water go to that swept us down here?" MacGregor

asked, raising his head. "It must get out somewhere, or this place would be flooded."

"Yes; I see that now."

"That's what I sought to find, and it was only after prolonged searching that I managed. We build the boat, and we're whisked off! That's all."

He closed his mouth hard, and a nervous look came into his eyes. He sat silent, staring straight ahead, as if he saw what lay before them, and the prospect was not pleasant. Then, as if by an effort, he roused himself, spoke cheerfully, and changed the subject somewhat.

"So our work is straightforward, and we had better buckle to it without delay," he said. "I've been calculating with Ted how much gold we hae gotten, and it runs to a very big sum. You two can keep on at it for a few days more, until I make a cart strong and big enough to carry it, wi' the assistance of Mendi and Galza. Mendi is a very handy fellow, as I ken from experience, and under my instructions he'll make it all richt without my overtiring myself. And then—"

"Then we'll build the boat," Ted cut in.

"Eh, mon, whaur are your brains?" MacGregor said, his eyes twinkling. "If we built a boat here, not the five of us could carry it to where it will hae to be launched. No; we'll start off with the treasure, and when we come to the richt spot we'll build the boat."

"How long will it be before we get to the upper world again?" Bob inquired.

MacGregor's eyes blinked.

"A matter of ten days at the very least," he said slowly. "And it would be tempting fate to stay on longer. Then there's Faik waiting for us at the other end."

"You're sure he'll be there?" Bob asked.

"That pocket-case of his has fairly gi'en him away," MacGregor replied. "There are letters in it that will land him in gaol if ever we turn the tables on him. He's like a cat the noo, waiting for mice to pop out of a hole, and we're the mice. And a very wideawake auld cat he is."

Ted chuckled.

"If he doesn't catch us right off when first we're blinking as we come into the sunlight again, I guess he'll get his whiskers singed," he remarked.

"Oh, he winna hae it a' his own way,"

(Continued on page 20.)

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IN A LAND OF PERIL.

(Continued from page 19.)

MacGregor agreed. "And noo, lads, I'm turning in. My poor auld head is beginning to throb a bit."

On the following morning he set to work to build the cart, whilst Bob and Ted worked hard at the gold. That evening he showed them, with some pride, how far he had progressed. The wood had been cut to the proper lengths, and some of it fastened together. Galza, as well as Mendi, had shown himself very adaptable, and MacGregor hoped to complete the job very shortly.

But next morning, before they left the hut, Mendi entered, wringing his hands. "O, Master and great White Chief!" he cried, addressing Bob. "Where be the whip with many thongs, that I may cut deep into the flesh? For, lo, what was yesterday is now no more!"

"Oh, these rotten riddles," Ted groaned. "What's up now, man? Why can't you speak plainly?"

But MacGregor seemed to understand. He brushed past Ted as he hurried to the entrance. When there he drew his breath sharply.

"They've clean dinged a' my work!" he cried. "Is it a monkey-freak, or is there more behind it? This is verra serious."

The others gazed in dismay. The work done had been smashed and scattered. MacGregor was stroking his beard.

"It's a good job that they didn't wait until it was finished," he said. "We ken nae what to expect, and we'll hae to take precautions. After all, we've lost but one day. But I dinna like the look of this; it may mean more trouble. Where are they now, Mendi?"

"If thou meanest those jackals who have done well to hide their ugly faces down here where they cannot frighten children and babes, then I do not know, O Barelegs, nor do I care should it chance that I may never see them again," Mendi replied. "For, lo! they are theimps of evil spirits that once wandered far and wide, spreading plague and pestilence, and now they are chained here for their crimes."

"They haven't been clamouring for food this morning, now that I've come to think of it," Bob said.

"No. They're fashed, I fear," MacGregor said. "And they're very dangerous when they get off their grub, for then there's nae way of coaxing them. You laddies had better go search for them, and be careful that you dinna let them come on ye unawares."

Bob and Ted started off together. They went to the ground where the strange creatures usually camped for the night. Not finding them there, they walked round in a wide circle. Still baffled, they were standing undecided when in the distance they heard murmuring.

It came from the direction of the gold mine. At once the young Britishers got on their track, and when they drew near the mine, Bob could not restrain a cry of horror.

"They're at the gold we've collected with-suck-pains," he gasped. "They mean to carry it away or disperse it! Run, Ted, for the rifle! If we can't drive them out of this all our hopes are at an end."

The Way Out.

Ted ran at full speed to the hut, and told what he and Bob had discovered. Seizing the rifle, he ~~came back~~ and then

together the two lads ran for the gold-mine.

The strange creatures did not hear them approach. They were jabbering together, and the first notification they got that they were detected was the sharp report of the rifle, and the echo of the din in the quarry, repeated a hundred times.

That dread sound, coming so unexpectedly, sent a thrill of terror through them. With unearthly shrieks they scampered away, and Ted sent a second shot after them to ensure their flight. Then he and Bob looked around.

"We've been just in time," Bob said, panting hard. "They did not know the value of the gold. They have been chucking the quartz about, but they have not touched the treasure we collected. In time they would have done so, though. We'll have to get the lot down to the hut, and guard it there!"

At this moment MacGregor came up. He had followed Ted as quickly as he could. His face brightened as he saw the position of affairs, and he at once fell in with Bob's suggestion.

"Yes, we had better carry it a' down," he said. "The job will take some hours, and I'm thinkin' you had better give up delving for more. If we all spend the afternoon working at the hut, we ought to be able to start early to-morrow, and the sooner we gang the better!"

He sent up Galza, and whilst the latter and Ted carried down the gold, Bob kept watch with the rifle. They had to make many journeys, but at last the task was accomplished. By nightfall a large, strong box had been fixed on the cart-axle also.

During the day they were left undisturbed, but at dusk the strange creatures began to gather round the hut. They must have been very hungry, but they did not raise any clamour for food; and when Bob picked a lot of fruit and threw it to them, they left it lying on the ground. And all the time they stared at the party, muttering uneasily.

"In some vague way they ken we mean to leave them," MacGregor said. "Their instinct is working. Nature tells them that when we go they will never get the fruit again, for they cannot pick it for themselves. There'll be trouble, I fear, but we maun face that!"

All the night the Britishers stayed on guard by turns, and occasionally they fired a shot. In the morning, when they made a start, the strange folk, with fierce gestures, surrounded them threateningly. Mendi and Galza at once became almost helpless with fear.

Bob and Ted were pulling the hand-cart, and it was now decided that Mendi and Galza must take their places. MacGregor found it necessary to speak very sternly to both of them.

"Hearken unto me, you two of the great tribe of the Inrobi!" he began. "Where is your courage? Do ye fear them which are but beasts? Will not the women and children laugh when we return and tell them that the two braves of their race did here like cravens because they would not come with us?"

"But, Barelegs, bravest of white men, why need we move as yet?" Mendi pleaded. "If we do but stay awhile these jackals will depart!"

"Mendi can choose for himself," MacGregor answered. "For us, we scorn danger. We go now. Choose, therefore! Wilt thou labour with Galza whilst we defend thee, or wilt thou give up without a fight?"

The black boy flung up his hands in a gesture of despair.

"It is as Barelegs says!" he groans. "We will go!"

He and Galza grasped the shafts. MacGregor and Ted stood at either side

of the cart. Bob had moved to the front.

"Ready?" he cried.

"Ay, ay!" the old Scot answered sturdily.

Bob fired. As the strange creatures turned to see where the shot had come from, the four others rushed the cart through the crowd, and Bob ran back and got behind it. He fired again, and held back the surging crowd. Once away and in the open, Mendi and Galza tugged the cart along quickly, fear and the longing to escape urging them on. Bob followed, turning round every few steps with the rifle to his shoulder.

They were moving swiftly over the ground. Bob's was the hardest work, demanding swiftness and steadiness. If he let the cart get too far ahead, the strange creatures would get round between him and it. If he hurried too much, they might think he was afraid, and so be encouraged to attack. But he kept his head, never relaxing his vigilance.

For three hours they followed, and then they stopped.

"We've shaken them off a bit, anyhow," MacGregor said. "And noo let us push all we're able. We've twenty miles to gang before we can be certain we hae seen the last of them!"

"Twenty miles?" Ted gasped.

"Ay! We'll not do it to-day, but by the morn's afternoon we ought to. We'll have to keep a sharp look-out the night. But, anyhow, we have succeeded so far!"

Resting occasionally, they tramped along until near to dusk. Then they selected a spot in an open place, where they could not be surprised by an attack, and prepared for a long vigil. About midnight they heard the jabbering in the distance which notified that the strange folk were coming after them; but there was no attack. They started again just as the darkness began to fade, and Bob had no difficulty in keeping back their pursuers when they appeared.

In the afternoon they came to quite a different country. Here there was no vegetation; all was rocky and bare.

"We've five miles of this before we get whaur trees grow again," MacGregor said. "Those puir creatures never cross this. They see there is nae food to be had here, and they haven't the minds to think of what may be on the far side, so they'll go back now!"

Mendi and Galza began to grin.

"O, Barelegs, wisest of men——" Mendi began.

"That's enough!" MacGregor grunted. "You showed the white feather, Mendi! Now make up for that by working all you can!"

Abashed, the black boy lung his head, and Bob patted him on the shoulder.

"Mendi very brave, but he cannot combat evil spirits," he said kindly; and Mendi's eyes shone with gratitude.

It was hard work pulling the hand-cart over the rock-strewn ground, but they got to the fertile plain before night-fall.

Next morning, after travelling for a couple of hours, they came to a fast-running stream.

"We follow that," MacGregor said. "And if we push on, we'll be at the spot where we can begin to build the boat. Hallo! Where's Ted?"

He looked back. Ted had sat down.

"What's the matter?" Bob cried.

Ted jumped up and came on.

"Oh, nothing!" he replied. "I felt a bit fagged all of a sudden, but I'm all right again!"

MacGregor drew his breath sharply. He waited for the lad to come up, and looked keenly into his face.

(Next week's issue will contain another splendid instalment of this exciting story.)