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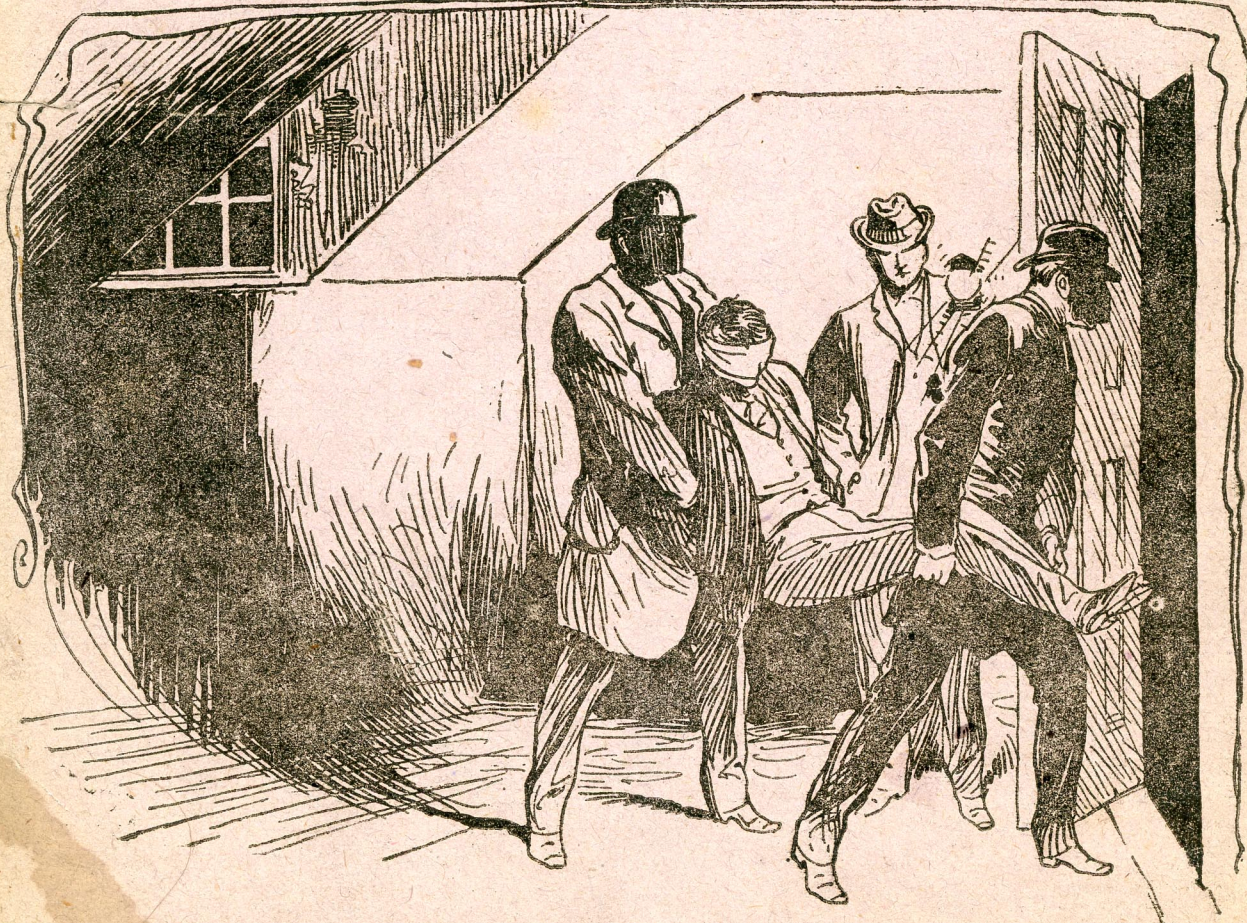
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RISING TO FORTUNE.



They were both wearing thick crape masks, which completely covered the face from forehead to chin, and effectually concealed the features with the exception of the eyes.

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

No. 216.

Rising to Fortune

By JOHN G. ROWE.

CHAPTER 1.

"DO YOU WANT A BOY, SIR?"—CHARLES CLIFFORD GETS A START IN LIFE—ERRAND-BOY AT FORSYTH AND CO.'S—A KIND-HEARTED EMPLOYER—MADAME GUICHARD, THE LACE AND SILK BUYER, GIVES CHARLIE A PARCEL TO CARRY HOME FOR HER—HER STRANGE BEHAVIOUR.

"Do you want a boy, sir?"

The question was put to a middle-aged, genial-faced gentleman, as he was coming out of the counting-house in the large drapery establishment of Forsyth and Co., Oxford Street, by a slim, though well-built, lad of about fifteen.

The gentleman turned in some surprise, and eyed his interrogator with a smile lighting up his pleasant countenance.

"So you want a situation, my lad? Well, what can you do?"

"I would be glad to do anything, sir—run errands, sweep out the shop or office, or—anything you'd like, sir."

Mr. Richard Forsyth—for the gentleman was none other than the head of the great firm—looked at the lad more closely, and was struck by his singularly open, honest-looking young face. He did not answer immediately, and the boy, taking courage at his silence, went on hastily:

"I'd be glad to take anything, sir, and I really would try to make myself useful. I—I have only just left school, sir, and—and I am most anxious to try and earn something to help my mother."

"Humph!" said Mr. Forsyth, regarding him still more closely. "What is your father?"

"He is dead, sir. He died some three weeks ago, and mother has had to take in washing since then to keep us. There are five of us altogether—three girls and two boys—I am the eldest, and I—I do want to get work of some kind or another, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Charles Clifford, sir."

"Well, Charles, I like your appearance, and I commend your wish to help your mother in some way. Come with me."

He led the boy up to one of the shopwalkers, and told the latter to put on Charley as an errand boy there and then. Then he turned away, and the shopwalker took the lad to one of the lady assistants in the shop, and asked her if she had any parcels to send out.

"Yes, several, Mr. Kenyon," the young lady replied, and the shopwalker, turning to Charley, said: "You will take these parcels for Miss Baines, and be back as sharp as you can. We want no dawdling on the way, you know. I suppose you know the City fairly well?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's all right, then. Before you take the parcels, though I think you had better come to the office and have your name entered on the books."

He muttered under his breath, though in tones perfectly audible to Charley Clifford:

"It's just like Forsyth, to take on a lad, without ever troubling to inquire as to his antecedents or respectability. He'll be taken in some day, I am inclined to think, engaging persons without a reference beyond their own tales. He is good-natured to a fault, and it is a wonder to me how he ever made his money."

And Charley could not help wondering the same thing before he was very long in the establishment of Forsyth and Co. The head of the firm was renowned for his kindly nature and magnanimous behaviour towards all his employees.

If he noticed one of his shop assistants looked particularly pale and run down, he would at once send him or her off for the day—perhaps for several days—and sometimes even pay the expenses of a trip to some seaside place. No one either, who had any reasonable complaint to

make, need ever fear approaching him on the subject. The consequence was, he was both loved and respected by all his hands, from the highest to the lowest, and a case where his kindness and consideration was abused was almost unknown.

Charley Clifford carried parcels to customers all day long in a tricycle-cart, so as to relieve the van-men of the lighter part of the work of delivery; and when night came he would be utterly tired out, and his legs would be almost ready to drop off him with so much pedalling. But still, the thought that he was able now to help his widowed mother to keep the house over them and put bread into the mouths of his younger brothers and sisters kept him up, and uncomplainingly each morning he would go to the shop to commence his laborious day's task.

When he received his wages the first Saturday, he could scarcely contain himself for joy, and positively ran the whole way home to throw the glittering little hoard into his mother's lap.

The constant racing about the City, however, in all weathers, soon made him strong and healthy, and the tired, fagged-out feeling he had at first experienced at the close of his day's work began to wear off. He got on famously with



The light of a bullseye lantern was suddenly flashed in his face, and a gruff voice cried, "What are you doing there?"

everybody at the shop, for he was always ready to oblige and perform little services, and the lady assistants from whom he received his parcels, frequently spoke of him to the shop-walkers in terms of the highest praise.

He had been in the establishment about three months, and in that space of time he had got to know pretty nearly everyone who had any power over him. One evening, when the shop was on the point of closing, and he was about to set forth on his last round for the day, Madame Guichard, the lace and silk buyer of the establishment, a handsome, fashionably-dressed lady of about thirty, beckoned him into her office.

Wondering greatly what this important member of the staff could want with him, Charley followed her into the apartment, and stood respectfully awaiting her commands. His astonishment, however, knew no bounds when, instead of at once informing him what she wanted with him, she first of all stepped up to the door, which he had closed after him, opened it, and looked up and down the passage.

Then she turned to him, and her manner seemed unduly excited and flurried.

"I want you to leave a parcel at my house on your round. It won't be very much out of your road. I heard Miss Davies say you would be going to Regent's Park Crescent, and I live not two minutes' walk from there. I will be very much obliged to you if you will take it."

"Of course I'll take it, ma'am," answered Charley promptly.

"Thank you; oh, thank you!" And still seeming extraordinarily agitated and flurried, the lady went to one of the large presses in the room, and rummaging under a heap of silk and satin pieces, drew out a pretty large bundle, neatly done up, however, in brown paper.

"Here it is," she said, or, rather, whispered, in the same excited manner, "and whatever you do, don't let anyone in the place know that it belongs to— Ah, I mean, you needn't pretend it is mine. Should anyone happen to ask you, you can say it is for a customer."

Charley took the parcel, which was exceedingly light, though rather bulky, and was moving towards the door of the room, when Madame Guichard glided before him, opened the door for him, and before letting him pass out, again looked searchingly up and down the corridor.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Charley, "but you haven't given me your address yet. Where am I to take the parcel?"

A look of annoyance and something akin to fear swept across her face.

"Oh—er—how silly of me to forget to give you the address. I do believe I would have let you go without it, if you had not spoken."

She laughed a little nervously, and going to a desk, took up a pen, and hastily scribbled down the address on a scrap of writing-paper.

"Here it is," she said. "Don't forget my instructions, and thank you again for obliging me. Here is something for your trouble," and she slipped threepence into his hand.

Charley drew himself up proudly.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said, "but I don't want any payment for obliging a lady. I would do the same for you any time. It will be no trouble, really, ma'am, as I will be in the neighbourhood; and—and I would really like you to take the—money back, ma'am. Thank you all the same."

Madame Guichard looked surprised, and eyed Charley keenly for a full minute. Then she said:

"Oh, but really you must take something. I cannot expect you to do me a service for nothing."

"If you don't mind, ma'am, I would sooner you took the money back; really I would."

"You are a strange boy," she remarked, again surveying him closely out of her black French eyes. "Well, since you won't take the money, thank you very much indeed."

Charley Clifford left the room with the parcel, and re-entering the shop, collected the other parcels, and set out on his round.

Regent's Park Crescent was his last place of call, except Madame Guichard's, so it was rather late when he rang the bell at the French lady's handsome residence in Colborne Road.

Madame Guichard herself answered the door, and took the parcel from him with many thanks; but somehow Charley, as he turned away, felt a strange, uncomfortable feeling that he had done something wrong.

A vague suspicion of Madame Guichard took root in his mind. Why had she acted so strangely when giving him the parcel, and why should she have not wished anyone else to know it belonged to her?

"Should anyone happen to ask you, you can say it is for a customer," she had said to him.

In other words, she had wanted to put a lie into his mouth,

to make him tell a lie. To what purpose? he asked himself now.

Why should she have not wished anyone to know to whom the parcel belonged? What was there to conceal?

Charley had, therefore, good grounds for looking upon the affair with considerable suspicion, and in inclining to the belief that he had done something he should not have done in carrying that parcel home for Madame Guichard.

And yet what wrong could there be in having done so? What wrong in simply carrying a parcel; and yet, why was the lady afraid anyone should know the parcel belonged to her? What could it have contained?

These suspicious circumstances had not occurred before to Charley. He had been too busily occupied steering his heavily-laden tricycle-cart through the crowded streets; but as he now walked home, after taking the vehicle back to the shop, he had time to think.

But suddenly he cut his own reflections short with an impatient exclamation at his absurd doubts of a lady so high on Mr. Forsyth's staff; one who was not only the head woman in the establishment, but the buyer of the lace and silk, and, therefore, a lady above suspicion.

Charley could not help bursting out into a hearty laugh at his own expense, as the comical side of the case struck him. He, an errand-boy, employed at a few shillings a week, doubting and suspecting of wrong-doing a lady high in the confidence of their mutual employer, and drawing her salary of several hundreds a year.

CHAPTER 2.

TWO YEARS LATER — CHARLEY STILL A MESSENGER—WHAT HE OVERHEARD—HIS SUSPICIONS OF MADAME GUICHARD REVIVED — HE SPEAKS TO THE SHOPWALKER—ARNOLD RYLSTON, THE CASHIER.

A couple of years rolled by, and Charley was still a simple messenger at Forsyth and Co.'s; but Mr. Kenyon, the shop-walker, had shown his appreciation of the young fellow's consistent good conduct and efforts to please by giving him a small rise in salary.

More than once since Charley had been asked by Madame Guichard to take small parcels home for her as he went on his rounds, and having laughed himself out of his former suspicions of the lady, he had always complied. So accustomed now had he become to obliging her in this way, that he never thought any more about it.

One day, though, as he was waiting in the shop as usual, before starting on his morning's round, he saw Mr. Forsyth in earnest conversation with Mr. Kenyon, the shopwalker; and presently the two approached him, without apparently observing his presence, for the counter between him and them was heaped up with large rolls of cloth.

"The warehouseman, Cole, is quite sure on the point," he heard Mr. Forsyth say. "The goods have gone on disappearing like this for some time, and he can find no clue to their disappearance. It is clear we have no common thief to deal with, for none of the ordinary assistants could contrive to abstract such valuable pieces of lace and silk without instant detection."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Forsyth," the shop-walker made answer, "for I could stake my life almost on the honesty of the girls in this department."

"No, it is quite evident the goods never got as far as the shop," went on the head of the establishment. "The robberies must have been effected from the store-rooms themselves, and I am now inclined to believe that it must be someone who has easy access to the rooms who is guilty of the pilfering. But then, there are only Cole himself and Madame Guichard who have keys, and it would be ridiculous to suspect the latter."

The two passed on, and Charley heard no more of their conversation; but he had heard quite enough to grasp its purport.

There was a thief in the establishment; valuable lace and silks were mysteriously disappearing from the store-rooms, to which only Mr. Cole, the warehouseman, and Madame Guichard, the buyer, had keys.

It was with difficulty he could suppress the cry of horror and amazement that rose to his lips, as a sudden suspicion flashed across his mind.

Could Madame Guichard be the thief? he asked himself. What was the meaning of all those mysterious parcels she got him to take home for her? Could they have contained the stolen laces and silks?

He scarcely knew what to think. Mr. Forsyth had said it would be ridiculous to suspect her, and if the head of the firm had such confidence in her, why—it was preposterous his entertaining any doubt of her.

And yet it looked very suspicious, and he asked himself should he mention the fact that he carried a great many packages home for Madame Guichard.

He finally decided that he would, if only to satisfy himself that he was not unconsciously aiding in the robbery of his kind employer. So, when Mr. Kenyon came back into the shop, Charley went up to him, and asked could he have a few minutes' private conversation with him?

The shopwalker looked the surprise he doubtless felt, but nevertheless said, "Certainly;" and the two walked out of earshot of the assistants.

"Well, Charley, what is it?" inquired Mr. Kenyon, with some curiosity to hear what the lad had to say to him in private.

"You will pardon me, sir, but I chanced to overhear part of your conversation with Mr. Forsyth a few minutes ago, though, believe me, sir, I had no intention of listening."

The shopwalker looked at him with still greater amazement, wondering what was coming.

"Well?" he said interrogatively.

"Well, sir, I thought it my duty to tell you that Madame Guichard has often asked me to carry large parcels to her house at the same time as I delivered goods to customers."

Mr. Kenyon looked at the lad attentively for several minutes; then a twinkle of amusement crept into his eyes, and his face relaxed into a smile.

"And you mean to infer from that—?"

He paused, and the smile died upon his lips, and a thoughtful expression replaced the twinkle in his eyes.

"Humph!" he growled. "Madame Guichard sends a great many parcels home by you, eh?"

"Not a great many, sir, but one or two occasionally."

"Humph!" said Mr. Kenyon again, and his brows knitted in deep thought.

"You had no means of learning, I suppose, what was inside those parcels?"

"No, sir, but I—I—"

"Well, what were you going to say?"

"That the first time, sir, Madame Guichard asked me to take a parcel for her she seemed frightened anyone should know of it, and told me in case anyone asked me who it belonged to not to pretend that it belonged to her."

The shopwalker made no comment upon this, but stood as if buried in thought. He looked up as a tall, broad-shouldered man, faultlessly dressed, and with a long, well-waxed moustache, drawn out on either side into a needle-like point, came down the shop.

Charley knew this gentleman to be Mr. Arnold Rylston, the head cashier of the establishment, who, from the first moment he had seen him, had inspired him with a sort of vague distrust. To all his equals, though, Arnold Rylston was the very essence of geniality and bonhomie.

Mr. Kenyon called him by name, and he at once approached the pair, eyeing Charley as he came up with a sort of supercilious contempt, not, however, unmixed with surprise.

"Mr. Forsyth has probably told you, Mr. Rylston, of these mysterious disappearances of goods from the warehouse? What do you think this lad has just told me?"

"I have no idea, I'm sure," said Rylston, twirling one end of his moustache, and gazing at Charley with a strange, baleful look in his eyes.

"He tells me that Madame Guichard has been in the habit of sending parcels home by him."

Rylston glanced sharply at Charley, and, if looks could kill, that moment would assuredly have been the boy's last. The latter was both horrified and amazed at the perfectly diabolical expression of hatred and malignity that shone from the fierce orbs bent upon him.

Involuntarily he recoiled before it, and fairly gasped again. But the next moment, Arnold Rylston had turned to Kenyon.

"And you infer from that, that she knows something about these robberies?" he asked.

"Well, it looks decidedly suspicious, I think."

Rylston burst into a mocking laugh.

"What, you mean to say that you can for a moment suspect her of thieving? Why, the bare idea is preposterous, and on the word of this lad—an errand-boy!"

Charley flushed up to the roots of his hair.

"It is true, every word I said!" he cried indignantly.

"Silence! who was talking to you?" And Rylston turned savagely upon the lad, with another of his annihilating glances.

"Well," said Mr. Kenyon musingly, "it does seem ridiculous to suspect her of any connection with the robberies, and yet what Charley has told me makes me rather sceptical. Anyhow, I consider it will be as well to lay the lad's story before Mr. Forsyth, and let him take it for what it is worth."

"It is preposterous—ridiculous!" said Arnold Rylston

again. "I would not be at all surprised if this youngster himself knows more about the affair than he cares to tell."

Charley grew hot and cold by turns at this rather pointed insinuation, but before he could frame a retort the shopwalker came to his rescue.

"You have no right to say such a thing, Mr. Rylston. As you know, the boy could not possibly get possession of the goods, and he could not discriminate between the superior material and the inferior, as it is evident the thief was able to. No, we have to look for the guilty party amongst the more experienced members of the staff."

"Anyhow," retorted Rylston with a sneer, "I would advise you to keep a sharp eye on that youngster. He is too clever by half. Well, do just as you like. Tell the governor, if you like, but he will only laugh at you, you'll see."

But Mr. Forsyth did not laugh when Charley was made to repeat what he had to tell before him. He looked very grave and concerned instead, and he and Mr. Kenyon consulted together in whispers afterwards.

"Madame Guichard is away on the Continent buying lace at the present moment, is she not?" Charley heard the head of the firm ask.

"Yes," answered Mr. Kenyon, "and I don't suppose she'll be back before the end of the week."

"That's very unfortunate; I would like to get at the bottom of this affair at once, and I don't quite see how we are to do it. Well, I suppose we must let the matter rest for the present. I will make Cole keep a sharper eye on the goods, and if these thefts continue, I will call in a detective. Clifford," turning to Charley, "if Madame Guichard gives you another parcel to take home for her, take it at once to Kenyon here. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, by the by, don't repeat what you have told us to anyone else. You are a good lad, Charley. Good-morning!"

CHAPTER 3.

THE MYSTERIOUS TELEGRAM — MADAME GUICHARD ARRESTED BY THE FRENCH POLICE FOR SMUGGLING—HER HOUSE SEARCHED, AND A QUANTITY OF THE STOLEN GOODS FOUND—CHARLEY TAKEN INTO THE CLERKS' DEPARTMENT — RYLSTON AND HEMSEL'S PETTY TYRANNY—CHARLEY STAYS LATE AT THE OFFICE.

Charley Clifford had barely left his employer's office and re-entered the shop, when a telegram was handed to him by one of the shop assistants.

"Take this to Mr. Forsyth at once."

Charley took the orange envelope, and returned to the private office. Re-entering, he handed the message to Mr. Forsyth, and stood waiting to know if there was any answer.

The head of the firm tore open the envelope, and hastily glanced his eye over the contents, to immediately utter an ejaculation of amazement.

"Call Mr. Kenyon back!" he cried. And Charley at once hastened back to the shop to bring the shopwalker.

The latter and Mr. Forsyth remained closeted together for several minutes, at the end of which time Mr. Kenyon came forth, looking exceedingly grave and stern.

"Charley," he called to our hero, "tell Mr. Cole Mr. Forsyth wants to see him at once."

Charley hurried off to find the warehouseman, and that gentleman was soon engaged in earnest conversation with Mr. Kenyon and the head in the latter's office.

The shop assistants were all on the qui vive of excitement. Somehow they had all got wind of the mysterious thefts from the warehouse, and the ill-concealed excitement of Mr. Kenyon, and the fact that Mr. Kenyon was sent for by the head, on the receipt of the telegram, had set all their tongues going.

"They have discovered the thief without a doubt," one whispered to another.

"I wonder who it can be?"

"Can it possibly be Cole himself?" one young lady hazarded.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," chimed in a fourth. "I never did like him."

But they ceased their chatter and scurried away to their own counters as the door of the private office opened, and the three gentlemen came out together.

Mr. Forsyth loitered about the shop, and pretended to occupy himself by examining things here and there, while Cole and Kenyon went for their hats and coats. Then all three left the building, the head telling one of the chief saleswomen to tell Mr. Johnston, one of the other shopwalkers, to come and take Mr. Kenyon's place.

After the departure of the three, tongues ran riot once

more, and all in the place were burning with curiosity to learn who was the thief. But it was not until late that night that the news leaked out in some mysterious way that Madame Guichard had been arrested by the French authorities for attempting to smuggle large quantities of Brussels lace over the frontier, and that suspicion also rested on her that she was the thief of the goods from the warehouse.

The rumour, unlike most rumours, was true in every particular. The French police had wired Mr. Forsyth that they had arrested his lace-buyer for smuggling, having long suspected her, and that gentleman had very naturally concluded that if she were capable of one illegal act, she might also be of theft.

A search warrant was procured without delay, and with a couple of officers of the law, Messrs. Kenyon and Cole, acting under instructions from their employer, raided Madame's handsome villa residence in Colborne Road. Not very much to their surprise, they found stored there a sufficient portion of the stolen laces and silks to leave no doubt in their minds she was the responsible party for every one of the thefts.

The affair crept into the papers, and caused a great sensation, and no small credit was given to Charley Clifford for having been the means of the thief's detection. Mr. Forsyth, however, refused to prosecute the woman, and did his best to hush up the matter, though, immediately on her release in France on payment of a heavy fine, the guilty woman mysteriously disappeared, as if she had in some way learnt of the discovery of her misdeeds. Needless to say, she did not return to the establishment of Forsyth and Co.

It was about a week after all this, when the excitement of the affair had somewhat subsided, that Charley Clifford was called into the head's private office, and that gentleman said to him:

"Charley, you seem a clever and intelligent young fellow, and you are doubtless anxious to get on. I will tell you what I will do with you. I will take you into the office, and you can assist Mr. Hensel with the books."

"You are very kind, sir, I am sure."

"Not at all. I presume you have had a fairly good education. Are you good at figures?"

"Yes, sir, I think I may say so."

"That is all right, then. Here is a pen. Give me a specimen of your handwriting."

Charley took the pen from his employer's hand, and wrote his name and address on a sheet of paper in a large round hand.

"Very passable," said Mr. Forsyth, glancing at the writing. "Yes, you will do. You will start your new duties in the office on Monday morning, and it will depend entirely upon yourself to rise. Good-day, Charley."

Our young hero seemed to be treading on air as he walked home that Saturday afternoon. He had got the rise he had long hoped and prayed for, and Mr. Forsyth had told him that everything would now rest with himself.

How pleased his widowed mother would be to hear of his good fortune. He could scarcely contain himself for joy, and felt inclined to shout at the top of his voice in order to relieve his feelings.

On the Monday Charley presented himself at the shop without the uniform he had worn as messenger, but dressed in his best clothes, for his fond mother had told him he must try and make himself look as respectable as possible. He waited outside the office until the arrival of his fellow-clerks, and they all seemed aware of his promotion.

The younger ones, those nearer his own age, chummed in with him at once, and made him feel quite at home amongst them. They seemed to vie with one another in teaching him his duties, and helping him over the first few difficulties he experienced in getting a thorough grasp of the work.

Arnold Rylston, the cashier, did not come in till an hour or so later, and by that time Charley was deeply immersed in the mysteries of invoicing. He did not, therefore, see the malevolent glance cast at him by Rylston, as he strode through the outer office into the inner one.

But the lad soon learned he had not as kind a master now to deal with as he had had in the shop.

From the very first moment of Charley's entrance into the office, the cashier seemed to go out of his way to find fault with and abuse him. Now it was that this invoice was made out wrong; now that it had not been properly entered in the book.

It did not matter that Charley was generally able to point out that he had made no mistake, Rylston seemed determined to pick faults with his work with or without reason, and the book-keeper and managing clerk, Mr. Vane Hensel, far from putting a stop to this petty tyranny, positively seemed to lend a helping hand in it.

It soon became so apparent to the most unobservant of the other clerks that the cashier and bookkeeper were both "down" upon him, as one of them termed their miserable and unmanly persecution, that they used to sympathise with him afterwards and advise him not to mind.

And poor Charley, with the thoughts of his widowed mother

and what Mr. Forsyth had said to him about it resting with himself to get on, bore the nagging and fault-finding as patiently as he could, and did his work honestly and conscientiously, desperately striving to please his superiors. But eventually he began to despairingly tell himself that they did not want to be pleased, that nothing would please them, and, in a moment of weakness he sincerely wished himself back again in the shop as a simple errand-boy.

Then, ashamed of his wish the next, he resolved that he would not be so easily disheartened, that he would go on as he was doing, conscientiously endeavouring to perform his duty, in spite of the cashier or the bookkeeper's seeming animosity.

And so matters dragged on with him for weeks, Rylston and Hensel still persistently subjecting him to all manner of petty annoyance and browbeating. But with true British pluck Charley stuck to his guns through it all, and, by steady plodding and attention to the smallest details, made himself master of the art of bookkeeping, and effectually deprived his tormentors of the ability to find fault with his work.

One day, Mr. Forsyth himself entered the office, and after a look round crossed over to Charley's desk, and glanced over his shoulder as he was making out some bills.

"How is Clifford doing now?" he asked, turning to the book-keeper, Hensel, who stood respectfully by. "Giving every satisfaction, I hope."

"Well, no, sir, I can't say that he is," promptly replied that individual; "he is willing and hard-working, but he is not sharp enough."

Mr. Forsyth said nothing for a few minutes; but, taking some of the accounts Charley had just made out, glanced through them.

"You must try and be a little brisker, Charley," he said, as he laid them down again. "You know, if you want to get on, you must be quick at your work."

Then he turned to Vane Hensel, and said: "He's a good lad, and means well, I am sure. You must bear with him a little, Hensel."

Turning again to Charley, he added:

"Let me have a better report of you next time I drop in." And, with a nod and an encouraging smile, he walked away.

It was about six months after this, that Charley had occasion to stop late at the office one night to assist the cashier and book-keeper to make up the books. The auditor was expected in in a day or two, and it was necessary that everything should be in order for him.

Frequently, during the balancing of the accounts and the posting of the various books, Charley observed strange meaning looks and signs pass between the cashier and the bookkeeper. But he thought nothing of this peculiar conduct at the time, though he was subsequently to ask himself how it was it had not excited some suspicion in his mind.

The hours flew by while the three worked, until it was close on twelve, and all the assistants who lived in the establishment had long since retired to rest. At length, Rylston yawned, and, throwing down his pen, said:

"Well, I think I'll do no more for to-night."

"No, nor I," said Hensel, also pushing back his chair. "I think we have got pretty nearly everything straight now," casting a meaning glance at the other, unseen by Charley, who was still immersed in his labours. "Have you got much more to do, Clifford?"

"No, sir, I'll finish in another quarter of an hour."

"Oh, well, you might as well stop, then, and finish off. We want everything right by morning. Rylston and I will be going. Here's the key; you might lock up the place after you."

He handed Charley the key, and then, arm-in-arm, the pair sauntered out, and a few minutes later the youth heard them leave the building.

CHAPTER 4.

CHARLEY ATTACKED BY BURGLARS—HE IS RENDERED UNCONSCIOUS, AND KIDNAPPED TO A STRANGE HOUSE—MADAME GUICHARD IN LEAGUE WITH THE KIDNAPPERS—WHAT IS THE MYSTERY?—A VILE PLOT—HE IS BLINDFOLDED BY MASKED MEN AND TAKEN IN A CART.

Charley wrote on and on, but more than a quarter of an hour slipped by, and his task was not finished. Half an hour, three-quarters passed, and still he was busy racking his brain with apparently endless columns of figures.

At length, however, he threw down his pen with a sigh of relief, and rose from the desk. He was proceeding to put away the books he had been using, when he distinctly heard a foot-step outside the office door.

With a thrill of apprehension, he stood still and listened intently, but the noise was not repeated.

Believing that he must have been mistaken, and with a half-laugh at the trick he thought his imagination had played him, he put away the books, and then, extinguishing the gas, left the

office. He was locking the door behind him, when there came a rush of feet, and before he could turn, a cloak or bag was thrown over his head, and he was dragged, fighting desperately to free himself of the encumbering folds, to the ground.

He uttered a shout; but the thick cloak muffled the sound, and immediately after a strong grip fastened upon his throat and compressed it with strangling force. Vainly he strove to throw off the grasp—to use his hands to tear away those of his unknown assailant.

Another pair of hands tightly seized his wrists and pinioned his arms helplessly to his sides, and then he received several cruel, crushing blows upon the skull through the cloak, which speedily deprived him of all consciousness.

He knew no more until he came to and found himself bound hand and foot, and gagged, lying upon the bare, uncarpeted floor of a small, unfurnished room.

Where was he? What had happened to him?

His eyes roved round the bleak, cheerless apartment, and from the sloping ceiling and narrow, deep-set window, he guessed he was in the garret of some house. Some hours, he realised now, with a thrill of alarm, must have elapsed since he had lost consciousness, for it was broad daylight, and the sunlight was striving to make its way in through the dirt-coated panes.

Charley could only lie there and wonder what strange place he had got into, without being able to move hand or foot, or utter a single sound above a faint murmur. He could not but experience the keenest alarm and anxiety at finding himself thus

It was about three-quarters of an hour later, when his quick ears heard footsteps approaching the door of the garret, and, rolling over on his side, he faced the door, half relieved to think that he was at last to learn the meaning of his strange kidnapping, and yet filled with a certain amount of alarm, only natural under the circumstances.

The footsteps stopped outside the door. The handle was turned, and, to his utter amazement, a woman entered, a woman dressed in the height of fashion.

One glance at her face, and Charley, with a start, recognised her as Madame Guichard, the ex-buyer of Forsyth and Co.

"Ha, so you have come to, then, my young amateur detective!" she said, with a mocking laugh. "Well, how do you like your new lodgings? Snug, are they not? But you will appreciate them better when you find yourself an inmate of a prison-cell, as you will very shortly. You were kind enough to inform Mr. Forsyth that I was purloining laces and silks from the warehouse, and he gratefully promoted you from messenger to clerk. I would like to know what he must think of you now, though, when it is evident to everybody that your return for his kindness was to force open the safe last night and abstract all the gold and notes within it."

She bent a piercing glance upon Charley, who returned it with one of the utmost bewilderment and horror.

Had he heard aright? The woman accused him of having broken open the safe in the office and stolen its contents!

Surely, after all, he really must be dreaming—this must all be some hideous nightmare?

Madame Guichard laughed mockingly at sight of his horrified, amazed visage, and without another word sailed out of the room, her jeering laughter still ringing in his ears as she went downstairs again.

Then, in a moment of time, a light burst in upon the youth's confused faculties. He saw through the whole vile conspiracy of which he was the victim.

Madame Guichard had been in league with his assailants of the previous night who had robbed the safe, and then contrived to kidnap him here, so that when his disappearance was remarked, suspicion must evidently fall upon him of having been concerned in the burglary.

He groaned in the deepest anguish of mind, as he realised how black appearances must look against him, when he was not to be found after being left in sole charge of the office.

And this was Madame Guichard's revenge. Yet it must have been unpremeditated, for how could she or her accomplices have known that he would be the only one in the office at the time arranged for the burglary?

Oh, if only he could escape now, and get to the shop, he would at once see Mr. Forsyth, and explain away the whole horrid circumstance. With this idea, he began again to strive to free himself of his bonds, tugging and straining with all his might, but his most desperate exertions were in vain.

The stout ropes would not yield with all his trying, and he was once more obliged to desist from sheer exhaustion.

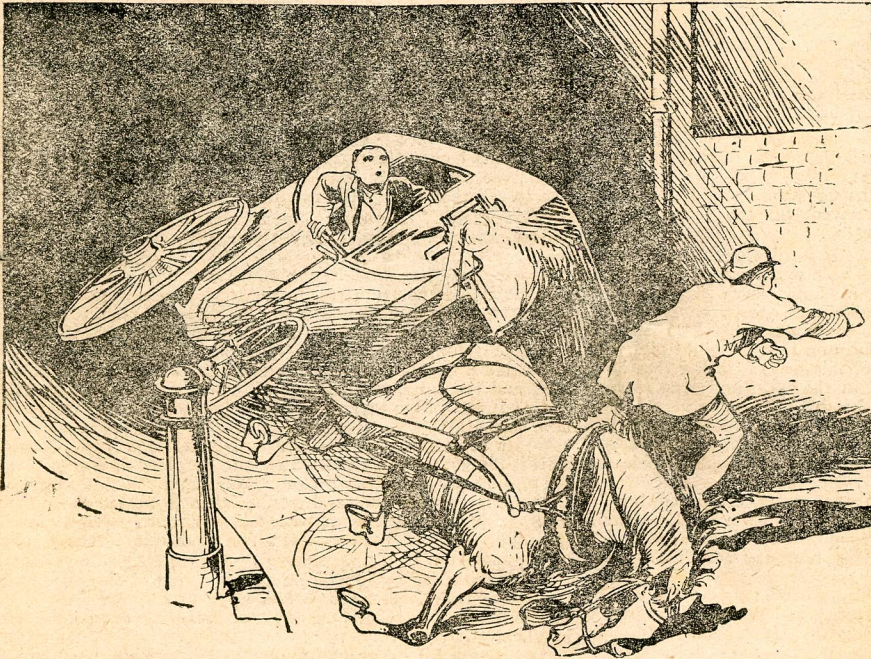
Hours rolled by, and he was still left lying there, bound and helpless. He saw no more of Madame Guichard, nor did anyone else come near him all day.

The mental agony and despair he experienced during that frightful captivity he could never afterwards even bear to think of.

From time to time he made other determined efforts to loosen his bonds; but it was all only so much waste of energy and labour, and the only result was that he chafed and lacerated his wrists and arms frightfully. The cords seemed positively to eat into his flesh, and the pain he suffered was excruciating.

The pangs of hunger and thirst also began to attack him, but not a soul came near him, and his heart sank in despair as night fell, and the wretched garret was presently plunged into total darkness.

It must have been long after midnight, when, with mingled feelings of relief and alarm, he once more heard footsteps coming up the stairs. The door opened, and two men entered bearing a lantern.



With a mighty crash, over went the cab on to the parapet on Mr. Jelk's side.

a helpless prisoner, and especially when he recalled the circumstance of that mysterious attack upon him in the office.

He asked himself again and again how he could have been brought to this place, who his assailants and captors possibly could have been, and what their object in thus kidnapping him?

He could find no answers to these self-put queries, and presently the thought struck him that perhaps after all it was nothing but a hideous, though startlingly realistic dream. So convinced at last did he become of this that he closed his eyes, and made a desperate effort to, if possible, throw off the thralls of the nightmare he believed he was suffering from.

But when he opened his eyes again, he only too fully realised that it was no dream, but a stern reality.

Yes, he was a prisoner, kidnapped in this, the nineteenth century, in the first city of the world, by whom or for what purpose he had not the slightest idea.

His suspense became agonising, unendurable as the moments dragged slowly on; and, at last, in a very frenzy of desperation, he began to tug and strain at the cords which bound his wrist in the vain hope of loosening them.

But the knots had been well tied, and would not give, though he strained and laboured until the perspiration bathed his body. From sheer fatigue, at length, he was obliged to abandon his efforts; and, throwing himself back upon the bare boards, he lay gasping and panting with his exertions.

They flashed the light upon the bound and prostrate form of our young hero, and, crossing over to him, without exchanging a single word, the two bent down over him and proceeded to tie a thick cloth over his eyes.

Charley caught a momentary glimpse of the heads of both men outlined against the rays of the lantern ere they succeeded in blindfolding him, and, with a strange thrill, saw that they were both wearing thick crape masks, which completely covered the face from forehead to chin, and effectually concealed the features with the exception of the eyes.

Bound as he was, Charley, of course, was unable to prevent them effecting their purpose, and when they had blindfolded him, his captors conferred for a few minutes together in whispers, and then the youth heard the footsteps of a third person mounding the stairs and entering the room.

After some more whispering, he felt himself lifted in the strong arms of two men, and borne out of the room and down several flights of stairs. When they reached the bottom of these, Charley heard a door unbolted and opened, and felt the cold night air strike upon his hands and face.

Once more he was taken up by his captors, and carried out as he believed into the open air. He felt himself lifted up and thrown roughly on to some hard material.

Then a cloak or rug was tossed over him, and there came an interval of several minutes.

Presently he heard a man's tones shout "Gee-up!"

There was the crack of a whip, and, simultaneous with the rattle of wheels over a rough road, Charley felt the hard surface on which he lay begin to jolt and vibrate.

In a flash, he realised he was in the bottom of a cart, and was being driven away from the mysterious house in which he had been detained a prisoner.

His heart sank anew at this, for he had built certain hopes during his captivity of clearing himself from the imputation of being concerned in the burglary by being able to bring the police to the house to which he had been kidnapped. There was no hope of his being able to do so now.

Lying in the bottom of the cart, he was soon bruised and sore all over from the jolting he received, for the vehicle was evidently being driven at a rapid rate.

Over the rough stones they rattled, until Charley Clifford thought every bone in his body had been shaken to pieces; but after about three-quarters of an hour of this sort of travelling, the conveyance got on to a wooden or asphalt pavement, and thereafter ran pretty smoothly, the wheels making little noise, and the horse's hoofs ringing out dully on the still night air.

Charley imagined from the fact of this sort of paving that he was being taken through the heart of the City, and once more he desperately strove to burst his bonds, or free his mouth of the gag. For some distance they rolled along thus lightly and easily, but presently they were once more clattering and jolting over stones, and after about another hour of this the vehicle came to a stop.

Wondering what was to be the next move of his captors, Charley waited, and after a slight interval felt the cloak pulled from over him. He was dragged roughly out of the cart, and was borne along for some distance by the head and feet by a couple of men.

Then he was thrown down upon damp earth; one of the men fumbled for a few minutes at the cords which bound his wrists, and then he heard them both running away from him.

CHAPTER 5.

CHARLEY FINDS HIS HANDS UNBOUND, AND HIS CAPTORS FLOWN—MAKES HIS WAY TO SOME HOUSES—IS ABOUT TO KNOCK AT ONE OF THE DOORS, WHEN POUNCED ON BY A POLICEMAN—TAKEN TO THE STATION ON SUSPICION—LOCKED UP FOR THE NIGHT—BROUGHT UP BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE—REMANDED—MR. FORSYTH EFFECTS HIS RELEASE.

For several minutes Charley lay where his captors had tossed him; then it suddenly dawned upon him that they were not coming back, but had left him there to be found by the first person who came that way. Making an effort, he struggled into a sitting posture, and, to his astonishment and delight, found his wrists were free.

His captors had severed his bonds ere leaving him. Quickly he disengaged his hands of the loose rope, and tore the bandage from his eyes.

He looked round him in astonishment. He was in a field, and the stars were twinkling overhead.

With feverish haste, he set to work and untied the cords which still bound his legs, and then he scrambled to his feet and stood, wondering where on earth he was, and what he should best do.

There was not a human figure in sight, so he struck across the field and came to a low, wooden fence, separating it from the

road. He climbed over, and, keeping along the road, presently reached some houses.

Not knowing in what part of London he was, but believing he was in some outlying suburb, he determined, after some hesitation, to knock up the inmates of the first house, and ask for food and shelter until morning. He did not altogether like to do so, however; he felt that the occupants must assuredly look upon him as an impostor were he to tell them of his startling adventures, and they would be almost certain to refuse to admit him.

But then, as he reflected that if he were to continue his way he might only be striking further and further out of London in his ignorance of which way to turn, he at length plucked up sufficient courage to open the gate and approach the door.

Here he again hesitated, and was of two minds, whether or not he should knock or go away, when the light of a bull's-eye lantern was suddenly flashed in his face, and a gruff voice cried:

"What are you doing there?"

Charley was so taken aback by the suddenness of the query that he was unable to find his voice for a moment, and the next he found himself in the strong grasp of a policeman.

"Caught you in the very act, eh? Come along now, and no nonsense, or I'll soon knock it out of you. Are you going to come quietly?"

Charley was too dazed for the minute to quite grasp the situation, and the constable, thinking this silence meant that he was meditating some desperate attempt to get away, promptly slipped the handcuffs upon his wrists.

"I've got you now safe and sound, my beauty," he said. "You've got to come with me to the station. I guessed you were up to some little game when I saw the suspicious way you hung about the gate. Come on, now! March!"

He screwed his knuckles into the back of our hero's neck, and pushed him along before him, while the youth at last awakening to the gravity of the situation began incoherently to try and explain matters to the man.

But the officer only laughed at him for his pains, and told him to tell that tale to the marines.

"Get along," he said; "you needn't try to come any dodges over me. Why, I caught you in the very act of trying the door."

Charley saw it would be useless to attempt to convince the man he spoke the truth, so he relapsed into silence, and with the best grace possible allowed himself to be taken to the police-station, and there charged with frequenting with intent to commit a felony.

When his captor had had his say, he told his extraordinary tale, and the inspector listened with a grave face; but at the end of it the latter turned to the policeman who had arrested him, and said:

"You've made a finer capture, Nicols, than you thought. This is the youth who's wanted for the burglary at Forsyth and Co.'s, without a doubt. So, my lad, that's the tale you tell, eh? It's very clever, and you'd make a fortune at novel-writing; but it won't wash with me. You are going to spend the night in a cell, and you can tell your tale to the justices in the morning."

Charley was led away with an awful feeling of despair clutching at his heart. He was locked up in a cell for the rest of the night, and in the morning was brought before the local magistrates.

As he took his place in the dock and heard his name called, he looked despairingly round; but there was not a single face there he knew, and in a sort of apathy he heard the charge read out again, and the police ask for a remand on the grounds that they believed they had got hold of one of the burglars at Forsyth's Drapery Stores.

Then, still sunk in that apathetic state, he was hustled out of the dock again, and once more incarcerated in one of the cells. The day he put in was one he never forgot, and at times such terrible despair seized upon him that he thought he would go mad.

Remanded on suspicion of being concerned in a burglary, of having robbed his employer as a return for the latter's kindness.

The mental anguish he suffered was dreadful; but he could—he would prove his innocence! He would denounce Madame Guichard as being in league with the real thieves and his kidnappers.

Surely, someone—Mr. Forsyth, Mr. Kenyon, all his friends at the shop—would believe him; and yet, as he realised in his calmer moments how extravagantly wild and improbable seemed the tale he had to tell of being kidnapped and kept in confinement by the real burglars, his heart sank within him, and he flung himself face downwards upon the floor of his cell and abandoned himself to the wildest grief.

Next day he was brought up again before the magistrate, and this time, as his eyes roved half hopefully, half despondently round the court, he caught sight of Mr. Forsyth himself talking with the inspector. He had no time to notice more before his

name was called, and he was led forward by a constable to the front of the dock.

The charge was read out again, the police-officer who had arrested Charley gave his evidence, and then there was a slight stir, as Mr. Forsyth rose from his seat and stated that he declined to prosecute the prisoner as he was firmly convinced he had had no hand in the burglary at his establishment.

"I have just had from the inspector's lips," he said, "the story the unfortunate youth told him of having been kidnapped and kept in confinement by the actual thieves, and highly improbable though it sounds, I firmly believe that he has told the truth. The woman he has mentioned as being concerned in his kidnapping, I may tell you, was, when in my employ as lace and silk buyer, proved to be a thief, chiefly through this young fellow's instrumentality, so that you see, your worships, she may very well have conceived the idea of kidnapping him out of revenge. I am sure I need only remark that the young man in the dock has always borne the most irreproachable of characters, and that I, his employer, whom he is alleged to have robbed, hold him in the highest esteem to bring about his acquittal."

The magistrates hummed and hawed a little, but after a short whispered consultation, agreed to dismiss the charge of frequenting with intent, and, with his heart full of bursting, Charley Clifford stepped from the dock free once more.

He rushed immediately to Mr. Forsyth, and caught and wrung that gentleman's hand.

"Oh, how can I ever thank you, sir, for your kindness to me for believing in my innocence when everybody seemed to believe me guilty? Indeed, indeed, sir, I am innocent, and I was kidnapped by the real thieves!"

"I believe you, Charley," was Mr. Forsyth's reply. "You haven't the face of a thief, and far from associating you myself with the burglary, when I heard you had disappeared, I believed at once the thieves had kidnapped you so as to keep you out of the way. Did you recognise any of your assailants on the night of the burglary?"

"No, sir, for they attacked me from behind and flung a bag or coat over my head before I could turn or shout for help."

His employer did not answer, but conducted the youth out of the court into the street, where Mr. Forsyth's own brougham was waiting.

"Get in, Charley," said the driver to the astonished lad. And, with a feeling that he could never return this debt of gratitude his kind employer had put him under, our hero scrambled inside the vehicle, and a few minutes later they were driving quickly towards London.

"You will resume your duties in the office, Charley, just as if nothing whatever had happened," said Mr. Forsyth. And then he made the youth tell him the whole circumstances of his kidnapping and confinement in the strange house.

He listened apparently with the keenest interest; though, as a matter of fact, the whole time he was closely scrutinising the young fellow's face as though trying to read whether he was telling the truth or not.

"He acts and speaks as though he were," he said to himself, "and if he is not telling the truth he is a more accomplished actor than I should have believed. No, no; a boy with an honest, open face like that guilty? I cannot believe it. Anyhow, I am glad I have decided to give him another chance. If he really was concerned in that burglary, which I don't for a moment think, he will soon show himself in his true colours, and I can take measures to have a sharp eye kept upon him."

"No, I'm beginning to think there are cleverer schemers at work to try and ruin me than this simple lad. I cannot understand matters lately at all. The books seemed all right when I looked at them last, and yet—yet there is some foul work going on somewhere, I firmly believe. I must have the auditor in next week, at any rate, without fail."

After this Mr. Forsyth relapsed into silence, and the rest of the long ride to the shop was accomplished without the occupants of the brougham exchanging another word.

Charley was received back by his fellow-clerks in the office with every symptom of cordiality and sympathy. The fact that Mr. Forsyth believed in the truth of his story was sufficient for most of them; and, moreover, none of them had for a single instant thought him guilty of the burglary.

They made him recite his startling adventure again and again, and hung upon his words with the keenest interest.

"By jingo, Charley, you have had an adventure," said one youth about his own age, named Will James. "They say 'Truth is stranger than fiction.' Well, I never believed it before, but I do now."

"I am blessed if I should care to have to go through such a terrible adventure," observed another. "You must have had an awful time of it, Charley. Phew, the very idea of passing through such an ordeal gives me a cold shiver down the back!"

So much for Charley's reception from the junior clerks.

The cashier, Arnold Rylston, and the bookkeeper, Vane Hemsel, though they did not actually make any remark or throw

out any innuendo, which might be construed into implying that he was concerned in the burglary, treated him, however, with a supercilious and freezing contempt which cut deeper into the lad's sensitive nature than any words could have done.

CHAPTER 6.

CHARLEY BACK AGAIN IN THE OFFICE—HE FINDS A SUSPICIOUS SCRAP OF PAPER IN RYLSTON'S ROOM—SENT TO THE BANK WITH A CHECKQUE—CHARLEY DETECTS IT AS A CLEVER FORGERY—STUNNED BY THE DISCOVERY, HE RETURNS TO THE OFFICE AND INTERCEPTS MR. FORSYTH.

Charley Clifford went about his duties in the office just the same as ever, though during the next few days he was being constantly called into the head's private office to meet the detectives, whom Mr. Forsyth had employed to try and trace the burglars.

To these he gave the fullest information in his power, and they exerted themselves to the utmost to discover the whereabouts of the house in which he had been confined, as well as of the woman known as Madame Guichard.

Her personal description was published broadcast, and the police entertained high hopes of running her to earth, when they hoped the tracing of the others in the plot would be comparatively easy.

The constable, who had been on duty in the vicinity of the drapery stores, now came forward with the statement that on the night of the burglary, and at precisely the same hour at which Charley was attacked in the office, he had observed a covered cart standing at the back of the premises; but he had thought nothing of the circumstance, as vans were often there to a late hour.

Questioned as to what manner of man the driver was, the officer said he had taken very little notice of the man; but as far as he could remember he was undersized and slightly built, and wore a heavy coat and slouched hat.

The detectives had no doubt but that the driver of the cart was none other than the woman Guichard, in disguise, and that after the burglary she and the others concerned in it had driven off with the booty and their prisoner to the house in which the latter found himself on returning to consciousness. As usual, the officers were confident they would succeed in finding the criminals within a few days; but those few days drifted into weeks, and still they had not got upon the track.

The auditor had not yet been in to examine the books, but he had promised faithfully now to be in in another day or so, and all the clerks were once more pretty busy.

Charley had occasion to go into the cashier's office to ask that gentleman something relating to the accounts; and, finding he was not in, he thought he might obtain the necessary information by referring to the cashbook, which lay open on the desk.

As he turned over the pages to look for the account he wanted, a small, doubled piece of blotting-paper slipped forth and fell to the floor, and as he stooped to pick it up a scrap of notepaper slid from between the doubled leaves.

Picking this up also, Charley was about to replace them both between the pages of the cashbook, when, to his astonishment, he saw the notepaper was covered with signatures of his employer. The name, "Richd. J. Forsyth," was scribbled all over it.

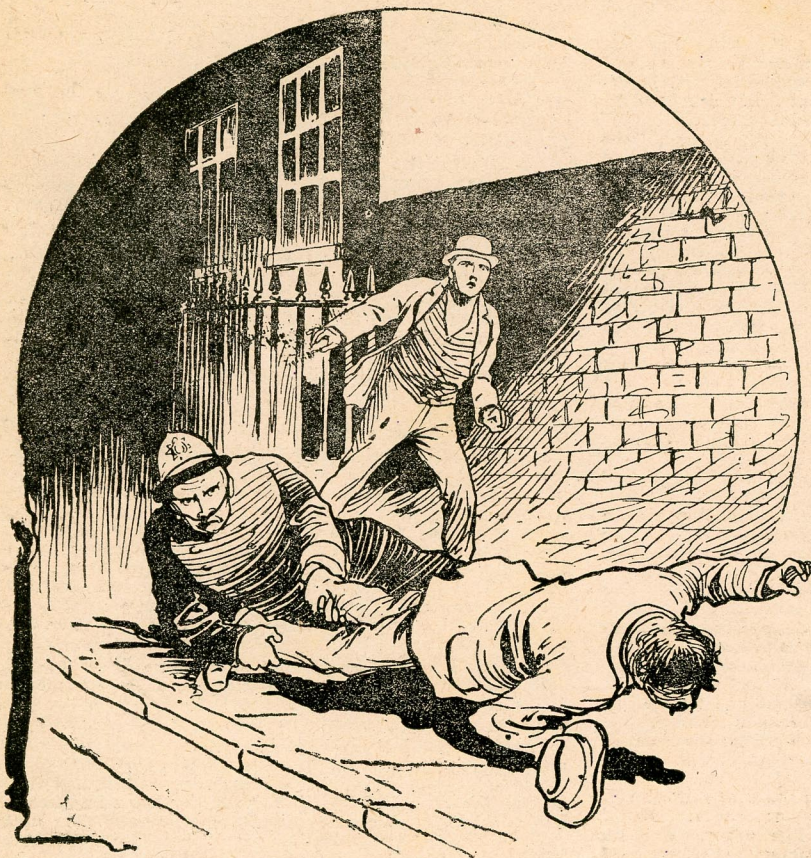
He marvelled greatly at this, and asked himself what on earth was the meaning of it. Surely the head of so large and busy an establishment had something else to do with his time than to write his autograph all over a scrap of paper?

No suspicion, however, that there could possibly be anything wrong crossed his mind for a single instant, and he carefully replaced the sheet of notepaper inside the blotting-paper, and both within the leaves of the cashbook, lest Rylston should know he had disturbed them. Then he looked through the book and found the entry he sought, and was about to quit the office, when his eye rested by the merest chance upon the firm's cheque-book, which lay open close by.

Without exactly meaning to read it, he saw that the cheque lying uppermost was made out "Pay selves or bearer £500," and was signed by Mr. Forsyth. But what particularly caught his eye was that the word "hundred," where the amount was written out in full was a positive scrawl, and might very easily be mistaken, he thought, if a "t" was put in front of it for "thousand."

He was turning away to leave the room, when the door flew open, and Arnold Rylston entered hurriedly. At sight of Charley standing near the desk, the cashier started back with a low cry, and turned deathly pale.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded hoarsely, when he could find his voice. "What business have you in my office?"



He grasped the ankles of the nearest man, and brought him down heavily on his face.

"I came to ask you, sir, for Boyce's account," replied Charley, in mild surprise at the cashier's startled aspect. "As you were not in, I took the liberty of looking it up in the cashbook."

"How dared you? How dare you touch anything on my desk?" retorted the other, the colour gradually creeping back into his cheeks, and an angry light now flashing from his eyes. "Kindly remember in future your place is outside this office, and if you have anything to ask me, and I don't happen to be in at the time, you can wait until I do come in! Don't let me catch you in here again alone, do you hear?"

Charley, though his cheeks flushed with righteous indignation at the unmistakable imputation contained in the other's words, bit his underlip and withdrew without a word.

However, as he took his place at his own desk in the outer room, some of his fellow-clerks noted the colour in his face and the fire in his eyes, and Will James inquired in a whisper across the intervening space:

"What's wrong, old fellow? That bully Rylston been blowing you up again? It's a confounded shame the way he gets on to you! Never mind, Charley, hard words break no bones."

Our hero worked away in silence the rest of the morning, and tried to forget the wanton insult that he had received. But in vain, the remembrance constantly rose in his mind and he felt that he hated Rylston.

He thought no more, however, of the scrap of notepaper, covered with signatures, nor of the badly written-out cheque. The affront had quite banished them from his mind.

After dinner he had barely resumed his seat at his desk when Rylston came into the office, and after whispering a few minutes aside to the bookkeeper Hensel, crossed over to Charley's side, and thrust a cheque into his hand.

"Clifford," said he, in for him an unusually amiable tone, "you might run over to the bank with this and get it cashed. I want it in gold and notes. Look sharp, and be back as soon as you can."

Charley took the cheque without replying, and, thrusting it into his breast-pocket without glancing at it, glided off his stool to the floor. He was about to put on his hat and coat, when Rylston, who was looking at him strangely and apparently thoughtfully the whole time, said:

"You will be careful with that cheque, Clifford. It is for

a pretty large amount, and you had better take it mostly in notes. It will be easier to carry."

"Very well, sir," answered the youth. And a minute later he was out in the street, and walking briskly to the bank. When he reached it, he found it pretty full, and as he stood waiting his turn at the counter, he drew forth the cheque from his pocket and looked at it.

It was for £5,000, and he uttered a cry of incredulous amazement as he recognised the number on it as the same he had seen on the cheque exposed on the cashier's desk for £500.

The number certainly ran into six figures, but Charley had a remarkably good memory. Moreover, the number, somehow, of the cheque he had seen had come back to his mind with startling vividness.

To cap all, there was a large dirty mark, as if from the impression of a not over-clean thumb, upon the cheque he now held in his hand, which he distinctly remembered having observed on the one on the cashier's desk.

It was the same cheque, without the shadow of a doubt, and Charley reeled, half-stunned by the discovery he had made.

The cheque, made out originally for £500, and signed by Mr. Forsyth for that amount, had been tampered with:—had been altered from that sum to £5,000!

Charley gazed at the cheque's face again, and saw that the word "thousand" had undoubtedly the appearance of patching—was, indeed, the scrawl, supposed to be the word "hundred," neatly and ingeniously altered with the letter "t" written before it. A close scrutiny clearly showed the work of alteration.

Charley did not notice the bank cashier was waiting for him—that there was no one now between him and the counter. He was stupefied, dazed by the discovery he had made, and with an impatient exclamation the bank-clerk stretched forth his hand for a bundle of cheques offered him by one of those behind the young fellow.

Then Charley felt himself rudely elbowed aside, and still barely able to grasp the full import of his discovery, he groped his way to the door. Once outside, however, his brain cleared, and he realised the meaning of the whole miserable affair.

The cheque was forged, that was certain; and there was only one man who could possibly have committed the forgery—the cashier, Arnold Rylston.

As this fact forced itself upon him, Charley saw that it was his duty to at once return to the office and denounce the forger, and with this intention he at once began to retrace his steps to the shop.

But as he went, turning over and over in his mind the whole strange affair, he came to a halt several times, and asked himself whether he should not go back to the bank and cash the cheque after all.

For all he knew, perhaps it was with Mr. Forsyth's own consent and knowledge that the cheque was so altered to ten times the original amount. But then he reflected that that gentleman would scarcely be likely to do such a thing. It would be, practically, teaching his subordinate how to defraud him at a later period.

And the finger-print, together with the number of the cheque, did away with the possibility of its being another cheque than the one he had seen.

No; all doubt that he was doing right in not cashing the cheque, but in taking it back with him, was cleared up in his mind by these reflections, and he felt assured that a bare-faced fraud had been perpetrated.

It was his duty to apprise his employer at once of the fact, and so Charley continued his way.

He was approaching the office door, when he saw Mr. Forsyth's phaeton waiting outside, and just as he gained it, that gentleman came bustling forth and skipped lightly into the vehicle.

CHAPTER 7.

MR. FORSYTH TAKES CHARLEY WITH HIM TO THE BANK—VANE HEMSEL SEES THEM DRIVE AWAY, AND SCENTS DANGER—HINTS HIS FEARS TO RYLSTON, AND THE TWO DECIDE TO FLY—FURY OF MR. FORSYTH WHEN HE FINDS THE ROGUES HAVE FLED—THE AUDITOR COMES TO EXAMINE THE BOOKS.

Charley sprang forward at once, and, laying his hand on the splashboard, cried:

"Mr. Forsyth! Mr. Forsyth! I want to speak with you a moment!"

The draper turned in astonishment, and his wonder grew as he beheld the only half-suppressed excitement of his young clerk.

"Well, what is it?" he asked heartily, looking the surprise he felt.

"Oh, sir, can I have a word with you in private?"

Mr. Forsyth stared at the youth, but what he read in the latter's expressive face made him say:

"Certainly, certainly, my lad!" Adding in a whisper,

"Have you found out something about the burglars?"

"It is not that, sir," answered Charley. "But it is about this cheque I was sent to the bank with!"

"About a cheque—what cheque?"

Charley made no response, but, drawing forth the cheque, simply handed it to him. Mr. Forsyth took it, and, glancing sharply at it, was beginning:

"Well, what's wrong with it?" when he stopped, stared at the paper in amazement for an instant, then rubbed his eyes, and looked again.

"Why, bless my soul!" he said, what is the meaning of this? Do my eyes deceive me, or is it really made out for five thousand? Why, I never signed any such cheque. Great heavens!"

He turned and stared at Charley, who hastened to say:

"It is a forgery, then, sir? I thought so; that is why I did not present it at the bank, but brought it back to show you."

"Come inside! Come inside!" gasped, rather than spoke, the amazed draper, and springing from the phaeton, he led Charley into his private office, which was the door in the corridor just before that of the general office.

He motioned to our hero to shut the door after him, and then, in a hoarse whisper, he inquired:

"Can you throw any light on this mysterious affair? You seemed to know that the cheque was forged. How did you come to learn that? Who gave you the cheque?"

"It was the cashier, Mr. Rylston, gave me the cheque," replied Charley, who could well understand, and partly shared, the excitement under which the other was labouring.

"And I thought it must have been forged, sir, because I saw the same cheque for only £500 lying on the cashier's desk when I went in this morning to refer to the cashbook. I knew it was the same, sir, because I took particular notice of the number, and also that it bore a finger-mark just under your signature."

Mr. Forsyth eyed him keenly as he made this explanation, and then glanced at the cheque.

"You are a smart lad to have noticed the finger-mark," he said, after a moment's silence.

Then suddenly his face darkened, an angry fire leaped into his eyes, and he took a quick step towards the door communicating with the clerk's department.

"By heavens!" he muttered half aloud. "Rylston is defrauding me. He alone can have forged this cheque. I will confront him with this evidence of his guilt before the whole office."

But even as his hand was on the door-knob he paused, and returning to the middle of the room, stood for a few moments lost in thought.

"Charley," he said at last, "you are a good lad. You have been the means of preventing this fraud being practised

upon me—of exposing a miserable thief and forger. I will not forget you for this incalculable service. I am going to the bank to make further inquiries, to have a proper investigation made, and—you had better come with me."

"Very good, sir," answered our hero, and a few minutes later Mr. Forsyth and he were driving as fast as the pony could travel to the bank.

But the two had been seen to enter the phaeton by a party almost as immediately concerned in the forgery as the cashier himself.

This was none other than the bookkeeper, Vane Hensel, who, we may as well now mention, connived at, and aided in, the systematic frauds perpetrated by the cashier upon their employer.

Rylston had forged cheque after cheque, by altering the amounts upon them, and Hensel had made false entries in the books under his charge so as to hide the frauds. Detection, therefore, was made a matter of considerable difficulty, and the falsifications in the books were made to such an extent that these would have to undergo a very severe audit before the frauds could possibly be discovered.

Hensel, therefore, knew that the cheque Charley had taken to the bank was a fraudulent one, and when he saw the youth and Mr. Forsyth seated together in the phaeton, and remarked the stern, resolute face of the latter, he at once guessed that the game was up—that in some way the forgery had been detected.

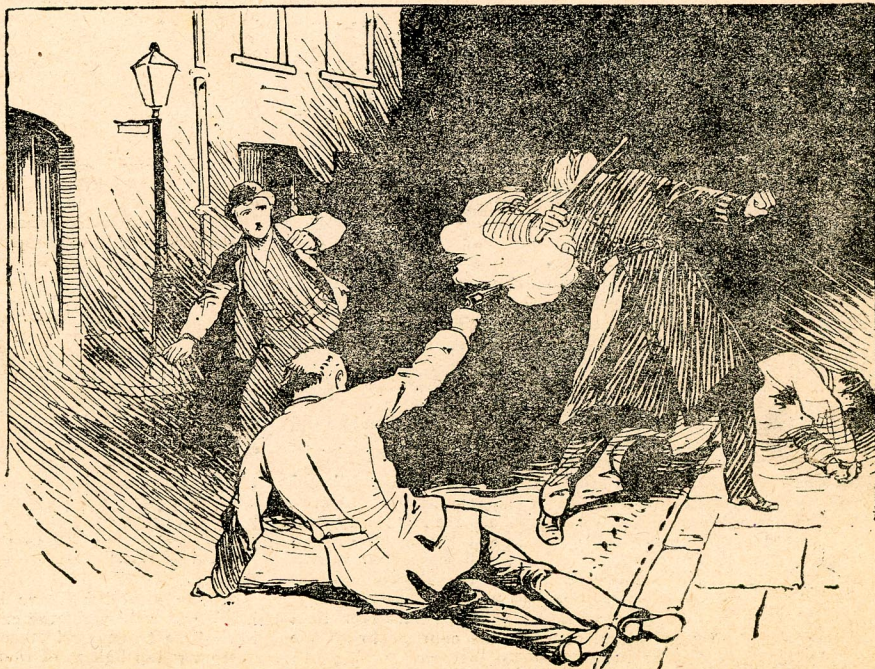
No sooner was he convinced of this than he darted back into the office, and hastily entered the cashier's room. In a very few words he informed the latter of the grounds for his fears, and that individual speedily shared them.

"That confounded young fool has given us away," Rylston vociferated. "He must have seen the cheque as it lay on my desk, before I altered it. I found him nosing round when I came in this morning. Curse the luck! Why did I risk giving it him to cash? We've both got to clear out, Hensel; duce'd quickly, too, or we'll both see the inside of a prison-cell this very day."

"I don't see that I should run," said Hensel slowly. "Suspicion can only rest on you."

"Fool!" retorted Rylston. "What about your books? Will they bear examination? And won't the very natural query be asked—how could I commit these frauds without your knowledge? You are a bigger fool than I took you for, Vane!"

The other turned deathly pale. "I forgot the books!" he gasped. "Good heavens! we are ruined, if that cheque really has been intercepted. But"—and his face suddenly lighted up—"how do we know for certain that we are discovered? Forsyth may merely have taken the boy—"



The policeman fell back with a low cry of "He's shot me!"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the other. "Forsyth has gone round to the bank with the boy and that cursed cheque. That's as plain as Doomsday. That boy, I tell you, must have seen the cheque before it was altered, and have smelt a rat when he saw it again at the bank. We've got to clear out, as I said before. Forsyth may be back any moment with a posse of police at his heels!"

A few minutes later the clerks in the outer office saw the two walk out with their hats and coats on.

"I'm just going across to Jones's, James," Rylston, the cooler scoundrel of the two, said to the young clerk. "If Mr. Forsyth should come back and want me, you might tell him I'll not be long."

It was over an hour after, when Mr. Forsyth re-entered the office, followed by Charley, an official from the bank, and a couple of policemen.

Will James and his fellow-clerks stared in astonishment at sight of the blue-coated officers of the law, and wonderingly followed the figure of their employer, as he rushed to the door of the cashier's private office and unceremoniously threw it open.

He came out again immediately, his face ablaze with baffled rage and indignation.

"Where is Mr. Rylston?" he demanded of Will James.

"He went out over an hour ago, sir, with Mr. Hensel. They said they were going across to Jones's, and that they would not be long if you asked for them."

Mr. Forsyth turned hastily to the bank official, and asked: "Can the rascals have got wind in some way that their frauds have been discovered? Hardly, I should say."

Then, turning again to James, he went on:

"Run across to Jones's, James, and tell Rylston and Hensel I want to see them both at once."

While James was gone, Mr. Forsyth and the bank official whispered together, while Charley stood aloof from his fellow-clerks, and the latter exchanged significant glances.

"Clifford has been found out in some wrongdoing," they each and all thought to themselves. "I wonder what on earth he's done? Yet he does not look as if he were guilty of any crime. Perhaps they've found out something more about the burglary—have caught the thieves?"

But their curiosity was not to be satisfied yet awhile. James returned presently with the information that neither Mr. Rylston nor Mr. Hensel had been across to Jones's, the large tailor's establishment opposite.

At this Mr. Forsyth turned to the bank official, and said:

"I do believe the rogues have caught the alarm and taken to flight. What is best to be done? I am determined I will be fooled and tricked no longer by ingrates like these. I will put the whole machinery of the law in operation against them. This is too audacious a fraud!"

The quiet, self-possessed man was roused at last; his kindly, generous nature was stirred to its uttermost depths by the base ingratitude and chicanery of the two men, in whom he had trusted implicitly, reposed such blind faith. He was determined they should not escape his just anger, that the full penalty of the law they had outraged should be meted out to them.

He directed the two constables to wait in his private office, and instructed them to detain the cashier and bookkeeper in case they did return, while he himself and the bank official re-entered the phaeton and drove to Scotland Yard to put the police upon the track of the forgers.

This done, they returned to the office, and despatched one of the clerks for the auditor to come at once to go through the books with them.

That individual thought it better to obey the summons right away this time, and when he arrived he remained closeted in Mr. Forsyth's office with that gentleman and the official from the bank until closing time.

Charley had gone back to his desk as soon as the auditor arrived, and his brother-clerks plied him with eager questions as to what all this excitement meant, but he told them he did not think he would be justified in saying anything just yet. Mr. Forsyth might not like him to.

Thereupon, they one and all voted him "a mean cad," and even his friend Will James joined in the general abuse of him. But this did not affect Charley very much. He knew very well that his employer would not like him to make what had occurred common property yet awhile; and, convinced he was acting rightly in maintaining silence, all the abusive epithets his fellow-clerks could hurl at him had no effect whatever.

In this he proved that he had that higher attribute even than mere physical courage—moral courage, the courage to do the right thing, or what he conscientiously believed to be right, despite the jeers and abuse of those around him.

CHAPTER 8.

CHARLEY ACCOMPANIES MR. JELK, WHO TAKES THE BOOKS HOME WITH HIM FOR THE NIGHT—THE CABMAN'S STRANGE BEHAVIOUR—THE UPSET—THE SCHEME TO SEIZE THE BOOKS—CHARLEY PURSUES RYLSTON AND HIS ASSOCIATES, WHO DRIVE OFF IN ANOTHER CAB—HE NOTES THE HOUSE THEY ENTER.

The auditor, whose name was Jelk, could not possibly go through all the books in a single evening, and he was unwilling to stay all night; while Mr. Forsyth, remembering that the fraudulent cashier had a key to the safe as well as to the office itself, was equally as unwilling that the books should be left there all night. He had not forgotten the late burglary, and the ease with which the safe had been opened on that occasion.

Eventually it was decided that Mr. Jelk, after working at the books up to a late hour, should take them home with him in a cab, and bring them back with him next morning.

Charley Clifford, Will James, and one or two of the other clerks stayed late to keep him company, as well as assist him in his work by explaining anything he might want to know.

About midnight Mr. Jelk determined to give over work for the night, and a cab was sent for, and he asked Charley to accompany him to his home, which was in Highbury, and not far from the lad's.

The young fellow, needless to say, jumped at the offer, and the books of the firm were placed on the front seat of the four-wheeler that had been brought, and Mr. Jelk and Charley took their seats, after the latter had seen all his brother-clerks out of the office, and looked up with the key Mr. Forsyth had entrusted him with.

The cabby whipped up his horse, and they drove off at a smart pace along Oxford Street, and turned into Great Russell Street, past the British Museum into Southampton Row. Cutting through Guildford Street, they passed the Foundling Hospital, and got into Gray's Inn Road.

They followed this to King's Cross, then drove along Pentonville Road until they reached the Angel.

Now, however, instead of driving along Upper Street, their cabby took them down the Liverpool Road, which is by no means a very well-lighted, or much frequented thoroughfare at night.

Charley noticed the route the driver was taking, and suggested to Mr. Jelk that they should tell him to drive along Upper Street; but that gentleman observed:

"Oh, never fear, he'll find his way. You can rely on a cabby for taking the shortest cuts."

Charley said no more; but he certainly thought the man was taking them a rather roundabout way.

They were about half-way up the Liverpool Road, when all at once the cabby turned his horse down a side street to the left, and began to drive like mad.

"What on earth has taken the man?" cried Mr. Jelk, springing to his feet. "Hi! cabby! cabby!" he shouted, hammering on the glass of the window next him. "You are going the wrong way!"

But the man took no notice of his shouting, if he heard him, but lashed at the horse with the whip, until the terrified animal bounded away at its fastest, and the cab swayed and rocked frightfully from side to side, threatening every moment to upset.

Mr. Jelk could scarcely keep his feet, and thoroughly alarmed now, he tugged at the window-strap on his side to let down the window, while Charley strove to open the other.

They were now in a dark, dismal alley, where there was not room for two cabs to pass each other; and, just as Charley succeeded in getting open his window and thrust forth his head, he distinctly saw the driver drag the horse's head round in such a way as to catch the kerbstone with the near wheel.

An upset was inevitable; and, with a mighty crash, over went the cab on to the parapet on Mr. Jelk's side. Charley, with his body half through the window on the opposite side, escaped with but a few slight bruises; while, just as the catastrophe occurred, the cabman sprang from the box and so saved himself.

But Mr. Jelk was undoubtedly seriously injured, if not killed; and Charley, deeply concerned, bent down inside the cab, and groped for him in the darkness.

He could feel him lying still and motionless, and so he turned to scramble out of the other window of the cab.

As he put his head and hands through the aperture with the intention of drawing himself up, he, to his delight, heard voices, and was about to call to their owners for help, when a well-remembered voice struck upon his ear—the voice of Arnold Rylston.

"They must both have been stunned by the fall. Lend a hand, and we'll right the cab and get the books. Quick! there is no time to be lost! Someone may come along."

He saw the figures of four men on the kerb, and like a flash it dawned upon him that the catastrophe was no accident, but

part of a premeditated scheme to seize the books and prevent the falsifications being detected.

The cabby must have been in league with the scoundrels, Rylston and Hemsel, and the whole thing been neatly and ingeniously planned.

Sinking down again into the interior of the cab, Charley hastily turned over in his mind what course to pursue, and while so occupied felt the cab give a lurch, and slowly rise under the united efforts of the gang.

In a moment his mind was made up, and, as the cab was slowly righted, he noiselessly opened the door beside him and leaped out into the road. He heard the men whispering and muttering, as they stood on the opposite side of the cab, and darting quickly across the street unobserved by them, he fairly flew back towards Liverpool Road in hopes of meeting a constable.

At the corner, he came upon another cab waiting with the driver on the box, and as he rushed out of the alley this man uttered a startled cry, and, springing down, gave chase to him. But the youth easily outstripped him, and now began to shout at the top of his lungs:

"Help! Help! Police! Thieves! Police!"

The pursuer thereupon turned, and, running back to his cab, scrambled on to the box again and blew a shrill whistle. Charley still ran on; but there was not a soul within sight, much less a policeman, and shout as he might no one came.

He felt he could not leave Mr. Jelk to the mercy of the gang of ruffians, and so, despairing of obtaining assistance, he ran back to the corner of the alley, just as the cab he had seen waiting came driving furiously out of it.

Charley pulled back hastily into the shadow of a doorway, and saw distinctly by the light of a street-lamp the faces of Rylston, Hemsel, and two others, strangers to him, inside the cab.

Our hero knew not what to do. How could he leave the unfortunate Mr. Jelk lying inside the wrecked cab, perhaps in a dying condition? And yet, if he did not follow this vehicle, the dastardly authors of the outrage would assuredly escape.

As he stood hesitating, he heard the heavy tramp of a policeman approaching. His cries, after all, had attracted attention.

The officer came up, and, pointing up the alley, Charley shouted:

"There is a man lying killed or senseless up there. Go to his help! That cab contains his assailants. I am going to follow it!"

With that he bounded away, though the officer called on him to stop, and blew his whistle for assistance.

Charley was determined the dastardly gang should not get away if he could prevent it, so, digging his elbows into his side, he sprinted after the cab in fine style.

The driver of the vehicle drove rapidly at first; but Charley had been considered a splendid runner at school, and he easily kept it in sight. The pursued only kept along Liverpool Road for a block or two, and then dived down a deserted side-street to the left. From this it turned into byways, where not a single belated pedestrian was to be encountered.

Charley got his second wind, and kept doggedly on; and presently, as the cab began to slacken its pace, he gradually decreased the distance between him and it. Still, it was too far ahead of him for the driver to hear the sound of his footsteps, and he had to put forth his utmost efforts to prevent losing it in the labyrinth of by-streets and alleys through which it led him.

At length he saw it turn into a quiet and somewhat secluded street, and pull up outside one of the houses. He was about twenty yards behind at the time, and quite breathless after his sharp run.

Panting and breathing hard he halted, crossed to the other side, and then crept softly along, screened by the friendly shadows from any chance of being observed.

The cab had drawn up, full in the glare of one of the street lamps, and Charley saw the four men get out, and three of them advance to the door of the house. This one of them opened, apparently with a latchkey.

The fourth man, who remained upon the parapet, assisted the driver of the cab to climb down from his box, and then, to the young watcher's surprise, mounted in his place, and after a short whispered colloquy, drove off down the street with the empty cab.

The ex-driver passed through the gate, and followed the other three men into the house, and Charley felt satisfied that he had run the gang to earth. His best move now, he reflected, would be to hasten to the nearest police-station and bring the guardians of the law down on them.

With this idea, therefore, he determined to make for Caledonian Road, which he knew must be close by, and after some little trouble he succeeded in extricating himself from the maze of courts and streets and reaching it. He knew the

situation of the police-station, and was speedily relating his thrilling experience to the inspector in charge.

That officer did not know what to think of his extraordinary tale at first; but when the youth went on to explain that two of the men he had tracked were wanted for forgery, and gave all the facts of the case, the inspector believed him, and decided to proceed himself, with as many men as he could muster, and arrest the occupants of the house on suspicion.

CHAPTER 9.

CHARLEY LEADS THE POLICE TO THE HOUSE—THE CHASE AFTER THE SCOUNDRELS—THE FIGHT IN THE STREET—CHARLEY'S PLUCKY CONDUCT—RYLSTON SHOOTS A POLICEMAN, BUT IS INTERCEPTED AND CAPTURED BY ANOTHER—CONVICTION OF THE FORGERS—THE END.

It was not without some difficulty that Charley found the street again, for in the dark he had been unable to read the name, and one street looked pretty much like another. But presently he recognised it by a shed he had noticed before in the back garden of the corner house.

To decide which the lamp was opposite was easy, for there was only one—in the middle of the street—and so Charley led the way confidently now. They kept on the other side until almost opposite the house, and just as they were on the point of crossing over, the front door opened, and several figures were silhouetted against the brilliantly-lighted hall.

With a rush the officers were across the road in a twinkling; but the men in the doorway heard their footsteps, and with startled cries sprang back again into the house. The door was shut to with a bang, and as the discomfited constables reached it they could hear the bolts being shot.

The inspector thundered on the door, and demanded admittance in the name of the law; but no answer was returned, though they could hear the noise of scurrying footsteps within.

"Potts, McLeod, O'Brien!" cried the inspector, addressing three of the constables, "quick with you! Round to the side-street. Climb over the garden-walls. They will try to get away among the gardens. Holmes, you stay here, with the lad, and Jones, you come with me to the top of the street, in case they try to escape that way."

The three officers first addressed darted away, and the inspector blew his whistle to bring reinforcements. Then he and the constable Jones ran to the top of the street to keep an eye upon the garden-wall, which bordered it. Charley and the other policeman remained where they were—outside the house.

Our hero felt quite excited by the prospect of an adventure; but the footsteps of the inspector and his companion had scarcely died away up the street when the front door of the house flew open, and out rushed three men. Before the policeman Holmes could blow his whistle to summon his comrades, two of them had pounced upon him, and with a couple of terrific blows from the club-like weapons they carried, they felled him half senseless to the ground.

But the officer was not put hors-de-combat. He grasped the ankles of the nearer man as the two were about to spring away, and brought the fellow down heavily upon his face. The next moment the constable and he were rolling over and over upon the ground, engaged in a rough-and-tumble scuffle.

His companion, without seeming to have noticed Charley, halted, and ran back to the side of the two struggling on the ground, crying to the third man:

"Run, Lisette, run! We'll follow you!"

Charley recognised Rylston's voice, and as the individual addressed as "Lisette," with a wild, scared cry or sob, ran past him also without apparently noticing him, he saw the face distinctly in the lamplight. It was that of Madame Guichard.

The night had been too full of surprises for him to feel any at meeting the woman under such a disguise, and he did not give chase to her, for he knew that P.C. Holmes would be unable to cope with the two desperate ruffians who had attacked him.

Turning to lend the officer what aid lay in his power, the youth was in time to see Rylston standing over the two struggling men with a clubbed revolver, waiting his opportunity, as the combatants in turn gained the upper hand, to bring it down upon the constable's head.

Springing quickly forward, Charley caught the ruffian's upraised wrist, and clinging to it desperately, uttered a ringing shout for help. Rylston wheeled with a string of oaths, and tried to shake him off, but Charley was nearly seventeen, and strong beyond his years.

He closed with the ex-cashier, and such was the fury of his onset, he bore the latter back a couple of paces. He kept shouting the whole time for help, and Rylston strove to wrest his arm free and fling him off. He contrived to wind both his feet round one of the latter's, and the next moment they crashed heavily to the ground, Rylston undermost.

The scoundrel's head came in contact with the edge of the kerb, and, stunned for the moment, he lay still and inert. Charley sprang to his feet at once, and ran to the other two combatants, to find, to his relief and joy, that Holmes had succeeded in mastering his adversary, and was in the very act of slipping the handcuffs upon him.

"Take my whistle and blow it for assistance!" gasped the almost breathless officer, "while I secure this ruffian."

Charley blew a shrill blast, and then, as P.C. Holmes scrambled to his feet, he cried:

"Quick, sir! the other man is only stunned."

The words were barely out of his lips when a bright flash pierced the darkness, and the policeman fell back, with a loud cry of "He has shot me!"

Charley turned, and saw the shadowy figure of Rylston darting away up the street, and uttering another shout of "Help! Help!" the plucky youth immediately gave chase, without calculating the risk he ran in thus following so determined and desperate a ruffian.

He could hear as he ran the whistles of the inspector and the constable with him in the rear, and his heart beat high with hope that the three policemen who had gone down the street to get to the back of the house might make their appearance in time to cut off the escape of the fugitive.

Rylston ran as only a man can run for life or freedom, and he was rapidly outdistancing our hero when, just as he reached the corner of the side-street, a constable sprang in front of him, and shouted to him to surrender.

But the ex-cashier had no intention of being taken so easily. He levelled the revolver he was armed with at the policeman's head, and told him with an oath to keep off, or he would shoot him dead!

The courageous officer paid no heed to the threat, but sprang forward at once to seize him, and crying, "Take your death, then, fool!" Rylston pulled the trigger.

The bullet, however, only furrowed the policeman's cheek, and did not stay his rush, and with a swinging blow of his truncheon full upon the forehead, he felled the desperado at his feet.

As Charley came running up, the gallant captor was engaged in handcuffing his prisoner. A few minutes later another of the constable's comrades joined him, and between them they dragged Rylston to his feet and led him back to the house, where they found the inspector bending concernedly over Holmes, who was bleeding profusely from a wound in the chest.

The constable Jones had been sent for the ambulance, and to summon reinforcements, and the other prisoner, whom Charley at once recognised as Vane Hensel, had been handcuffed round one of the railings to prevent him getting away.

Before the ambulance arrived, the missing policeman made his appearance with yet another captive in tow. He had caught the fellow after a sharp chase over several garden-walls, but the fifth ruffian had got safely off.

However, the police had not made a bad capture, all things considered. They had three out of the five, and when the ambulance arrived, and they all returned to the station, Charley gave the name of Madame Guichard as one of the fugitives.

The young fellow remained till morning at the police-station, the staff of which at once sent a man over to High-bury to apprise the officials there of the capture of Mr. Jelk's assailants.

That gentleman, it subsequently proved, was not seriously injured by the upsetting of the cab. He had been badly bruised about the head and face, and deprived of consciousness at the time of the catastrophe; but the officer who had come to Charley's call found him just recovering his senses.

The books which undoubtedly Rylston and his companions had been after, were found inside the cab, none the worse. The would-be thieves, in their alarm and fear of capture, had left them behind, after all they had gone through to gain possession of them.

The newspapers rang with accounts of the whole affair, and praise unstinted was given to Charley for the noble part he had played. He became a popular hero in fact, and his portrait appeared in all the weekly papers.

As for his fellow clerks, indeed, all at Forsyth's, they could not make enough of him, and his kind-hearted employer, immediately on his return to his duties, took him into his private office, and after speaking in glowing terms upon his

heroism and devotion, offered him there and then the post of assistant cashier.

"Of course," said Mr. Forsyth, "I will have to get someone to fill Rylston's place at once. You are rather young yet, and have had no experience in the duties of a cashier; but you will learn—you will learn. Charley, my boy, you have the makings of a great man in you. I feel convinced, and rest assured from this hour, I will do my best to help you on."

Rylston, Hensel, and the other man, whose name was discovered to be Colter, were brought up for trial, and the police, who had searched the house in Islington, and found there the proceeds of several large robberies, were of opinion that the three were members of a regular gang of swell mob-men, and asked for a remand, to make further inquiries.

While the prisoners were lying under remand, Madame Guichard surrendered herself to the police, and it transpired she was the wife of Rylston, and had been the whole time the two had been in Mr. Forsyth's employ.

She made a statement which led to the arrest of the fifth member of the gang; and at the trial, which excited general interest, it was conclusively proved that Rylston and Hensel had committed extensive frauds upon their late employer to something like the amount of £30,000, and that the former, in trying to evade arrest, had wounded, with intent to kill, P.C. Holmes. The upshot of the case was that the ex-cashier was sentenced to penal servitude for fifteen years, and the ex-bookkeeper to seven years.

Madame Guichard volunteered the statement that it was her husband and Hensel who had committed the burglary at Mr. Forsyth's, and kidnapped Charley Clifford to the house in Islington, she herself, in the disguise of a man, driving the van the policeman on duty had seen. For thus assisting the police in bringing the crimes home to the leading spirits in the conspiracy, the authorities dealt leniently with the woman, who got off with a few months' imprisonment.

Colter and the other member of the gang got a couple of years each for their share in the attack on the cab, as well as several burglaries that were brought home to them.

The police were jubilant. It was the break-up of one of the cleverest gangs of swindlers and professional thieves that had taken place for a long time.

Mr. Forsyth was as good as his word. He did help on his young assistant cashier, and the latter rose steadily from one post to another, until, at the age of twenty-five, he was the manager of the entire business of Forsyth and Co., under Mr. Forsyth's personal supervision.

Now, in receipt of a salary he had never even dreamed of in his early struggles, Charley Clifford was able to purchase a large number of shares in the firm, and eventually Mr. Forsyth took him into partnership.

The business was thenceforward carried on under the name of Forsyth and Clifford; but after the partnership had lasted for several years, it was dissolved by the death of his friend and former employer. Consequently Charley became sole proprietor of one of the largest and most prosperous drapery establishments in all London—of the establishment in which he had once occupied the humble position of errand-boy.

THE END.

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READ THIS FIRST.

The story opens on Harry's fifteenth birthday.

Harry and Pierre Evison, whose son Harry thinks he is, are about to have tea, when Harry's great chum, Shaggy, a newsboy, enters, and tells them that a body has been dragged from the Thames at Limehouse, and that on the breast of the dead man is a strange tattoo—a scarlet cross, and half of the five of clubs.

On hearing this, Pierre Evison turns deadly pale.

Harry asks Shaggy to tea. The newsboy tells his chum that he has a few papers to sell first, and goes out.

He does not return, and Harry sets out in search of him.

In the street he meets Paul Lamaret, who asks if he knows where Pierre Evison lives. Harry directs him to their home, and goes on his way.

A few moments later, Paul Lamaret enters. "Pierre Evison, otherwise Pierre Gourbet, I salute you!" he says. And tells him that he has come to take his life because he has not killed one Horace Temple as he promised to do. The pair fight with rapiers, and Pierre is mortally wounded. The murderer escapes. Harry, meanwhile, goes to where Shaggy lives. He is out. Harry is about to leave, when he sees a rat gnawing a paper. He takes it from the animal, and discovers it to be a letter half eaten away. He puts it into his pocket and goes home. He discovers Pierre dying, and is told by him that he is not his son; that his family name is Temple; and that he must beware of the Lamarets, all of whom are marked on the breast with the scarlet cross and the half of the five of clubs. Then he falls back dead.

Mawker, a crafty old lodger in the house and the father of a fair girl, Angela, enters the dead man's room at night-time for the purpose of searching for a note Harry, whom he has drugged, has in his pocket. While engaged in this search, he hears some one enter the room. It is in perfect darkness, so Mawker cannot see the man's face. But when the latter leaves the room, Mawker finds that a dagger has been plunged into the bed where Harry had been lying.

Through the craftiness of Mawker, Harry is next day arrested on a charge of theft. But he escapes from the policeman, for the purpose of placing some mementoes on the breast of Pierre. To accomplish this, he is compelled to visit the mortuary at midnight, and while discharging this sacred duty, a lady (whose face he cannot see) enters and places a bunch of flowers on the shroud. Harry afterwards overhears a conversation between this mysterious lady and the organist of the church. Then, having fulfilled his duty, he voluntarily gives himself up to the police.

He is tried, and sentenced to be sent to a reformatory for a year. As sentence is pronounced, Harry sees Paul Lamaret and the veiled lady in the court.

CHAPTER 18 (continued).

The man was listening eagerly, so that not a word of the sentence should escape him; and had Harry glanced in the direction of the veiled figure he would have found that she was similarly intent on every syllable that fell from the magistrate's lips.

But at that moment Harry had no eyes for her—only for that keen, cruel face—the face of Paul Lamaret. His eyes were fixed upon it as one fascinated. He took in every line of the brow and cheek, as though he would fix them on the tablets of his brain for ever.

The magistrate had finished his sentence. As he did so, the eyes of Paul Lamaret turned to Harry, and gave a sardonic glance into his.

A policeman tapped Harry on the shoulder. The spell which had hung upon the boy was broken.

"Arrest him!" cried Harry. "There's my father's murderer!"

But even as he spoke Lamaret disappeared in the throng.

The police, thinking the boy wished to create a disturbance in court, promptly seized him by the arms and dragged him to the cells below.

CHAPTER 19.

"MANSLAUGHTER!"—TO THE REFORMATORY—
HARRY'S NEW COMPANIONS—PROBYN'S STORY.

Before Harry was taken to the reformatory, he was called upon to attend an inquiry similar to that he had already attended at Limehouse—the inquest on Pierre Evison; but this time he attended in the custody of a constable. He was one of the first witnesses to give evidence in the inquiry.

Harry, remembering Pierre's wish, was careful not to disclose his secret to the coroner. In his evidence, he told the latter that he had found his father dying; that, in answer to his questions, the dying man had informed him that he had received the wound in fair fight, and that he did not wish anyone to avenge his death.

"Do you know the name of the man your father fought with?" asked the coroner.

"Yes; my father called him Paul Lamaret," answered Harry.

"Are you acquainted with anyone of that name?"

"No!" answered Harry, with a shudder. "When my father told me the name that was the first time in my life I had ever heard it. I had met the man once before, I think."

"When was that?"

"Just before his death. I was leaving the house to take a friend home with me to tea, when a man came up to me and asked me where Pierre Evison lived. He said he was an old comrade of my father's. I directed him to our home. On—on—my—return, I found father dying!"

The words came from the boy's lips in short gasps; he was almost choking.

"You say your father told you that he fell in fair fight?"

"Yes."

"As this is a most important part of the inquiry, I must ask you to tell me his exact words. There is no hurry. Take time to refresh your memory. Then speak the words distinctly, so that I may take them down."

"There is no need to refresh my memory," answered Harry promptly. "The words are deeply graven on it, so that I can recall them without an effort. My father said to me: 'I do not ask you to avenge me. I fell in fair fight. I deserve all I have got. I have broken the most solemn oath man could take.' Those were his exact words."

Harry did not tell the coroner that there was a great deal more just as deeply graven on his memory. That, he considered, a matter for himself, and no one else.

The coroner took a note of Harry's words, and read them slowly over to him, so that there should be no mistake.

"Those being the last words of your father," said the coroner, dropping the paper, and speaking with great deliberation, "how comes it that you called upon the police at the police-court yesterday to arrest somebody or other for murdering your father?"

Harry's hand went to his forehead. Those fierce eyes seemed still glaring at him from the back of the police-court.

"I was very much excited at the time," he at length answered. "I saw, as I believed, this man looking at me, and then it was that I called upon the police, in my excitement, to arrest him."

"As a murderer?"

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"As a murderer, for in my eyes Pierre Evison was murdered!" said Harry firmly.

"Notwithstanding what he said to you at his death?"

"Yes."

Other evidence was called; but nothing that added very much to that given by Harry. The coroner then summed up.

"It was quite certain," he remarked, "after the evidence given by the lad, Harry Evison, that no murder has been committed. The deceased himself admitted that he was killed in fair fight, so that at the worst it is only manslaughter."

The jury, after being thus directed, at once returned "A verdict of manslaughter against a person known as Paul Lamaret."

The inquest over, Harry was hurried off to the railway-station, and taken to the reformatory schools. He was very miserable. He would have liked to see Shaggy once more before starting on his new career, and above all he had a natural desire to attend Pierre Evison's funeral.

He had the consolation of knowing, however, from the conversation he had so strangely overheard in the deadhouse, that he would not be buried in a pauper's grave.

Twelvemonths in a reformatory school—twelvemonths away from the world! At any rate, he would be able to mature his plans for the future.

The schools were some distance in the country—at a wild, bleak place known as Stentham. They were joined at one of the stations by three or four more boys, who were under the care of another officer.

These had all been regarded as incorrigible, and had been sent to the schools with a vague hope that they might be reformed.

One of the group was a boy named Merrick—Phil Merrick. He was a low type of youth, about the same age and size as Harry. But here all comparison ended.

He was an incorrigible of the incorrigibles. He answered the officers insolently, talked backslang with amazing facility, and was regarded as king by his associates, both from his proficiency in slang, his impudence, and audacity.

Directly he caught sight of Harry he nudged one of his companions with his elbow, and informed him with an insolent stare at our hero "That they were just getting amongst the scarecrows!"

This drew upon Harry the laughter of the rest. He was wise enough to ignore it; but he plainly saw that Merrick would be a thorn in his side during his residence at the schools.

At length they reached them. They were situated on a bleak, open common. They were great buildings—a perfect barrack of red brick.

Their aspect was cold and harsh, and a shiver passed through Harry as he looked at them. Over the entrance to the iron gates was a coat-of-arms with three gold swords fastened to them—emblem of the stern discipline maintained within.

Inside were interminable corridors and huge dormitories, scrupulously clean, yet harsh of aspect. It was like another world to Harry.

There were workrooms devoted to all sorts of employment—carpentering, tailoring, shoemaking, mat-making, brush-making, and several other trades.

Attached to the grounds was a farm of many-acres, on which were cows, pigs, fowls, and sheep. Nearly two hundred boys were employed about this farm.

Harry nearest neighbour in the dormitory was one, Sidney Probyn. He was not a very strong boy, and he was so meek and gentle that Harry was curious to know how it was he came to be sent to a reformatory.

Harry took an interest in Probyn from the first time he saw him, and he was glad to find when he commenced work in the schools—he had been placed in the carpenter's shop—that Probyn was in the same workroom.

They often chatted together, and one night, when they were in the dormitory, Harry's curiosity got the better of him.

"How did you manage to get sent to a place like this, Probyn?" he asked.

"For thieving," Probyn answered frankly, though a rush of crimson came to his cheeks with the admission.

"Thieving!" echoed Harry. "You won't mind my saying it; but I didn't think you were built that way."

"Ay, there's many a wolf in sheep's clothing, even in this place," answered Probyn, with a sad smile. "Many of us look better than we are, and many are better than they look. The wrong 'uns are sometimes right 'uns, and the right 'uns wrong 'uns."

"Do you come from London?"

"Yes; Bermondsey."

"Any father?"

"No; father and mother both dead. That's what brought it about."

"What? Thieving?"

"Yes. You see, after mother died, there was only me and Peggie to keep things a-going. Peggie's my sister, a bit younger than me."

"Hadn't you anybody else?"

"Yes; an elder brother—Tom his name was. He ran away from home when I was quite a kid. Goodness knows what's become of him! We've never heard on him since that time, and I'm thinking we never shall. Well, Peggie and me rubbed along all right for a few months after mother's death, and then things went rocky. Peggie was took ill, and I begun to be afeared she was going mother's way."

Sidney brushed his hand quickly across his eyes as he spoke, and Harry saw that there were tears in them.

"I was a shopboy at a grocer's," he went on, "earning just about enough to keep us going. I used to start work about eight and never left till about ten. Well, when Peggie was taken queer, I used to run home to see her during the day, and I was so worried that I forgot things. My gov'nor wouldn't stand that, so I got the sack."

"That was rather hard on you, Probyn?"

"Yes; it was a bit rough, and it made me bitter at the time, I can tell you. But I didn't despair. I went in search of a fresh job. I could have got into several, but the character my last gov'nor gave me always spoilt me. He didn't say anything bad about me, and he didn't say anything good. It was a sort of betwixt and between character, and that's the sort o' character that's worse than none at all."

"That gov'nor of yours must have been a very hard man."

"Not harder than the rest of 'em. It was just bis'ness. He was afeard I might introduce some of his customers to anyone who gave me work, and so he kept me out of it. Well, I daren't tell Peggie I'd got the sack for fear it might make her worse. So I used to go out in the morning—same as usual, and come back of evenings—same as usual? And Peggie, of course, thought I was going on the same as usual."

Probyn drew a deep sigh, and sat with his face buried in his hands.

"I saw plain enough," he presently resumed, "that there was nothing but starvation staring us in the face unless I did something. What? That was the question I kept asking myself over and over again. Well, it was quite clear I couldn't get any honest employment. There was only one thing left to me—I must steal!"

As these words fell from Probyn's lips, a boot flew past Harry and caught Probyn right in the face. It struck him with such force that the blood gushed out from nose and mouth.

Harry turned to see whence the boot had come, and he saw a pair of bold, black eyes staring defiantly at him about four beds off.

It was Merrick—he it was who had flung the boot with such vicious force at the face of Probyn.

CHAPTER 20.

THE FIGHT—HOW IT BEGAN, AND HOW IT ENDED—THE DARK CELL—THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

The hot blood rushed to Harry's face. He would rather—much rather—that the boot had struck him than Sidney Probyn. He was stronger, and to him a bruise or two of that sort was not of much consequence. To Probyn it was different.

Besides which, Harry's heart had been touched with his story, and a feeling of pity and compassion had come to him as he listened to it.

So he went over to the bed on which Merrick was sitting, and with clenched fist and blazing eyes demanded:

"Did you throw that boot?"

"What's that to do with you?" answered Merrick insolently.

"Everything. If it's not to do with me, I'm going to make it do with me."

The boys in the dormitory began to prick up their ears. They were in various degrees of undress, but they ceased in their occupation as by magic. All interest was centred in the bed where Harry was standing.

"Oh, that's your style, is it?" Now, look here, we've been kept awake long enough by you two jabbering over there. Someone's shut up the mouth of your pal, and I shall have to shut up yours, if you don't go steady."

"Was it you threw that boot?" demanded Harry, his blood getting hotter and hotter.

"Supposing it was—what then?"

"Supposing it was? You know it was you, you cur—you brutal coward. Take that!"

Harry shot out his fist, and caught Merrick a blow where the boot had struck Sid Probyn—in the mouth.

With the force of the blow Merrick reeled backwards on the bed.

"A fight! A fight!"

Every boy rushed in hot haste to the spot. Merrick had lorded it over the entire dormitory for some days past. Who was this hardy champion who had dared to question his authority?

There was an ugly expression in the dark face of Merrick as he sprang quickly to his feet. Harry had the satisfaction of seeing that the blow had reached the mark at which it was aimed.

Harry had backed into the middle of the dormitory, so as not to be hemmed in by the beds. Merrick had followed him, and a ring was quickly formed round the two.

Harry at once saw that he had an opponent of no mean skill or strength to deal with. Merrick, in fact, had been victor in many a fight, and this superiority accounted in no small degree for his insolence to others.

Harry's experience had been limited. He had never thoroughly acquired the art of boxing, but he had been quick to watch and turn to account the little he had learnt.

Furthermore, the lessons Pierre Evison had given him in the art of fencing had, strange though it may seem, been of signal assistance to him in the "art of self-defence" where fists were used and not rapiers. It had taught him quickness of the eye, and that was of equal importance as strength and elasticity of limb.

For the rest, there was one word Harry had never learned to spell—and that was fear.

Merrick advanced nearer and nearer; then, feinting with the right, he got in a heavy blow on Harry's cheek. Harry struck out wildly; he saw Merrick's head twisted quickly to one side. Then he found himself on his back, with a bruised feeling about the mouth.

"Tit for tat!" cried Merrick grimly, calmly awaiting for his opponent to rise.

"Time!" came the cry from the bystanders.

Harry needed no second bidding. He hastily wiped away the blood from his mouth, and sprang lightly to his feet. The two blows he had received had had one advantage—they had steadied him.

On the other hand, Merrick began to make light of his opponent.

"Now, then, show them what you can do!" he said dauntingly. He assumed an affected style of sparring, with which Harry was altogether unacquainted, but which duly impressed the excited onlookers.

Harry took no notice of the taunt. With difficulty he restrained himself, determined to remain strictly on the defensive. He saw clearly enough that he would have quite enough to do to defend himself, and that by waiting on the defensive a chance might presently come of getting in a blow.

So Merrick, seeing that Harry was not to be moved by his taunts, began to act once more on the offensive. But every blow was neatly stopped by his opponent. He tried all the feints of which he was capable, but, much to his annoyance, he found that he could not break down his opponent's guard.

At last he slightly overbalanced himself in making a vicious blow at Harry's head. Then Harry swung round his fist, and—crash! He caught Merrick a blow on the jaw, which knocked him clean off his feet.

"What's this? What's this? Fighting? By the Lord Harry, I'll fight you!"

The noise of the fight had brought the superintendent of the school on the scene. He was a stout man, with fierce, red whiskers. The boys shrank back at his approach, but before he had reached the scene, Merrick had sprung to his feet again, and rushed at Harry.

The two boys clenched, and whirled rapidly round and round the superintendent, who could not separate them.

"Go for Mr. Skimper!" roared the superintendent.

One of the boys rushed out, and the next instant Mr. Skimper entered the room. He was a tall, powerful man, close upon six feet high, with a hard, severe face. He had been in the army, but was now drillmaster and taskmaster of the reformatory.

"Separate those bloodthirsty young scoundrels, Mr. Skimper!" commanded the superintendent.

The drillmaster, used to fights and scenes of disorder, dashed at the struggling boys, and eventually succeeded in tearing them asunder.

Merrick struggled desperately to get once more at Harry, but the powerful drillmaster held him firm.

"What does this mean?" cried the superintendent, glaring from one to the other. "Who began it?"

"He did!" cried Merrick, pointing savagely at Harry. "He struck me first—right in the mouth!"

"Is that true?" demanded the superintendent, turning to Harry.

"Quite true, sir," acknowledged Harry, to the astonishment of the boys, who were not used to hearing the truth thus frankly confessed. "But he has forgotten to tell you how he provoked me." "How?"

"He threw a boot at Probyn while I was talking to him. The boot struck Probyn in the mouth, and gashed him cruelly. That's the reason I struck him in return."

"I threw the boot at Probyn because he was jabbering and wouldn't shut up. I didn't mean to hit him in the face. Anyhow, it was nothing to do with Evison. And if you'll just let me have a quarter of an hour with him, I'll give him the best lesson he's ever had in his life."

"Upon what?" asked the superintendent grimly.

"Upon interfering with his'ness that don't concern him."

Here Merrick made another desperate attempt to get at Harry, and in doing so tore his shirt-collar into slits. The drillmaster held firmly to him, however.

"Never mind!" said Merrick between his teeth. "I'll have it out with him some other time."

"Put them both in the dark cell for to-night, Skimper!" commanded the superintendent; "And twenty strokes each with the birch to-morrow morning for their breakfast!"

With these words, Skimper led both the boys, scantily attired as they were, out of the dormitory, down a couple of flights of stairs, along a stone corridor. Here were half a dozen dark, or refractory, cells.

The first of these was opened by an assistant, and Harry was thrust inside. Merrick was taken to the cell at the other end. Here he made another attempt to evade the drillmaster, but without success.

"I'll give both you beauties a lovely breakfast to-morrow!" said the drillmaster grimly, as he at length turned the key on Merrick. "You'll be so full that you won't want anything more to eat for a long time."

Harry's ears heard this announcement, as they were intended to hear it.

He could see nothing in the room, but he groped his way to the narrow bed, and sat down on it bruised and sore, and overwhelmed with bitterness.

He had no regret for the part he had taken in the fight. He had no regret for taking the part of poor Probyn, and striking Merrick for his cruelty and insolence; but—the birch—twenty strokes with the birch! It was that prospect which made him writhe.

Pierre Evison had never once raised his hand against the lad. The indignity of receiving a thrashing with the reformatory birch, in the presence of other boys, was, therefore, as wormwood and gall to him.

Harry lay on the cold, cheerless bed, and tried to sleep, but he could not. He still remained staring blankly at the darkness, trying to think of some way in which he might evade punishment.

Alas! He could think of none, except escape—escape from the reformatory altogether.

He leapt up from his bed as the thought came to him, and groped his way round the cell. He carefully felt the walls. They were made of solid, fire-proof brickwork. There was no chance of escape through that.

He turned to the door. It was as solid as the wall, and just as firmly fixed.

The momentary ray of hope that had come to Harry died out as soon almost as it was born. He again sank on his narrow bed, very much as a condemned prisoner might have done awaiting his execution on the morrow.

Eleven o'clock struck from the clock-tower of the reformatory!

Twelve o'clock! Still no sleep came to the tired eyes of the boy.

Then the clock chimed the half-hour. Scarcely had the last chime died away, when he heard a stealthy foot in the corridor without, and a moment later a key was cautiously put inside the lock of the cell-door.

Harry started up on his bed. Who could his night visitor be?

CHAPTER 21.

THE ESCAPE—ON THE PORTSMOUTH ROAD—AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS—HARRY'S DECISION.

As Harry put to himself the question, he could hear the door opening, and then it was as softly closed again.

"Harry!"

Harry, who had felt some natural apprehension as to whom his night visitor could be, rose joyfully to his feet.

"Is that you, Probyn?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven! How did you get the key?"

"Stole it from the drillmaster's room. Up to my old dodge, you see!" said the youth, in a half sad, half pleased voice. "I could not sleep without coming to you."

"You have come to help me out of this—this degrading hole?"

"If you care to—yes; but not so loud. We may be overheard."

"If I care to!" repeated Harry bitterly. "Can you ask it,

Probyn? I have been sentenced to imprisonment in these schools through no fault of my own. To that punishment I have patiently submitted, hoping that the day would come when my innocence would be clear. But I—cannot submit to be flogged. The degradation would kill me."

Harry felt Probyn's hand grasping his sympathetically; then he took something from under his arm.

"Here's your coat and waistcoat. I've brought them from the dormitory."

Harry hastily slipped on the coat and waistcoat.

"But when I get out of the cell, how am I to get out of the schools?"

"When you're quite ready I'll show you."

"I'm quite ready now."

"Good! Follow me, then, as softly as you can."

Harry followed Probyn on tiptoe to the door. When he had passed through, Probyn shut and locked it, as though Harry were still a prisoner within.

"Are you going to do the same thing for Merrick?" asked Harry, half jocularly as they crept past the cell in which his opponent was confined.

"Yes; if I wanted murder to be committed between you. It was very kind of you to do what you did for me, Harry; but you have made for yourself one more bitter enemy in the world."

"I do not care about that so long—"

"Hush! for Heaven's sake!"

The warning came too late. There were loud cries of "Help! help! help!" from the cell in which Merrick had been imprisoned.

The fact was that he, like Harry, had been unable to sleep; but it was not because he felt any shame in submitting to a punishment which he had had once or twice before. It was because his brain was busy scheming out some means of revenging himself on the one opponent who had not yet lowered his colours to him in token of defeat.

While thus busy thinking he had heard the footsteps of Probyn, had heard the key turn in the lock of Harry's cell, and the sound of voices within.

He could, of course, hear nothing distinctly, and he had at first imagined that it was somebody connected with the official staff.

But when Probyn and Harry passed his cell-door, he heard their voices distinctly. He at once guessed what had happened. Here was his hated adversary escaping under his very nose. So he raised the alarm.

"Help! help! help!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"He has heard us!" whispered Probyn agitatedly. "Quick, or we shall be caught!"

He took Harry's hand in his, and led him swiftly along to the extreme end of the corridor. This was bisected by a second but narrow corridor, down the left arm of which Probyn passed, followed by his companion.

There was a small private door at the end of it.

Probyn opened it with a key as he had opened the cell-door.

A cool draught of air came through it to the hot brow of Harry. It seemed to him like a health-giving breath of ozone from the mighty ocean.

In the distance they could hear the sound of voices. The cries of Merrick had evidently roused the officials. Presently they would be in full pursuit of their quarry.

"Listen!" whispered Probyn hastily. "I am well acquainted with this building and surroundings. I've been in it longer than you. We are now at the back. If you want to get clear, mind and not get near the front. Work your way to the left corner, and then you will find yourself in the open country. Quick! They will be on you in a moment."

"But you're coming with me?" cried Harry.

"No; I cannot."

"Then I refuse to go!" said Harry firmly. "I'm not going to slink off and leave you in the lurch."

"For Heaven's sake, do not stay to argue!" cried Probyn.

"You will spoil all. Recollect, I've no home to go to. I'm happier here—indeed I am. While I'm here I'm safe from temptation—from crime. Some day we shall meet again, never fear. Don't you hear! There's not a moment to lose. If you wish to make me miserable—stay! If you wish to make me happy—go!"

"You mean that?"

"As Heaven is my judge!"

Probyn's voice was trembling with emotion and suspense. There was no need to question the truth of his words.

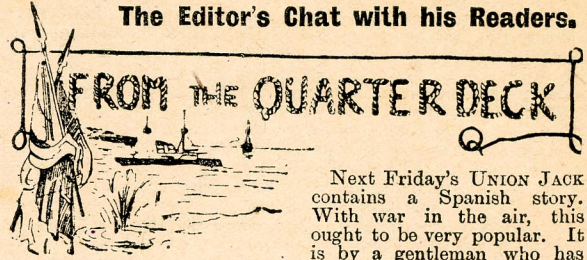
"Very well, I will go! Some day, as you say, we shall meet again—till then, Heaven bless you, Probyn!"

The hands of the boys rested tightly for a moment in each other. The next, Harry found himself in the grounds, with the door locked against him.

He ran quickly along. Once he turned back, and saw lights flashing from the building.

(To be continued in next Friday's UNION JACK.)

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.



Next Friday's UNION JACK contains a Spanish story. With war in the air, this ought to be very popular. It is by a gentleman who has travelled extensively in Spain, America, and Cuba, so you may be quite sure that his facts are correct.

I am going to print two more letters to prove that when I offer prizes I give them. The first is from the second prize-winner:

"3, Ethel Street, Larcom Street, Walworth, S.E.

"Dear Skipper,—I received your cheque safely, and I cannot say how very much obliged I am for it. This is the first competition I have ever been in for, and I was quite surprised when I saw my name down for second prize. I never expected to get anything more than a knife or a pencil-case. I have been a reader of the UNION JACK ever since No. 1 came out; but I have never been in any competition before because I have been told that they are all frauds—but now I know better, and can tell anybody that Harmsworth's publications which give competitions are quite fair and well worth a shot at.

"My copy of the UNION JACK generally passes to two or three fellows every week, as also do my 'Boys' Friend,' 'Marvel,' 'Chips,' 'Pluck,' and 'Wonder,' all of which I have been a reader of since No. 1. Again allow me to thank you for your present.—I remain, dear sir, yours gratefully,

"H. DEAR."

This is from the winner of a watch:

"64, St. Dunstan's Road, Fulham Palace Road,
"Hammersmith,

"May 16th, 1898.

"Dear Sir,—I write and thank you for the handsome watch which I had the good fortune to win in your 'Nations Competition.' It came safely to hand last Thursday evening, and I was exceedingly surprised and pleased to receive such a handsome prize. I have had the UNION JACK from the commencement, and have had the first four volumes bound. They make very nice books for both young and old to read. I look forward every Friday for my little friend in the blue cover with great pleasure. As it is the first time I have been lucky enough to obtain anything from the UNION JACK, I shall always prize my watch. I intend to have a suitable inscription engraved on the back to remind me of the UNION JACK. I trust that as the UNION JACK is so thoroughly up-to-date, it will always maintain its high standard. 'The Sign of the Scarlet Cross' is a thoroughly exciting and interesting serial. It is always read first by me. I must conclude my long letter by wishing the UNION JACK long success, and that it may be seen in every household.—Trusting that I may be fortunate enough to obtain many other prizes in our little friend, I remain, yours respectfully,

C. H. SPENCER."

"K," who wishes to join the Marines, must write to the Post Office for a form headed "Application to Enlist for the Royal Marine Forces." (Long-service corps.)

This is what he will have to sign:

Name.....
Address (to be fully given).....
Height (without shoes).....feet.....inches.
Chest Measurement.....inches.
(To be taken without clothes horizontally round chest.
Chest not to be inflated.)

Age.....years.....months.
Whether served previously in Army, Navy, Militia, or Volunteers, and if so, in what Corps, or whether now serving in Militia or Volunteers

If an Artisan, state what trade.....
Name and Address of referee if required

As "K" lives in Birmingham, he should address his form to the officer commanding, Royal Marine Recruiting Party, Birmingham.

It will not be necessary for your friend to produce his birth certificate, J. Swallow.

A WATCH FOR NOTHING

We are going to give away 1,000 Silver Watches to advertise our Catalogue and our Jewellery. This is no catch, but perfectly genuine. Read our conditions, and then go in and win.

C * B * Y S C * C * *
 T * * * L * S * V * C * * O *
 R * * N * * E * S * C * C * *

The words, when filled in, represent the names of three largely advertised articles of food.

DIRECTIONS.

Fill in the missing letters to the above words, and send the answer to us. If correct, we undertake to send you a Solid Silver Watch, a good timekeeper, usually sold by us at £2 2s. Our conditions are that you send us a stamped addressed envelope for us to write and tell you if you are correct; and if you should win the Watch, you purchase one of our Real Silver Chains as per our offer, which we will send you. Write at once, as by delay you may lose the chance.

To convince you of our offer being genuine, we send herewith copies of a few Testimonials which we are daily receiving.

The originals can be seen at our depot on application.

"West End, Hoxton,
 "October 16th, 1897.
 "Gentlemen,—I received the Watch and Albert safely, and am exceedingly pleased with same. I have shown it to my friends, all of whom are astonished to find it such a genuine bargain. One of my friends wishes to know if he could obtain one in the same manner, or has the time expired? With sincere thanks, I remain, yours truly,
 "10, Dean Street, Lislecard,
 "November 1st, 1897.
 "Dear Sir,—I received the Watch and Chain on Tuesday last, and I am very pleased with them. The Watch is keeping good time.—Yours truly, Miss E. Swartz."

"The Folly, 48, Thornton St., Hertford,
 "November 1st, 1897.
 "Dear Sir,—I received your Watch and Chain quite safe, and was very well pleased with them; and many thanks for your kindness for sending me one of your catalogues; and perhaps I will have the pleasure of giving you another order before long. I remain yours truly,—Miss E. Gates."
 "New Brancepeth, Durham,
 "November 2nd, 1897.
 "Dear Sir,—Just a line to say that I received the Watch and Chain which you sent me, and was highly pleased with them. I have shown the Catalogue to many of my friends.—Yours respectfully,
 "MISS ADAMSON."

P. GRAHAM & CO.,
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you want one write to us without delay. With your letter send us 1s. Postal Order, for which we will send you a tablet of Dr. Garland's Facial Soap and our Offer, on complying with which the Watch will be sent free by registered post. We have overwhelming testimony that our Facial Soap is the best ever offered to the British Public, and our idea for giving away the Watches is that you may talk about us

among your friends, and recommend our Soap wherever possible.
 "The Gold Watch arrived quite safe this morning. I am very pleased with it. Many thanks to you for sending it."—Miss H. HUNT, Potbridge, Odiham, Hants.

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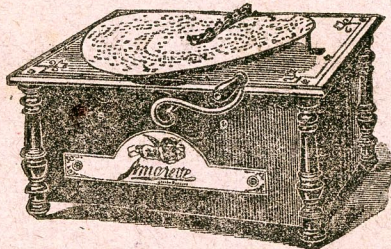
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equal in every respect to the four-guinea organs advertised elsewhere. The **ROYAL AMORETTE** is in a handsome black and gold case, has 16 indestructible steel reeds, and will play not dozens, but hundreds of tunes. We sent one to the Editor of "Fashion Novelties" for his inspection, and he replied: "Herewith please find 20s. for the **ROYAL AMORETTE** you sent on approval. I shall purchase several for Christmas presents, and cannot understand how they can be made at the price. It is the best home musical instrument I have ever seen."

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