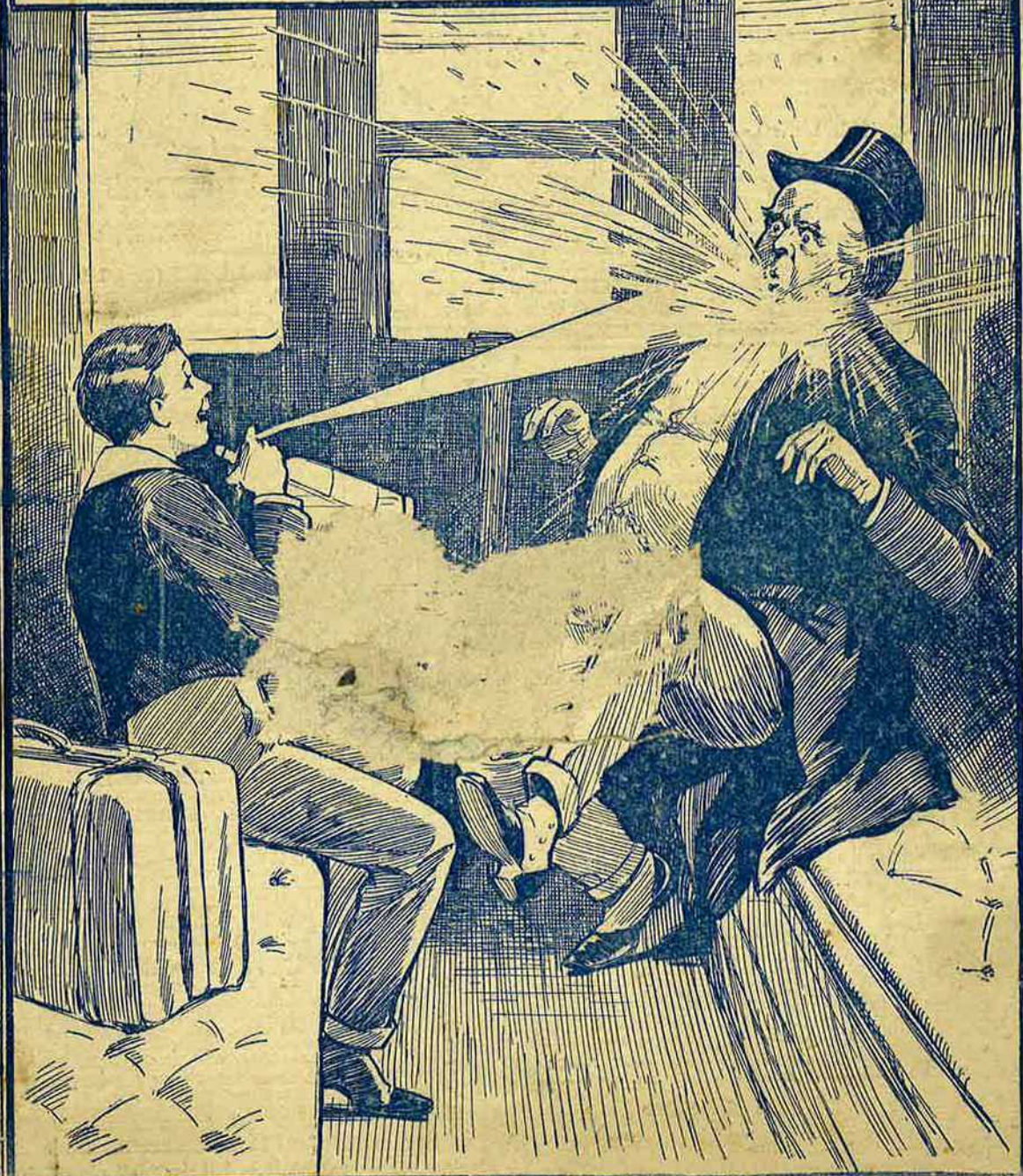


Extra Long School & Adventure Stories ⁱⁿ this Issue.

PLUCK

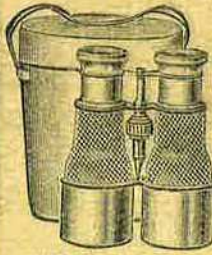
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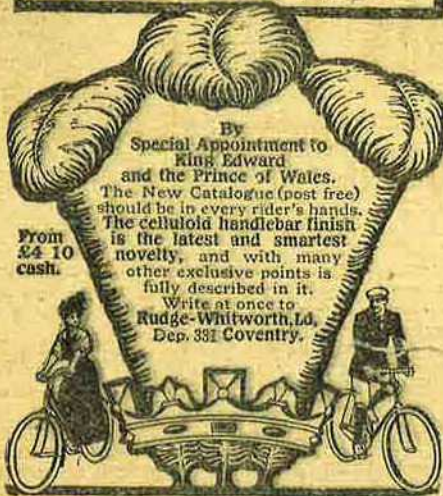
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[VOL. 6, No. 148, NEW SERIES.]

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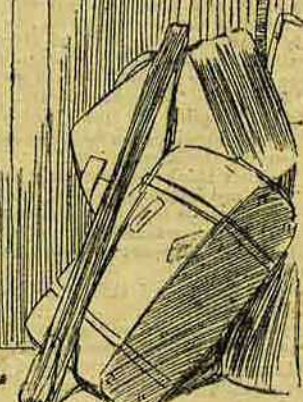
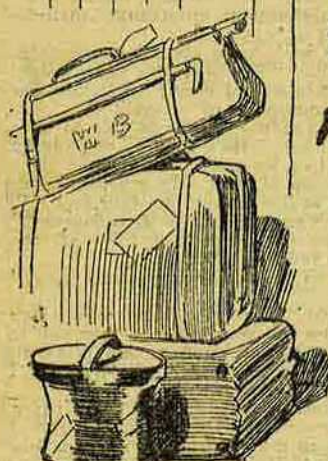
Complete in this Issue.



Sixteen of Them!

A Tale of the Wycliffe Chums.

By JACK NORTH.



CHAPTER I.

A Warm Afternoon.

"HALLO, Wicky! All serene?"
"All serene, Harris, old chap. An' how's your- self? My word! You're a gorgeous swell to-day!"

It was near the big bookstall at the L. B. and S. C. R. London Bridge station that Wicks and Harris had met, a day or two after the end of the summer term. They were going down together to Stenfield, in Sussex, near to which little town the estate of Captain Valentine Jackson lay, and there they anticipated meeting every one of the original members of the Wycliffe Society, known as the Brothers of Borden—sixteen in all, including themselves and their host's son Jack. That is, they anticipated meeting them all there, unless they ran against any of them on the way down, which was not unlikely, as several others were expected to arrive at Stenfield Hall that day.

Harris was a swell, indeed. Silk hat, frock-coat, white waistcoat, patent-leather boots. Wicks had never seen him in half such gorgeous raiment before. Wicks himself was sporting a new fancy waistcoat and a tie that had taken him forty minutes to choose, and his well cut lounge-suit was as nearly new as hardly mattered; but he felt very small potatoes beside Harris.

"Oh, chuck it, Wicky! I'm only dressed like any other chap with decent self-respect goin' on a visit."

"Solomon in all his glory!" murmured Wicks. "Decent self-respect! I like that extremely! I will not say 'not half!' lest it should offend the ears of your high magnificence."

"Talkin' about ears, do you want a thick one?"

"No, thank you, old deah! Mine are quite big enough

already, though not up to Saunders's mark. By the way, that kid ought to be somewhere about, unless he's gone to Victoria instead. If he has, we sha'n't see anything of him until we change at Morsham."

"Where are your traps? It's gettin' close on departure time."

"Oh, they're all properly labelled an' in the van. I suppose Methuselah, there, is in charge of yours?"

"Yes; an' he seems to be in a bit of a difficulty with the bike. Hi, porter! I guess I'll wheel that jigger myself. I don't want quite all the enamel chipped off to decorate the various belongin's of the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway Company."

An ancient-looking porter, with a watery and gleamy eye, but sturdy enough still, was pushing a truck-load of luggage with one hand and trying to get a bike along with the other. The iron steed seemed particularly restive and troublesome. It had already run over the tail of a clipped and beribboned poodle, assaulted the back of a stout and elderly female, and severely barked with one of its pedals the shins of an inoffensive old gentleman.

"Oh, it ain't no trouble, sir!" replied Methuselah.

"No; but it seems to be causin' a lot. Here, you take my ticket, Wicky."

Harris caught hold of the handle of the machine, and wheeled it through the barrier.

"Ticket, sir?"

"Oh, that's all right! It's somin'!"

Methuselah's broad truck, ahead of Wicks, had kept him back.

"That won't do! I must see your ticket before you pass through!"

"Well, that's off, any way, for I'm through already!"
The ticket-inspector gave two hasty strides, and caught him by the arm.

"Be good enough to show me your ticket at once, sir, please!"

"Can't! Haven't got it!" replied Harris, wrenching his arm free. As he did so, the bicycle slid away from him, and a pompous, red-faced individual in a loud check-suit and a white hat stumbled over it and fell headlong.

"There now, inspector! See what you've been an' gone an' done!" said Harris reproachfully.

"I wasn't responsible for that! Will you show me your ticket, sir?"

"Here it is, an' mine, too, inspector!" said Wicks, in a small, meek voice. "You went off in such a hurry, you know, an' Methuselah here blocked my way, an' I couldn't shout to you, because my aunt says I mustn't speak loudly. It's rude!"

The inspector looked at Harris more in sorrow than in anger.

"You should have told me, sir," he said.
"You didn't give me a chance, old chap! Never mind! Here's a bob, if it's any use to you."

"I say, inspector, when you clip tickets, what do you do with the pieces?" asked Wicks, still in that small, meek voice, and with a look of eager interest.

"Eat 'em!" replied the official. "Pass on, gentlemen, please!"

"Inspector!" roared a voice of thunder.

The individual in the white hat and the check-suit had now been upon his feet some seconds. Methuselah had made him skip, and nearly caused him to fall again by pushing the front of the truck against the back of his knees, with a "By your leave, sir!" And since then he had stood as if petrified, glaring with a glare to which those of the Gorgons three were the merest circumstances.

"Inspector!" he roared again.

"Sir!" replied the inspector coolly.

"What do you mean by this conduct? What do you mean by leaving the barrier, sir?"

"I don't think that's exactly your business."

"Not my business? What do you mean? I'll have you to know, inspector, that I am acquainted with a director of this line—personally acquainted—know him personally—and that I'll report you to him if I have any of your impudence!"

"Ah, I've heard that little yarn before! Ticket, sir, if you please!"

The white-hatted one began to fumble for his ticket.
"Hurry up!" said the guard.

Harris shoved his bicycle into the luggage-van and tipped Methuselah, and then he and Wicks sought a suitable compartment.

A smiling face, with a background of large ears, suddenly showed itself at a second-class window. Behind it were two other smiling faces, with ears not quite as big.

"Hallo, Harris! What cheer, Wicks!" shouted Saunders. "Come along in here, my beauties! Plenty of room! There's only me an' Conway an' Blencowe!"

"Get your ears out of the way, kid, an' we'll come in!"

They got aboard; and then Harris monopolised the window.

"I say, Wicky, the old beggar can't find his ticket! He's stampin' an' swearin' like a good 'un! The inspector's as calm as a giddy iceberg, but the guard's gettin' a bit warm!"

"Let's have a look!" said Wicks.

"Too late! He's found it now, an' the guard's trottin' him along, blowin' the whistle all the time. Oh, I say, guard, we can't have him in here!"

For theirs was the nearest second-class compartment, and for it the guard had made, had quickly turned the handle, and was bundling the red-faced and pompous one inside.

"I'll report you! I'll report the whole wicked gang of you!" fumed that personage. "Guard, I'll report your impertinent conduct! Do you hear? It's scandalous! Nothing short of scandalous! To be hurried along like that—and on such a hot day, too!"

He took out a big silk handkerchief, and began wiping an extremely wet and sticky face. As yet, apparently, he had not recognised into what sort of company the guard's impetuosity had plunged him. The train was now on its way, the guard had clambered aboard, and the end of the platform was receding.

Harris was in the highest and most exuberant spirits. When, in his new and stylish clothes, he had said good-bye to his mother, he had felt himself the man all over, and at least twenty-three. Now he seemed to have jumped back to thirteen. No Wycliffe fag could have been more mischievous and irresponsible than this big fellow, who would

next term be numbered among "the grave and reverend" company of prefects.

But the accident with the bicycle had really not been his fault, and he had no particular wish to make the pompous gentleman uncomfortable, if only that personage would leave him alone. For the present, since no more was said, there was consequently a truce.

"Seen anything of the other fellows?" asked Harris.

"No. Don't think we're likely to, either, until we get to Stanfield," answered Conway. "Five of 'em—Merry, an' Sinhji, an' Mac, an' Paddy, an' Taffy—went straight down from Wycliffe with Jaeger. The Commander an' the Black Prince are goin' to stay the whole time, I believe. They'd have had to stay at the school else."

"An' Cartwright will be comin' by Portsmouth an' Worthin, an' Hardy by Tunbridge Wells an' Broughton. So we sha'n't run against them," said Saunders.

"There's Crosswell an' Bob Merritt an' old Percival accounted for, though, an' they'll all be comin' from or through town," added Wicks.

"Then we may meet them at Morsham. Nobody seems to have had sense enough to arrange that we should all go either to Victoria or London Bridge."

"Do you boys mean to tell me that you, and all the others you are talking about, are going to the same place, and on a visit?" asked the other occupant of the compartment.

"We didn't exactly mean to tell you so, because we weren't talkin' to you," answered Wicks. "But, if it interests you at all, we are!"

"Fifteen of 'em!" murmured the red-faced one to himself. "Now, goodness help the poor unfortunate man to whose house they're going!"

"Sixteen of them, if you wish to be absolutely accurate, sir," replied Harris politely. "You see, the poor unfortunate man happens to have a son of his own who has the distinction of bein' at the same school as we are."

"An' the poor unfortunate man is very well able to take care of himself," added Wicks. "He's been among plenty of worse tribes of savages than we are."

"I don't believe it! Sixteen of 'em! My gracious goodness! They'd send me silly in less than twenty-four hours!"

"Well, you see, sir, it don't take long for a short journey," retorted Saunders. And, at the laugh that followed, the pompous one's face became redder than ever.

"Are you aware whom you are addressing, young man?" he asked haughtily.

"Can't say I am! Oh, yes! I see your name on the bag up there—at least, I suppose it's your name—unless you've bagged another chap's bag by any unfortunate accident."

"Mr. Samuel B-l-i-m-e-l-o-w—what's that spell, Wicky? I don't seem to get the hang of it somehow."

"Blimelow," answered Wicks, with something like a titter. "Sweetly pretty name—never heard a prettier! But I can't say that it's familiar to me. Ask the gentleman who he is, Horatius. I daren't! He's too ferocious for me! But he seems quite to have taken to you."

"How dare you? I am—the mayor of—my—town!"

There was a slight pause after each word, and every word was spoken with a dignity that ought to have annihilated them, but didn't.

"He says he's the grey mare!" giggled Blencowe. "I don't care; I'm not goin' to back him! I'd put my money on a gingerbread horse first!"

Mr. Blimelow glared, but did not answer.

"Thirsty, Harris?" asked Saunders.

"I should jolly well think I am! Got anything to drink, kid?"

"Yes; thought of it just before I came away. Right stuff, too."

He produced from his bag a syphon of lemonade and a whisky bottle.

Mr. Blimelow naturally jumped to the conclusion that the bottle contained whisky. Certainly it bore the label of a well-known firm of Scotch distillers. Moreover, its contents looked like whisky. Actually, it was lime-juice. Saunders had found that the long-necked lime-juice bottle he had collared from the pantry at home would not go into his bag, and so he had decanted it into the first empty bottle at hand.

"Boy, you do not mean to tell me that you and your companions intend to drink that intoxicating liquor before the eyes of a mayor and a justice of the peace?" said Mr. Blimelow, with awful gravity.

"I don't know that I mean to tell you anything. Seems to me you ask too many questions; an' I didn't know there were two of you, but p'r'aps you'll look like two when I've had a good stiff dose of this sinful an' intoxicatin' liquor! This is what we're in the habit of drinkin', anyway, so you needn't worry. Say when, Harris!"

He had produced a glass from his bag, and had begun to pour out the lime-juice.

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"Throw that wretched stuff out of the window at once, or I will take it from you and do so!"

"My dear sir, don't you know that throwin' bottles from the window of a railway train is distinctly dangerous?" asked Harris.

But Mr. Blimelow—Mr. Alderman Blimelow, J.P., as one should say—made a dash at Saunders. Next moment the bottle was flying out of the window, and the glass had shivered to pieces on the floor.

"All right, you old beggar, you've spilt the lime-juice—now you shall have the lemonade!" said Saunders furiously.

He held up the syphon, and pressed. Somehow Mr. Blimelow got entangled with Blencowe's legs—it was not in any way Blencowe's fault, of course!—and fell. Swish! The stream of fizzing, sticky liquid took him full in the face. He gasped and spluttered and kicked, but Saunders was remorseless. Not until the gurgling "gluck," which told that the syphon was empty, sounded did he desist.

Then the train began to slow down. The mayor arose, in a manner somewhat lacking in mayoral dignity, it is true; but, still, he arose. Lemonade dropped from his nose and fizzed in his whiskers; wild words were upon his tongue. He grasped his bag, and fumbled wildly for the handle of the door.

"Allow me, sir!" said Harris politely.

"Corking! Corking!" shouted a porter.

"Good-bye!" said Saunders. "I'll come to Corking some day, an' bring another syphon with me!"

CHAPTER 2.

Sixteen of Them!

"YOU wasted all the lemonade on that silly old ass, an' now we haven't got a drop to drink!" said Conway reproachfully.

"Well, we couldn't drink it out of the syphon, fat-head, could we? The dotty old beggar broke the glass, an' I only had one."

Saunders had still a very bad ache in his temper. The summary vengeance he had inflicted upon the pompous one had not thoroughly appeased him.

"I say, he doesn't live here," said Wicks. "It's no good your comin' to Corking with your syphon, Saunders. He's got into another compartment, an' is goin' on!"

"Here's Morsham!" said Wicks, later on. "I wonder whether the other fellows have got here yet?"

But they soon found that the train from Victoria was not due for twenty minutes. When it did arrive, Crosswell, Merritt, and Porson all scrambled out of it.

The train for the branch line down which they had to travel was in waiting at another platform. They saw their luggage and bicycles on board. Then Bob Merritt turned the handle of a door.

"Come along, you fellows, this will do. There's only one passenger in here!"

Wicks pulled him away.

"That's one too many, old man! We mustn't get in with him. We've had some!"

The guard's whistle blew, the boys scrambled into the next carriage, and the train moved out.

"His worship the mayor don't seem a very popular character," remarked Harris.

"He seems a wretched old donkey!" answered Bob Merritt. "But, I say, what have you fellows been doin' to him?"

The story of what had happened provided them with merriment almost throughout the thirty or forty minutes that elapsed before they reached Stenfield. At each station one or other of them had looked to see whether Mr. Blimelow was yet leaving the train; but he had not left so far.

"Stenfield! Stenfield!" cried a porter, as the train slowed down once more.

"There are our fellows!" cried Wicks. "Brothers, ahoy!"

There they stood in a group on the platform—Jack Jackson, fair-haired and handsome; Donald MacDonald, red-headed and plain, with his broad shoulders and his sturdy figure; Merry, the Australian, cool and plucky; Sinhji, the Rajput of Royal blood, with his dark, proud face and wonderful eyes; mischievous, cheerful Paddy O'Hara, and clever little Taffy, so general a favourite with all that he stood a good chance of being spoiled among them.

"Ahoy!" cried Jack.

And all six made a rush, and, before the train stopped, were shaking hands with the fellows, from whom they had parted only two or three days before, as if they had been separated for ages. They were a wonderfully united family, the Brothers of Borden!

"Hardy an' Cartwright ought to come off the up-train," said Jack. "It should have been in before yours; but I don't suppose it can be many minutes now."

"Here it comes, begorra! Let's cut over the bridge!"

They hurried across, leaving the groom who had come down with Jack to pick out their traps from the rest of the luggage. On the way over they passed no less a personage than Alderman Blimelow, J.P.

"I say, Jacker, who's that?" asked Harris.

"The old buffer with the grey whiskers an' the white hat? Why, the Mayor of Stenfield, bless you, old man! Keeps the big provision shop in the town."

"I hope he isn't a friend of your governor's?"

"No fear! The pater says he's a most objectionable old humbug, an' it's a scandal that he should be on the Bench! What do you know about him?"

"Tell you later on. We've had some rare fun on the way down!"

The up-train puffed in, and Hardy and Cartwright found a group of fourteen to welcome them with genuine heartiness. The tally of the original members of the Brothers of Borden was now complete. Sixteen of them, all told, and a fine, healthy, plucky lot of youngsters, of whom any school in England might have been proud.

The Mayor of Stenfield, gazing at them with a jaundiced eye—or, to be more exact, a pair of jaundiced eyes—would by no means have agreed with anyone who had remarked this, however. He had no doubt whatever that they were all as bad as those with whom he had already made acquaintance; and no doubt he was right as to this. Conway and Blencowe and Saunders were three young rips; but Hardy, Paddy, and Taffy could give them a start and a beating where mischief was concerned; and for sheer nerve Harris and Wicks were certainly not ahead of Jack and the Commander.

"Everything there?" asked Jack, when the luggage had been got together. "Come along, then!"

They found awaiting them outside two big, powerful motor-cars, a four-wheeled dogcart, and a couple of luggage-carts. Captain Jackson, as his son had once admitted to his chums when pressed on the point, was "fairly rolling in money."

"Now, then, split yourselves up! Six to each car, an' four to the cart. Jolly and Chota Ram will see to the luggage and the bikes. Anybody got a driver's licence?"

"I have!" cried Harris eagerly.

"Then you can drive one car, an' the Commander the other. We went over to Lewes yesterday, an' got a licence for him; an' I can tell you he's a crack hand at it already. But you'll have to go jolly careful through the town. There are one or two beastly awkward corners, an' the governor's down on reckless drivin'."

Jack and Paddy, Merritt and Crosswell and Wicks got in with Harris; Taffy and Mac, Sinhji, Cartwright, and Blencowe were Merry's passengers; Hardy, with Conway by his side, and Porson and Saunders behind, drove the dogcart.

"What's the cheery old mayor waitin' for?" asked Wicks, with a glance at Mr. Blimelow, who had come out of the booking-office and stood watching them with a most unpleasant expression as they sorted themselves out.

"For his car, I guess."

"What! D'ye mean to say that old dotter has a motor?"

"Yes; an' drives it himself, too. An' he don't half put her along, either! The pater says the old humbug will find himself before himself on a charge of furious drivin' before he's much older, an' have to fine himself ten quid an' costs. Rather a lark, wouldn't it be? Look sharp an' drive on, Commander! You'll have to go ahead, because Harris don't know the road."

Merry had got his crew aboard now, and the car was panting for the start. Just as it got under way, a big, yellow car came swishing through the station gates, and it was only the Commander's nerve that saved a collision.

"All right, my boy!" murmured Jack. "That's old Blimelow's son in the car—Shakespeare Blimelow, his name is!—an' he's a bigger boulder than his father, if that's possible. Cut away as quickly as you can, Harris. The road's pretty wide for a hundred yards or so; but after that it gets very narrow; an' if we only keep ahead of 'em so far, I guess we can keep on being ahead. But we won't hurry; we'll just show them how to drive nicely an' steadily."

The dark-green car started on in the wake of the red one, and both made good pace along that first level and wide hundred yards; but then Jack hailed the yellow car, and both the drivers slowed down. They steered aside to let Hardy drive past, but then they took the middle of the road again. Then they drove steadily out of the town, and once beyond it, and on the broad high-road, let the motors rip, quickly covering the two miles or so to Stenfield Hall in not much over five minutes.

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IN "PLUCK," ID.

CHAPTER 3.

A Nocturnal Visitor.

CAPTAIN JACKSON stood on the wide steps of the Hall as the two big cars came up the broad drive, and welcomed them all with a heartiness that could not be mistaken. He, at least, was not dismayed at the prospect of having his home invaded by sixteen of them.

"Very pleased to see you all, you fellows! Hallo, Harris, quite fit again? Congratulate you on your success in the exam. Wicks, you look positively blooming! Crosswell, I've got a surprise in store for you and Merritt."

He had, indeed; for at that moment old Squire Feltham, Harry Crosswell's uncle, who had adopted Bob Merritt as his heir, walked out of the great oak door to join the group. And it was not only Harry and Bob who were pleased to see him. Not one of the fellows there but hailed this addition to their party with delight.

"You might have given us the tip, Jacker," said Crosswell.

"Didn't know, old man. This is some of the pater's artfulness. I know he was sendin' a carriage over to Wilborough Station, but he never breathed a word about who it was for. I say, it's jolly to have the squire with us, isn't it?"

"But where are Hardy and our stout Porson, and the clever little chap with—"

"The flappers," suggested Wicks, knowing it was Saunders who was referred to.

"No, Wicks, I was merely going to say the ears; and I'm sure Saunders wouldn't have minded that. Your suggestion verges on the personal. Ah, here they come! Hardy knows how to handle the reins, I see."

"My word, he ought to!" said the Commander, who had visited Hardy's home. "They've got some pretty good horseflesh at his place. I can tell you."

"And now," said the captain, after all the greetings were over, "come along and have a drink. That's the sort of thing that suggests itself first on a day like this, isn't it? Then Jack and Merry and these others who have had time to find their way about will show you round the place; and by the time that's over your traps will have arrived, and I guess, though it may be a little early for it, we'll have dinner."

"This makes up for the stuff that we didn't have in the train, because that wretched old Blimelow spilled it," said Saunders, taking his face out of a huge glass of iced lime-juice-and-soda.

"Hallo, have you fellows been coming into contact with the mayor?" asked Captain Jackson, with a twinkle in his eye. Then they told him the whole story, extenuating nothing; and he and the squire, trying hard to look severe all the time, could not help but roar over it.

"Too bad! Too bad, really! But of all the meddlesome, idiotic old duffers that ever walked the earth, commend me to the Mayor of Stenfield! He's a laughing-stock on the Bench, and a confounded nuisance there and everywhere else. But do you know that I shall have the honour of entertaining him on Wednesday next? It will be a bit awkward for some of you, won't it?"

"Why, dad, you don't mean that he's comin' up here with the cricket team?"

"Yes, he is; and that elegant son of his, too. Prebble, the newsagent, showed me a list of the eleven to-day, and they're both down."

Jack explained.

"They got wind in the town that I was expectin' a lot of you fellows down on a visit, an' that we were hopin' to get some cricket; an' two challenges came along directly—one from the town club, which is really pretty strong, an' the other from the Tradesmen's Early Closin' Club, which is what the papers describe as 'weak medium'—rather more weak than medium, I guess. We're goin' to play 'em both; but I fancy the tradesmen's match will be more of a barny than a game at cricket. They hadn't a notion that they'd meet four or five of the Wycliffe eleven, I guess."

The captain laughed at that.

"I don't suppose they'd be so very much alarmed if they knew it. You see, a school's a school to them; and perhaps they don't quite realise that Wycliffe is only just below first-class county form."

"Now you're rottin', dad! Come along, you fellows; I always leave him to himself when he gets sarcastic. I hope he won't work it off on you, squire."

They hurried out, eager for the promised look round.

"Let's go an' see your cricket pitch first," suggested Harris.

"That's just where I was goin' to take you. I say, it's a lark about old Blimelow, isn't it? The old beggar's been doin' all he knows to suck up to the pater; an' I suppose he thinks if he once gets in here he can make it the thin

end of the wedge. 'Tisn't that he's a tradesman—the governor doesn't mind that; not such a snob—but he objects strongly to the beggar's ways."

"He won't want to come after what's happened to-day," suggested Wicks.

"Oh, won't he? You don't know him, old man. He's a gigantic old hypocrite. Bet you twopence he tells the governor that he had quite a pleasant time with you fellows comin' down. Say, do you fellows know who this is?"

They had reached the cricket-ground, and an active youngster of eleven or twelve had jumped off the roller and come forward to meet them. A smart youngster, too, though a little shamefaced-looking just now, conscious as he was of the difference between his present appearance and that which he had worn when the fellows had last seen him. Some of them, indeed, did not remember having seen him before. But Hardy knew him at once.

"Why, it's Tommy Tidd!" he cried. "Bully for you, Tommy! Shake hands, old chap!"

When seven of the sixteen then present had so narrowly escaped an awful death at the blowing-up of Wakely Castle early in the summer term, it was Tommy Tidd, a youngster from Wycliffe village, whose pluck and resource had saved them. Tommy's father was now gamekeeper on the Stenfield Hall estate, and Tommy himself had been sent to a good school by Captain Jackson.

Already his altered way of speaking, as well as his appearance, showed what rapid strides the sharp-witted youngster had made. He had had a good deal to put up with in his new surroundings, but he was the right sort of youngster to fight through difficulties, and he had become quite a leader among the juniors at his school by the time the end of the term came.

"He's goin' to make a nailin' good cricketer, too, aren't you, Thomas?" said the Commander.

Tommy smiled, but did not speak. His customary self-possession had deserted him among all these fellows, the youngest of them at least four years his senior, and some of them strangers to him. But Jack laid a hand on his arm and took him along with them to inspect the pitch.

"I see you fellows have been at it," said Harris, nodding towards the nets at one side. "I say, Jacker, what a rippin' wicket! Level as a billiard-table, an' so sweet an' green-lookin', after the baked old playin'-fields."

"Well, you see, it's been rolled an' mowed an' watered all through the summer, an' never had a game played on it yet," explained Jack. "Seems almost a pity to have it cut up by chaps like these two Blimelows, don't it?"

"Oh, bless you, they won't stay long enough to cut it up much; we'll take care of that!"

"You won't get a chance, old man. Some of us will have to stand down from each match, an' I guess you an' I an' the Commander an' Sinhji an' Bob will take our turn first, since we aren't likely to meet any other team quite so weak as the Early Closers. You won't mind, will you? There'll be several more matches."

"Not a bit," replied Harris, "though I should have liked to send down a fast one or two to old Blimelow."

"Come along now; we can't stay here all night. The Commander wouldn't stir away except for meals if we didn't drag him. Let's go an' have a look round the kennels an' the stables an' the gardens."

Half an hour later they went in to dinner. They found that their luggage had been taken up to the rooms they were to occupy; and as these were all in one wing of the Hall, the amount of chatter and calling from one room to another through the doors left open all along would have worried a nervous man immensely. But the captain and the squire both liked it; and when, one at each end of the table, gleaming with silver and gay with flowers, they looked down its length and noted how well the boys looked in their dress-suits—like good-bred ones and good-plucked ones, as the captain said later on to the squire—and how happy they all were, it was easy for them to drink with enthusiasm the toast: "May Wycliffe flourish!"

They were pretty late in getting to bed that night, for the captain had many stories to tell of his adventures abroad, and the squire chipped in with some fine old crusted yarns of the days when he was young, and there was naturally a good deal of talk about school matters. But at half-past eleven their host gave them a gentle hint, and they trooped upstairs, with many a jest and laugh en route.

"I think I'd better toddle too, Jackson—better toddle too—ah? Much more tired than any of the boys, I'm sure—much more—but never enjoyed an evening more in my life—never! They're the best of good company, the boys, captain, eh?—the very best of company!"

"I believe they are, for a man with a heart as young as yours, Feltham," replied the tanned and wiry explorer, giving his guest's hand a hearty grip.

The squire looked ten years younger than he had done

Buy "The Union Jack"—Every Friday, Id.

before as he went upstairs. He was always a different man when the gout ceased to trouble him; but there was something more than freedom from gout to account for his cheerfulness now. He had something to live for at last. It had pleased him beyond words to see "his boy," Bob Merritt, the fellow from a London Board-school whose pluck and chivalry had so attracted the squire as to lead him to adopt the boy, holding his own with the rest, one of themselves, and as popular as any among them.

Scarcely had the squire disappeared when Chota Ram, the Hindoo servant who had been at the station with Jolly, the groom, when the boys arrived, glided noiselessly up and spoke a few low words to his master.

Chota Ram had been the captain's faithful body-servant for over ten years, and during that time had shared all his travels and dangers. There were other men about the place who had been picked up by the explorer in his wanderings, and had proved so valuable and trustworthy that he had been unwilling to part with them, but there was none upon whom he relied quite so confidently as upon Chota.

"What's that?" said the captain, instinctively keeping his voice low, in spite of his astonishment. "Come in here, Chota, and tell me all."

Whatever it may have been that the Hindoo had to tell, it was evident that Captain Jackson attached considerable importance to it, for, having ascertained that the household had all retired, he, with Chota as a companion, made a complete round of the lower part of the house, examining every door and window, and making sure that each was securely fastened.

The captain's face wore a troubled look; but his trouble was not personal fear. A braver man than he never stepped. But he could not forget that besides his own son, dearer to him than everything else the world held, he had under his care the sons of others to whom they were dear.

"That's all we can do, I think, Chota," he said. "I needn't ask if you're armed."

The Hindoo evidently did not take this as a question, for not even by a look or a nod did he reply. He followed his master upstairs, and when the captain's bed-room door closed, Chota brought a tiger-skin from further up the long corridor, and, laying it down in front of that door, composed himself for sleep.

If he had had his choice, he would always have slept thus. To-night he knew that his master would not object, though he had not asked him. Chota never wasted words. There were servants at Stenfield Hall who had never heard him speak, although he could talk English when he chose as well as any among them.

The boys slept in eight double-bedded rooms. This had been arranged at Jack's suggestion. He knew that they would like it better than each having a room to himself, as each might easily have had, even had there been double their number. He and Merry occupied one, Sinhji and Paddy another, Mac and Taffy a third. Wicks and Harris were together, Crosswell and Bob Merritt, Blencowe and Cartwright, Porson and Saunders, Hardy and Conway. The rooms which the master of the house and Squire Feltham occupied were in a corridor at right angles to that along which the boys' rooms lay.

It was a night of marvellous beauty. The moon rode high in a sky free from clouds, and a breeze from the west cooled the atmosphere, almost unbearably heated during the day. The windows of the room which Sinhji and Paddy occupied were wide open, and the blinds were up, so that for the most part the room was flooded with light.

How it was that Beiram could not sleep he hardly knew. Paddy had dropped off very quickly, and the Rajput could hear his gentle, regular breathing from the other bed. Paddy was not a noisy sleeper, like Mac, whose snores Sinhji fancied he could hear through the two thick walls that were between their rooms. The Scot never minded being chaffed about his snoring; but Taffy, who was devoted to Mac, always stoutly maintained that it was nothing worth making a fuss about.

Sinhji lay there, thinking of many things—of his early life in far-away India, memories of which flooded fast upon him whenever he saw or thought of Chota Ram's dark, intelligent face; of his first coming to England; of his falling-in with those dear comrades of his; of the many scrapes and dangers they had shared; of the foundation of the Brothers of Borden, widening the circle of his friends by giving him others nearly, but never quite, as dear as those first ones; of days on the Wyvern and days in the cricket-field; of painful things and pleasant things, and sad things and funny things.

And in all that medley of thought there was nothing that he need have been ashamed that anyone should read. Loyal and chivalrous and high-hearted as any knight of old, this son of an Indian warrior race could bear a comparison with the best that Wycliffe had ever bred. Not Raleigh himself,

the best captain the school had ever had, not MacDonald, to whom the Indian lad himself was accustomed to look up to like the rest, because Mac was so strong and reliable, yet so gentle and soft-hearted, was clearer-minded or more honourable than Sinhji.

What was that? A sudden creaking noise, so slight that it might have been inaudible to ears less keen, roused his attention. It seemed to come from the darkest corner of the room; but he could see nothing there, not even when he got out of bed and inspected everything thoroughly.

"A rat, I suppose," he said to himself. "Silly of me to let it disturb me!"

Little did he think that while he moved lightly around, searching, two men were holding their breath in suspense within a few feet of him. It was well that he did not discover them, for had he done so that moment would have been his last.

They were no mere ordinary burglars, these two who stood side by side in that narrow secret passage in the thick wall. The room which Sinhji and Paddy occupied was next a wall which had formed part of the original structure of the Hall, most of which had long since been destroyed by fire. It was only a few years ago that Captain Jackson had bought the place; and he had never until this summer spent more than a few weeks in it. He had absolutely no suspicion of the existence of any secret passage.

Sinhji got back into bed, and almost immediately fell asleep. Perhaps the disturbance of his train of thought accounted for his falling off so readily. But he was always a very light sleeper.

A panel opened silently in the wall, and a man with a strange, wild, yellow face stole out. His companion stood within, holding the secret door just so much ajar that it should not quite close.

Sinhji slept on. But suddenly two sounds awoke him; and even in waking he was aware that there had been two distinct and separate sounds, the one a click, such as the coming-to of a spring catch might produce, the other the turning of a door handle.

He was out of bed on the instant. The moon had ceased to shine into the room now, but there was light enough to enable him to see that the door was open. Without a thought of fear he passed out of it, and along the corridor with that noiseless, catlike tread of his.

The man ahead of him did not hear. All his attention was devoted to the doors that he passed. His behaviour was that of a person who, in an unknown place, is trying to follow the directions given beforehand by someone who is familiar with it.

He turned the corner of the corridor with the Indian not five yards behind him. There followed the sound of a man springing quickly to his feet, and a hoarse, guttural cry.

The intruder had stumbled right upon Chota Ram, and Chota had struck.

Next moment Sinhji was hurled violently to the ground, and Chota, bounding over his recumbent body, was in hot pursuit of the man who had thrown him.

A startled cry came from Paddy, and almost in the same instant the corridor swarmed with figures in nightgowns and pyjamas, for Sinhji had called for help as he fell.

"To our room, quickly!" cried the Rajput.

But they were all too late. Even Chota Ram was not in time. The mysterious visitant had disappeared.

Paddy had seen him, however, and had made a desperate rush at him, colliding with Chota Ram as the latter entered the door. And Paddy had seen more than that.

"I don't know what it was that was ather wakin' me up," he said breathlessly to the assembled throng. Every fellow of the sixteen was there by this time, besides Captain Jackson, with his faithful follower, and Squire Feltham. Some of them were in the room, others in the corridor, some crowded closely around Paddy's bed, others looking over the shoulders of the nearer ones.

"Faith, I don't know what it was. All I know is that I woke up quite suddenly, an' heard a noise in that corner. It wasn't much of a noise, either; but, somehow, I'd woke up with a feelin' that there was something wrong entirely. I had a box of matches on the chair at my bedside, an' I reached over quietly and struck a light all of a sudden. An' there, looking out of the wall, was a horrible yellow face. Bedad, I niver yet saw a face like it in this wuruld! 'Twas only a glimpse I got, for the match wasn't ather catchin' properly aight. An' before I could strike another I heard Sinhji yell out, an' thin a figure comes rushin' in at the door, an' I jumped out of bed an' wint for him. But I didn't get him, I only got Chota Ram, begorra! Hope I wasn't ather hurtin' ye, Chota?"

"The young sahib did not hurt his servant. It was the brave heart of the young sahib that brought him from his

NEXT SATURDAY:

"BY THE SAD SEA WAVES,"

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale, AND

by H. Clarke Hook;

"THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY CAR,"

A Thrilling Detective Story,

by Cecil Taylor.

IN "PLUCK," 1D.

bed so speedily," answered the Hindoo, with grave politeness.

"But what the beggar meant, begorra, was just 'I'd have got him if ye hadn't blundered into me like a silly idiot!'" said Paddy ruefully, afterwards.

Someone had switched on the electric light when they had all crowded into the room. Jack, standing by his father's side, looked up into his face. That face had not turned pale; but the boy saw a look of grave trouble in the keen eyes. He said nothing, but pressed his father's arm within his, and the pressure was returned in a way that Jack understood.

"What was it all—eh? Can't understand it. Don't comprehend in the least," remarked the squire. The brave old fellow was a bit shaken, but quite fearless. "Was it burglars—eh? But how could it be? Burglars wouldn't know. But how would anyone else? Which panel was it, Patrick—eh? Which panel?"

"Look here," said Harris. He pointed to a bright red stain on the carpet. The Commander put his finger to it. It was still wet, and unmistakably a bloodstain.

"Here's another," said Wicks, "and another!"

There were several others—half a dozen between the bedroom door and the panel, and more, as they speedily found, in the corridor.

"It must be the blood of the man who knocked you over, Sinhji," said Harry Crosswell. "You an' Chota appear to have been the only people who got near enough to touch him, an' neither of you is wounded."

Chota, who had been downstairs, appeared again now, and put all their doubts to rest. He showed them the weapon with which the wound had been made.

"Yes, I struck!" he said simply.

They examined carefully the panels in the corner where Paddy had seen the face. It was certain that there had been two men, one of whom had waited within the secret passage while the other had gone on his murderous errand. The reason of his so waiting they could only guess; but, as it chanced, their surmise was correct.

There was no doubt that at one time some spring in the panel gave access to the secret passage from the bedroom; but it would appear that at present the panel could only be opened from the other side. These mysterious intruders, who seemed so well posted in secrets relating to Stenfield Hall of which even its owner was ignorant, must have known this. The second man's task had been to keep the door ajar so that his companion might be able to get back after accomplishing or failing in his errand. The click which Sinhji had heard was due to his accidentally letting it close just as his fellow-villain was leaving the room.

All their examination of the panels was fruitless. They could find no sign of any spring, nor could they detect any perceptible difference between the sound of one and of another when they were tapped. Certainly none of them rang hollow.

"Boys," said Captain Jackson, "I think we'd better all go downstairs, and Chota shall make us some coffee. It isn't worth while disturbing anyone else in the house. In fact, I'd rather you shouldn't say anything about it to anyone either inside or outside the Hall. I have my suspicions as to the cause of this, but to publish them abroad would only ruin our chance of catching the rascals. You mustn't mind if I don't tell you now. You shall hear the whole story when I am quite sure that I am right, and know how the affair has ended or is to end. For there is a story hanging to it. Meanwhile, don't be alarmed. But there, I need hardly say that, for if you'd all been grown men and soldiers you couldn't have behaved better."

"You're right, Jackson—quite right, as usual. Absolutely right—eh? Boys, I'm proud of you—proud of you all. Wycliffe boys—my boys!" said the good old squire, with gleaming eyes.

"You can't sleep in this room again, of course, you two," went on the captain. "Even for such plucked ones as you it wouldn't be conducive to rest to be in the neighbourhood of that wretched panel. Confound the thing that we can't find out which it is! Chota will take your traps to another room, and we'll lock the door of this on the outside. Come along down now."

They all trooped downstairs. The captain let Jack go ahead, and at the top of the stairs one of his hands rested a moment on Sinhji's shoulder and the other on Paddy's. He did not speak, but for speaking there was no need. Both understood that he was thanking them for their pluck and promptitude, and each felt a glow of pride at his heart as he followed the famous explorer down the broad staircase.

"HERE'S the old bounder!"

Mr. Samuel Blimelow had just driven up to Stenfield Hall in his big, yellow motor-car, which his enemies said looked like nothing else as much as a tin of mustard. His son Shakespeare sat by his side, and half a dozen members of the Stenfield Early Closing Club, highly elated and visibly excited at the honour done them, were crowded into the tonneau.

Obviously the motor-car could not bring the whole eleven; but the mayor's system of selection was worthy of his intrinsic snobbishness.

"We can't ask Fletcher, Shaky," he had said. "A mere pork-butcher—bah! And there's Soles, the bootmaker. That's a low trade, that is. And young Burley. Why, he's only one of our own 'prentices. Those three can walk up very well. I dare say we can crowd the rest in."

It mattered nothing to him that Fletcher was the best bowler on his side, Soles a very decent wicket-keeper, and his own apprentice the only man with the slightest pretensions to class as a batsman. In fact, it is doubtful whether he knew. Mr. Alderman Blimelow, J.P., and Mayor of Stenfield, was not in the habit of condescending to play for the Early Closing Club. It was only because this match was to be played on the Stenfield Hall ground that he had volunteered to take part in it. Having so volunteered, he quite characteristically took control of the whole proceedings.

Some of the other players were a bit bewildered. They could not remember when or where or how Mr. Samuel Blimelow had been elected captain. They could not recall ever having seen him play cricket, though his hopeful son was a pillar of the Stenfield team as a fast bowler. But here he was, and most certainly he was taking it for granted that his calling and election as captain was past all dispute, and was talking as though W.G. and Ranjitsinhji and Spofforth all rolled into one would have been barely equal to him.

The Stenfield Hall team had been chosen on the principle of leaving out, not the weakest, but the strongest players. Captain Jackson, whose cricket days were long since past, had been urgently besought to play, but could not be persuaded. The captain was anxious and ill at ease just then, though he showed it little. The squire had actually consented to play. It was twenty years since he had last donned flannels; but he had been a notable cricketer in his time, and could tell tales of the days when George Parr was a young man and the Graces were children.

Then Tommy Tidd had been given a place. That meant that only nine of the sixteen Brothers of Borden could play. Cartwright preferred to score; for him alone among the brothers active cricket had little charm. The others who stood down were Jack, Merry, Sinhji, Harris, Bob Merritt, and Mac.

Wicks was made captain of a team that was certainly not desperately strong. Some of them would make runs, no doubt; but their captain was the only one from whom one could expect with any sort of confidence a decent score, and he and Saunders were the only reliable bowlers on the side.

"Why, my dear boys, how is it that you are not ready?" asked Mr. Blimelow effusively. As Jack had predicted, he had made up his mind to be magnanimous about the little affair of a few days earlier. "I quite expected that we should start almost as soon as we got here."

"We're not playin', you see," explained Jack.

"Not playing? What—"

"We can't all play, an' so some of us are standin' down."

"But we should be quite prepared to play all of you. Only boys, you know—boys against men! No reason why you shouldn't play sixteen against our eleven."

"Oh, I think you'll find our team strong enough to give you a good fight, though we have left out all the fellows who are in the eleven at Wycliffe," answered Jack.

It was only Mr. Blimelow's blatant bluntness that made him say that. He was sorry for it the moment afterwards, because he realised that it wasn't quite the politest thing possible to have said, and reflected, too, that they would be rather let down if by any chance the Early Closers should scrape a win.

"And where is your respected father?" asked the mayor beamingly. "We count it a great honour that so famous a man should have come to reside among us."

"Come on purpose to live near old Blimelow, of course!" whispered the Commander in Jack's ear.

"And we only wish that we saw more of him in the town. Is he playing to-day, may I ask?"

"No, we couldn't persuade him to. He'll be here in a moment."

And just then Captain Jackson appeared, together with the squire, the latter in flannels, and a faded old Zingari blazer that had been carefully put away nearly a score of

Buy "The Marvel"—Every Wednesday, Id.

years before. He had sent to Borden Grango for it, and wore it to-day as some grey old knight might have worn the cuirass that had served him well in many a stricken field.

The captain, as has already been indicated, did not like the mayor, and he defected the way in which that personage thrust himself forward, obscuring everyone else on his side, and treating the whole affair as if he personally had arranged it with the owner of Stenfield Hall, whereas if Captain Jackson had imagined at first that it would be what his son called "a blessed Blimelow business," the challenge would never have been accepted.

All of them appreciated Shakespeare's attitude more than they did his father's. The younger man did not pretend to have forgiven and forgotten the way in which the boys had treated his father. He glanced sulkily at them, and kept well in the background.

"Nasty-tempered brute," remarked Harris to Jack, "but got more backbone than his father, anyway. I'd rather deal with a scowler like this than the old man."

"Your young friends and I had quite a gay time together on the day of their arrival!" said the mayor, with a forced liveliness that did not suit him, and that made his son look blacker than ever. "The high spirits of youth, my dear Captain Jackson—the high spirits of youth! What would not you and I give to be boys again?"

"It wasn't spirits at all!" grumbled Saunders to Porson. "It was only lime-juice. Dotty old ass!"

"Personally, I wouldn't give twopence," replied the captain. "I hadn't a very good time of it as a boy; but it's good to see the young ones enjoying themselves; and I am pleased to hear that you also found enjoyment in their fun. I was rather afraid—that they might have been a nuisance to you, to tell the truth."

"Not at all—not in the least, I assure you!" the mayor hastened to answer. Then, as if afraid he might be reduced to telling untruths if the subject of conversation were not changed, he asked: "Is your team ready for play? We are all here, I believe."

"Oh, yes, they are ready. Wicks is our captain to-day." Mr. Blimelow recognised in Wicks the curly-headed youth with the small, meek voice, whom he had mentally set down as worse than any of the crew, except Saunders of the syphon and Harris.

They all made their way to the cricket ground, which the mayor praised in a condescending manner that caused Jack and the Commander to long to kick him.

"My word, you might think the wretched old boulder had twenty at home, all better than this, to hear his piffin' talk!" said the Australian in Harris's ear.

"Who is your captain?" asked Wicks. "Perhaps we had better toss."

"Oh, I am, naturally," answered the mayor, with elephantine skittishness. "In so important an engagement as this who should lead the doughty forces of Stenfield if not the highest municipal officer of that famous town? I call 'woman,' Mr. Wicks."

Shakespeare scowled worse than ever; and Wicks grinned as the half-crown he had spun came down with the Royal arms uppermost.

"Then we'll bat," said Mr. Blimelow. "Here, hold on a moment! You haven't won the toss!" expostulated Wicks.

"Oh, but I have! That was what I meant when I said 'woman.' There is the King's head on the other side, of course."

"No giddy fear!" answered Wicks. And he showed the coin, which was of the mintage of the last reign. "If you could call the Royal arms 'woman,' you'd just as soon call the King's head so. Had to pin you down to something, you know. You can't say you've won now, for the 'woman' was certainly underneth."

"Why on earth didn't you call 'head,' or 'tail,' like a civilised human being, guv'nor?" asked Shakespeare, in a tone not so low but that it reached the ears of most of those around.

"In my young days, Shakespeare, we always called 'man,' or 'woman,'" replied the father, with dignity.

"In your young days it was pitch an' toss you played, not cricket!" growled the son.

And the Brothers began to like Shakespeare distinctly better. The fellow appeared to have glimmerings of common-sense, anyway.

"Then I suppose I must allow you to bat," said the mayor, with a sigh like a sirocco.

"Yes, I guess you must," replied Wicks drily.

Wicks and Hardy went in first, to the bowling of Blimelow, junior, and Fletcher, the pork-butcher. And the bowling was none so bad either. Shakespeare rattled them down at a terrific pace, and Fletcher bowled a good-length, slow, medium ball, which was not too easy to score off.

Properly supported by the field, those two bowlers might

very well have put out the whole side for a moderate score; but they were not properly supported.

The fielding was, as the Commander said, "simply putrid." Very few of the regular Wednesday afternoon players were in the team. Their places had been taken in several cases by their employers, who wanted the distinction of playing in a match at the Hall, and had a notion that, as they would only have boys to play against, they might succeed in doing something notable. Some of them had not played in a match for years, and apparently others had never before played in a match at all.

Hardy had a charmed life. He hit at everything, and never bothered about keeping the ball down, and time after time catches from his bat were dropped. Wicks, on the contrary, was playing finely, taking the game quite seriously, as, indeed, he was justified in doing as far as the bowling was concerned, and never lifting the ball.

Seven times the Morant's fellow was missed—three times in the country, twice at point, and twice in the slips, where the mayor had posted himself, together with Prebble, the newsagent, who was about twice as far round as he was. Then one of "Shakey's" fastest sent Hardy's middle stump flying for 35 out of 55.

Harry Crosswell came in, and quickly hit up 20, before Soles stumped him, off Fletcher. By this time the younger Blimelow was beginning to tire. The long run he took must have taken a good deal out of him, and he did not appear to be in the best of condition. He made short work of Conway, who was silly enough to underrate him; but, with Paddy and Wicks together, his length went all to pieces, and his pace died away.

Paddy hit high and hard and often, and Wicks, quite at the top of his form, tapped boundary after boundary, apparently almost without effort.

Mr. Prebble was hit in the back with the ball, and he was helped off the field, and Mac came out to field as a substitute. Five minutes later the newsagent, with a long glass of whisky-and-soda in his hand, had perfectly recovered, and was quite happy; but he could not go out to field again. He was very sure, he said, that the young gentleman was much fitter for "scouting," as he called it, than he was.

Which was undoubtedly true, as Paddy realised when Mac dismissed him from a hard stroke off one of Burley's balls, and he had to go for 43.

"Forgot you were there, begorra!" he said. Squire Feltham came in next. He had asked to be put down No. 11, but Wicks would not hear of that; and the good old fellow looked as happy as a sandboy when he got hold of a half-volley from Burley and drove it neatly along the carpet for 2, and the Brothers cheered him until they were hoarse.

But that was not the end of the scoring. He was not very active, and his eye was not so keen as of old; but he played with a straight bat, and watched the ball all the way, and the cheering broke forth again when he got round to a slow and sent it to the leg-boundary.

Then he cut neatly for 2, and thereafter several singles brought his total up to 13, when the younger Blimelow, who had gone on again with slow leg-breaks, scattered his stumps. He came in radiant with glee.

"Unlucky number, thirteen—deuced unlucky number! Always was so for me, I know. The only girl I ever proposed to refused me on the 13th of September, and she was thirteen at the time—no, she wasn't, though. I'm wrong. I was thirteen, and she was twenty-six—twice thirteen, d'ye see? I found afterwards that she was actually engaged at the time to an uncle of mine. And she married him—married him, she did, and led him the very dickens of a life—the very dickens!"

"Well, after all, then, yours wasn't such bad luck, squire," answered Jack. "An' you've done jolly well to-day, anyway. You've shown us what style they played in at the time when W. G. was a youngster, an' you never gave half a chance to the field."

And now Wicks, still going strongly, had reached his century, directly after which he obligingly poited a ball right into Mac's hands, and retired amid applause.

"You did that for the purpose, Wicky!" said Harris.

"Yes, I think we've made about enough to be safe, anyway, an' it will give some of the others a chance of a hit. I put it to old Mac, 'cause I couldn't see anyone else near who'd be at all likely to hold it. Tommy, you'd better go in next. You fellows don't mind, do you? I want to give the nipper a turn."

Taffy and Blencowe were now in together. Porson and Saunders did not at all mind waiting. And Tommy's turn soon came, for Taffy was run out after scoring a dozen, through the mayor throwing at one wicket and hitting the other.

"The youngster shapes well," said the squire. "Yes, he's goin' to make a cricketer," answered Jack.

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by H. Clarke Hook.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY CAR,"
A Thrilling Detective Story,
by Cecil Hayton.

IN "PLUCK," I'

"Bravo, Tommy! Well hit indeed!"

For Tommy had sent a short-pitched one from Burley to the leg-boundary. He made 10 before he was caught by Blimelow, junior; and as Blencow and Porson and Saunders all reached double figures, too, everyone was happy, including Conway, who had made a duck, but had extorted from Wicks a promise that he should be given first chance with the ball.

The total was close on 300.

Tea over, the Stenfield Hall team took the field, and Mr. Blimelow and Mr. Prebble went to the wickets together, the latter, heartened by whisky-and-soda and a substantial tea, jocularly declaring that the sooner he went in the sooner he would be out, which would all be for the best, and the former only doubtful about making a century because he was not quite sure whether there would be time enough.

Conway bowled the first ball. He was not a stock bowler. He might possibly have gone on as seventh or eighth change for the School House; but he had never done so yet. He believed his forte to be pace. Certainly that first ball of his was fast enough. Unfortunately it was not straight. It took the mayor in exactly the same place as the mayor's first delivery had taken Mr. Prebble; and when the mayor sat down and roared with pain, Mr. Prebble was rude enough to roar with laughter.

"I should think perhaps you'd better retire hurt, sir," suggested Taffy from behind the wicket.

"Nothing of the sort! Where is your British pluck, that you should suggest such a thing?" answered Mr. Blimelow, with considerable heat. "My dear lad, I must ask you to bowl with more moderation!" he said to Conway, facing him again.

Conway had not in the least intended to hit him. But he felt inclined to bowl at his body when he heard that patronising form of address and that distinctly unusual request.

"Well, here goes for the old bounder's middle stump, anyway!" he murmured to himself, as he started to run up to the wicket again.

And verily it was so! The mayor gave a wild swipe, and his middle stump went somersaulting. The next man in, another member of the Wide Waistbelt Society, fell to the next ball, standing outside his ground to receive it, missing it altogether, being stumped by Taffy, and saying nasty things to Sinhji, the umpire at that end, for giving him out.

Soles came in, tapped his first ball right into the hands of the squire standing rather deep at point, and went out wondering audibly what the world was coming to when old buffers of seventy took catches like that!

Shakespeare Blimelow hit up a dozen, made up of three 4's off three extremely bad balls from Conway, and then was stumped. Burley, sent in last but one by his employer as a salutary lesson against conceit, had no chance of showing what he could really do, but managed to make 5 before his partner succumbed. These were the only runs scored. In less than half an hour the whole side was out for 17, Conway having taken seven wickets for 16, and done the hat-trick, and Saunders the remaining three at the cost of one run.

Before the follow-on began, Shakespeare took his father aside and talked to him with emphasis. The result of this was that Burley was sent in first with Fletcher, and that the pair put on 30 before a wicket fell. But then Burley was rather unluckily run out, and Fletcher succumbed directly afterwards. Young Blimelow again scored double figures by determined slogging; but not one of the others contributed a solitary run, and before half-past seven the innings was over for 41, and the Early Closers were beaten by an innings and 230 runs!

CHAPTER 5.

News of an Old Enemy.

"YOU can go on, gov'nor," said Shakespeare Blimelow to his father when the motor-car was ready to start.

"I've got business to do here."

Then, to Jack's surprise, he said to him:

"I say, Jackson, I want to have a talk with you and the Indian chap who stood umpire. It's important; and it's on your account, not my own."

Instinctively Jack's thoughts flew to the midnight invaders whose appearance was still unaccounted for. They had not yet made a second invasion; but somehow the boys felt sure, from the precautions taken by Captain Jackson and Chota Ram, that their seniors did not believe them to have accepted the first defeat as final.

"D'ye mind if I call two or three of the other fellows, too?" asked Jack. "We always work together, you know; and I should tell them about it directly anyway, unless you objected."

"Oh, I don't object," was the answer.

Shakespeare still spoke a little sulkily. He felt that these

fellows were inclined to look down upon him; and it seemed to him a little bit rough, because he really did mean to do them a good turn.

So Jack called the Commander, Mac, and Harris, as well as Sinhji. The fellows who had been playing had gone off to change, and Bob Merritt appeared to have accompanied Crosswell.

Jack led the way in to the gun-room. Then their visitor, looking very serious, began:

"I know you fellows think I'm a bounder," he said, "but you can take it from me that I'm straight, anyway, and you can believe what I'm going to tell you, for it's the truth. Do any of you know a fellow named Laringa—Victor Laringa?"

They looked at one another. This was something quite different from what they had expected. Of course, they knew Laringa, the scoundrelly prefect who had gone near to ruining poor little Taffy through his mesmeric arts, and who had decamped from Wycliffe after being exposed by Sinhji and thoroughly beaten by Harris.

But what could young Blimelow know of him?

"Yes, we all know him, an' there isn't one of us that knows a ha'porth of good of him," replied the Commander. "He played an abominable trick on the youngster who kept wicket to-day, and Harris here thrashed him well for it. But do you mean to say you know him?"

"Know him? Of course I do! Aren't you aware that he lived here?"

"Lived at Stenfield? No, never heard it before."

"Not at Stenfield—here, in this very house? He came here with his people when he was quite a youngster, and I suppose he'd have been fifteen or so when they gave up the Hall. It stood empty for a while, and then Captain Jackson bought it and the estate. The Laringas had only rented the Hall. I knew Victor pretty well. I was three or four years older than he; but then he was old for his age; and we were a good deal together in the holidays. But I had to chuck him. I wasn't a saint, by a long way—in fact, I believe I was a particularly hard case—but he was altogether too thick for me to stand. You fellows may have known him pretty well, but I don't think you can have any real idea of what an out-and-out wicked brute he is!"

"Well; but that wasn't what you were going to tell us."

"No; but it has a good deal to do with it. He's about here again. I met him down at Brighton the other day; and this morning I heard that he'd been seen up here in a motor-car several times lately. More than that, he was making inquiries of a fellow I know about the visitors at the Hall, and especially about Sinhji. The chap had promised him to keep it dark, I believe Laringa bribed him. But he's one of the sort that can't help opening their mouths too wide; and I didn't consider that I was in any way bound to make a secret of it after he'd told me."

"What d'ye think he was gettin' at—Laringa, I mean?"

"No good, you bet! If he owes Sinhji one, you other fellows had better take care that he ain't given a chance to pay it off. For he's the cruellest and most revengeful beggar I ever struck. He wouldn't stick at murder, if he could manage it without risk to himself. But he's a white-livered beggar. There's a streak of cur in him somewhere. Now the old man—"

"Laringa's father, do you mean?"

"Yes. There's no funk about him. He's the desperado all through. There were funny tales floating about just before he left here. They do say he was concerned in a big plot for supplying the Boers with guns and ammunition during the war. Where he is now, nobody seems to know; but in China I should guess. They say he's been in places in China where no other white man was ever seen, and that he's hand in glove with all the rascals right through from the Yellow Sea to Tibet, which seems a pretty large order when one comes to think of it."

"What do you suspect Laringa—Victor Laringa, I mean—of intending?" asked Harris.

"You've got me there. I haven't the ghost of a notion what form it's likely to take; but he means harm to Sinhji—and to you, too, since you thrashed him, and very likely to all the rest of you."

"It's awfully good of you to warn us, Blimelow," said Jack gratefully.

"Not a bit of it. Nothing more than my clear duty. But to tell you the truth, I was so riled with you that if it had been anyone less dangerous than this brute, I might not have said anything. Then this afternoon, while we were playing, it seemed to strike me that after all you were decent chaps, and that if you did annoy the gov'nor it's likely enough that he annoyed you first. He's rather a bumptious old buffer, I know, and inclined to be quarrelsome at times; but he don't mean any harm, and he's decent at heart."

"Look here, old man, we won't do another thing to annoy him—pon my honour, we won't!" said Jack earnestly. And the others nodded assent.

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"Thanks! I'd be grateful if you wouldn't. And now I'll be off."

"We're not goin' to let you walk home. I'll have a car round in a couple of minutes, an' drive you. You fellows will come, won't you?"

They all agreed; and Shakespeare's expostulations went unheeded.

"I say, Blimelow," said Jack, when they shook hands with him at parting, "you'll be playin' against us for Stenfield, of course; but we've several other matches on, an' we'd be awfully glad if you'd play for us in them."

"But I should be keeping one of you out," answered the other fellow, plainly anxious to accept.

"That don't matter. We take turns to stand down. You'll play then? That's right! Good-bye!"

And they were off.

It was high time to dress for dinner when they got back; but during the process of dressing a good deal of talk went on about what they had heard. Wicks and Paddy and Taffy were driven nearly frantic by vague allusions to things that were to be explained fully later; and the rest of the Brothers, in the four other rooms, wondered what on earth the beggars across the corridors were buzzing about.

Laringa—Laringa's father—the Hall—the Boor War—China—Tibet—what a jumble it all seemed!

Yet to Sinhji, at least, a good deal of the mystery was already clear. He had realised from the first that the two midnight visitors were of some Oriental race, and that one of the Mongol races. He was sure they were not Japanese, and did not think they were Chinamen; but what could be more likely than that they were Tibetans, seeing that Captain Jackson had only lately returned from travelling in the most mysterious country of Asia?

The most difficult thing to account for was their being able to enter the Hall by a passage unknown to its owner. Now that seemed easy to explain. Laringa's father, the former tenant of the Hall, was in the Far East somewhere, and was believed to know more of Central Asia than almost any other white man.

The man was a renegade, and an all-round rascal. His son, who was in the neighbourhood of Stenfield, was as bad as he. It seemed more than probable that his were the directions that had guided the two yellow men by the secret way.

Perhaps none of the other boys had pieced things together quite to this extent; but they all had a glimmering of what might be the solution of the problem; and they went down to dinner in a state of intense excitement. Jack had asked them to say nothing to his father as yet, however; and in talking of the match, and the games that were to follow it, the affair soon got thrust to the back of their minds. Only Sinhji sat and pondered over it, with that inscrutable face of his; but as Sinhji never talked much, no one noticed his silence.

Jack had intended to tell the captain what he had heard when once dinner was over; but before he could do so a visitor called, and a few minutes later their host looked in to bid the fellows good-night, as he was going to drive his visitor over to Brighton in the Mercedes, and would not be back until too late to see them again.

They did not say anything to the squire. The excitement of the day had told upon him, and he looked older and less strong than usual. Even the most reckless and least thoughtful of these boys was very tender where the squire was concerned. The old man was fond of them all, and there was not one of them who did not return his affection.

"I'm tired, lads," he said—"quite tired out! Twenty years since I played cricket last—twenty years. A long time—eh? I think I'll go up to bed now, and get a good, long night's rest. That's the best thing—eh? Will two of you give me your shoulders? I'm afraid my gouty toe is going to give trouble again. Wretched thing, the gout! But there, I mustn't grumble!"

Would two of them? There were thirty-two shoulders there, from the broad, muscular ones of Harris to Cartwright's, which were slight and weak; and not one of the thirty-two but was at the squire's service. Every fellow rose; but all understood that Bob Merritt must be one of the two, and they made way for him. The squire picked out Cartwright from the rest.

"Come along, Charley—come along! Your father and I were chums at Wycliffe together in the long ago—quite in antediluvian times—eh, lads? But he'd more mischief in him than you have, Charley, though he is a bishop now—a bishop now—eh? Good-night, boys, and God bless you all!"

"Good-night, sir!" came the chorus of young voices.

"Isn't he an old brick?" said Jack. "Wait till those two come back, then we've something to tell you fellows."

"I should think you have!" grumbled Wicks. "You've sent us pretty near dotty with your hints already."

"It didna spoil your appetite, though, mon," remarked Donald.

"Shure, if a fellow mayn't ata a good big dianer—say, enough for about tin—afther scorin' a century, whin may he, begorra?"

Bob and Cartwright were soon back, and then the story was told. Dessert was neglected that evening. Even Porson was too excited to trouble about it.

"Fancy that brute Laringa bein' at the bottom of it all!" burst out Taffy.

His quick mind had solved the puzzle in very much the same way that Sinhji's had.

Some of them did not quite follow him, and said so. He explained quickly what he meant, looking at the Indian from time to time for approval, and every time he looked Sinhji nodded gravely.

"Look here, I vote we go an' have another look at those panels!" suggested Jack.

"D'ye think your governor wad like it, mon?" asked canny Mac.

"Oh, he won't mind! Why should he? I'll go an' get the key of the room."

But he returned without it. Chota Ram had it; but not all Jack's wiles could induce him to part with it.

"Doesn't matter much," said Harris. "After all, we couldn't make anything of the panels before, an' there's no particular reason to suppose we should have any better luck now. If only we could find the other end of the passage!"

"Good notion! Let's go an' hunt for it!"

"But where is it?" asked Blencowe.

"Silly ass! If we knew that we wouldn't need to hunt, would we?" snapped the Commander.

"But Blen's right, too, in a way. He means that we ought to have some idea of where to look before we start out," remarked Bob.

"I don't think it can be anywhere very near at hand," said Harris. "We've made such a jolly careful search, you see. An' some of these old secret passages are miles long, I believe. What's to hinder this one leadin' out in some lonely part of the Downs?"

They were rather struck by the idea. The long range of the Sussex Downs, looking singularly regular from a distance, but found to be broken and hollowed out when one saw them closer, backed Stenfield Hall, at something like half a mile away. Caverns are few in the Downs; but there are curious saucer-shaped deep hollows here and there, into which few people, save a lazy shepherd-boy now and then, ever intrude. It seemed likely enough that the other end of the passage might be discovered in one of these.

"It's moonlight," said Jack. "Let's go! I'm quite sure that the pater would agree; but, on the other hand, we can't be sure that he wouldn't. And if we find out anything, he'd be jolly glad. No harm can happen to us if we stick together."

The suggestion commended itself to all. They got upstairs, and changed their dress-clothes for Norfolk suits or flannels, and sallied out. There was no one to say them nay, or even to ask them where they were going. The butler would as soon have thought of trying to fly as of doing so; and Chota Ram, the only person in the household who knew that there might possibly be danger, would not have dreamed of trying to exert authority over "the young sahibs."

CHAPTER 6.

The Yellow Men.

IT might easily have been foreseen that the plan of keeping together would not be carried into execution.

Before the boys had been out twenty minutes they had split up into four or five parties. Everyone wanted to find the outer end of the passage; and everyone searched with more or less zeal. But if it was to be accepted as possible that the secret way was a mile, or even half a mile, long, this gave so big a range for the exit that the chances of finding it were small indeed; and some of the fellows realised that sooner than others.

And it was glorious out there on the Downs. The day had been intensely hot; but the air was quite cool now, for a fresh wind blew inland from the Channel. The brilliant moonlight clothed the bareness of the hills with beauty, every bush and tuft on the higher ridges standing out clearly in its lustre. But there were dark hollows here and there, and into one of them, a great, almost circular depression, of which they could hardly see the bottom, three of the fellows were gazing intently. Bob Merritt, Harry Crosswell, and Paddy were the three.

"I don't see what it can be if it isn't a fire," said Bob. "It's gone low now, of course, an' all that we can see are the glowing embers; but I'll bet we'd have seen the blaze right enough if we'd been here an hour ago."

"But who'd be afther lightin' a fire down in that dark

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IN "PLUCK," 1^o

hollow, an' phwat would they be wantin' a fire for?" objected Paddy.

"To cook their grub at, fathead!" returned Bob.

"An' as for who it is, it might be a tramp; but, on the other hand, it's just as likely to be those two rascally yellow-faced johnnies who gave you such a fright the other night, Irish," remarked Crosswell.

"Fright, be jiggered, ye spalpeen! Who was frightened, anyhow? But 'tisn't likely to be a tramp. Ye don't often find those gentry so far away from a main road as this."

"An', on the other hand, it don't seem at all out of the way to imagine that it's the two yellow men—perhaps more than two of them. They aren't anywhere in the town or at any house round about, that's certain; yet I know Captain Jackson an' Chota Ram don't think they've hooked it. Let's go down an' see!"

Bob's proposition was a rash one; but it appealed to the other two, both of them as thoroughly fearless as boys could be.

"Can't see any of the other fellows around," said Crosswell. "An' we musn't yell to 'em, for the beggars down below would be sure to hear us."

"D'ye think we can scramble down without their hearin'?"

"Shure, I guess we can, if you'll come fifty yards or so this way. I was round here the other mornin' wid Harry, an' I noticed thin that it wasn't quite so steep there."

Paddy took them to the place he had indicated, which had the additional advantage of being as far from the dying fire as it could be, while still being on the dark side of the hollow.

Very cautiously they clambered down, restraining their natural inclination to call out whenever their hands, searching for something to hold by, grasped gorse-bushes, as often happened. They reached the bottom of the hollow without having made any noise likely to have been heard by anyone sitting by that fire, and there they halted a moment.

"Bodad, it'll take me all night to pick the gorse-prickles out of my hands!" whispered Paddy.

"Well, you needn't pick 'em out. We don't mind if you leave 'em there. An' we've got some of our own, anyway. I say, don't you think we'd better go on all fours an' crawl up to them? It looks to me as if there was a biggish clump of bushes just this side of the fire. If we can reach that without their suspectin' anything, we may be able to discover somethin'."

It was hard work, that crawl. Their knees were soon as full of prickles as their hands. But they reached the bushes undetected.

They were now only some ten yards from the men who sat by the fire. For men there were there, and not only that, but beyond all doubt the men they had expected to find!

What they had been wearing on the night of their visit to the Hall, Paddy had been too excited to notice; but they were certainly not clothed then as they were now, for each now wore a long sleeveless robe of red, with a high, stiff collar. Their skulls, clean-shaven, had no covering, and their feet were bare. One nodded as he sat, for sleep had almost overcome him; but the other sat upright on his haunches, murmuring to himself over and over again four words:

"Om mani padmi hum!"

None of the three who listened had any idea what these words meant; but Sinhji or Captain Jackson could have told them that they formed the prayer, thousands of times repeated each day, of the Tibetan Buddhists.

"What are we goin' to do now?" whispered Crosswell.

Bob laid a finger on his lips.

"Look," he said, pointing to the opposite side of the hollow, lighted by the moon, down which a dark figure could plainly be seen making its way.

"'Tisn't one of our fellows, I bet!" said Paddy.

"No fear! But I believe I can make a good guess as to who it is," answered Crosswell.

The figure came straight up to the fire, and laid a hand on the shoulder of the man who muttered.

"I don't know him," said Bob.

"You wouldn't. He was before your time at Wycliffe. But we do," answered Crosswell significantly.

"Yes; it's that brute Laringa!" added Paddy.

Laringa darted a glance at the bushes. Had he heard anything to arouse his suspicions? It appeared not, for he went on talking to the praying man, while the other, as yet apparently unaware of his presence, still nodded.

The language they used was one that the boys had never heard before, and their annoyance at thus being prevented from overhearing what they did not doubt was some foul plot against their host was intense.

"D'ye think we'd have any chance if we rushed 'em?" asked Bob, in an eager whisper.

"Chance of capturin' 'em? 'Fraid not. They're three to

three, probably all three armed, and all over our fightin' weight."

"Then what ought we to do?"

"Best thing would be if one of us went back an' tried to bring some of the other fellows to help. But it's a risky job."

"Faith, I'm willin' to go!" said Paddy.

He was the right one to go, beyond doubt. If he were discovered while attempting it, they would go to his help. If they were found out after he had gone—well, they were both heavier and stronger and capable of putting up a bigger fight than the Irish lad.

"All right; cut along! But be careful!" said Crosswell.

Paddy started. But he had not got twenty yards away, when a shout made him jump to his feet, and rush back to the help of his chums.

And as he rushed back he sent a wild cry shrilling out into the night:

"Brothers, ahoy! Wycliffe, to the rescue!"

And an answering shout came back from somewhere on the edge of the hollow.

Crosswell had one Tibetan by the throat, and was locked in deadly grapple with him. Bob had got home with his left on Laringa's face; but his enemies were two to one, and but for Paddy's sudden onslaught, that moment might well have been his last, for he was down, with Laringa astride of him, and the Tibetan had snatched up a dagger, when Paddy rushed in like a young whirlwind, smote the Asian brute in the face, and, disregarding for once all rules of civilised warfare, kicked Laringa under the chin with all his force, sending him reeling off Bob's body.

"Kill them—kill them all!" yelled Laringa, spitting blood.

He forgot in his fury that his colleagues could not understand the words. But perhaps they guessed at their meaning; and, in any case, they needed little adjuration.

The dagger descended, but Paddy clung to the striker's arm, beating him about the head all the while, and the keen point only grazed Bob's skin. Crosswell, with a swift cross-buttock, had flung his man; but as the Tibetan fell he dragged his opponent down with him, and they renewed their struggle on the ground.

"Wycliffe! Wycliffe! Rescue!" panted Paddy, never releasing his hold, never ceasing his blows.

And the answering shout pealed out, close at hand now, and the rescuers came sliding, jumping, tearing, tumbling down the side of the hollow.

Laringa, cur and coward, took to his heels, and fled by the way he had come. He had no mind to face the vengeance of his former schoolfellows.

On a sudden the Tibetan relaxed his efforts against Bob, and struck Paddy full upon the temple with his clenched fist. The boy fell senseless. At that moment, too, Crosswell's opponent sprang to his feet, and made a rush for the side of the hollow. The other man leaned over Bob, an awful grin of triumph on his wicked yellow face, and poised his dagger. But the stroke did not fall, for Jack and Sinhji and the Commander came tearing through the bushes, and Mac and Taffy and Hardy raced across from the other side. And from the top came the shouting of Wicks and Harris as they, too, attracted by the cries of rescue, plunged down to the fray.

But not even the first comers were in time to make a capture, though undoubtedly their arrival saved Bob's life. For the remaining Tibetan, with a wild bound, had sprung into the darkness of the bushes that fringed the side of the hollow, and, though they followed, they never caught him, but from somewhere above they heard the sound of a mocking laugh, and words in an unknown tongue.

Right up through the bushes they went, Jack and Merry and Sinhji, leaving the others to attend to the fellows below; up beyond them to the very lip of the hollow, and no one could they find. Out there the level top of the downs showed clear to view in the moonlight for some hundreds of yards. But in all that space only one figure showed itself, and that was the figure of someone in English garb, running hard towards the south. Laringa, no doubt! But what had become of the other two?

It was a mystery that they could not solve. When they reached the bottom of the hollow again, they found that Paddy had regained consciousness; but Crosswell, whose head had been beaten violently upon a stone, was still senseless. He came round after a bit, though. And then they made a thorough inspection of the side of the hollow.

By this time the whole company had arrived upon the scene, most of them very disappointed at having missed what they called the fun. The trio who had had all the fun seemed strangely unconscious of any humour in it. Crosswell, with a lump the size of a hen's egg on the back of his head; Paddy, with a great bruise on his left temple; and Bob, white and shaken from that awful moment when death

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had been so near, were quite unfit for any share in the search indeed.

The others were sanguine that the two Tibetans must have disappeared into the secret passage. It seemed likely enough indeed; but if it was correct they were none the wiser for it. For they were unable to discover any sign of the entrance. The darkness in which that side of the hollow was shrouded was against them, of course, but they were very loth to give up their search. It was only the absolute necessity of getting the three injured ones home that made them do so.

And even then they did not all go. At Sinhji's suggestion half a dozen of them—himself, Jack, the Commander, Harris, Wicks, and Mac—stayed there while the rest went back. To Taffy was entrusted the charge of telling Captain Jackson the story. Taffy was eloquent, and withal a favourite of his host.

"An' if the pater's got home, you bet it won't be long before he turns up here!" said Jack. "Look here, you fellows! We're goin' to keep a watch here all night. If those beggars are in the passage, we've got 'em like rats in a trap! They can't get out this end while we're here."

"But they can at the other," suggested Harris.

"Yes; into a locked room! We've got 'em, right enough! But if any of you fellows mind stayin'—"

"Oh, chuck it, Jacker, or someone will have to sit on you! Of course we don't mind! Wild horses wouldn't drag us away!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Mayor makes Himself Useful.

IT was cold, dreary work, that long night watch, after the excitement of the events that had preceded it. No one was warm enough to sleep while the others kept guard; and, after a while, they were reduced to making up and relighting the fire, which they had allowed to go out.

"I should think the pater must be staying down at Brighton for the night!" said Jack impatiently.

"No, mon; he wouldnae dae that," replied Mac, who realised better than Jack did the anxiety on behalf of the boys under his care which Captain Jackson felt.

"Ahoy, there!" came a voice from the top of the hollow. But it was not the captain's voice.

"Ahoy! Who are you?" shouted back the Australian.

"Blimelow!" was the unexpected answer. "Chota Ram and Jolly are with me. I'll come down, and tell you how it is I'm here."

He was with them two or three minutes later, and it was with great relief that they saw the load his companions carried. Half a dozen thick overcoats, rugs, a hamper that spoke louder than words of good cheer for the inner man, and a coffee-pot.

"Good business!" said Harris. "I say, Blimelow, it's awfully decent of you to come; but how is it you're on in this act?"

Shakespeare grinned.

"Tell you in a moment," he answered. "Let's get you all into overcoats and the coffee on first."

"My word, I'm glad of that! I never thought a night in August could be so cold," said the Commander, as he slipped into one of his host's heaviest greatcoats.

"Cold, sir?" asked Jolly, the groom, who had borne the greater part of the load of coats and rugs. "Why, I call it one of the hottest nights as I ever knew!"

So might Merry have done had their occupations been reversed during the last half hour.

"Chota Ram's to go back," said Blimelow, "but Jolly's to stay here with us; so he'll have a chance of coolin' off."

"Pater back, I s'pose?" asked Jack. "Anything been seen yet at the Hall of those yellow rascals?"

"He's back; but they haven't turned up yet, and he hardly thinks they will. Still, they may; and, if they do, he'll find a deputation to receive 'em. Your governor, with all the fellows except Crosswell and the Irish youngster, whom he insisted on sendin' to bed, and three or four of the men, are waitin' in the corridor outside the room with the panel. Chota Ram's to join them when he gets back. Hallo, where is he?"

They looked round, but the Indian had disappeared. He had merely waited long enough to put down his load and take sure that all was well with them, and then he had gone off in his usual noiseless fashion.

"Is he dumb?" asked Blimelow. "I've seen the beggar about these three months or more, an' I've never heard him say a word yet."

Jack laughed.

"He's not dumb; but he ain't nuts on talkin'. I say, what have you got there?"

"Don't grab! They're all loaded; but the captain said

they weren't to be used unless it was absolutely necessary, and that no one was to have one that couldn't assure me that he knew how to use it."

He had produced four revolvers from the pockets of his big plaid overcoat.

"There's one for you, Jackson, an' one for Sinhji. The captain said that you were both experts. Who claims the other two?"

"I can use one all right!" said Harris eagerly.

"I've never handled one in my life," confessed Mac.

"I have; but I'd be just as likely to hit anything else as what I was aiming at," said Wicks.

"Then you don't have one, my friend; nor yet the Scotchman there. Merry?"

"Oh, yes; I can use the jiggers. But you won't have one left for yourself."

"You bet I will! Got one of my own. Carried it ever since I was attacked on the road one night comin' home from Brighton."

Jolly had now unpacked the provisions, and the smell of hot coffee was perfuming the night air.

"Beefsteak an' kidney pie, gentlemen. Ham an' chicken, gentlemen. Cold boiled beef, gentlemen," said the zroom.

"Give me a bit of everything," answered Harris. "I could eat the ham-bone, if there wasn't anything else."

"Get out with you! You're as bad as old Porson! I say, Blimelow, you were goin' to tell us how you came to turn up here?"

"Oh, yes! I'd been down to Brighton. Came away from the Hippodrome just before cloven, had a wet, an' started back in the car. Just the other side of Doreham saw a car,

pulled up at the edge of the road, an' a chap tinkerin' wit' it. Asked if I could help, never suspectin' who he was. He

must have finished what he was about just then, for he gave me one glance, scared-like, jumped into the car, and started off like fury. For the moment I thought he was mad. Then

it suddenly dawned upon me that it was Larings; and I can tell you it gave me a turn! Puttin' together the fact

of his bein' on his way back by the road from here, and the fact that he was scared half out of his wits at recognisin'

my voice, I concluded that he'd been up to some mischief. An' I shouldn't have been a bit surprised if I'd heard when

I got to the Hall that someone was a gon'er—probably you, Sinhji! I made up my mind to run up an' see, anyway,

though I realised what a fool I'd look if nothing had happened. So I looked in at home on the way, an' told

my old man that I might not be back for some hours."

Harris nudged Jack, to remind him that he had put down Shakespeare as being worse than his father, if possible.

They were all inclined to think very differently of him now.

"What did he say?" asked Wicks, who felt a kind of proprietary interest in the sayings and doings of that queer specimen, the Mayor of Stenfield.

"Wanted to come along, too, when I gave him a hint that there was danger. Ah, you fellows may grin; but, whatever my old man isn't, he is a good-plucked one."

"Oh, we're sure of that!" said Sinhji. And the others, remembering how Mr. Blimelow had faced Conway again after that nasty knock in the match, refusing to consider the advisability of retiring hurt, murmured assent.

"Well, I caught up the captain just before he got to the Hall gates. I dare say he started from Brighton well ahead of me; but I was doin' a bit of what you fellows call the Jehu son of Nimshi trick between Doreham and here. Saw a bobby take my number just outside Doreham, but didn't think it worth while to pull up. Summons in the morning, I dare say."

"First?" asked the Commander, with a grin.

"Well, no; it wouldn't be quite the first. But I haven't had one in this petty sessional area yet, and I'm not anxious to give the governor the chance to play the stern Roman father. Yes; I will have another cup of coffee, Macdonald, please. And I'll have a bit more ham, if you'll slice me off a bit, Wicks. Hope you fellows don't mind my eatin' while I talk!"

"Oh, no! It's very interestin'—the talk I mean, of course."

"I'd hardly caught your governor up before the little wicket-keeper came out to him with the tale of what had happened down here. Then, naturally I offered my help, and—well, there you are, you see! That explains it all, as far as I'm concerned. By the way, I fancy the captain has a pretty good notion where these two yellow wretches come from, and now that he's heard about the former connection of the Larings with the Hall, things seem middlin' clear to him. He wanted to impress upon you that these beggars are to be captured without hurtin' 'em, if possible. From their point of view, he says, they're doin' nothing wrong. But he looked very stormy when I told him about Larings, an' I guess Master Victor will have a warm quarter of an hour if once the captain gets hold of him. I wonder whether

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there's any way of provin' the case against him sufficiently to get him a dose of stone jug?"

"Of course there is!" said Jack. "Doesn't everything fit in?"

"But, mon, we haven't an atom of proof against him yet," objected Mac. "He hasn't been seen at the Hall; an' the town's free to ilka ane that likes. He was talkin' to them foreigners, certainly; but only ane that happened on them by accident might ha' tried to do the like."

"He joined with them in attackin' our fellows, anyway."

"Did he? Did they attack our fellows? From what I could make out, no one's quite sure who struck first," said the Commander. "They found Bob an' Harry hidin', an' then there was a scrimmage. Laringa didn't use any weapon, an' I don't suppose the law would make him responsible for the yellow mugs usin' their stickers. You jump at things too much, Jacker."

"Well, he may give us another chance of catchin' him out."

"Not he! If he doesn't see that the game's up now, I don't know Laringa. Mind, I'm not sayin' that he'll give up his notion of gettin' even with old Sinhji and the rest of us. But he won't try to make any more use of the yellow mugs. He'll see that they're tools too clumsy for him to handle properly."

"The most satisfactory meal I ever made in my life," said Harris, draining his last cup of coffee. "While you fellows have been talkin', I've been doin'. It looks as though some of the rest of you have been doin' too. I say, Blimelow, I hope you've had enough?"

"Yes, thanks, I've made a capital meal."

"That's a good thing, because there ain't a scrap left. Eight good, able-bodied appetites, eh? Jolly!"

"Yes, sir," said the groom, with a grin.

He had done his share of the work of demolition, and was now engaged in packing the crockery into the hamper. That bivouac under the stars had been the keenest enjoyment to them all.

The moon had set now. The air had grown colder still, for a chill breeze heralded the dawn that was making grey the eastern sky.

A shrill whistle from the edge of the hollow smote their ears.

"That's Tommy Tidd," said Jack. "What on earth is the youngster doin' out at this hour?"

"Here we are, Tommy! Come along!" yelled Harris.

Tommy came hurrying down, in great excitement.

"You might have told me!" he said. "I didn't know nothing—anything, I mean—about it till farver—till father came in just now! An' all the time I know where that passage is, an' I guess I'm the only one that does know!"

"You mean to say you know it?"

"Yes; an' it isn't fifty yards from where you're sittin' now!" answered Tommy, in triumph. "I found it when we first came down here, before I went away to school, one day when I was wanderin' round by myself. An' I never told a soul, 'cause I fought—I mean I thought—I'd keep it a secret to tell the gov'nor here—Master Jack, I mean—when he came home for the holidays."

"But how came you here now?"

"Father came home an' found me awake. He'd been out lookin' after poachers, an' he told me all about the row there'd been on up at the Hall, an' how some of you were watchin' down here. Then I told him that I knew the passage, an' said I'd go to you. But he said that I shouldn't. So I waited till he'd gone out again—expect he's gone to the Hall to tell the captain—an' then I found he'd locked my bed-room door, so I dropped out of the window, an' here I am!"

"But how d'ye know that the hole you found is the secret passage, Tommy?" asked Jack. "You never went right through it, surely?"

"No; but I went more'n a hundred yards, an' didn't find an end, so I expect it must be. It's 'most a pity you didn't tell me about those two yellow chaps sooner, I think. You could have trusted me, anyway!"

So they might have done; but they had had the captain's express command that no one should be told. The happenings of the night had made a difference. Whether the Tibetans were trapped or not, it was impossible longer to keep the whole affair secret. The police would have to know, and the public, too. Captain Jackson had felt sure that the two Asiatics were very unlikely to be dangerous to anyone they should meet by chance, or he would not have kept it dark.

"Well, we're goin' to follow 'em up, I suppose?" said the Commander.

"Yes; but we shall want a lantern," remarked Wicks.

Tommy produced an acetylene bicycle lamp from under his coat.

"Brought this," he said, nodding his curly head in triumph.

What a boy it was! Here was a youngster of under twelve, an age at which a spoiled, coddled child has still a great deal of baby in him; and yet such were his pluck and resolution and resource, that he took his place almost as an equal among the eight others, of whom the groom and young Blimelow were nearly twice his age, and the Wycliffites all four or five years older at least than he.

They could hardly wonder that they had not found the entrance to the passage when Tommy showed it them. They had been looking for a trapdoor, or for some big opening in the side of the hollow, not for a hole scarcely a great deal bigger than a fox's, so screened by bushes that one might have passed it fifty times without suspecting its existence.

"In there?" asked Blimelow. "Why, youngster, we can't get in!"

"Oh, yes you can, if you go down on your hands and knees, an' wriggle a bit if it's too tight a fit," replied Tommy. "It's only a yard or two like that, then there's a passage high enough for any of us to walk upright in."

One might have gathered, hearing him without seeing, that he was at least six feet, and the tallest there.

"I'll go first," he said. "I know the way."

But, of course, they could not allow that.

"No," said Blimelow, "I'm first man in!"

But that, too, did not find general agreement. Harris and Jack and the Commander all disputed his right; and the only reason why Wicks and Mac and Sinhji and the groom did not do likewise, was because they knew it would be no good.

They settled it by tossing, and Blimelow won. In their excitement it did not occur to any of them that they were taking it too absolutely for granted that the Tibetans must necessarily be in that secret passage. But, after all, if they were not, but had managed to escape over the edge of the hollow, and were lying hidden somewhere on the downs, they were hardly likely to return just yet to the place at which they had been disturbed.

They had to take their overcoats off, and these and the hamper they left by the bushes that hid the hole. Then Blimelow went down on hands and knees and squeezed into the hole. He was largely made, and it was an exceedingly tight fit.

"Wriggle a bit!" cried Tommy.

Blimelow wriggled, and suddenly disappeared.

"You young beggar!" he said, his red face appearing again inside the hole, as Jack held the lamp at its mouth.

"You didn't tell me there was a drop of three feet when one got inside!"

"Forgot all about it. Sorry!" replied Tommy contritely.

"Shove the lamp through, Jackson, then I can hold it while you others scramble in."

One after another they came, Tommy, greatly to his disgust, having to be content with last place, an indignity which he resented by trying to puncture Jolly's slim, gaitered calves with a pin as the groom crawled through before him.

They all stood upright together in a passage about a yard wide and rather more than two yards high. It was somewhat stuffy, but not unbearably so, and though the floor was rugged and uneven, walking along it presented no difficulty.

"Now those beggars are caught like rats in a trap!" said Jack gleefully. "We're closin' in on them from behind; an' there's a warm reception waitin' for 'em in front. We're bound to have 'em!"

"If they're here at all."

"What an old croaker you are, Mac! Can't you move a bit faster, Blimelow?"

"I can; but I don't want to knock my head off. The roof isn't always the same height, and I got a nasty tap just then. It isn't an ornamental head, I know, an' I'm not sayin' that it's particularly well furnished, but such as it is, it's all I've got."

"Sorry I spoke. It's a beautiful head, I'm sure, and we all admire it. We wouldn't have it cracked for worlds!"

Jack rattled on, talking some sense and a good deal of nonsense. That was the way that high nervous tension took him; he could not help talking. It affects different natures in very different ways. The Commander it made irritable, until the time came for the actual struggle, then he was cheerful enough. Wicks and Jolly the groom muttered to themselves as they walked. Harris clenched and unclenched his big fists continually. Mac and Sinhji were more silent even than usual. Of all the nine, Blimelow in the front, and Tommy Tidd in the rear, were most like their ordinary selves.

From that night the Brothers of Borden counted Shakespeare Blimelow among their friends. He had faults of manner, no doubt, and it was a great pity that he possessed such a piffling old donkey of a father, they thought; but the fellow who could go so cheerfully and unconcernedly into dangers that he might have stayed outside of, was after

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their own hearts. Many a time afterwards, when the chums found themselves in tight corners, would Harris or Jack, or the Commander say: "Wish old Blimelow was here!" And though they said "Old Blimelow," they didn't mean the mayor.

They were nine to two, and five of them had revolvers; but that did not do away with the danger. At any moment the two whom they sought might spring upon them from one of the many crannies in the walls of the passage, several of which, quite capable of holding two men, they had already passed.

"There's my mark!" called out Tommy suddenly. "I know it by that big heap of earth near it."

And sure enough, when Blimelow threw the light of the lamp on the wall to the left, there was to be seen a piece of wood, stuck between two stones, and on that piece of wood two roughly-carved letters, "T. T."

"Do you mean to say that you came all this way alone, Tommy?"

"For they were now not only 'more'n a hundred yards,' but a good two hundred and fifty along the passage.

"Yes," replied Tommy nonchalantly. "But," he added as an afterthought, "there wasn't any Tibbits in here then."

"Any what?"

"Tibbits—the chaps you're after. That's what father called 'em, anyway."

"I say, we didn't bargain for this," said Blimelow suddenly. "If you'd come only a few yards further, youngster—though it beats me that a kid should have had the pluck to come as far—you'd have found out something!"

For the passage had forked, and they were suddenly confronted with the choice of two ways.

Which were they to take? Mac, Sinhji and Harris said the left; the other six voted for the right.

"The only thing to do seems to be for some of us to stay here, or some to take one way, and some the other," said Blimelow. "I don't like the idea of splittin' one force into two, either."

"I'll stay here for one," answered Harris. "I'm sure you fellows are wrong. You can come back when you've found out you are. An' if the yellow-mugs come along our way in the meantime, I guess we can give an account of them."

Mac and Sinhji were also quite willing to stay. Wicks wavered. He liked to be where Harris was, and yet he felt sure that he and the rest were right. So the groom was left with the three, and Wicks went on with the other four.

Somebody once said that the minority is always in the right. It was so in this case, anyway.

A long, weary time the four waited in the dark, for, of course, the other party had taken the lamp. Harris and Sinhji held their revolvers in their hands. Jolly spoke from time to time; generally Harris, less often Mac, answered him. That was the sort of vigil to try the courage of the bravest. Outside the world was glorious with sunrise, and the short, crisp turf of the downs was springy underfoot, and the rabbits were coming out to play and feed. Down here was intense darkness, out of which at any moment might emerge the ruthless and desperate enemy.

"Here come our fellows back," said Mac. "I hear a noise in the right gallery."

"It's in the left, sir, I think," said Jolly.

They listened intently.

"It's in both!" cried Sinhji, speaking for the first time for over an hour. "Hark; don't you hear them yellin'?"

"Wycliffe ahoy! Here they come!" yelled Harris down the passage, along which they could now plainly hear the voices of their returning comrades.

There came a yell from the other passage.

"Brothers ahoy! Stop the brutes! They've killed Cartwright!"

And the next moment the Tibetans were upon them! The butt of Harris's revolver smote the head of someone; but in the darkness and confusion he was really not sure whether it was enemy or friend that he struck. Mac caught hold of a high, stiff collar, and hung on for a moment; but a stab in the arm made him give way.

Hurrying footsteps came along the other gallery, and Blimelow's lamp shone ahead just in time to show the two red-cloaked figures speeding down the passage in front, with Blencowe and Hardy close on their heels. Harris and Jolly, Mac and Sinhji, joined in the chase at once. After them, pell-mell, came the four who had taken the wrong way, mixed with the rest from the Hall, Captain Jackson, the first of them, then Conway, Saunders, Poraon, two stalwart footmen, Bob Merritt, Chota Ram, Taffy, a groom, Crosswell, and Paddy, in their pyjamas, and Cartwright, blood streaming down his face, but far from being dead.

The order in which they came was no indication of that in which they had started, and no proof of greater eagerness in one than in another. Not one but had had, at least,

one stumble; and it was those who had been lucky enough to escape with the fewest who were ahead. When they examined the passage afterwards they were amazed that no necks had been broken.

"For shure," said Paddy, "the rocky road to Jordan was a complete fool to it!"

There was no chance of using a revolver. The two fugitives were screened by the bodies of their pursuers. Would they escape after all?

They were very near the entrance now. Blencowe, spurning madly, stumbled, and over his body rolled Hardy and Harris and Mac. The rest dashed past, and Sinhji made a futile grab at the heels of the second Tibetan as he disappeared through the narrow opening.

Then, from without, they heard a voice that they recognised at once.

"Where are you coming to? Here, hold on there! I'm a justice of the peace, I am, and I command you to stop!"

"That's my governor!" said Blimelow, half inclined to chuckle, but pressing forward to get through first lest his father should be hurt.

"That's right, Mr. Mayor! Hold on to 'im! For I've got my man all safe an' comfortable, in a manner of speakin'!"

"An' that's my father!" exclaimed Tommy, hugely delighted. "It's all right, Mr. Blimelow! There's no danger! Father's there!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Captain Explains.

AS they emerged one by one from the hole behind the bushes, a sight burst upon their eyes that made almost all of them roar with laughter, grave though the situation was. Sinhji did not laugh, nor Chota Ram. Conway did not, for his head was pretty badly hurt, nor Blencowe, who had been almost squashed flat in his fall, nor Cartwright, who staggered, and was only kept from falling by Harris's strong arms; but the rest roared.

For there lay the two Tibetans, fairly caught at the moment when freedom had seemed to them within sight. And on the back of one of them, with his two powerful hands holding the Asiatic's struggling arms behind him, sat Jabez Tidd, the headkeeper, while slung across the stomach of the other, whose weapon had been dropped in the fight, and whose eyes were now nearly starting out of his head with pain and fear, was His Worship, the Mayor of Stenfield!

The two had come there, moved by a common impulse— anxiety as to their respective sons. Jabez had gone home, to find that Tommy had decamped, and had at once started for the hollow. Mr. Blimelow met him near the Hall gates, having been driven out of doors by his fears as to Shakespeare's danger, and they had gone on together.

The hamper and overcoats left behind had showed them where the exit of the secret passage was. The mayor was altogether too stout to have the least chance of entering it, and while Tidd was debating as to whether he should go in, they had heard the sounds of fight and pursuit, and had come forward to bear a noble share in the capture.

The captives were soon tied up. That done, Jack said:

"Three cheers for the mayor!"

And the cheering rang out through the soft morning air and the brilliant sunlight, startling the sheep at their grazing for a mile round.

"An' three cheers for my farver!" cried Tommy.

Jabez gave him a reproving glance, but everyone else cheered heartily.

"These murderers must be taken to the police-station!"

said the mayor, swelling with importance.

"But, my dear sir, we can't call them murderers! They haven't killed anyone!" objected Captain Jackson. "When we heard them enter the room in which this passage ends, Cartwright chanced to be among the foremost to rush in, and he was struck down; but I perceive that he is a long way from being dead."

And he gave Cartwright an approving smile, that made the boy flush with pleasure. It was the first time he had ever distinguished himself before his comrades. Possibly it would not be the last; for Cartwright, nervous, and not over strong, had yet the right stuff in him.

"Burglars then?" said the mayor.

"I doubt whether the law would call them burglars. They did not break into the house, and they did not come with intent to steal."

"Rogues and vagabonds, at least!"

"Well, even of that, I'm not confident. And even if they are, that isn't such a desperate offence. They are foreigners, you see, Mr. Mayor, and, as good Britons, we ought to treat them a little better in view of that fact."

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The mayor scratched his nose in a puzzled, but extremely dignified manner. This conception of the duty of a Briton was rather new to him.

"Hang me if I can make out what you intend to do, captain!"

"Then I'll tell you. I shall have a talk with these men. After that, I believe that they will go quietly to their own distant home. If necessary, I will provide them with the means to travel."

Mr. Blimelow was thunderstruck.

"After all this! You've got a forgiving nature, captain, I must say. But they can't speak English, surely?"

"No; but I can speak their language. I know it's difficult for you to understand at present. But will you, at my request, waive any powers you may have as a magistrate? And if you and your son will favour us with your company at dinner this evening, I will explain the whole matter. There's a story to it, though I'm afraid you will all be disappointed with the story as such."

The mayor capitulated. The invitation for which he had longed was his at last! Beside that great fact, other things mattered little.

"I say, somebody gave me an awful whack on the head in the dark!" said Conway.

"I believe that was me," replied Harris. "Sorry, old chap; but I really thought it was one of the Tibbits, as Tommy calls 'em, that I was hittin'!"

Everyone of those who had pursued from the Hall was more or less bruised; but there were no serious casualties. Mac's arm was merely pricked. Cartwright was most hurt; but even his damage was not great.

They all trooped back to the Hall together. Fortunately, it was too early for other people to be abroad, or the sight of Crosswell and Paddy in pyjamas and slippers might have caused some comment.

Baths, a change of clothes, an early breakfast, and then bed for some of those in worst case, was the order of the morning. But there were not many who went to bed.

"What was the programme for to-day, Jacker? You told me, but I'm hanged if I don't forget," said the Commander. "This sort of thing muddles a fellow's mind up so!"

"My dear fellow, if the thing you call a mind can't stand this—well! But the programme was—and is—that we should all—or as many of us as care about it—motor down to Hove, to see Sussex play Middlesex on the county ground. Cartwright, Crosswell, Paddy, Conway, Blencove, and Bob have gone to bed, I believe. That leaves ten of us. If the pater and the squire come, we shall just have comfortable room in the two cars. We might send one back for any of the others who care to come down later on. I say, here comes the paper-boy! Queer thing to be gettin' 'em without havin' been to bed, isn't it? Seems like havin' two morning papers in one day. Hi, Smith & Son, you needn't go up to the house. I'll take 'em."

"Who's playing at Hove?" cried the Australian.

"Oh, the usual lot for Sussex! An' for Middlesex, P. F. Warner, Gregor MacGregor, C. M. Wells, J. Douglas, G. W. Beldam, M. W. Payne, W. Raleigh—"

"What?"

"Yes; there it is! Old Raleigh's playin' for Middlesex! Glory for the Brothers! We won't half cheer him, will we?"

When they came back to the Hall that night they had Raleigh with them in the Mercedes. Every one of the sixteen had been down to see him play, some of them returning by rail to be met at Stenfield Station a little later. And Raleigh had done credit to Wycliffe. He was 57, not out, when stumps were drawn, and had not given a chance. On the morrow he was to make his century, thus joining the famous roll of those who have done so at their first appearances in first-class cricket. So everyone said; and for once in a way everyone was right!

Not only Raleigh was there, but also his staunch chums, Butler and Paddison, who had run down to Hove to be present at his debut. And that was a merry dinner. Even the squire, who had been in a bad temper all day, because he had been allowed no share in the doings of the night before, but had slept "like a log"—his own words—through all the excitement, grew his old genial self before the meal was half way through. The mayor was just a little too self-assertive at times; but they could put up with him now, and nothing was too much for them to do in honour of his son.

After dinner was over, Captain Jackson told the story he had promised them. As he had said, it did not amount to much as a story, but it served to explain matters.

During his exploration of Tibet, one of the men of his party had stolen from the temple of a lamasery, that they had visited, a jewel that was greatly prized and venerated by the priests. The theft was not discovered at the time, or indeed, until some days afterwards. Then the man was

punished; but it was quite impossible for the expedition to return in order to restore the jewel. So its leader had hidden it securely, and had sent a messenger to the head lama telling where it might be found.

He had thought little more of the matter at the time; but it had occurred to him directly Chota Ram had told him of two men, who appeared to be Tibetans, having been seen in the neighbourhood. Then had come the attempt, which Singhji's wakefulness had helped to frustrate. New complications arose from this, for, naturally, the captain could not understand how they had discovered the secret passage, of which he himself was ignorant.

"But I understand that now, and much more. I came across traces of that dastardly renegade, Laringa, in Tibet, though it is not by that name he is known there. There can be no doubt of his identity, however. He must have cabled to his son to meet these men, who tell me that the messenger whom I sent never arrived, and that the head lama had despatched them to England to recover the jewel from the supposed thief—me! Then young Laringa seems to have endeavoured to work his own scheme of revenge into the strands of the conspiracy. The lamas—they are both really priests, you know—have confessed to me that they had promised him, once they had recovered the jewel, to set the Hall on fire!"

"The brute—the scoundrelly, inhuman, young fiend!" said the squire, hotly. "And we can't punish him—we can't even know that he won't attempt something of the sort on his own account, eh?"

"Not he!" answered Harris. "Too big a cur to run any risks himself, I guess. Go on, sir!"

"I really haven't anything more to tell. The men lurked in the passage by day, it seems, and came out into the hollow to cook, and eat their food, and to pray by night. They had their praying-ropes on when you came upon them—you three. Their other things Chota Ram has found in the passage. They were awaiting some fresh instructions from Laringa, I gather. They seem to have realised that their return to the hollow meant capture, and so made a bold attempt to escape at the other end. Probably they may have thought that our main strength was waiting in the hollow—as perhaps it was. Still, we had a very serviceable little army here, and they got a reception that sent them back instanter. Then came the chase; and you know the rest!"

But the three prefects had to be told of it all. At the end of the story Raleigh said:

"And what's become of them now, sir?"

"They are on board ship by this time," replied the captain, looking at his watch. "I sent Chota up to town with them, with orders to take their tickets and see them safely on board."

"Bless my soul!" said the mayor. "And they're not to be punished in any way?"

"No! After all, they believed themselves to have good cause of complaint against me. And they only obeyed the orders of their superiors. There's something fine in that blind obedience, to my mind. Think of their coming all these thousands of miles, to a country utterly strange to them! Don't you think they have gone through enough?"

"But they would have burned you all in your beds?"

The captain smiled.

"I fancy not! Once they had the jewel back—supposing me to have had it—I imagine they would have forgotten their promise to that young scoundrel. And as they certainly wouldn't have burned the house while they believed the jewel to be in it, we are pretty safe, anyway. But enough of this. It would be better for all of us to forget it for a while. We should sleep better. Let me hear some yarns from you fellows."

"Tell the captain the story of Barnes and Dawson, Raleigh," suggested Harris.

The ex-captain of Wycliffe was not easily persuaded. He did not care a great deal for talking himself. But they prevailed upon him at last, and the story was told. There is no chance of recording it here; but any who feel interested in it may read it soon. For it was a Wycliffe story, though of all there only the three prefects, Harris, and Crosswell had been at the school when its events took place.

"An' we all shook hands with the giddy old mayor; an' no one even so much as whispered the word syphon! Ain't we a polite lot!" said Saunders as they went up to bed that night.

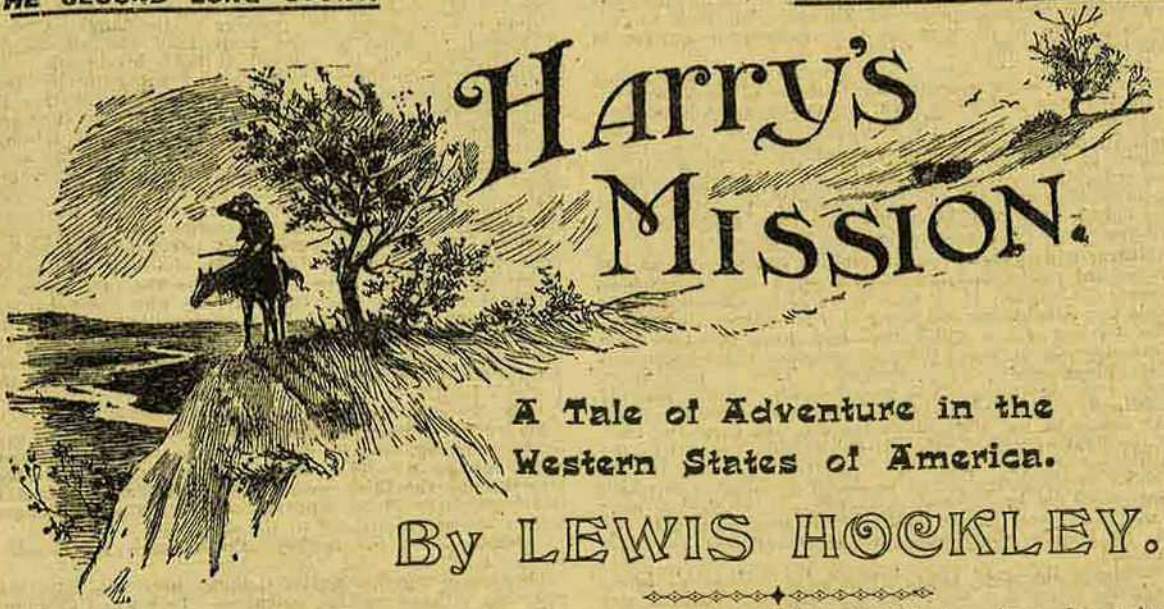
THE END.

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THE SECOND LONG STORY.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.



A Tale of Adventure in the
Western States of America.

By LEWIS HOCKLEY.

CHAPTER I.

A Duel on the Prairie.

BEHOLD a picture of the great rolling prairie-land of the western half of the United States of America, a picture in tints of vivid blue and yellow and brownish green, a picture that, once seen with the living eye, stamps itself upon the memory for evermore; that impresses by its immensity rather than by its presentation of any clearly defined features, and the equal of which is not to be found outside the New World.

Overhead the sun, a vivid, living globe of actual fire, yellow and scorching, and from the fierce, burning rays of which one can find no shade or shelter in this vast region of bare grassland, which, for all its seeming flatness, actually is undulating like the bosom of a mighty ocean suddenly stilled. This same golden sun is a factor to be reckoned with, as likely to be enemy as well as friend.

It is shining from a sky of brilliant, cloudless blue, azure overhead, a pale, delicate blue in the distance; and, on the horizon, where it may be scarcely distinguished from the surface of the earth to which it stoops, it is of a soft French grey. Such skies are only to be seen above vast expanses of land, level land, for above the sea the reflected light from the shining surface of the waves alters and hardens the sky tints.

Beneath the sky stretches the mighty prairie, a delightful clear green in the foreground; for it is now early summer, and the sun has not yet had time to change its hue to the dull brownish bronze which it assumes later in the year. And blotting this foreground with patches of dark colour are hundreds upon hundreds of reddish-chocolate hided cattle, steers, and heifers, growing into beef which, at the proper time, shall be changed into gold to fill the pockets of Davis & Kingdom, occupiers and owners of the Yellow Creek Ranch, which this section of the prairie before us represents.

But one beholding this picture would have but short glances for sun or sky or cattle, for there are two other figures included, the figures of two men, both horsemen, and attention—keen, rapt attention—would at once be given to them, for they are engaged in the greatest and most exciting game that man, since his appearance on this planet, has had the wit and skill to devise—the game of life and death.

And the two players are conducting their game with all the skill and courage that race, breed, personal qualities of brain and muscle, and the wisdom that comes of familiarity with the game and experience of its possibilities can teach.

The one is an Indian, a redskin, one of the dispossessed race which, three centuries before, reigned undisputed lords and masters of this mighty continent. Hawk-nosed, quick-eyed, with coarse black hair and skin—for he is naked to the waist—of a dull, dirty copper colour, he sits in the saddle as if he and the hard-muscled, grey-coated pony between his knees were one single animal. A single feather from an eagle's wing stands upright from his thick hair, gaily-trimmed and bedecked trousers of dressed leather

cover his lower limbs, and his feet are bare. In one hand he holds a short rifle—a carbine—and at his back may be seen a small bow and a quiverful of arrows.

Motionless as a bronze statue sits the redskin, his black eyes intently fixed upon the second player of the game, his opponent in this fascinating amusement, in which he who loses, loses everything. This second player is a couple of hundred yards away; a white-skinned individual—white, that is, by comparison, for whatever its original colour may have been, it is now of almost as deep and rich a hue as a polished plank of mahogany. A European evidently is this opponent of the red lord of the soil; a broad-shouldered, upstanding fellow with— But we shall make closer acquaintance with him later on. Meanwhile, the game is awaiting its opening.

It comes. A sharp crack, as of a cleverly-manipulated whip, breaks the wonderful stillness of the atmosphere; almost as it sounds the redskin's knee presses upon his pony, and the clever little animal, understanding the command thus conveyed, moves forward. The Englishman—for such, in fact, is the redskin's adversary—has fired the first shot in the magazine of the Winchester repeating-rifle he carries in his right hand, and the bullet has missed its intended billet by half a dozen yards.

The grey pony moved onward, and suddenly—ten seconds, perhaps, since the report of the Winchester—its rider flings himself from the saddle and along the little animal's side, remaining suspended by one stirrup and a looped cord around the pony's neck. From this position the redskin pushes the muzzle of his own weapon between the pony's jaw and neck, takes a quick aim at the Englishman and lets fly. Beyond cutting the air the bullet does no damage.

Both red and white man are now on the move, riding in circles, and gradually getting closer; every now and then a flash and a sharp report indicates the sending of another leaden messenger of death from one or other of the weapons, but as yet no harm has been done.

Such duels as these are common enough out on these vast plains, where a man in charge of an outlying bunch of cattle—as was this Englishman—might be killed and lie dead for a week before his slaying was discovered. A lonely white man gave opportunity for the securing of a young warrior's first scalp—proof positive of his right to be denominated a brave, and to take part in his tribe's expeditions—and if the cowboy fought to save his scalp from being taken, and with little to reward him if chance or superior skill served him well, he at least fought with no unwillingness. In hundreds of places might be found the skeletons of those who had gone under in these conflicts.

And these were fair fights—as a rule. Sometimes the redskin would lay in wait for his victim and secure the long-desired scalp with a secret rifle-shot, and without exposing himself to danger; but, ordinarily, the white man was not to be caught napping, and the encounter was a fair and square duel, fought on level terms, beginning with the exchange of rifle-shots, and when these failed in effect, terminating with a hand-to-hand encounter, with bowie against

scalping-knife or tomahawk, and sometimes naught but the bare hands.

Sometimes the redskin was the winner; sometimes the white man not only preserved his scalp but took his adversary's life in payment for the unsuccessful attempt to rob him of his own.

Once a party of United States cavalrymen, riding from a western fort, came upon the scene of one of these combats. Both red man and white man lay on the ground together. Both were stone dead. The Indian's knife was thrust to the hilt in the cowboy's heart; and gripped in the sinewy fingers of the white corpse was the slender throat of the red man. Nor could that strong grip, which had sufficed to take vengeance for the fatal knife-thrust and make of the fight a drawn battle, be unloosed, and locked together, the two corpses had been buried in a common grave.

Nearer and nearer came the circling combatants; so fast moved the ponies that the frequent shots their riders fired missed the marks. It is not easy to hit a galloping horse when one is being carried along at a ten-miles-an-hour gait. The feeding steers and heifers had given one prolonged stare to the opponents at the commencement of the encounter, after which, satisfied that themselves were in no danger, they had resumed their business of eating, scarcely sufficiently interested to raise their heads when the whip-like cracks of the rifles smote the air. To them the issue of the fight mattered little. If the redskin were victor he would go away, leaving them guardianless and free to wander where they chose—a condition of things with which they would not be disposed to quarrel. If the cowboy were triumphant—well, things would remain unaltered, that was all. So long as there was grass in plenty they were not troubled.

Suddenly the grey pony between the red man's knees staggers, uttering a shrill squeal of agony, stumbles, and comes heavily to the ground. A bullet from the cowboy's Winchester has passed through its neck; it will gallop no more. But, quick, lithe, and active as a panther, the Indian does not participate in his steed's downfall. He springs from the saddle at the first falter in the stricken animal's stride, and is on his feet, his face to his foe, stern, impassive, defiance in every line of his wiry, upright body. The first point in this fascinating game has been scored by his opponent.

The cowboy is now holding an advantage—if he care to make use of it. Apparently he does not; for he reins in his own tough little broncho to a standstill and dismounts leisurely. With unusual and mistaken chivalry he declines his advantage. From this circumstance, were there an on-looker of this game, he would be able to form an opinion of the character of the white man. The Indian gives no sign of recognition of such generous feeling; in his heart he probably considers the white man a fool. What he is concerned with is the number of shots still remaining in the cowboy's magazine rifle. His own weapon is loaded, but once discharged, so it will remain; there will be no time for reloading.

The cowboy brings his rifle to his shoulder, the Indian does the same; so quickly does each take aim, it seems as if the raising of the weapons and the pulling of the triggers are continuous movements. There is no report from the white man's weapon; he has already fired his last shot of the fourteen in the magazine—and forgotten that he had done so.

The red man has aimed at the broad forehead beneath the wide-brimmed sombrero facing him; but his aim is an inch too high. The bullet cuts a furrow through the cowboy's thick hair, and sends his hat whirling to the ground, that is all. The red man cannot repress a deep, low, guttural exclamation of disappointment as he drops his weapon. The coveted scalp had seemed very near to his hand indeed. The cowboy laughs, a joyous, reckless laugh, the laugh of a boy who finds little of seriousness in anything. He lugs from its sheath his broad-bladed bowie-knife, and with careless, swinging stride moves toward his enemy, who has also drawn his knife, and, still as a statue, every muscle braced for quick and forceful action, steadily awaits him.

"Hard luck—eh?" sings out the cowboy, as he arrives within ten feet of the man whom he is going to slay, or who will slay him, within the next quarter of an hour.

There is a smile on his healthy, tanned face; a smile in his reckless eyes as well as around his well-cut, smooth lips. He does not look as if he had escaped death a moment before by a bare inch or so, or that he will be shortly struggling fiercely to keep the grim monarch at bay. Beneath his close-curling, golden-brown hair his forehead is unruffled and smooth; one would think he was engaged in some piece of mischief, carrying with it that spice of danger without which no man of the Anglo-Saxon race can thoroughly enjoy himself.

But, six feet nearer, his face suddenly changes; the dan-

ing light goes from out his blue eyes, which fill with the gleam of fight, the lips compress quickly, hard and close, and the broad, firm chin grows set and square. If the Indian did not know the meaning of the laughing words addressed to him, he does understand the significance of these signs; for the moment he holds his breath.

The white man appears to hold an advantage in physique; he looks broader, more heavily and strongly built, than his opponent, though this may be due to the fact that the latter is unclothed from the waist upwards. His neck is somewhat short and thick, he is wider across the back, more square-bodied, and his thighs seem the bigger. Probably, however, he has not the Indian's catlike activity.

For perhaps ten seconds the pair stand still, their eyes fixed; then the Indian makes a sudden leap forward and sideways towards his adversary's left hand, and strikes crosswise at the side of the neck. His aim is that vulnerable point—the carotid artery—a little below the ear. Quick as is his movement, it does not take the white man by surprise. He draws back a little, though without shifting his feet; the knife-point whizzes across his shoulder, and before the striker can spring out of distance he has replied with a slash at the inside of the forearm. Blood spurts from the Indian's limb.

"One to me," mutters the cowboy.

He advances upon his foe, who retreats, and then, suddenly crouching, leaps forward, striking an under-arm blow as he springs in. The knife-point, keen as a chisel-edge, rips through the shirt covering the cowboy's body as if it had been paper; blood appears near to the severed edges, and in the neighbourhood of the short ribs.

"One to you," the cowboy says, through his clenched teeth.

They come together again, striking, parrying, thrusting, swerving with astonishing quickness. To see the gleaming blades flash here and there one would expect either or both of the fighters to be cut to ribbons within half a minute; how they escape such a fate seems a miracle. But they do; each is master of his weapon and knows every guard and parry proper thereto. Knife-fighting is a business the Indian brave learns at a very early age; duels such as this now being fought are common amongst themselves, and lads practise with strips of lath long before being permitted to use the steel. And amongst the cowboys the use of the bowie-knife is thoroughly well understood. Their play may not be as skilful and artistic as that of the inhabitants of the Canary Islands, for instance, whose reputation is known to all travellers, but, in their own tongue, "it gets there all the same."

But though not cut to pieces, the two fighters did not escape scatheless. They were bleeding from half a dozen superficial wounds—which would be painful later, though not dangerous—but had sustained no serious injury. Each manoeuvred to get his back to the sun.

At length, as if by mutual consent, they drop apart for a few moments to recover breath. Then they were together again, leaping in and striking simultaneously. A red line from eye to ear appeared across the cowboy's face, his opponent staggered back with the muscle of his left upper arm—shield of his heart—cut asunder. Recovering, the Indian hurled his knife full at his adversary. It was an unexpected movement, and, unable to guard it, the cowboy received the weapon in his left shoulder; but for the point striking against a bone, the blade had been buried in him.

As it was he staggered, and before he could recover himself was gripped in his opponent's arms. Dropping the knife, the white man grappled, and together they swayed and wrestled desperately to and fro. The red man's foot found the blade of his own knife, and the edge cut deeply into his naked flesh, but he did not relinquish his grip. With a strength for which none had given him credit, he sought to lift his man bodily and to hurl him to the ground. He had the under-hand—an immense advantage.

But the cowboy was not to be thrown. With the skill of one to whom the scientific tricks of wrestling are familiar, he locked one leg around the redskin's limb and saved himself from being lifted. When at last the Indian ceased his effort, that leg-lock became a chip of offence. Held fast, he was bent over backwards, the white man keeping his leg locked, and making no effort to drag the captured limb off the ground. He had another, a more fatal, purpose. His locked fingers were across the red man's back, the knuckles forcing themselves into his spine, and, aided by his greater height, he bent forward, using every ounce of his weight and every atom of his diminishing strength. Human flesh and bone could bear the strain no longer; further backward was the Indian's body bent, until, with a broken spine, the scalp-seeker dropped limply to the ground; his adversary, exhausted by his great effort, falling senseless upon his broken body. And as they fell so they lay, motionless, unheeding, the burning sun above, and, a quarter of a mile away, the still-feeding cattle.

Buy "The Union Jack"—Every Friday, Id.

CHAPTER 2.

What Followed the Duel.

WHEN John Wilmot, attracted by the news of the amazingly rich strike of ore at Cripple Creek, joined the army of eager men who made their way thither, helter-skelter, pell-mell, each intent upon beating his neighbour and securing a claim close to the mine where the great strike had been made, he took with him his fourteen-year-old son, Harry.

The farm, a few hundred miles away from Winnipeg, was abandoned; and as fast as might be Wilmot and his lad travelled to Cripple Creek. There were no ties to bind him to the farm; his wife was dead, Harry his only child. And, anyway, of what use to continue the drudgery of farm-work, slaving like a nigger day after day, and earning thereby little more than a bare subsistence, when at the creek fortunes were being made daily, where the lucky miner, a beggar at sunrise, with one stroke of his pick, laid bare a vein of virgin ore, and went to bed that night the owner of wealth so vast that his imagination had never conceived aught so great? If others had done so, why not he?

So John Wilmot had argued, and to Cripple Creek he had made his way, to find, as did thousands of others, that such gifts of marvellous luck as he had read or heard of fell only to the very, very few, and that for the vast majority there was nothing but disappointment, disillusion, and—if they stayed—toll of the severest kind, with very little to repay them for it.

Some grew rich; ninety out of every hundred speedily found themselves in worse straits than heretofore. They had rushed to the alluring creek; they drifted away from it disgusted, unsuccessful men.

Such had been John Wilmot's luck; but being an Englishman, with a full share of the bulldog courage and dogged pertinacity of his race, he did not give up the game at the first disappointment, but hung on, trusting something to himself, and something to luck, that a change for the better would come.

For two years he remained in the locality, prospecting, mining, for ever buoyed up with hopes of the luck changing, sometimes doing fairly well, sometimes worse off than the beggar in the streets.

The gold-seeking fever had entered his veins, and, as with others, he could not conquer the attraction of its specious promises. Sooner or later luck would come to him.

And, as a matter of fact, the luck did come at the end of the second year. He struck it rich—at least, he thought he had. Others thought so, too. And it was not long before John Wilmot was defending his claim with his own right arm and a '22 calibre rifle.

But one man can't fight a dozen successfully. Number gives to them an advantage, and it is only a question of time before they wear him down.

And John Wilmot was worn down. One night, Harry, then a stout, well-grown lad of sixteen, hard as nails, and handy with pick, revolver, and cooking-pot, a good son, and a true and gallant comrade, was awakened to find the shack in which they slept full of armed ruffians, and his father lying on the floor with a bullet in his chest.

Before the lad could move hand or foot he saw one of the gang, a squat-built, red-bearded fellow, of villainous aspect, whom he knew by the name of Sandy McAulay, walk deliberately towards his father and shoot him through the head.

Harry never forgot that night, the countenance of his dead father, or the face of the man who had deliberately and in cold blood murdered him. McAulay, Harry hoped, he would live to see again.

How he had escaped from the shack Harry never clearly understood. He did escape, however, and uninjured; and, as he knew his life, if he stayed in the locality of the mine, was not worth a minute's purchase, he left as quickly as he could.

With the natural aptitude of the Englishman, he obtained work of some kind or another, never staying long in one place, however, and drifting from state to state, until he at last arrived on Oklahoma territory, and found a job cow-punching.

But for Sandy McAulay's fatal shot, Iron Horse would have found another guardian taking care of Messrs. Davis and Kingdom's cattle, and might have gone away with a sound skin and plus the scalp he required.

Perhaps he would have died, anyway; but it may be safely assumed that the cause of his decease would not have been a snapped backbone. However, he did find Harry Wilmot, and he did die of a broken spine, as the previous chapter set forth.

After tumbling upon the dead Indian, the first sensation of which Harry Wilmot was conscious was the feeling of an acute burning pain in his mouth, followed by a great cold-

ness across his forehead. A streak of fire seemed to run through his veins, a gasping sob choked in his throat. Opening his eyes, he struggled into a sitting position, despite efforts to restrain him.

"Gee whiz! He ain't a goner, after all!" exclaimed a rough, surprised voice.

"Must be a tough 'un!" someone replied.

"Give him a drop more, Roberts," commanded another voice—an authoritative one. "We haven't much of the stuff, but, by thunder, a chap such as this is worth every drop of it!"

What had been nothing more than dark, indistinct blurs before his dulled and confused vision were slowly resolving themselves into the figures of men and horses. Something was put to his lips. Again his mouth was filled with a burning pain, and his limbs moved and glowed in response to the spirit that was poured down his throat. Full sensibility returned to brain and body.

"Feeling better—eh?" inquired the commanding voice.

Harry nodded in assent. The owner of the voice was a young man, clad in the undress uniform of U.S. Cavalry—a good-looking, fair-moustached young fellow, whose blue eyes were fixed upon Harry's bloodstained face with an expression of mingled solicitude and relief.

"Had something of a scrap?" went on the soldier.

Again Harry nodded. Around him stood half a dozen dismounted troopers. One was kneeling by his side, and three others sat their horses a few yards away.

"Dead, sir?" observed one of the soldiers, whose attention had been given to the redskin.

A grim smile curved young Wilmot's lips.

"I reckoned so," he said softly.

"Much hurt?" inquired the young officer laconically.

Harry scrambled to his feet. His head was a bit dizzy and clouded—the effect of lying in the full glare of the sunshine for so long—and his legs were a trifle shaky; but beyond the smarting of the gash across his face, and slight pricking pains in various parts of his body and limbs, he was not feeling a great deal the worse for his life-and-death struggle.

The soldiers were watching him, with admiration written on their embrowned, hard-featured faces.

"Only a kid," one of them murmured.

Harry heard the remark, and smiled. The trooper's words were intended as a compliment.

"May be; but he's broken this varmint's back, for all that!" the speaker was he who was examining the redskin, and his words brought every eye upon him.

"So, lieutenant!" the man went on, addressing the staring officer. "Bone's snapped, or I'm a Dutchman!"

The admiration in the spectators' eyes increased.

"Don't look equal to it neither," said the officer to himself.

Harry had been taking stock of himself meanwhile. Though none of his wounds might be serious, there were many of them, and he had lost a quantity of blood. Now that the immediate effect of the spirit he had swallowed was wearing off, a faintness was stealing over him. He was beginning to feel weak; but recollection of his duty did not leave him.

"Say"—and he turned towards the young officer, bracing himself, and by an effort standing upright—"say, I'd be glad if you can—if you will—send over to th' foreman. He's not far away—Black Creek. Tell him I'm all right, but I'd like—I'd like—a rest—for—a bit—so's I can—"

The drawling, halting words died away in a windy whisper; his eyes closed, his swimming head sunk on his breast, and, his knees suddenly collapsing, Harry fell into a heap before any one of the dismounted troopers could reach and catch him.

"Take him up, boys!" ordered the officer. "We'll carry him along with us; and do, one of you, ride over to—where was it he said?—Black Creek, and let the foreman of the gang know that another man's wanted to take care of this outfit."

When Harry Wilmot opened his eyes again it was to find himself lying in a small, white-covered, iron bedstead, with an orderly in uniform sitting beside him.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed, immediately his eyes were open, and trying to sit up.

"Ye're in Fort Custer, kid, and yer to keep quiet!" was the soldier's laconic answer.

"But the steers. I must—"

"Hold yer tongue an' be still, I tell ye!" interrupted the orderly, but in no unkind voice.

The entrance of a square-built, bearded man stopped the words on Harry's lips, and he looked at the new-comer with interest.

"Say—"

"Doc, he's wantin' to get up, an' I'm having no end of

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"Wantin' any help, old man?" he said, in a quiet voice. And he looked towards the waiting crowd.

"Think not, Tip." The new-comer was Fergusson, the foreman, to find whom Harry had entered the saloon.

"Wal, boys"—the remark was addressed generally to the crowd—"has th' play ended, or is it only the first act that has been gone through? If there's more of it, yer can reckon on more actors chippin' in."

One of the men came forward.

"There ain't no more of it, Tip," he answered; "least-ways, not to-day." And he looked with some meaning towards Harry. "Yer pal there has given Buck Connors just about all he's needin' to go on with for a bit, an' we ain't upsettin' ourselves fightin' Buck's battles."

"Not me!" "I ain't havin' nothin' to do with it!" "Buck Connors ain't no chum o' mine!" "This ain't my lay out!" half a dozen voices chimed in; and Fergusson thrust his pistol back into its place.

"How did it happen?" he inquired; and half a dozen all tried to tell him at the same time. Their sympathies were clearly with Harry Wilmot.

"But, sonny"—and one of the men came towards Harry—"if yer ain't above takin' a friendly word of advice, yer'll clear out, an' yer won't let no grass grow under yer feet, either. Connors is a tough customer, an' he ain't one as forgets nothin'. He ain't dead; an' when he does come to, it'll be with ideas that won't be healthy for yer if he gets th' chance to make 'em good. If he or his chum McAulay lays holt of yer after this, yer can just say yer prayers an' get ready to quit. That's straight."

Tip looked at Harry.

"I guess Dave's about right. I don't know this peach here, but I've heard of McAulay, an' if the two are pals—well, watch out. An' now, with the brandin' all waitin', I can't afford to lose one good hand. Sonny, we'll vamoose. Got th' irons?"

"Irons all waitin' at the blacksmith's," Harry answered. "Right-ho, Tip; I'm with you. Say"—and he turned to the man who had offered the warning—"who's this McAulay you spoke of? Do you know him?"

"Sure," Dave answered, "th' worst all-fired skunk an' rascal in th' territory. What he ain't done I wouldn't say. Horse thief, cattle stealer, wann raider—he's all the worst, an' more. I guess there's a warrant or two out agin him in other States, but he slipped over here an'—"

"Yes, yes," Harry said impatiently; "but I mean, do you know what he's like? Have you seen him?"

"Sure," the man said again, "an' whoever sees Mac ain't likely to forget him."

"Describe him."

"Wal, he ain't tall, but wide as a house, with ginger hair; clean shaved, only one eye, an' a scar that's made his mouth all twisted up. Oh, yes, I know him! He's in Parker; in here only two days back. Yer won't forget him once yer've seen him."

"I guess I won't; I have seen him—once," said Harry. "I'm wanting to see him again real bad. But I can't stop now. Thanks for telling me." And he followed the foreman, who had already left the saloon.

"Want to see Mac, do yer, sonny?" muttered Dave, looking after Harry's back. "Wal, if I was yer I'd be prayin' I didn't, if Mac had a down on me."

Harry rode back to the ranch where the great round up was to take place very silent and thoughtful. The pal of the man he had so thoroughly overthrown was, there could be no doubt of it, the very man who had murdered his father, and whom he had sworn to bring to justice. Six months after that fearful night when he had been made fatherless he had come across McAulay, and, not daring to measure his boy's strength against the ruffian, he had gone to the sheriff of the Arizona township where McAulay was and laid information against him. But to no purpose. McAulay had contrived to get away, and almost twelve months elapsed before Harry came across him again. This time it was in Nevada, and before the boy could make a move, McAulay had left hurriedly, the friends of a man he had murdered hot on his trail. Now, quite by an accident, he had turned up again.

Harry resolved to wait before making any attempt to effect his purpose. He could not throw up his job under Tip Fergusson in order to wait around for McAulay. To do so would not square with his ideas of duty. He owed something to the men who employed him; they were depending upon his assistance at the round up; at least, Tip Fergusson was, which was the same. It was not the first round up at which he had assisted, and he knew very well that the loss of one man, especially when the outfit was already shorthanded, as was Fergusson's, was a matter of some seriousness. It would not be right to withdraw his services at a time when they would be badly needed.

After the separation and branding of the young beasts he

would be free, if he chose, to draw his wages, and become his own master again for so long as it suited him. But service under a man demanded obligations, and Harry could not bring himself to neglecting them. The work completed, he would take up McAulay's trail, and this time he might succeed in running the scoundrel down.

The days that followed were so thoroughly occupied, so fully crowded with work, hard and continuous, that Harry had little leisure or inclination to think of McAulay. Up before daybreak and in the saddle, after snatching an apology for breakfast, riding hard and long, driving the bellowing, galloping mobs of frightened beasts into the great fenced enclosures, separating the young and unbranded animals from those already marked, he was so thoroughly tired and worn out at the close of the day, that he had no energy or will to do more than fill himself with the food plentifully provided for the evening meal, and, rolling himself in a blanket, sink into deep sleep, worn out and exhausted.

It is hard work this, and the exhaustion of the body prevents the mind from exerting itself very thoroughly. When the head is swimming in consequence of the violence of the exercise carried on at a feverish pace beneath the scorching rays of the sun, when muscles are aching with the intensity of the strain, continuous and severe, which they are called upon to undergo, when every sense and feeling has been on the alert for hour upon hour, the brain refuses to think, the claims of the body dominate all.

But one of sound physique and strong constitution quickly recovers; if one be not too tired to sleep, a good night's rest acts as a wonderful restorative, and however weary one goes to bed, one arises in the morning fit and ready for another such day as that which has gone.

When the last calf had received its owner's mark, the irons put away, and the fires to heat them extinguished, Harry drew his pay, and intimated to Tip Fergusson that he was going to take a holiday. The foreman was not surprised, so many cow-punchers do the same; but he was sorry to lose Harry, and said so.

"We'll always be able to find a job for you, Harry," he said, before Harry left the ranch. "When you're tired of doing nothing, come back, and we'll sign you on again. A cow-puncher such as you is worth something."

Harry took the direct trail to Parker, and the first person he ran against was the young officer whose lucky appearance at the close of his duel with the Indian had prevented him from succumbing to his injuries.

"Hallo!" the young man said frankly. "Glad to see you again. You're looking fit, too. Come up to my hotel; I've got the doctor there. You haven't forgotten him, I suppose? He'll be glad to see his old patient again, and looking so well."

So Harry went up to the hotel, saw the doctor, and the three spent a couple of hours together very pleasantly, not a little of the time being given to the examination of the officer's horse, a magnificent dark chestnut with black points.

"You're a bit of a judge of horses, I suppose, Harry?" said the owner. "Tell me honestly what you think of him."

"That he's one of the finest brutes I have ever set eyes upon" was Harry's verdict. "Thoroughbred, isn't he?"

"Entirely; from the blue grass country, Kentucky."

"Then he ought to be all right. If my judgment's worth anything, he's a clipper, real AI, and nothing less."

"Glad to hear you say so," said Lieutenant Van Hoorn—for such was the officer's name—delightedly. "I gave eight hundred dollars for him, and it'd be a real disappointment if he weren't worth it."

"He is, take my word for it, every cent. Only if I had a horse like that, I should be afraid."

"Afraid!" echoed the doctor, who had joined them. "You afraid! And of what, may I ask?"

"Afraid that someone else would recognise the animal's value and appropriate it. And if I were to bring him to such a place as this, I should want to sit in his stable all night, with one end of the halter in my hand, and then I shouldn't be sure of keeping him."

"You mean—" said the doctor.

"That there are such beings as horse thieves in existence. Why, by Jove, the sight of such an animal as that is enough to tempt any man to become a horse thief!"

"We'll have to keep an eye on our young friend here, Dennis, that's evident," laughed Van Hoorn, winking at the doctor.

"Keep an eye open, by all means; the man who won't trouble to take care of a gam such as that horse deserves to lose him," Harry retorted.

"Well, if Royal is missing to-morrow, I shall come to you."

"If you can find me."

From the hotel—by courtesy—Harry went to look up Dave Stanniford, the man who had warned him against Buck

Buy "The Union Jack"—Every Friday, Id.

Connors and his pal. Stanniford was in his shop, and stared when he saw Harry come through the doorway.

"Why, sonny," he said, with a surprised look on his face, "hev yer gone plumb crazy?"

"I don't think so," Harry answered, taking a seat on a packing-case. "Never felt more sane. I've come here to look for Sandy McAulay."

"Look for McAulay! My lad, you hain't got to look far. He's in Parker, with Connors, an' they've got their eyes skinned for you. They're goin' to shoot on sight; I've heard 'em say so."

"That's a game two can play at," was Harry's quiet answer. "And the next time I'll take care my gun doesn't get stuck."

"Oh, well," said Dave, in a resigned voice, "if you're set on a shootin' match, I guess McAulay an' Co.'ll accommodate yer. He's got a spite against yer, has Sandy, it seems; an' you'll want eyes in th' back o' yer head if yer to keep a bullet outer yer back."

"Thanks for the warning, old man; I'll keep a look-out. And I tell you, if they're so anxious to see me, I'm ready to meet 'em more than half-way. I've been looking for McAulay these two years, and I don't want to miss him now. Where is he living, Dave?"

"With Runyon, fellow who keeps the fare lay-out close by O'Brien's saloon."

"Thank you. I guess it won't be long before we resume acquaintance."

"Cool hand that, though he is but a kid," was the store-keeper's comment. "But it's th' first time as ever I heard o' anyone dyin' to meet any o' that kind."

As Harry walked back to his lodgings, and he didn't go about in a half asleep fashion, either, he passed Lieutenant Van Hoorn on his chestnut out for a ride. There were plenty of men on the roadway, and more than one admiring and envious remark reached Harry's ears as he passed along. But he gave scant heed; his mind was upon Sandy McAulay, and he was trying to evolve some plan for carrying out his long-delayed intentions in regard to that ruffian.

His first idea was to make a round that evening of the various saloons and gambling places in Parker, and when he found McAulay, as he had no doubt he would, to take the law into his own hands and execute summary justice on the murderer. It was a risky plan, for if Connors were with his pal there would be two to fight instead of one, and the chances were against him that he would emerge alive from the quarrel. Still, he could think of no other way. In Parker the law, though not altogether a minus quantity, was not too reliable; and as the pair of scoundrels had not apparently done anything to render themselves obnoxious to the local authorities, the sheriff might have some scruples against acting in respect of a crime committed in another State, and of which the only evidence—to him—was the mere word of Harry Wilmot. Even if the sheriff would move in the matter, it would not be at once; and delay was what Harry was anxious to avoid, since it would give McAulay opportunity for once again removing himself from danger of being apprehended.

CHAPTER 5.

Lieutenant Van Hoorn Sustains a Loss.

HARRY kept to his resolution, but an evening spent as he had intended it should be spent brought him no success; neither in saloon or gambling-room was there any sign of Sandy McAulay and his brother rogue. Harry went to bed that night disappointed, fearing that once again the man he sought had slipped through his fingers.

He was eating breakfast next morning, when a man burst into his room. It was Lieutenant Van Hoorn, and the young man's face was pale and agitated.

"Well, you're a truer prophet than I gave you credit for," he exclaimed, directly his foot was inside the door.

"Prophet! What d'you mean?" inquired Harry, suspending operations with knife and fork.

"Why, it's gone."

"What has gone?"

"Royal; my horse that you saw yesterday. By thunder, I wish I'd known how near to the truth you were yesterday with your talk of horse thieves! What is to be done?"

"When did the horse go?"

Harry was already upon his feet, ready for work.

"Some time during the night, I guess. I saw him stabled yesterday afternoon when I came back from my ride. I was down to see him during the evening just before supper. He was all right then. This morning when I went down, intending to have a gallop before breakfast, the stable was empty."

"And what do the hotel people say?"

"Know no more than you do. Stableman swore Royal

was in his stall when he locked up. This morning the door was open, and the horse gone."

"Any other of the horses there gone?"

"No; there were four others there, including the doctor's animal, and they're all right."

"H'm! Someone evidently saw you out riding yesterday and took a fancy to your mount. What did I tell you?"

"Oh, yes, of course! Well, I'm for the sheriff right away. The thief can't have got such an almighty long start, and perhaps we'll catch the beggar. Will you come?"

"Like a shot! Go to the sheriff. There'll be a posse out in less than ten minutes! I'll join you."

It was only a few minutes' journey to the house where McAulay and Connors had been boarding, and Harry went there hot-foot. After some trouble, he aroused the proprietor, who surlily told him that neither of his boarders were there; they had paid up and left the evening before. Where they'd gone he didn't know, and he didn't care—not a red cent.

Within a quarter of an hour the sheriff and a dozen men, well armed, rode out of Parker. Van Hoorn and the doctor were there, riding alongside Harry. The other men joined in the chase with zest. A horse-thief was a scoundrel against whom every man's hand would always be willingly raised; he was several degrees worse a criminal than a murderer, and more than one of the sheriff's party had seen the stolen animal, and, because they knew a good horse when they saw it, they were anxious to help in its recovery.

"Guess the hoss-thief'll make a bee-line for the Indian territory," asserted the sheriff. "It ain't far to the boundary, an' I reckon he thinks he'll be safe if he can cross it. Wonder who the fellow is?"

Half a dozen men spoke at once, each suggesting a different likely culprit, and then Harry Wilmot got in a word.

"Guess we'll find there's not one thief, sheriff, but two of 'em," he said quietly.

"Two! How d'you know, sonny?" asked the sheriff.

"Because I do, an' I don't think I'd be far out if I told you their names!" Harry answered.

"Out with 'em!"

"Sandy McAulay and Buck Connors!"

"Two o' th' worst crooks in Parker! Guess you ain't far out, sonny," said the sheriff. "But what makes ye think it's them?"

"Because I went round to their lodgings before we started, and both of them had gone—left last night."

"Well, boys," struck in Van Hoorn, "there'll be ten dollars apiece all round if we land them. Royal's worth it."

"We'll get 'em if it's possible, Mr. Hoorn," said the sheriff quietly, "an' we're not wantin' any cash for doin' it, neither. It's my business, an' the pleasure of everyone else here, to corral a hoss-thief. They're vermin, an' we don't want payin' for bringin' 'em to book."

At a hot pace the party were travelling, and when the first twenty miles had been covered, the sheriff decided that the best mounted should push on ahead.

"Widen out, boys! They may have gone a bit off the trail, an' we musn't lose 'em," he said. "If ye can head 'em, do it."

Himself, Harry Wilmot, and two others, whose horses were better than the rest, went on ahead, leaving the rest to follow at the best pace of which they were capable.

At a hostelry placed near the junction of a smaller stream with the Rabbit Ear River they had news of the horse-thieves.

"Stopped here f'r a drink two hours back, two men did," said the shirt-sleeved proprietor in answer to the questions of the sheriff. "One-eyed chap, with a red head, ridin' a chestnut, an' a big chap, nigh's tall as a house, on a bay. Ridin' like a cyclone they was. Guessed they was in trouble; but it hain't no business o' mine."

"They're our men. Get on, boys! We ain't far behind 'em!" And the sheriff turned away.

Through the afternoon they rode without meeting a single wayfarer, and apparently getting no nearer to their quarry. A stern chase is always a long one, and so they were to prove it. The horses were beginning to show signs of weariness, too, and their riders were not unaffected by the long ride, for though the sun might not have the same power as it did in the middle of summer, the temperature was quite high enough to make a seven or eight hours' gallop at racing speed a somewhat exhausting feat.

"Sonny," exclaimed the sheriff suddenly, addressing Wilmot, "I guess it's up to you an' me to go on. Davis and Murdoch's ponies can't last at this rate. Are yer game?"

"I'm with you!" Harry answered shortly.

"There's two of 'em, an' they're likely to show fight."

"Well, there's two of us!"

"Yer real grit!" chuckled the sheriff. And the two pressed on, leaving their late comrades to wait while their ponies took a needed rest.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"BY THE SAD SEA WAVES,"
A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale,
by H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY CAR,"
A Thrilling Detective Story,
by Cecil Haycox.

IN "PLUCK," 10-

Half an hour later the pursuers got a view of their quarry. Nearer and nearer the two pairs of galloping horsemen drew together until they were almost within rifle shot. The escaping men were, in fact, Connors and McAulay; both the sheriff and Harry recognised them, and also the horse beneath the shorter man.

"Reckon they're trying to reach the river!" shouted the sheriff. "If they get there ahead of us, an' get across amongst th' trees, they'll have a cinch on us. They'll get hidden an' draw a bead on us as we're goin' over."

And this, it was evident, was what was in the minds of the horse-thieves. Across the river with a start sufficiently long to enable them to find cover amongst the tall trees and undergrowth lining the banks, they would hold a decided advantage. Hidden themselves, they would be able to take pot-shots at their pursuers, which would likely relieve them of immediate danger.

"Pile it on, boy!" yelled the sheriff excitedly. And Harry did pile it on, and his horse gamely responded. But the horse-thieves were urging their animals to greater efforts, and the start they had was too great to be much reduced in the comparatively short stretch between them and the river. The trail led down to a ford, and, with a good two hundred and fifty yards in hand, they dashed through the water and crossed safely, a bullet fired by the exasperated sheriff, who had suddenly pulled up and thrown his rifle to his shoulder, whistling harmlessly over their heads. Five seconds later both had disappeared amid the timber.

Harry and the sheriff pulled up suddenly and looked at each other; for the time being, at least, the ruffians were safe, holding an advantage.

"Well, what's to do?" asked the cowboy. "Sit down an' cuss!" the sheriff replied tersely. "I guess that's all we can do. If we try to cross th' river, they'll pump us full o' lead."

"Perhaps; and if we don't get across they'll get away," Harry retorted.

"Wal, sonny, if yer anxious to commit suicide, yer cross then, right away," the sheriff said irritably. "There's two o' them; there's two of us; one rifle apiece."

"We can cross the river somewhere else?" Harry suggested.

"No ford nearer nor fifteen miles; know this river like my hat!"

"Swim it, then."

"Try it; others hev. Sometimes their bodies hev been found; sometimes they haven't."

"Well, what is to be done?" Harry was getting impatient.

"I told yer—sit down an' cuss!"

"Which won't help us to catch the rascals."

"Sure thing!"

A bullet came singing through the still air, passing within a foot of Harry's head. It was a long shot; but very near to its mark.

"What did I say?" shouted the sheriff triumphantly, as they moved further away. "That McAulay's a dead shot! What'd he do to us if we tried to rush th' ford—eh?"

"All very well," Harry observed; "but I'm not going to sit here and do nothing. We'll be no better off when the others do come up."

In spite of the remonstrances of the sheriff—who was not a coward by any means, but a man who saw no reason for throwing his life away uselessly—Harry dismounted, and, throwing himself flat on the ground, commenced to wriggle himself cautiously in the direction of the river. Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty yards he covered safely, no sign indicating that the thieves had seen him. Yard by yard he drew himself until no more than a hundred feet separated him from the water, and then a puff of white smoke suddenly appeared on the face of the timber looking upon the river. There was a sharp report, and a bullet ploughed up the ground near to the stretched-out form. Another and another followed, but the sheriff, sitting his horse a hundred yards away, his straining eyes fixed upon the target of this continuous firing, saw Harry going steadily forward.

Twenty yards, ten only to go. The sheriff almost held his breath with the stress of excitement. Was it possible Harry should reach the water? It was incredible—miraculous—that he should have advanced so far unscathed by the hail of lead that fell around him. Suddenly there was a loud cry, one arm of the crawling cowboy waved convulsively in the air, and then the body rolled sideways. Only a couple of yards separated it from the edge of the river. Simultaneously came a loud, triumphant yelling from the further side of the water.

"By thunder, they've plugged him! He's got it at last!" shouted the sheriff.

He touched his pony's flanks with the spurs and shot forward. His prudence and caution were gone—swept aside by

the sudden gust of fierce anger that came to him as he beheld Harry roll over dead—or, at the best, seriously wounded. If the boy were yet alive, he should be saved.

Like a lightning flash he swept onwards, and, as he neared where the body lay, a cry of amazement broke from his lips; for, before his very eyes, the apparently dead cowboy rose to his feet, and leaped headlong, Winchester in hand, over the bank into the river.

"Fooled 'em, sheriff! Come along!" shouted Harry, as he jumped.

He had not been wounded at all. By some stroke of luck not a single bullet had touched him, and the cunning plan by which he had gained the ford had suggested itself to him as he wriggled himself along the ground.

A double yell of rage at being thus tricked came from the hidden men. Their rifles went back to their shoulders, fingers pressed the triggers, and a couple of bullets whistled towards the sheriff, who, checked for a brief moment by Harry's sudden return to life, had pushed forward. One bullet went harmlessly astray, but the second took the plunging pony in the upper part of his right foreleg, smashing the bone. Down came the little animal, bringing its rider to the ground also. To extricate himself from the stirrup and rise to his feet was for the sheriff but the work of a moment—sufficient time, however, for the deadly repeater of Sandy McAulay to discharge another bullet.

A second followed, taking the sheriff in the lower part of the body. He staggered, dropped on one knee, recovered himself, and threw up his rifle, sending a shot where he supposed the hidden desperadoes to be. Before he could fire again two bullets hit him, one in the arm, the other piercing his brain. Without a cry he toppled forward, and lay still, his arms outspread, one hand hanging over the edge of the bank.

Harry Wilmot was nowhere to be seen. The tumbled surface of the broad river revealed nothing. On the bank above the stricken pony was writhing and tossing in agony.

CHAPTER 6.
On the Trail.

WITH fierce, wondering eyes, Sandy McAulay and his brother rogue swept the river. What had become of Harry Wilmot they could not understand? They had been so intent upon pumping lead into the sheriff, whom they had recognised, their attention had been altogether taken from the daring fellow who had escaped their bullets in so marvellous a fashion, and the last of whom they had noticed was his headlong leap into the river. He had disappeared, anyway; so much their eyes told them. They listened intently, but beyond the swirling and swishing of the river, no sound caught their ears.

"Gone under," growled McAulay, at length—"drowned, an' good riddance!"

"Ain't so sure!" Buck Connors exclaimed.

"Wal, we can't see him, so he must be."

"Might've got across when we wasn't lookin'!" Connors objected.

"Bunkum!" retorted the other. "If he had, we sh'd hear him. He's drowned, pardner. An' now, since there don't appear to be more'n these two, we may as well be gettin' on."

"But s'posin' he ain't drowned?"

"But he is, man. Believe I saw him go under just as we finished t'other one."

"I didn't; an', what's more, I ain't goin' till I've made sure o' th' young whelp!" Connors declared obstinately.

McAulay's one eye regarded his partner curiously. An ugly sneer twisted his already contorted mouth.

"Blessed funk yer in all of a sudden," he said scornfully.

"Who is th' kid, anyway, Buck Connors, that ye're so frightened of him?"

"Frightened!" repeated Connors angrily, and his eyes lighted dangerously. "I ain't frightened of him or no one—not even you, an' don't yer forget it! But that kid—thunder! I've sworn I'd cut his heart out, an' before we go from here I'm goin' to make sure whether he's dead or not."

"What's he done to yer?" McAulay inquired.

"He—oh, snakes! He done what no one ever did, an' I'm goin' to even up before he's done with." And Connors' villainously ugly face became still more repulsive, as recollection of his ignominious overthrow in O'Brien's saloon recurred with increased vividity to his mind.

McAulay burst out laughing.

"Oh, was it him?" he asked. "I heard something of it. Wiped yer eye, didn't he, an' afterwards laid yer out O.K.? That was it, wasn't it?"

A string of oaths was Connors' answer. He got up from his kneeling position, in the clump of buck-eyes, which had served to conceal the two ruffians, and stood upright.

"I'm goin' to find out about him," he announced.

Buy "The Marvel"—Every Wednesday, Id.

McAulay stopped the fit of chuckling which had seized him.

"Go on then; don't be long!" he choked, and fell to his inward laughter again, heedless of his companion's furious glances.

High above the timber that had hidden his huge form so thoroughly, the giant towered for half a minute, looking around.

"I'll try," he began, and then stopped, for at that moment a rifle cracked, and with a yell of pain he subsided, one hand pressed to his face, on which an expression of agony appeared.

Blood spurted quickly from between his fingers, for a bullet had passed through his jaw, smashing the bones, and removing several teeth in its passage. Dropping his rifle, he rolled upon the ground, yelling madly.

In an instant McAulay was on his hands and knees, crawling rapidly away, heedless of the shrieks and groans and curses of his wounded confederate.

"Gosh!" he said, as he went off, his departure hastened by the vicious zip-zip-zip of bullets amongst the close tree-stems. "Gosh, the kid wasn't drowned after all!"

As quickly and noiselessly as he could he made his way from the spot. Whether Connors would follow, or was able to follow him, he neither knew nor cared. Certainly, he was not going to remain behind to find out, and thereby run the risk of annexing a bullet from the rifle of their enemy, who had now discovered the hiding-place. He was going to make tracks as fast as he could, leaving his companion to his fate, to shift for himself. Sandy McAulay was not the sort of man to sacrifice himself, even for a brother criminal—not by any means.

McAulay was quite right—Harry had not been drowned. He was, on the contrary, very much alive, as Buck Connors had found to his cost. When he had plunged into the river he had avoided the shallower water of the ford, and, diving, had swum beneath the surface more than two-thirds the width of the river.

Raising his head for a moment to secure a deep breath, he had again gone under, reaching the bank safely, and without the hidden desperadoes having caught even a momentary glimpse of him, which they would have been lucky to do, even if their attention had not been occupied by the sheriff.

Drawing himself up the bank, without making the slightest noise to betray his whereabouts, he sat down to recover breath. Then he looked to his rifle. Tearing off a portion of his shirt, he wrung the water out of it, and wiped his weapon as dry as was possible. The cartridges in the magazine were useless; but removing the damp shells, he replaced them with fresh cartridges, of which he had carried a few in a water-tight box, and which had remained undamaged by the immersion. Then he waited for the horse-thieves to show themselves, with what result, we have seen.

For a long while after the fall of Buck Connors, and his pumping of lead into the close thicket of buck-eyes, where the wounded man had fallen, Harry Wilmot remained quiet. Then, hearing no sound, and no response to his fusillade having been given, he crawled quickly towards the clump of chestnut saplings, or buck-eyes, as the Western folk call them, from a fancied resemblance of a white spot on the dark skin of the fruit to the eye of a buck. Nearer he came, and still nearer, until he could plainly hear the stifled, agonised cries and profane oaths of the wounded ruffian.

Peering between the slender stems, Harry saw the long, drawn-out form of Connors writhing on the ground—no sign of his fellow criminal was to be seen. So, Winchester ready to be brought to his shoulder should need arise, Harry pushed his way through the buck-eyes, and stood beside Connors.

The wounded man raised his head, and a string of curses were reeled off his blood-dripping lips. He recognised his enemy, and his hand went to his hip, but fell away immediately.

"Where is McAulay?" Harry demanded.

But Connors paid no heed, and not until the question had been thrice repeated, and Harry's six-shooter brought into persuasive proximity with his head, did the man reply.

"Gone—th' skunk!" he gasped. "He heard yer—an'—an' sloped!"

In a moment Harry had turned, and was crashing his way through the dense bushes. The timber formed but a narrow belt alongside the river, and in a very short while he had reached its outer edge. McAulay had gone, for sure. The marks of his horse's hoofs, together with those of an unriden horse, were plainly visible. McAulay, fearing pursuit, had taken the precaution of carrying Buck Connors' horse along with him.

Harry turned fiercely back to the timber. Much as he desired it, he knew that pursuit was all but useless. The

sheriff's horse lay disabled, his own pony was on the further side of the river; even if he could again swim the river—and this he doubted—by the time he had done so, found his pony, and crossed again, McAulay would have so long a start that hope of catching him within measurable distance was futile.

How long he had been gone already Harry did not know. His own eyesight was of the keenest, the plain bank of the river was of the flattest and barest, yet no moving speck on its bare surface denoted the whereabouts of the flying horse-thief, murderer, and his own life-long enemy.

When, an hour afterwards, the rest of the sheriff's posse reached the river, it was to find the dead body of their leader beside his wounded horse, and to be hailed by Harry Wilmot, keeping guard beside the wounded companion of Sandy McAulay.

In silence and in sorrow the party of avengers returned to Parker, bearing with them their dead leader, and their wounded prisoner, of whom it may as well be said right here that he enjoyed a speedy release from the pain of his smashed jaw without needing the services of a surgeon. For the Parker folk, on general principles, since there was no telling whether the bullets that had slain the sheriff had come from Connors' rifle, or that of McAulay, very solemnly, and very thoroughly hanged Connors from a rope suspended over the first convenient support they encountered upon entering their town, greatly to their own edification, but little to the satisfaction of young Lieutenant Van Hoorn, whose valuable Kentucky horse was no nearer recovery because of the execution of Buck Connors.

But the number of those who returned to Parker was lessened by one. Harry Wilmot remained where he was. Alone, and unaided, he intended to find McAulay. He would hang on to his trail for a twelvemonth, or more, if necessary, but corner him he would. Again had the chance of avenging his father's death come to him; he did not intend to let it slide. He was deaf to all persuasions to the contrary, shook his head decidedly, his lips tight, his jaw set firmly, in answer to all argument, and stayed behind. All he asked was for someone to ride his pony across the ford, and the loan of some cartridges.

These matters settled, he waved a farewell to the Parkerites, shook hands with Lieutenant Van Hoorn's doctor friend, and went back into the timber, after hobbling his horse, there to build a fire and dry his clothes before putting in a very sound and well-earned sleep.

It was barely daylight when Harry awoke, and, saddling his pony, took up McAulay's trail. He was now in Indian territory, the state the United States' Government had once set apart for the existence of the redskins, a country unknown to him, and a fitting hiding-place for such as McAulay.

Through the long morning he rode at an easy, untiring pace, such as a Western pony may keep up for hours without fatigue, and towards midday he came upon a man herding sheep, the first living soul he had beheld.

The man, a half-breed, answered his hail, and for half an hour the pair chatted amicably. Yes; the half-breed had seen McAulay, he had passed along the trail in the very early morning, riding fast, and had not halted. He was travelling due south.

Late that evening Harry arrived at a settlement on the banks of the River Canadian. He had seen no one since meeting the sheep-herder, and in the settlement no one had news to give of McAulay. He had not passed that way. Four days Harry spent here, riding around, trying to pick up news, but McAulay had disappeared entirely. The country was not particularly well-adapted for hiding, the valley between the foothills being small and shallow, though well-wooded. But it was very sparsely populated, and this means something out West, where a man does not consider himself particularly lonely if a four or five hours' ride will take him to a neighbour.

On the fifth day Harry's pony put his foot into a rabbit-hole, and came down, shooting the rider out of the saddle, and snapping the bone of its left foreleg. A revolver-bullet put the poor little beast out of its misery, and Harry tramped eighteen miles back to the settlement, a decidedly unpleasant journey for a cowboy, who spends sixteen hours out of every twenty-four in the saddle, and ordinarily doesn't know what it means to walk half a mile.

A new pony was a necessity, but horses in the settlement were scarce, and every man owning one did not desire to part with it, even for good dollars, though these were still more scarce. At last he was directed to approach a certain Bill Thompson, who, it was suggested, might have a pony for sale. Harry's informant smiled as he gave the information, and the lad set out for Thompson's place without delay.

"Wantin' a pony!" drawled out the prospective seller when Harry put his question. "Guess I may oblige yer, pard."

NEXT SATURDAY:

"BY THE SAD SEA WAVES,"
A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale,
By H. Otis Hooker

AND "THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY CAR,"
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IN "PLUCK," 1st

Without undue haste he got himself off his bunk, where he was lying smoking, found his pony, took a lariat, and led the way to a small, enclosed paddock.

"Take yer choice, pard," Thompson said, in a melancholy voice, as he pointed across the rails of the corral.

A single pony was grazing within the paddock; apparently the choice Harry was able to make was a very limited one.

"All you have?" he demanded shortly.

"Yer right!" Thompson replied.

Harry eyed the pony critically. The animal seemed ordinary enough, a trifle bony, perhaps, and with a somewhat halting gait, and it was staring at the two men outside the rails with a strained, somewhat frightened expression.

"Guess I'll buy him, anyway," he said at length.

He wanted a pony badly, and this, apparently, was the only one to be had. Thompson rode into the corral, lassoed the pony without a great deal of difficulty, and hauled him forth.

"Wild, isn't he?" Harry inquired, noting the creature's wandering eye and laid-back ears.

"He was a bit running loose last year," the owner admitted indifferently.

The pony was saddled and bridled. Harry mounted, was pleasantly surprised by the absence of any demonstration of vices to which the broncho is only too often compelled to plead guilty, and, somewhat satisfied, asked the price.

"A hundred dollars," Thompson answered in a sad, far-away voice.

"Forty!" Harry observed shortly.

"I said a hundred!"

"And I said forty!"

"Then there's no trade!"

"I'm sorry for your sake!"

"Yer welcome, pardner. I'm pow'ful sorry for yer!"

"Then I may as well go back again."

"Yer'll stop an' have a bite!"

Ultimately the deal was made at fifty-five dollars, which Thompson pocketed as if the bills were his death certificate, and Harry, declining to assist in emptying the demi-john that stood alongside Thompson's bunk, rode back to the settlement, very alert to possible tricks on the broncho's part, and agreeably surprised that he reached his starting-point without having been compelled to give his mount personal notification of the fact that rider and not steed was to be master of the partnership.

CHAPTER 7.
Equine Trickery.

CROSSING the Canadian, Harry did a fifty mile stretch the first day, reached the Washita river, and put in another week hunting for possible indications of McAulay's whereabouts. His pony carried him well: a quiet, if ugly-looking mover, he raised no differences of opinion, and Harry began to think he had made something of a good bargain with the sad-voiced Thompson. Near the Washita, at a town called Lehigh, he had news of McAulay. The one-eyed rascal had entered a saloon there, raised trouble, and, though no shooting had taken place, had concluded his health was safer in less thickly populated parts. Anyway he had left Lehigh, and more than one who had made his temporary acquaintance judged he had gone towards Texas, a popular health resort for gentlemen in his circumstances. Harry took the road towards the Red River, which constitutes the Texan boundary.

During the afternoon Harry suddenly checked the loping stride of his broncho and drew his revolver. Jack rabbits were round about in plenty, and the sight of them gave him the inclination for roast rabbit as the evening meal. Dismounting, he took a turn of the lariat around his wrist, just as a precaution against the pony moving off unexpectedly and spoiling his shot, the other end being fastened to the saddle peak, and walked forward. Picking his rabbit, Harry got a sight on it and fired. The next moment he was lying flat on his back, his left wrist badly lacerated, and fifty feet away was the broncho moving rapidly. The broncho was evidently not so great a fool as he appeared.

Harry didn't wait to see whether he had hit his rabbit or not; immediately he picked himself up and saw what was going on he started to run after his pony, behind which trailed the sixty-foot length of lariat. By the time he was in his stride the broncho was a hundred yards to the good, and increasing his pace. Blessing the pony's perfidiousness, Harry followed.

It was hot, very hot, not a cloud in the sky to intercept the fierce rays of the golden sun, not a breath of cool air to temper its heat. Harry was not used to fast and continued running—though he made a surprisingly good show—and only the pony enjoyed the long-drawn-out game of catch-who-catch-can. That he did so was evident by his careful allurements to induce Harry to continue it. He always hold

out hopes of the cowboy's ultimate success. He would run a short distance—say a quarter of a mile—and then stop to look round innocently and commence grazing. Harry would put on a spurt, arrive within a dozen yards of the end of the trailing lariat, and then see it suddenly whisked forward as the broncho, kicking up his heels, with a backward glance at his perspiring pursuer, would bound forward and begin a further half-mile gallop. Oh, yes; the game was quite to his liking!

Half a score times was this delightful trick repeated, until the exasperated cowboy, reeking wet, his very hair dripping with perspiration, his breath quick and panting, and feet weary, was within an inch of lugging out his revolver and putting an end to the wily broncho's performance with a bullet. But, instead, he changed his tactics, sauntering instead of sprinting towards the alluring rope when it was at rest upon the scrubby ground, and so hoping to throw the broncho off his guard. But the careless indifference of his attack did not deceive the pony; it was not the first time he had got some fun out of this game—to him, at least, it was not a fresh novelty. As Harry neared him he began to edge away in the most tantalising fashion, grazing as he went, admiring the surrounding landscape, yet not neglecting Harry by any means.

Hour after hour the game was played—the loss of his pony was too serious a matter for the cowboy to surrender all attempt at recovery easily—Harry, getting more hot, tired, and angry every minute, but the broncho still remaining fresh and cheerful, until the position of the declining sun marked the passing of the afternoon and the approach of evening. Then Harry attempted to make a circuit and come upon the broncho from the front; but the scheme failed, the pony was not to be caught napping, and danced off in another direction long before Harry was near enough to secure him.

Frontal attacks, stratagems from the side and rear, violent rushea and persuasive callings all failed; the broncho had his liberty and was not willing to part with it. Perhaps it had some apprehension of an uncomfortable quarter of an hour if once the cowboy obtained the opportunity of regaining the saddle. Anyway, it lost interest in the continuation of the game, and finally, somewhere about seven in the evening, and after six hours of amusing and exciting play, it decided it had had enough. Suddenly raising its head, the pony uttered a shrill, sustained noising, and with one last derisive kick of its hind limbs, started off at a pace that put further pursuit out of the question.

Too angry to speak, yet conscious of a certain, if disagreeable feeling of relief, Harry stood stock still, watching the disappearing form of his late property. The recollection of the grin with which the man in the settlement had spoken of Thompson as a likely seller of a pony came back to him, adding fuel to his wrath. His fists clenched, and he said some hard and disagreeable things of Bill Thompson, which might have awakened that worthy from his condition of melancholy indifference.

Perhaps Thompson had been aware of what might happen; perhaps this was not the first time Thompson had sold that pony; perhaps an unwary customer, paying a visit to Thompson's tumble-down shack in the near future, with a view to a deal in horseflesh, might be escorted to the corral as Harry had been, and bidden make his choice of the identical pony which had provided the cowboy with so much unaccustomed pedestrian exercise and undesired excitement. Perhaps Thompson had trained the beast to such tricks; he might be making an easy income out of the animal. Then the absurdity, the ludicrousness of his recent performance, struck Harry most violently. A laugh broke from his lips, another, and yet another, and he had cast himself upon the ground, rolling over and over in a paroxysm of uncontrollable, if foolish, mirth. He could not help himself; he realised what a funny figure he must have cut, and he laughed until he grew hotter than before, and the tears came into his eyes; laughed until his ribs fairly ached, and he could laugh no longer, but lay on the ground breathless and helpless.

When he finally picked himself up his fit of merriment had passed, the seriousness of his position occurred to him, and he looked the situation squarely in the face. It was an unpleasant one, there was no denying it. He was alone on the vast, limitless prairie, miles away from human habitation or assistance, and afoot. Sitting down, he took stock of his possessions. His Winchester was with the pony, hanging in its saddle-holster, his blanket likewise was gone. His revolver he had, and a score of cartridges for the same. A knife, of course; a small supply of matches, and a small quantity of dry bread and some cold meat left over from his last meal. But his water-flask was gone, tied to the saddle, and this was a truly serious matter. Without water one cannot get on at all in this naturally dry region, where, for all he knew, streams or water-holes might be as infrequent and far apart as angel's visits. The appearance of the

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country did not suggest the prevalence of the most precious of all fluids.

For his canteen filled with water Harry would willingly have bartered knife, food, and the clothes he wore. Given water and his revolver, he would be able to sustain life, at least; without the former, the prospect of being overcome by heat and thirst, of dying, and his bones being picked by wandering coyotes and left to bleach in the sun, was a likely and not far distant one. However, sitting down wouldn't help him out of his trouble; the proposition facing him was a tough one, but it was necessary to grapple with it unless he meant to cave in without a fight; and while the murderer of his father roamed the earth this he was not likely to do.

After a short rest, Harry was on his legs again. Turning his face due south he began to walk slowly, for his limbs were extremely tired; and over-exertion, though the heat was now somewhat less, meant an increase of thirst, the torments of which were already beginning to attack him, for in his useless pursuing of the pony his mouth and lips and even his throat had become dry and parched.

After a mile dragged out its weary length. He knew that the Red River lay somewhere ahead, and he hoped that his craving for water might be held in check until the means of assuaging his thirst was reached. As he climbed each rise in the ground—and though these may not be easily apparent to the eye, on account of the vast extent of the open ground, they were noticeable in no small degree to Harry—his eyes searched longingly but vainly for some sign of water.

Compelled to rest again and again, he continued walking until the stars came out in the velvety blackness of the sky. It was no use trying to camp; sleep was less necessary than water, but from time to time he was compelled to halt and rest his aching legs and blistered feet. His thirst became intense; he tried to eat some of his bread and meat, but it was as dry in his parched mouth as chips of wood, and after swallowing a few crumbs he desisted from his attempt to eat. Walking and resting, the night at length passed; though when dawn came, it found Harry stretched face downwards on the ground, inert, and in a sleep that was more than half a state of insensibility.

The sun was high when at last he struggled back to consciousness and his cracked lips parted in a whispering cry of gladness as he stood upright and his eyes beheld, seemingly only a short distance away, a dark line that stood for the trees along the banks of the river. Refreshed by his rest, and stimulated by the renewed hope of relieving his torturing thirst, he pushed forward. But the dark line was further away than he had imagined; it was long before he could distinguish amongst it the formation of trees, but bit by bit he moved forward, slowly, painfully, yet determinedly. With the longed-for goal in sight, he was not going to throw up the sponge.

At length the trees were quite close. Amongst them he could distinguish, in a slight clearing, the outline of what was evidently a small cabin or hut, but he did not turn aside. Forcing his way towards the river-side, he found a spot where the bank was of sufficiently low inclination to enable him to reach the water; and then, casting himself upon his stomach, he bent his head until his lips touched the cool, delicious fluid, of which he sucked great mouthfuls. Again and again he drank, until there came to him some relief of the torturing pain, and then, drawing himself up, he made a cup of his hands and drank still more.

Now life seemed to run through his veins as he drank, new strength filled his muscles; his brain became clearer; for half an hour he lay beside the river, drinking at intervals, then he slipped off his clothes and plunged into the water. When he came out he felt a different man. A little longer he stayed, to eat what remained of his food, and then, refreshed, reinvigorated, he rose to his feet and turned in the direction of the hut he had observed earlier.

CHAPTER 8.

McAulay Cashes In.

IT was mere curiosity which led Harry Wilmo to examine the hut beside the Red River. He had no knowledge that it was inhabited, as he came nearer to it he decided that it was not. Even from the outside of a dwelling it is impossible to form conclusions as to whether it owns an occupier or not. The hut was but a small one, built of logs stood upright, the ends roughly squared to receive rough rafters, which were covered with smaller boughs, soda of earth, and stones. A window and a doorway broke the surface of the front, but the window-shutter had gone, the doorway was unclosed, and no smoke arose from the opening left in the roof to serve as a chimney. It had the appearance of being unoccupied—of being in rapid process of decay.

In consequence, it was with greater surprise than alarm that Harry, when within twenty feet of the hut, heard a

loud report, a bullet whistle within an inch of his head, and a hoarse voice command him to stand and put up his hands. He was entirely unprepared for such a reception; but while he remained hesitating and astonished, a second shot no less well-aimed than the first warned him to delay no longer in obeying. Up went his arms, and at the same moment a man stepped into the doorway, a smoking rifle in his hands.

For a moment the two stared at each other. Then a cry of surprise broke from Harry. The man uttered a short laugh. There was cause for Harry to stare; the man before him was Sandy McAulay!

What curious trick of Fate or Providence had brought the two together? But for the playful mischief of the broncho, Harry, in all human probability would never have come to this lonely hut, on which McAulay, on his flight from Lehigh, had happened by the purest accident, and, finding it suited his purpose, had elected to stay there.

In this meeting Harry, as he stood before the hut, his arms elevated, his eyes on McAulay, his brain busily working, saw, not chance, but the hand of an avenging Providence. McAulay had reached the end of his tether; it was ordained this should be the end of his long quest for justice. The loss of his broncho was part of the scheme. Such were the thoughts that were born in Harry's brain as he faced his father's murderer, and in consequence there was no fear in his heart.

"You!" exclaimed the one-eyed ruffian, and he laughed again.

"Yes," Harry spoke with a quiet cheerfulness that surprised his interlocutor. "Yes, it's me right enough."

"Th' kid as swum th' Rabbit Ear, an' wiped out my pard?"

"The same."

"An' where's th' rest of yer gang?" McAulay demanded. Harry raised his shoulders expressively.

"I don't know," he answered; "gone back, I guess."

McAulay chuckled.

"Saw th' sheriff," he observed, with satisfaction. "So yer here on yer little lonesome. Ain't got a dozen pals be hind yer, anywhere?"

"No," Harry admitted, "I'm here by myself."

A puzzled expression came into McAulay's one villainous eye, for a while he remained silent.

"And what yer here for?" he inquired. "Horse we borrowed yours?"

Harry shook his head.

"Then why? Keep yer arms up, you, unless yer want yer head blowed off!" His voice rang out in fierce menace, and Harry's arms stiffened again. "What's yer interference for—eh, kid?"

"A matter of my own," Harry answered quietly.

He was calculating what chance he had of evading a shot if he were to make a sudden jump to hide amidst the timber at his elbow. Again the puzzled expression came into McAulay's face.

"Yer own!" he repeated. "I ain't seen yer. Who are yer, anyway?"

"I have been waiting to tell you these three years. I think the time has come now."

"Is it a serious matter ye've been waitin' to see me for?"

"It is—for you!" Harry replied grimly.

McAulay's eyes were fixed upon his face. He meant to jump. Once behind a tree, he would be able to draw his six-shooter, and then the wanton killing of his father should be avenged.

The purpose in his brain was written in his eyes. Though McAulay did not recognise the lad, did not know who he was, or why he sought him, he was quick to read the intention his face expressed. He suddenly moved, and the muzzle of his rifle covered Harry's heart.

"I guess, then, I'd better prevent it," he observed.

His finger tightened upon the trigger, and at the same moment Harry jumped sideways. The bullet, instead of piercing his breast, cut through the flesh of his left arm.

Before McAulay could fire again the young cowboy was

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behind a tree. McAulay backed at once within the hut. For a while both remained quiet. To reveal themselves to each other might mean a bullet, and sudden death. At such short distance as they were apart Harry's revolver was as effective a weapon as his adversary's Winchester, and a great deal more easy to use. It was more than probable, however, that McAulay also carried a six-shooter.

Suddenly the voice of the latter broke the stillness of the atmosphere.

"Say, kid," he shouted, "what's this fool-game we're playing, anyway?"

Harry's only reply was a short, hard laugh. Game this man called it! Well, perhaps it was a game, only a game that would have anything but a playful ending—a game wherein the players were staking nothing less valuable than their lives—a game to be fought out to the bitter end—the oldest, deadliest, most fascinating game that has ever been invented, and which for excitement has never been and never can be equalled.

McAulay repeated his question, and this time Harry answered him.

"No fool-game," he exclaimed, "but a mighty serious game for both of us."

"Sure!" returned McAulay. "Say, let us call it off. Come out, an' we'll talk it over."

Harry smiled to himself. He was not so simple as to be taken in by such an obvious trick.

"Thanks, I'm comfortable here!" he said, and his teeth clenched tightly behind the words.

To think that he should be exchanging chaffing words with the man who had murdered his father! Again there was silence; then:

"Who are yer? What in thunder is it that yer 'pear to be wantin' me so badly?" shouted McAulay.

There was no indication of apprehension or alarm in his hoarse voice; merely a lively curiosity.

"Well," answered Harry, after a few seconds of hesitation, "I reckon there's no harm in telling you now. You recollect Cripple Creek?"

"Shure! Sh'd think I do!" And McAulay laughed softly.

"Well, what then?"

"Perhaps you also recollect John Wilmot who was there also three years ago?"

"Wilmot—Wilmot! Can't say as I do, kid."

"I think you will. You went into his shack one night—you and a few more—and you shot him."

"Ah, sure, I recollect now, kid!"

"Well?"

"But what——" began McAulay, in a puzzled voice.

"I'm Harry Wilmot."

"Th' kid!"

McAulay stopped. In Harry's voice was accusation and condemnation. That laconic statement of his name was quite sufficient. Sandy McAulay's memory was awakened. He remembered that night; and with that recollection came realisation of what it was he was up against. He understood that this was a business that meant life and death.

Quiet and still he stood in the cabin. His fertile brain was trying to evolve some plan for the destruction of his waiting enemy, for the man who was to come alive out of this situation was Sandy McAulay. He felt no remorse for the three-year-old crime—but one of many that could be laid to his charge.

Outside waited Harry, finger on trigger, ready to shoot directly a glimpse of McAulay was to be had.

And, unseen by outlaw or cowboy, hidden amidst the thick greenery of the trees, a pair of keen, expressionless, dark eyes, set in a face of dull copper, were watching both. Indistinguishable almost against the dark trunk of a tree behind which it stood, was a half-naked figure, still and motionless as if carved from a log of wood.

No sound reached the ears of Harry, but no single movement he had made since entering the wood had been unobserved. Every word he had exchanged with the concealed outlaw had fallen upon other ears than his. The words had been understood, and in the brain of the hidden watcher and listener were thoughts which, could Harry have been aware of them, would have startled him. He was not McAulay's only enemy; he was not the only one of fixed and relentless purpose, with skill to track, with patience to wait, with the will to execute.

A long time passed, and Harry's patience gave way. If McAulay would not come to him he would go to McAulay; and that his life should not be needlessly sacrificed he meant to make a circuit, and come upon the cabin from the rear.

Making as little noise as possible, he crept slowly through the timber; but, despite all his care, his foot stepped on a dead stick, and it crackled loudly, for in the silence of the wood the slightest sound seemed magnified twenty times.

McAulay heard the sound, faint though it was when it reached his ears. A smile crossed his villainous face. He

guessed the cowboy's object. His own chance had come. He would slip out, and when Harry reached the cabin he should find it empty.

One step, and his powerful figure was framed in the open doorway. Before he could raise his foot for a second to carry him through it the sharp, vicious crack, snap, of a rifle shattered the silence of the wood, and a bullet sped through the air straight to McAulay's face, piercing eye and brain. McAulay had cashed in; John Wilmot was avenged.

So quickly, so suddenly death came, McAulay had no time for a single cry even. A quick shudder ran through his body, his rifle dropped from fingers suddenly become nerveless, and the muscles of his limbs relaxed. He fell forward upon his face like a lay figure of which the sustaining string has been severed.

There was a crashing amidst the trees. Harry had heard the shot, and, startled, alarmed, he turned and dashed towards the hut.

Bounding into the little clearing, his astonished gaze fell upon the body of Sandy McAulay lying prone on the ground, face uppermost, and by the side of the corpse knelt an Indian, whose right hand was even then drawing from his belt a long scalping-knife. The red man leaped to his feet, but knife and hand fell to his side as he looked into Harry's face.

"He kill my father!" the Indian exclaimed.

And white man and red, each animated by the same spirit, each striving for the same object against he who lay dead before them, brought together in this strange fashion by the hand of Providence, looked and knew that no enmity lay between them.

Two hours later, mounted on Lieutenant Van Hoorn's horse, Harry Wilmot rode away. Justice had been done upon the murderer of his father; and now that the penalty had been paid he was conscious of a feeling of satisfaction that he had been spared the killing of McAulay. The advent of the Indian had spared him a task of which the disagreeableness now seemed no less apparent than its justice.

The young officer had left Parker to take up a command against the Dakotah Indians, again becoming troublesome; and when Harry did find him, Van Hoorn had no great difficulty in persuading him to exchange his former roving, unsettled life for one no less exciting and agreeable.

As a trooper in the U.S. Cavalry Harry served with the expedition against the rebellious Sioux, finding therein an opening for his powers, which led later to his development into the scout to whom, because of his courage, resource, and immunity from ill-luck, the Indians gave a name which, freely translated, means "The Wakeful Grizzly Who Never Gets Hurt."

THE END.

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When Pat Nugent arrives at St. Kit's, an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school between Arthur Talbot and Eldred Lacy. Talbot gains the victory, but afterwards resigns his position on account of a mean plot instigated by Eldred Lacy and his brother, who is Squire of Lynwood. Soon after the election for the position of captain, which Talbot has vacated, draws near, and Talbot's chum Brooke, who opposes Lacy, is elected captain of St. Kit's. One morning the Head discovers he has been robbed of £80. He calls a meeting in the hall, and Arthur Talbot is openly accused of the theft. His study is searched, and the notes are found hidden beneath the carpet; but Arthur declares he is innocent. He is sent to Coventry by the whole school except Nugent, Blagden, and Green, his three chums, who believe in his innocence, and who are determined to stand by him.

(Now go on with the story.)

Trimble Catches a Tartar.

"Let 'em go," said Trimble, with a sneer. "They'll be cut by the whole Form, and perhaps something worse than that."

Pat looked at him coolly.

"Shure and you've already once had a taste of ragging us," he remarked. "You remember the time, Trimble, when you played a trick on Lacy, and got the whole Form detained, and didn't confess until you were found out."

Trimble turned very red. It had cost him a great deal to live down that unpleasant episode in his career at St. Kit's, and he did not like to have it raked up again before his followers.

"You threw the blame on me," said Pat, "and you and your set ragged us in the end study, but I think we gave as good as we got."

"I'm not talking about that now—"

"I know you're not, but I am. I remember Cleeve used to screw money out of you for keeping the thing dark, when he knew all the time."

Cleeve turned crimson.

"And Cobb was in it, too," said Pat. "Nice lot you are to be down on anybody, I don't think."

"Look here—"

"Even a thief isn't much meaner than a liar," said Pat, "and you told a bushel of lies on that occasion, Trimble, to say nothing of other times when you have distinguished yourself in that line. Don't talk about sending anybody to Coventry. You make me sick!"

Trimble was red with rage.

"You stand by Talbot, I suppose, because you're birds of the same feather," he hissed. "If there's anything missing in the Fourth Form studies at any time, chaps, we shall know where to look for it."

Pat took a quick step towards Trimble. His eyes were flashing fire, and his fists were clenched hard.

"What do you mean by that, Trimble?"

"What I say," replied Trimble, defiantly, and yet half wishing that he had left the words unsaid as he saw the expression on the Irish lad's face.

"You mean to call me a thief, then?"

"Well, you stick to a thief pretty tight, so—"

Biff!

Trimble had no time to finish the sentence. Pat Nugent's fist smote him full on the mouth, and he went staggering along the passage, to fall upon his back with a sounding thump.

Pat followed him up with ready fists and flashing eyes.

"Now get up and have some more," he cried.

Trimble sat up. There was a thin stream of "clarot" flowing from the corner of his mouth, but he did not look inclined for a fight.

"Go it, Trimble!" exclaimed Cobb.

"Yes, go it," cried Pat; "get up, you coward. You have called Talbot a thief, and now you call me one, and now you've got to fight."

"I'm not going to fight with a fellow who's sent to Coventry."

"Aren't you? You should have thought of that before"

Get up!"

"She'n't!"

"Get me a cane out of the study, Blaggy," said Pat, who

was white with righteous anger. "He shall fight me, after what he's said, or I'll thrash him where he lies."

"Righto!" said Blaggy.

He darted into the end study and reappeared with a light walking-cane in his hand, which he passed to Pat.

The Irish lad made it whistle in the air.

Trimble eyed it nervously.

"Now, Trimble, are you going to fight, or to take a licking?"

"I won't—I—"

Thwack! The dust rose in a little cloud from Trimble's jacket as the cane descended across his shoulders. It was a smart cut, and it hurt Trimble, and the lanky Upper Fourth boy leaped to his feet with a howl of pain and rage.

"I'll fight you!" he hissed. "I'll half kill you!"

And he rushed at Pat like a mad bull. Pat dropped the cane and put up his fists. He was in the mood for a fight, in the mood to inflict summary vengeance upon one of the worst and meanest of Arthur Talbot's enemies.

And he did inflict it. The other Fourth-Formers stood round, but did not offer to interfere. It was a fair fight, face to face, and foot to foot, and no one was called upon to interfere. Trimble had the advantage of age and size, and Pat the advantage of boundless pluck and righteous indignation. And the latter told.

On a previous occasion Trimble had shown that he could not stand up before Pat Nugent, and on this occasion his downfall was even more swift.

Up and fro and up and down Pat drove him, till he sank to the floor again, exhausted and thoroughly thrashed, panting for breath. Pat stood over him with blazing eyes.

"Have you had enough?"

"Yes," groaned Trimble. "I'll pay you out for this, Pat Nugent!"

"Bah! Now you can send me to Coventry if you like."

Pat's eyes flashed round upon the juniors. "I tell you all that I know Talbot's innocent, and I'll stand by him to the finish. Now you can send me to Coventry if you like, and act like a silly pack of cads, as a good many of you are. I don't care a rap."

And the three chums went into their study, and slammed the door, leaving Trimble to limp away with his friends, feeling for the time as if life were not quite worth living.

Tit for Tat.

Pat Nugent had been "sent to Coventry" once before during his career at St. Kit's, and although he had stood it very well, he had found it very lonely and unpleasant.

On that occasion it was Arthur Talbot who had been the means of rescuing him from his isolation; and now, by a peculiar chance, it was owing to his loyalty to Talbot that he found himself in the shades of Coventry once more.

For the Fourth Form had made up their minds on the matter.

A few friends, perhaps, remained to the fallen captain of St. Kit's, but they were very few.

The proofs of his guilt seemed clear enough to nearly all the school, and on every side he was loudly condemned.

Those who had always been his enemies did not conceal

NEXT SATURDAY:

"BY THE SAD SEA WAVES,"
A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale,
by H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY CAR,"
A Thrilling Detective Story,
by Cecil Mayer.

IN "PLUCK." I.

their satisfaction in seeing him brought so low at last, and his former friends had little to say to stem the tide of condemnation.

When it was known that Brooke, Talbot's closest chum, had not spoken to him since the discovery of the banknotes in his study, it was felt that the last word had been said on the subject.

If Brooke believed him guilty, it was no longer possible for anyone to doubt.

Talbot had brought disgrace upon himself and upon the school, and no decent fellow should speak to him again. That was the general verdict.

The Sixth and the Fifth decided upon their course of action, and the Fourth Form had followed suit, led by Trimble and Cobb.

Almost alone against the general storm, Pat Nugent and the chums of the end study stood firm in their faith.

Pat had given Trimble a lesson he was not likely to forget, and so there was no open hostility manifested towards the end study.

But the three were sent to rigid Coventry, more rigid and more implacable than on the previous occasion.

It was not a pleasant position for the three heroes of the Fourth, and they felt it keenly; but they did not falter.

There was no question of surrendering.

Pat had been Talbot's fag ever since coming to St. Kit's, and he had never

particularly enjoyed fagging, and sometimes, it must be confessed, Talbot had had reason to complain of negligence, though, as a matter of fact, he had never found fault.

Now Pat threw himself into his fag's duties with ardour and zest.

He wanted the whole school to see him at it, thus to prove that his faith in Arthur Talbot was unwavering, and that he didn't care a single solitary rap for the general opinion.

While Talbot was out in the afternoon he tidied up the study in a way he had never equalled in his greatest efforts on previous occasions.

Fellows looked in and saw him at work, but never a word did they speak.

The study was as neat and as clean as a new pin when Pat was finally satisfied.

When he rejoined his chums they were looking rather glum.

"They mean it," said Blagden; "we're in Coventry again, Pat. No more cricket for us."

"Can't be helped."

"I know; but it's rotten."

"Yes, the silly asses want kicking hard," said Pat.

"But the truth is bound to come out, kids."

(Another fine instalment next Saturday.)

Your Editor's Corner.

All letters should be addressed, "The Editor, PLUCK, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London."

"BY THE SAD SEA WAVES"

is the title of our long, complete school tale for next Saturday's issue.

The story deals with the adventures—or, rather, I should say the misadventures—of

SPECS & CO.,

and is written by H. Clarke Hook.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY CAR,"

our second long story—extra long—will, I am sure, prove one of the most interesting detective tales you have read for a long time.

True, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, but a great recommendation is the fact that

"THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY CAR"

is from the pen of Cecil Hayter.

By the way, when you write me that postcard, will you let me know whether you like the PLUCK stories without pictures? You will see that I am giving you extra long stories this week, and in consequence have left out the usual illustrations. Let me know how you like the change, will you?

Next Friday two new additions to "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Complete Library will be on sale and obtainable from all newsagents.

These are the numbers and titles you should order:

No. 25,

"THE STOLEN SUBMARINE,"

a thrilling tale of Nelson Lee, detective, and the Great Unknown, by Maxwell Scott.

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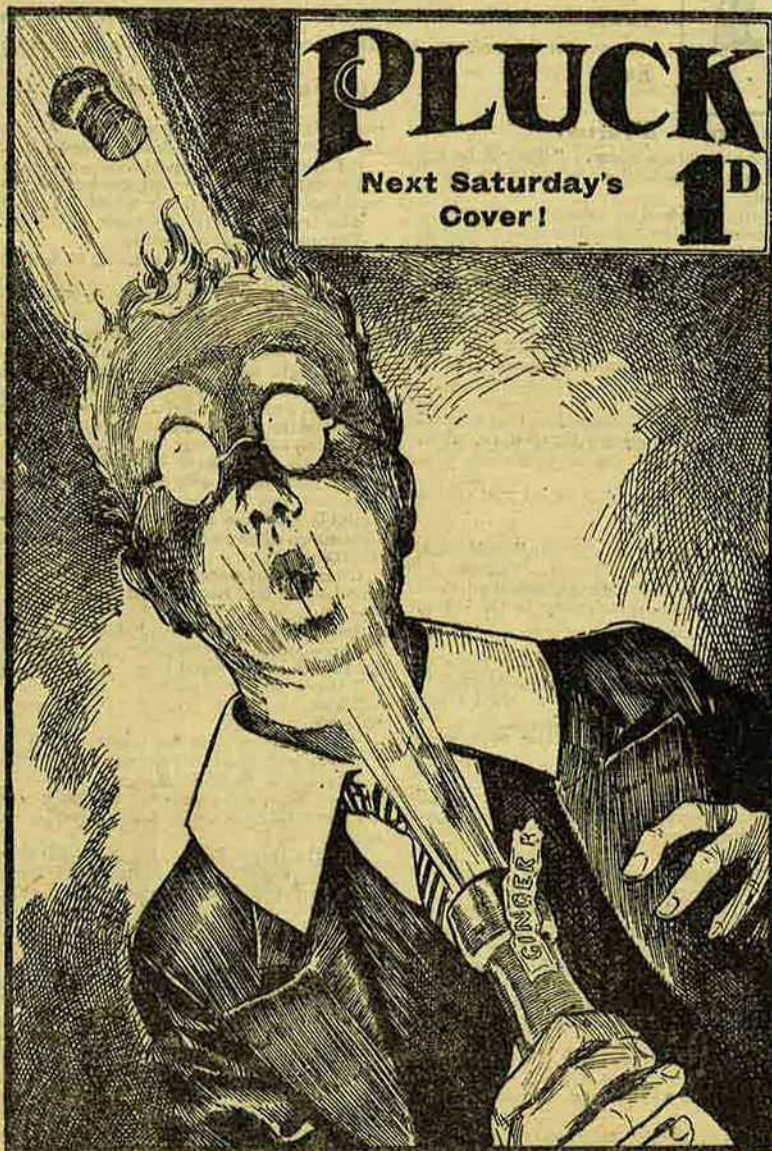
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a new, original, and laughable tale of Jack, Sam, and Pete, by S. Clarke Hook.

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Do you know this merry schoolboy? He is the very popular character in the school tale by Martin Clifford in "The Gem" Library. Now on sale. Price one half-penny.

YOUR EDITOR.



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