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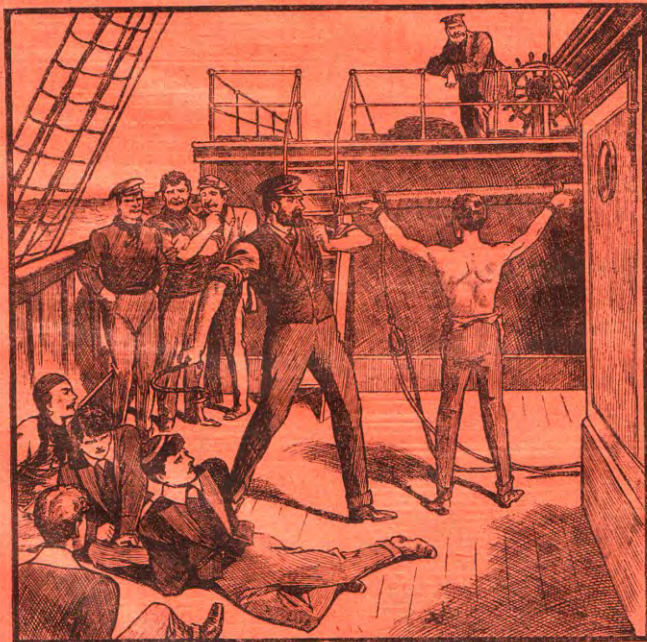
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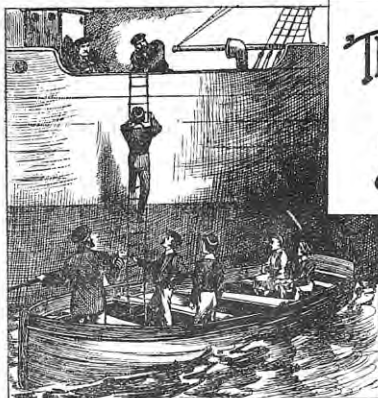
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By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Early Risers.

BOB CHERRY sat up in bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars and yawned.

The rising-bell had not yet changed out, and all Greyfriars was sleeping, with the exception of Bob Cherry. And Bob Cherry was very near sleeping, too. The early sun of the July morning was peeping in at the high dormitory windows, and Bob Cherry blinked in it and rubbed his eyes.

"Yaw-aw-aw-aw!" yawned Bob Cherry.

Then he turned out of bed.

He stepped to the next bed, and shook Harry Wharton by the shoulder. Wharton opened his eyes and blinked.

"Groo!" he remarked.

"Get up, slacker!" said Bob severely.

"Yaw-aw! 'Tain't rising-bell," murmured Wharton sleepily.

"It's time to go down and bathe."

"Groo!"

"Feel sleepy?" said Bob Cherry, with great sympathy.

"Yaw! Yes."

"All right! I'll give you something to stop all that," said Bob cheerfully; and he squeezed a wet sponge over Wharton's face.

Harry Wharton woke up then, quite suddenly and emphatically.

"Ow! You ass! Grooh!"

"Time to get up," explained Bob Cherry. "Turn out, and lend me a hand with Nugent and Johnny Bull."

Wharton rolled out of bed. The rest of the Remove were sleeping soundly. Outside, in the Close, the birds were twittering in the old trees, awakened by the sunshine, but the Greyfriars fellows were sleeping on grimly till rising-bell. Wharton rubbed the water out of his eyes, and Bob Cherry went to wake Nugent. He bent over the sleeping junior, and uttered a sudden terrific bellow close to his ear. That was Bob Cherry's playful way of calling him.

Nugent was startled out of his slumber, and he jumped up in bed, and there was a loud crack as his head met Bob Cherry's.

"Oh!" roared Bob.

"Ow!" gasped Nugent.

"You ass—"

"You fathead—"

"Yow!"

"Oh!"

"Ha ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "It's time to get up. Nugent, if we're going down to the sea before brekker. Turn out. Wake Bull up, Bob."

"I'm awake, thanks," said Johnny Bull, grinning, as he turned out. "I think Bob would wake the dead when he lets his voice fairly go. What's the time?"

"Half-past six," growled Bob Cherry, rubbing his head. "Nugent, you silly ass—"

"You fathead—"

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter, awakened by the disturbance, sat up in bed. "I say, you fellows, this is jolly early to go out for a feed, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! We're not going out for a feed, you fat butter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I suppose you weren't going to wake me," said Billy Bunter indignantly. "I'm jolly well coming, all the same! What have you got to eat?"

"Nothing, ass! You can come if you like, but we're only going out to bathe!"

Bunter groped for his spectacles, and nudged them on his fat little nose, and blinked at the captain of the Removite. "Oh, rats!" he replied. "It's no good telling me that anybody would be idiot enough to get up before rising-bell if he could help it unless there was a feed on! Look here, you fellows, I'm coming!"

"Oh, go and eat cake!"

The four chums of the Removite dressed themselves. Billy Bunter blinked at them dubiously. He was torn between the desire to stay in bed and the stronger desire to share in the supposed feed. Finally he crawled out of bed.

"I say, you fellows, you might have fixed a more sensible time for the feed," he grumbled. "It's a bit rotten making a fellow get up at this time in the morning." I say, Cherry, you might chuck me over my boots, will you?"

Bob Cherry chuckled. "Certainly!" he replied.

And he grasped the fat junior, wheeled him round, and threw him over his boots, and Billy Bunter sat down on the dormitory floor with a loud bump and a hoarse yell.

"Yarrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you ass!" gasped Bunter, seeing his spectacles straight. "You dangerous ass! What's that did you do that for?"

"Why, you asked me to!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"You fathead! I asked you to chuck me over my boots!" shrieked Bunter.

"Well, I've chucked you over your boots."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you idiot! I—I meant, chuck my boots over to me."

"Well, you should say what you mean," said Bob Cherry, with a shake of the head. "If you don't say what you mean, you can't expect me to guess. Still, I'll chuck your boots over to you if you like. Catch!"

"Yarrah!" roared Bunter, as he caught one of the boots on his chest.

"Here's the other."

"Yarrah!"

"Anything more I can do to help you?" asked Bob Cherry blandly.

"Oh!" roared Bunter. "No! Beasts! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter dressed without further assistance. The Famous Four took their towels over their arms and left the dormitory. Bunter rolled after them.

"I say, you fellows, where's the grub?"

"There isn't any grub, fathead! We're going down to bathe," said Nugent.

"Oh, don't be funny! I suppose you mean it's there already."

And the fat junior rolled down the passage after the Famous Four, convinced that there was to be a feed, and quite determined not to be convinced otherwise. Bob Cherry led the way downstairs. The house was quite silent—only a housemaid was to be seen, armed with a pail and a mop. Bob Cherry paused on the lower landing.

"Blessed lot of slackers!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Don't you think we ought to call some of them, Wharton? It's rather rotten, fellows staying in bed like this on a lovely July morning."

"Well, we don't get up till rising-bell, as a rule," said Harry.

"Oh, don't argue! I'll call Wingate, anyway."

"You ass! Better leave him alone—"

Bob Cherry went into the Sixth-Form passage and opened Wingate's door. The captain of Greyfriars was sleeping soundly. Bob Cherry shouted into the room.

"Wingate! I say, Wingate!"

The Greyfriars captain started out of his sleep.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" he exclaimed, sitting up in bed, and blinking at Bob Cherry with sleepy eyes.

"Nothing!"

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"Eh!"

"It's half-past six."

"What have you called me for?"

"Beautiful morning," said Bob Cherry.

"You young ass!" roared Wingate. "I'll—I'll—"

"Come on and have a batho," suggested Bob Cherry.

"No slacking, you know! I—Ahem!"

He dodged away and slammed the door, and a pillow smote the door upon the inner side and fell upon the floor. Bob Cherry chuckled as he rejoined his chums on the lower stairs.

"I've called Wingate," he said cheerfully. "I suppose I'd better call Queech now—"

"You fathead!" said Nugent. "Don't play your japes on a giddy Form-master."

"But, I'd better wake him—"

"You'll jolly well wake him out without saving up a set of feelings for us when we come back!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, grasping his exuberant chum by the arm. "Take his other arm, Franky."

Nugent grasped Bob Cherry's other arm, and the sturdy Removite was rushed downstairs at top speed, and out into the Close. Having once started, the juniors kept up the rush across the Close and reached the gates. Billy Bunter panted after them. He had several stone of extra weight to carry, and the pace was rather too much for him. Gosling, the porter, was just coming out of his lodge, and he blinked at the juniors.

"Top of the morning to you, Coosy!" said Bob Cherry. "Coming down for a batho? It will do you good—remind you of your early youth, you know, when you used to wash every morning."

Gosling grunted.

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Sure you won't come? A complete change is good for the health, you know."

"Which I 'opes as 'ow you'll be drowned, Master Cherry," said Gosling charitably. "Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as a diminutive figure came scudding from the School House. It was little Wun Lung, the Chinese junior. "What are you doing up so early, Confucius?"

Wun Lung grinned.

"Me connee, too," he said.

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter, coming up breathless.

"We're going to be in at the feed, Bob Cherry. You ain't going to leave us out."

"Come on," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "A batho will do you more good than a feed, Banty."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

The Famous Four marched out of the school gates into the road, with the little Celestial trotting after them. Billy Bunter yelled after them as they tramped down the lane.

"I say, you fellows, where are you going?"

"To the shore, you ass."

"But where's the feed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's give Bunter a race to the sea," suggested Johnny Bull.

"Good egg!"

And the chums of the Removite broke into a run. Billy Bunter followed them for about a dozen paces, and then stopped, quite winded.

"Beasts!" he gasped. "I don't believe there's a feed at all. You've been taking me in. Yah! Beasts!"

And Billy Bunter rolled back into the Close, and went back to bed. And the Famous Four and Wun Lung, laughing merrily, ran on towards the sea.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

"Shanghaied!"

"RIPPING, ain't it?" said Bob Cherry.

It was indeed ripping.

The sea rolled, gleaming in the sunlight, having the soft sands at their feet. The village of Pegg lay sleeping on their right, and on their left, at the end of the bay, rose the rocky summit of the great Shouder. Out in the bay a steamer lay at anchor—a dusty-looking old "tramp," with a thin column of smoke rising from her funnel. A man could be seen on the bridge, staring stolidly landward.

"Simply gorgeous!" said Harry Wharton.

"Neece—neee!" said Wun Lung.

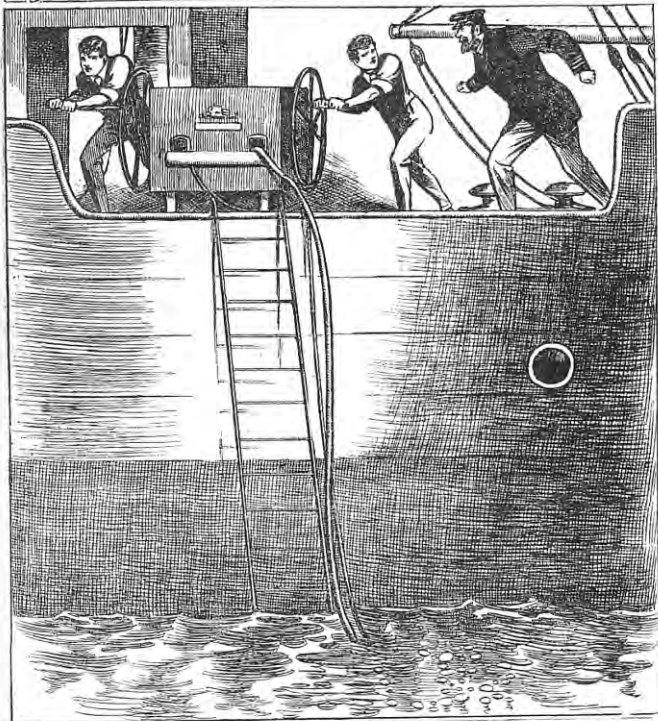
"That giddy old tramp's been there all night," said Nugent, with a nod towards the anchored steamer. "She put in yesterday. Some of her crew have deserted, I heard Courtney say."

"They seem to be interested in us," remarked Nugent.

A second man had joined the first upon the steamer's bridge, and both of them were looking towards the group of

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"You'll keep at those pumps, you yonkers!" Captain Hobbs said. "If there's any hanky-panky, you'll get it dead sure." "Stick to it, Bob!" murmured Harry Wharton encouragingly. Bubbles rose to the surface of the sea beside the anchored steamer. Deep below, the axes of the divers were crashing upon the wood-work that protected the precious consignment. (See Chapter 9.)

juniors. One of them raised a pair of binoculars to his eyes, and scanned the group.

"Well, I'm going in," said Bob Cherry.

In a few minutes the juniors were swimming in the shining water. Little Wun Lung, the Chinese, tied his pigtail very carefully about his head, and protected it with a bathing-cap. All five of the juniors were good swimmers, and they enjoyed their early morning dip. Bob raised himself out of the water after a while, and looked at the steamer out in the bay.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's a boat!" he exclaimed.

"Going to Fogg, I suppose," said Harry Wharton. "If the skipper's short-handed, he will have to get some hands from there."

"Tain't we got out, I think," said Nugent, as half-past seven.

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rang across the still countryside from the village church. "I'm ready for brekker."

"Same here."

"Allee saumee," grinned Wun Lung. "Boater come here."

The juniors drew themselves out of the water, and tumbled themselves down on the soft sands. They looked towards the boat; it was undoubtedly coming towards them, and not going to Fogg. There were six men in it—a mate and five swains. A man who appeared to be the skipper was still standing upon the bridge of the tramp steamer, with his binoculars turned upon the group of schoolboys.

The juniors dressed themselves, wondering what the strangers wanted with them.

The bows jurred upon the sand, and a stout man, with a

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fringe of red hair under his cap, jumped ashore, and the seamen followed him. The mate still sat in the boat.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.
"Aho, my hearties!" said the stout seaman. "Skipper's sent us. Would you like to row out, and look at the ship?"

The juniors did not reply for a moment. The suggestion surprised them, and at a closer look at the boat's crew, they did not like their appearances. They were not by any means average seamen to look at. The man in the mate's cap in the boat was a truculent-looking fellow, with a black moustache and a foreign air about him. The two men who had landed were ruffians, every one of them, and the stout fellow who had addressed the juniors was the roughest of all.

"Thank you," said Harry Wharton, after a pause. "But we have to get back to the school."

"Oh, you come with me," said the stout seaman. "I'm Joe Curtis, bo's'un of the Pomerania, and I'll take you for a row."

"Thanks! We can't come."
"You'll come, my hearties," said the boatswain coolly.
"Captain's orders."

Wharton flushed.
"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "I suppose we needn't come if we don't want to."

The boatswain of the Pomerania grinned.
"That's where you make a little mistake," he replied. "You've got to come—willynilly, you young swab. Head 'em into the boat, my boys."

"Ay, ay!"
The five ruffians drew round the juniors in a circle. Harry Wharton & Co. drew together in amazement.

"Look here!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You'd better shoo off. We're not coming out to your giddy old tramp, and if you bother us, we shall hit out."

"Hittee hardee!" said Wun Lung.
The burly boatswain burst into a roar.
"Haw haw, haw! Collar 'em, my hearties!"

"Line up!" shouted Harry Wharton, as the five seamen rushed upon them.

"Yes, rather!"
And the Greymfriars juniors put up their fists, and met the rush of the ruffians manfully.

But their resistance was of little avail.
They had plenty of pluck, but a boy was not of much use against a full-grown man, and the five seamen were all burly ruffians.

In a couple of minutes Harry Wharton & Co. were helpless in the grasp of the boatswain and his mates.

"Bring 'em into the boat!" called out the mate. "By Jimes, they are plucky uns, anyway, and they'll be useful, I reckon. Throw 'em in."

"Let us go!" roared Wharton, struggling in the grasp of the big boatswain, as he was carried down bodily to the boat.

"Let go, you scoundrels!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You'll be prosecuted for this."

The big boatswain chuckled.
"Heave 'em in, my hearties."

Bump!
Harry Wharton landed in the boat. As he picked himself up, somewhat dazed by the shock, Bob Cherry came whirling in. Bump, bump, bump!

One after another the juniors were flung into the boat. Last of all came Wun Lung. The little Chance was not struggling. He was as helpless as a baby in the grasp of the burly seaman who held him, and he was taking the extraordinary occurrence with Oriental philosophy.

The seaman held him up in the air as easily as if he had been a rabbit.

"This any good, sir?" he asked.
The mate chuckled.

"Yes, chuck him in, Bill Haddock. The more the merrier, I guess."

Bump!
Wun Lung landed in the boat beside the others. The seamen followed them in, and took up the oars. The mate shook a warning finger at the five angry and amazed juniors of Greymfriars.

"You keep quiet," he said. "I guess you're going to sail in the Pomerania. I guess you'd better take it quietly. What?"

"Sail in the Pomerania?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.
"What do you mean? We've got to go back to school."

The American mate chuckled again.
"I guess you ain't going back to school just yet," he said. "We're short handed, my sons, and you're goin' to work on this here craft."

"What?"
"Great Scott!"
"Work on that ship!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in angry amazement. "We shall certainly not do anything of the sort."

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Do you mean to say that you are kidnapping us to work on that ship?"

The mate nodded.
"I guess so."

"You'll be sent to prison for this, you villains!" exclaimed Wharton indignantly. "You will be arrested as soon as you touch at a British port."

"I guess we shan't tetch at a British port in a hurry," grinned the mate. "And I guess you'll learn to speak civil, and to say 'sir' to an officer, afore you've been long on board this hyer craft. You'll larn 'em, bo's'un."

"You bet!" said Joe Curtis, with a grin.
The juniors looked at one another in utter dismay. It was an unexpected and alarming end to their morning bath.

The boat pulled out to the steamer, and a rope ladder dangled down the side.

The skipper looked down with a grin.
"All right?" he asked.

"All right, sir," said the mate.
"Send 'em up!"

The mate pointed to the rope ladder.
"I guess you'll go aboard?" he remarked.

"We won't," roared Johnny Bull.
"Get your ficker about you, bo's'un!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"
The big boatswain produced a thick rope's-end from his pocket. He took a business-like grip upon it.

"Goin'?" he asked affably.
The juniors looked at him, and at one another.

"We will go on board if we must," said Harry Wharton quietly. "But you will be punished for this."

"I guess we'll risk it," said the bo's'un, with a grin. "Op!"

And the juniors climbed on board.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. On the Tramp Steamer.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. stepped on the deck of the steamer.

The skipper looked down at them from the bridge, with a grin upon his bearded face, but it was a hard and cruel grin. It was easy to see that the skipper of the ocean tramp would be a hard man to deal with.

"Five of 'em," he remarked. "By Jimes, that's luck! As many as we've lost, bar one. What luck! You young swabs know how to work? I jest hope so, for your own sake."

"We're not going to work," said Johnny Bull.
The grin faded from the skipper's weather-beaten face, and he glared at the junior of Greymfriars.

"Wot's that?" he roared.
"We're not going to work," said Harry Wharton.

"You've forced us to come aboard your rotten old ship, but we're not going to touch work here."

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry.
"You'd better send us ashore," said Frank Nugent.

"You know jolly well that what you're doing is against the law. You've kidnapped us."

Wun Lung did not speak. He might have been as angry as the other fellows, but he was perhaps wiser.

"Ho!" said the skipper. "Agin the law! I've shanghaied hands in more'n one port, from Frisco to Hong Kong. The law ain't touched me yet. You ain't going to work, ain't you? We'll soon see about that."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the boatswain.

"You'll call me 'sir,' and teach your cap when you speak to me," said the skipper. "I'm Captain Obbs, skipper of the Pomerania, my lucks, and if a hand don't work on this

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ship I make him hop. Understand? I'm short-handed. Six of my men sloped last night, darn their skins! The voyage wasn't good enough for them. You're going to take their place. Understand?"

"We won't!" said Harry Wharton.

The skipper clicked his teeth.

"You'll see. Tumble 'em below, bo'sun."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Harry Wharton exchanged a glance with his companions.

"We could swim ashore," he whispered.

"Here goes," muttered Bob Cherry. "All together!"

The juniors may as well rush to the side, but before they could carry out their intention the seamen closed around them, and they were dragged back.

"Kick 'em into the fo'c's'le!" said the skipper. "We'll handle them after we've sailed. Engineer!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Git the steam up. We've got to git outter this afore them scallywags ashore tell too many tales, and we're stopped."

The grimy engineer grinned and went below.

The five juniors were bundled headlong into the forecabin, and the door was closed upon them.

"They had been pitched roughly down the steps, and they sat up in the gloomy place, feeling bruised and shaken."

"My hat!" Bob Cherry ejaculated. "This is rather thick, and no mistake."

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"The hounds!" he exclaimed. "They've kidnapped us, and the law must be able to touch them for it. The rotters!"

"We won't work, anyway," said Nugent. "You can take a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. They can carry us off to sea, but they can't make us touch a rope if we don't choose."

"No fear!"

Wun Lung looked up.

"Better workee," he said.

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Bo'sun likeee with ropee if no workee," said Wun Lung. "Baddiee jobbee, but no good makee worsee. Bettiee workee."

Bob Cherry burst into a laugh.

"There's something in what the giddy heathen says," he remarked. "They've got us in a cleft stick, you know. There are seven or eight seamen, and I don't know how many engineers and stokers. We couldn't do anything against that crew."

Wharton set his teeth.

"But we won't do what they want," he said. "It looks to me as if this ship is on some unlawful business. What did six of her men desert her for? And you heard what the captain said about telling tales ashore."

"Yes, rather!"

"Blessed if I know what they can be up to!" Johnny Bull exclaimed, wrinkling his brows in thought. "It must be something fishy, or the captain could ship more hands in the ordinary way, without troubling to kidnap schoolboys."

"It's something very fishy, I think. Besides, what does a tramp steamer like this want with so many hands? There are enough to work the ship without us."

"Right enough. But they look like a gang of hoodlums more than seamen. They don't look as if they're fond of work."

"But why should the captain ship such a crew? It shows that the ship has some business that won't bear the light."

"True enough."

"What on earth can it be?" Nugent exclaimed. "The days of pirates are over a long time ago. The skipper is a regular hoodlum, but he isn't a giddy Captain Kidd. What can the ship be going to sea for?"

"Something dishonest, of course, though we can't guess what. And if we lend a hand, we may be as liable as they are to be arrested afterwards."

"Pshaw!"

"It's agreed," said Harry Wharton, looking round. "We're going to refuse to work, and make the skipper understand that he'd better set us ashore and save trouble."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're getting away from shore, though," said Bob Cherry, after a pause. "Listen to the engines! And we're going at a good rate now, too."

The juniors could hear the engines throbbing.

The motion of the ship showed that they were going through the water very fast. The tramp steamer rocked, and the motion and the close smell of the forecabin—which was in a decidedly dirty state—made the juniors feel a little queasy. But they were not seasick. They had had many a run upon the salt water, owing to Greyfriars being on the coast, and they were all good sailors.

They waited in the stuffy forecabin till they should be hauled out on deck again.

They understood very clearly that the skipper was leaving them in the forecabin.

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dealing with them until they were out of sight of land. The Pomerania had been "hung up" by want of hands, and now that Captain Hobbs had succeeded in kidnapping five new ones, he was losing no time in getting away from the bay.

The juniors sat about the forecabin, listening to the thumping of the engines, and the swishing of the water against the sides of the steamer.

An hour—two hours passed.

Still no one came to the forecabin.

The ship throbbed on over the sunlit sea. The juniors were growing very hungry. They had eaten nothing that morning, and it was now nearly ten o'clock.

"Dash it all!" Bob Cherry exclaimed at last, moving restlessly about the narrow space. "I wish they'd come for us. Anything would be better than being penned up here like this. Blow them!"

There was a heavy footstep outside. The scuttle was opened, and the red face of the boatswain looked in.

"Tumble up!" he roared. "Ere you are, my hearties! Tumble up!"

"Me comee."

"Oh, we're all coming!" said Bob Cherry. "Would you mind taking your face away, sir? You shouldn't spring a face like that on us too suddenly."

The burly bo'sun choked.

"You tumble up!" he gasped. "By James! By gum! I'll farn yer! You tumble up!"

And the Greyfriars juniors tumbled up.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Flogged!

Far away on the horizon there was a dim outline of cliffs. Round the steamer gleamed the wide blue waters. The Pomerania was far out to sea, leaving a trail of black smoke behind her as she glided through the waters. The eyes of the Greyfriars juniors turned landward, and they started to see how far off the shore was.

Away there, far out of sight behind the cliffs, lay Greyfriars School—and the fellows at that hour would be all in the form-rooms, grinding away at their lessons—and the kidnapped five wondered what they were thinking of their absence and what the Head was thinking. No one at Greyfriars, certainly, would guess what had happened. The juniors could hardly believe it themselves, as they looked round at the wide rolling waters, and at the dirty deck and slovenly ruffians there.

"Oh, hyer you are!" said an unpleasant voice from the bridge, as the skipper came out of the chart-house. "Now, my lads, you listen to me."

The juniors looked at him grimly.

"Hyer you are," went on Captain Hobbs, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and wagging it at the juniors from the bridge. "You're in my crew now! Understand!"

"We are not in your crew, Captain Hobbs," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We don't belong to this ship, and we'll have nothing to do with you."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

A ferocious look came over the skipper's rough face. "By James, is that the way you talk to your captain?" he roared.

"You are not our captain!"

"No fear!"

The captain jerked his little black pipe towards the burly boatswain.

"Cutts!" he rapped out.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Larn them manners."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Set them to work," said the skipper. "If they won't work, teach 'em!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"You're under Cutts' orders," said the skipper. "Joe Cutts ain't easy with slackers. I advise you to work. That's Captain Hobbs' advice. You take it!"

"Go to the dickens!" said Johnny Bull. "Set us ashore, or you'll be made to suffer for it, I can tell you that."

"Cutts!" roared the skipper.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Stop their gab!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The skipper turned away and lighted his pipe. The mate looked at the rail, and looked down at the juniors with a grin. The boatswain produced the rope's-end from his pocket.

"Now, then, my hearties, you're under my horders!" he said.

"Rats!"

"You'll begin," said Mr. Cutts, "by swabbing up the decks. You 'ear!'"

"Bosh!"

"Are you goin' to obey horders?"

"No."

"Then 'ere's for a start," said the boatswain.

Swish!

The rope's-end came down across Harry Wharton's shoulders. There was a giggle from the ruffians standing round.

Wharton's face flushed crimson.

He made a sudden spring at the boatswain, and both his fists lashed out at once.

His right caught the burly brute on the point of the chin, and his left crashed into the ruffian's left eye.

Big and powerful as Joe Cutts was, he reeled under that tremendous drive, and went down upon his back with a crash that made the deck ring.

He lay for some seconds, gasping, evidently too astounded to realise what had happened.

"Ow!" he gasped. "By James! Ow!"

There was a roar from the bridge.

"Cutts!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" mumbled the astounded bo'sun.

"How long are you going to lie there? Are you taking a nap?"

"Ow! By James, sir!"

"Get up, and 'farn those puppies manners!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Cutts leaped to his feet. His face was purple with wrath. He yelled to the seamen.

"Seize them!"

The seamen advanced upon the juniors at once.

The Greysfairs fellows drove together and hit out. But, as with their resistance on shore, it was all unavailing. They were seized by the burly roughs, and flung upon the deck, and ropes were triced round their limbs.

They lay gasping on the deck.

"Now, then, Cutts, put them through it!" roared the skipper.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The boatswain pointed to Harry Wharton.

"Trice that cub up for a flogging, lads!"

Wharton was seized and lifted to his feet.

His jacket was stripped off, and his shirt torn down to his waist, and his wrists secured to a rope above his head.

Then the boatswain stepped up to him with the rope's-end in his hand.

"A round dozen," said the skipper.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Wharton set his teeth as the boatswain raised the rope.

Lash!

The rope descended upon his bare skin with all the force of Joe Cutts' powerful arm.

Wharton shivered under the blow.

It left a red mark across the white skin, and the pain of it thrilled through every nerve in his body.

But he uttered no cry.

His teeth were set tight together, and though his face went deadly white, not a sound escaped him.

Lash, lash, lash!

The rope rose and fell.

Blow after blow fell upon the junior's bare back, till the blood showed through the lacerated skin.

Wharton's teeth remained hard set.

It was not till the ninth blow that a cry escaped him.

The boatswain grinned.

"Found yer crow, young bantam, 'ave yer!" he quipped.

Lash, lash!

Another sharp cry.

"You brute!" shouted Bob Cherry, struggling in vain with the bonds upon his limbs. "You larking, cowardly brute!"

The boatswain turned towards him with an evil grin.

"Your tvin's coming, my pippin!" he said.

Lash!

The last blow of the dozen fell, and Wharton hung heavily upon his bound wrists. He had fainted.

"Cut him loose," said the skipper, "and chuck some water over him. He'll come round. He ain't fust for fieses yet."

Wharton was cast loose.

One of the grinning ruffians threw a bucket of salt water over his lacerated back, and a sobbing wren escaped the junior.

His eyes opened.

Joe Cutts grinned down at him.

"Come to your senses yet?" he demanded.

"You cowardly brute!" Wharton muttered faintly.

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Read the grand new story of the "Juniors of St. Jim's, entitled: "AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR!" In this week's "GEM" Library. Now on Sale, id.

"Oh, you ain't 'ad enough yet?" said the boatswain.

"Shall I give him another dozen, sir?"

"Let him alone, you hound!" shouted Nugent. "Do you want to kill him?"

"'Nuff said, young bantam!" said the boatswain, lashing Nugent with the rope as he lay on the deck. "You learn to speak civil to your superiors."

"Oh, you villain!"

"Now, then," said the skipper, "you kids belong to my crew. Are you going to turn to, or are you all goin' through it?"

The juniors were silent.

"Mind, I'm captain of this ship—me, Captain 'Obbs," pursued the skipper. "I don't allow any back-answers on this hyer craft. Understand!"

Silence.

"You're goin' to work, and stoke, and do as you're told, and I'll make sailors of ye. Better'n larnin' rot in a school ashore," said Captain Hobbs. "You're got to toe the mark, younkers—that's what! Will you join my crew and obey orders, or shall Joe Cutts give you a lesson all round!"

The juniors looked at Wharton, with the streaks of red showing upon his back where the cruel rope had lashed him. They were helpless in the hands of the brutal skipper; it was useless setting themselves up against superior force.

"We'll work if we have to," said Bob Cherry, after a pause.

The skipper chuckled.

"Thort you would," he remarked. "Mind, it will be a flogging if you slack, and a cuff for a saawy word. I keep order on my ship."

"Better give 'em a dose all round, sir," said Joe Cutts.

The skipper glared at him.

"Hold your tongue, Joe Cutts. I'm captain of this ship—me, Captain 'Obbs. Cast them loose, and set them to work!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"You're goin' to obey orders—hey!"

"Yes, sir," said Bob Cherry, gritting his teeth. "We can't help ourselves."

"More sensible if you'd thought of that afore," chuckled the skipper. "Cast 'em loose!"

The juniors were unbound.

Bob Cherry ran to Wharton, and helped him to his feet. Wharton drew his jacket on with shaking hands.

His eyes were gleaming.

"Take it quietly, old chap," said Bob, in a whisper. "Our turn will come, but they've got us at their mercy now."

Harry Wharton nodded. He realised that.

"Now, then, no palaverin' there!" roared the boatswain.

"Work's the word, my hearties. And if there's any shirlin', look out for my ficker, that's all."

And the juniors, with furious faces, set to work.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Joke on Mr. Cutts.

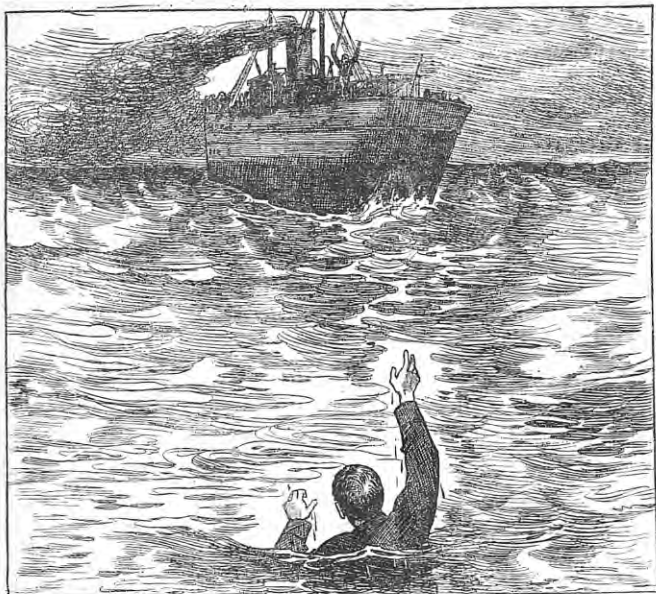
CAPTAIN HOBBS watched the juniors, as they were set to work by the boatswain, with a grinning face. The skipper had apparently not paid much attention hitherto to the cleanliness of his ship; but that was perhaps because he had sailed with such a very peculiar crew. Now the juniors were set to work swabbing up the decks and cleaning out the forecabin, while the seamen stood idly by or sprawled about smoking. There seemed to be little or no discipline on the ship. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were sent down to act as stokers, and they slaved at the work, with bullying and curses from the engineer as their sole reward. The others slaved above, with curses and an occasional lick from the rope's-end to keep them to the task.

There was no doubt that it was a peculiar crew and a peculiar captain. If the juniors had not suspected it already, they would have guessed now that the vessel was bound upon no ordinary voyage.

What the object of the voyage was they as yet could not guess, but they knew that it was something that would not bear the light.

The skipper seemed to divide his time among the various occupations of scanning the sea through his binoculars, taking liquid refreshment from a big black bottle in the chart-house, and cursing the mate. The mate replied to the captain's abusive remarks with a choice of language fully equal to his own.

The men did what work was necessary, and idled and smoked for the most part. The engineer was the only really active man on board, and it was very necessary for him to be alert and active, for his engines were in a crazy



"Help!" gasped Captain Hobbs. Harry Wharton rushed along the deck, threw his hands together, and dived to save the man who was his enemy—who had treated him cruelly. Splash! there was a shout from the scoundrelly crew—a shout of admiration for the boy's pluck, in spite of themselves. (See Chapter 11.)

condition and required constant care. He kept his amateur stokers at work till they were ready to drop.

Land was long out of sight now, but in what direction the ship was steering the juniors did not know. The course was southward, but that was all they could tell by the sun. And they had little leisure to think about the matter.

They were kept constantly at work, and a moment's resting was enough to call down upon them a volley of abuse.

They snatched meals as they could—odds and ends from the galley, which they ate hastily as they worked under the savage eye of the big bosun.

It was a strange and peculiar change for the juniors of Greyfriars, and sometimes it seemed to the stolen schoolboys like some evil dream.

They were worn out with fatigue as the hot July day wore on to a close, and they were glad when the shades of evening fell upon the sea.

More than once they had seen ships passing—coasting smacks, and big sailing-ships and handsome steamers—once a magnificent liner.

But there was no chance of communicating with the passing vessels and obtaining help; the tramp steamer did not pass near enough to them for that.

Night fell upon the sea at last.

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Order Early.

Then the vigilance of the boatswain relaxed, and the juniors crept away to a shadowy part of the deck to rest.

They threw themselves down, and for a long time they were too exhausted even to talk.

The stars came out over the sea, and their reflected light shimmered on the bosom of the deep.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry, at last, as seven bells sounded. "Half-past seven! The chaps will be doing their preparation at Greyfriars now."

"Lucky bargees!" said Nugent, with a sigh. "I wish I were back there, even if I were lagging for Loder."

"Yes, rather!"

"If this is going to sea, I'm fed up with it!" grunted Johnny Bull. "I used to think I'd like a life on the ocean wave. Ugh!"

"Not nice!" murmured Wun Lung.

"You blessed heathen," growled Bob Cherry, "you've got off best of the lot. You haven't had half the licks we have had."

Wun Lung grinned.

"Bettee takee calmee," he suggested. "No goodee kickee against blick wall. We no helpee ourselves. Bettee thlee quietly, and keepee stiff uppee lip."

"That's all very well. I wish we had Wingate and a dozen other big chaps here; we'd make these rotters hop."

"We'll make them hop, anyway," said Harry Wharton, with a glitter in his eyes. "The rotters! We'll turn the tables on them, somehow."

"But how?" grunted Nugent.

"Me tinkie."

They stared at the little Chinese.

"Eh? What have you got in your pigtailed noddle?" asked Bob Cherry. "How are you going to turn the tables on those heasts, hid?"

"Me tinkie."

And more than that the little Celestial did not say. He curled himself up in a dark corner and went to sleep. The others followed his example. It was a very warm night, and they could have slept anywhere after their hard day's work.

A roar from the boatswain aroused them.

"Now, then, you shirkers, where are you?"

"Here, sir!" said Bob Cherry, jumping up.

There was a hoarse chuckle in the gloom.

"Larkin' manners, are you?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Two of you go below; Mr. Biggs wants you."

Mr. Biggs was the engineer.

"Right-ho!"

"No shirking while I'm 'ere," said the boatswain, as Wharton and Nugent went below. "You others can come and sweat out the heat."

The boatswain had evidently been drinking. His speech was thick and his gait unsteady. A bottle peeped out of his pocket, still a quarter full of liquor. He drew it out, put it to his mouth, and took a long swig.

"Now, then, lively, my hearties!" he roared.

The juniors moved off. Wun Lung, curled up in his corner, remained motionless, and the half-intoxicated boatswain did not notice him.

"Fetch me a pannikin from the galley, one of you!" he roared.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Johnny Bull fetched the pannikin. Then he and Bob Cherry moved off. They knew that they had only to get out of sight of the boatswain to be let alone. He was sitting on the deck now, with his back against the bulwark, with the bottle in one hand and the tin pannikin in the other. The liquor gurgled into the pannikin, and the boatswain took another swig, and then his eyes closed and he snored.

Then Wun Lung sat up.

The little Chinese was evidently awake. He crept away into the darkness, but returned in a few minutes, and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull saw that he had something in his hand.

It was a can of a strong-smelling oil, which he had been using some time before to fill the smoky little lamp which illuminated the fore-castle.

Bob Cherry caught his breath.

"My only hat! Look at him!" he murmured.

Johnny Bull chuckled.

"Good egg!"

The little Celestial's hand, with the can of oil in it, hovered over the pannikin for a moment, and there was a gurgling sound.

Then the little Celestial vanished in the shadows.

The boatswain snored on.

It was about ten minutes before he opened his eyes and blinked round him. He grunted, and swallowed liquor out of the bottle into the pannikin.

It overflowed, and the boatswain lifted it to his lips and drained it almost at a single draught.

The next moment there was a fearful yell.

The burly ruffian leaped up, and the bottle went to the deck with a crash, and smashed into a hundred pieces.

The boatswain staggered to and fro, pressing both his large hands to his stomach.

"Ow! he roared. "Groot! Oh! I'm pizen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Ow, ow! 'Eip! I'm pizen! Groot! Abov, lads, 'elp a shipmate! I'm pizen!" yelled the unhappy boatswain.

"Better get out of this," murmured Bob Cherry. "We don't want to be suspected."

"Ha, ha! No."

And the two juniors scuttled away.

The watch on deck surrounded the unfortunate boatswain and looked at him in wonder and alarm.

Joe Cutts was staggering wildly to and fro. His face was deadly white, and his chest was heaving with sickness.

"What's the matter, mate?" demanded Bill Haddock.

"Ow! I'm pizen!"

"Pizen? Be blowed!" said Haddock contemptuously.

"Who's pizen? You've took too much rum."

"I'm pizen, I tell yer!" shrieked the boatswain. "He, he, he!"

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wasn't rum! It was pizen—deadly pizen! Ow! I'm a dead man!"

"You're making a lot of row for a dead man, bo'sun," said one of the wakers.

And there was a grim chuckle.

The boatswain staggered towards the bridge, and collapsed upon the steps, gasping and gurgling wildly. The skipper came out of the chart-house.

"What's the matter there?" he roared.

"Joe Cutts says as 'ow he's pizen, sir," said Bill Haddock.

"Drunk, more like," said the skipper.

Cutts raised himself on the steps.

"You've pizen me, George 'Obbs," he gasped. "It's a game to keep the gold ingots all to yourself, you villain!"

"You're drunk, you fool!"

"I'm pizen!"

"Oh, go to your bunk, and sleep it off!"

"You villain!" gasped the boatswain. "You gave me that there rum—you gave it to me with your own 'ands!"

You villain!"

He came clambering up the steps of the bridge, taking out a clasp-knife as he did so. There was a yell from the crew.

"Look out, skipper!"

But the skipper was looking out. The barrel of a revolver looked into the tanned face of the boatswain, and he stopped short.

"One more step, and you're a dead man, Joe Cutts!" said the skipper coolly.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Wun Lung Does Not Savvy.

CUTTS stopped, glaring at the levelled pistol, and the cool, hard face behind it.

Bob Cherry caught his breath.

"My hat!" he whispered to Johnny Bull. "Do you see that? What sort of a shiptoad of murderous villains have we got into?"

Johnny Bull nodded without speaking.

There was a soft chuckle behind them, and they turned their heads to see the little Chinese. Wun Lung was grinning cheerfully.

"Allee lightee!" he murmured.

"You young ass!" said Bob Cherry. "There may be murder done."

"Allee bettee?"

"What!"

"Spooee skippee killee Cutts—spooee Cutts killee skippee—allee bettee for us," said Wun Lung, with perfect coolness.

"Why, you awful young heathen!"

"No savvy. Me tinkie allee bettee."

Bob Cherry did not reply. He was used to Wun Lung at Greyfriars; but he had to remember sometimes that the Chinese came from a far Oriental land, where life was held cheap, and that his ideas were not English ideas.

The juniors watched the scene on the bridge. For several moments Joe Cutts faced the levelled revolver, the knife still in his hand. It was evident that the idea that the skipper had attempted to poison him had impressed itself upon his intoxicated imagination, and but for Captain Hobbs's readiness, there might, indeed, have been murder done under the stars. But the boatswain was not drunk enough to rush upon a levelled revolver.

He backed away a step, with a savage oath, at last.

"Throw that knife overboard!" rapped out the skipper.

Spash!

The knife fell into the sea.

"Now get to your bunk, you drunken fool and let's have no more of this! Next time you get your ears up like this, I shall pull trigger! You can't play these hyer tricks on me, Captain 'Obbs!"

The boatswain lurched down the steps.

A violent fit of sickness seized upon him as he reached the deck, and he collapsed, as sick as any "greenhorn" on a first Channel trip.

"Take him away," said the skipper, in disgust. "Yank him into the fo'c's'le."

And Bill Haddock and another seaman helped the boatswain away. The man looked so white and sick, and the two ruffians handled him so roughly, that Bob Cherry came forward to lend a hand. As he lurched into the fore-castle and clutched hold of a bunk to steady himself, the boatswain turned to the two ruffians.

"You keep your weather eye on the skipper," he muttered thickly. "He give me that rum, with his own 'ands, He put pizen in it."

Haddock grinned.

"You're dreaming, bo'sun."

"We'ta made me sick like this hyer, then?" demanded Cutts fiercely. "Ain't you seed me drink my bottle of rum like a man afore now—two bottles, or three, for that matter? We'ta made me sick if the rum wasn't pizened!"

"But why should the skipper go for to pizen you, Joe Cutts?" asked the other man incredulously.

"Cause why he wants the gold ingots of the Red Earl for himself," said the boatswain thickly. "It's a game to git me out of it, Tom Hicks."

"You're dreamin'!" repeated Haddock.

"You mark my words," said the bo's'un.

And he rolled into a bunk, and groaned himself to sleep. Bob Cherry returned to Johnny Bull and Wun Lung. The little Chinese was chuckling in his peculiar silent way.

"You awful young bouncer!" said Bob Cherry, grinning. "You've made that drunken boobigan believe that Captain Hobbs was trying to poison him!"

"Allee bettee."

"You don't mean to say you knew——"

Wun Lung shook his head.

"Me no savvy that he tinkee poison," he answered. "But me savvy that he awful sickee, and to-morrow he no swearce and whackee. He too sickee."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He knower somethin'," grinned the Chinese. "To-morrow me dose other lakers, allee essee, mister bo's'un. If tinkee poison, allee bettee. He killen one another, allee bettee fol us—p'laps we take ship. What you tinkee?"

"Oh, you take the cake!" said Bob Cherry. "I suppose it's no good talking to you. But I'd rather go on swabbing decks than see them murder one another."

"No savvy."

"Better drop the idea, Wun Lung."

"No savvy."

"Look here, you young ass," said Johnny Bull. "We want to turn the tables on those scoundrels, but we don't want any bloodshed. Do you understand that?"

"No savvy."

"You savvy well enough when you choose, you young rascal!"

"No savvy."

"And Wun Lung, who was evidently determined not to 'give' any more, said—

"We've got into a jolly crew, I must say," Bob Cherry remarked. "Did you hear what that ruffian said—the gold ingots of the Red Earl. The Red Earl's a ship, I suppose."

Johnny Bull nodded.

"Must be! Are they pirates, after all?"

"That's not possible. They're after a robbery of some sort, but it can't be robbery with violence on the high seas. They're not armed for it; only the skipper seems to have a pistol, and he needs it with this kind of a crew."

"Gold ingots!" said Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "I don't see how they're going to plunder the other ship without a ruse."

"Nice for us to be dragged into it, anyway. We may not be able to prove afterwards that we had no choice in the matter."

It was not a pleasant prospect before the stolen schoolboys. But there was evidently nothing to be done just then; and they laid down on the deck again to sleep. This time they were not disturbed. They slept until the sun was up, and when they awoke it was full morning, and the July sun was blazing on the sea.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent came up from the stokehold, dripping with fatigue.

"You two are wanted below," said Wharton.

And Bull and Bob Cherry, after a few minutes' talk with their chums, went down to take their turn with the stoking.

It was evident that the crew of the Pomerania did not care for that work themselves, and they intended to make the Greysians juniors earn their meagre rations.

Harry Wharton looked out over the sunlit sea. There was no land in sight; in the distance a steamer was leaving a black trail of smoke against the sky.

"Where are we, Franky?" said Wharton.

"Blessed if I know."

"Twenty-four hours at sea, old chap, and no chance of getting away. What are we going to do?"

"I'm going to sleep," said Nugent.

Wharton laughed.

"So am I!"

And in one minute more the two fatigued juniors were sleeping soundly, while the sun climbed higher in the heavens.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Salvage.

JOECUTTS looked white and sick when he emerged from the fore-castle in the morning. The big boatswain's ruddy colour was gone, and he had evidently not quite recovered from Wun Lung's little joke. But he had no suspicion of the little Chinese. His suspicions were directed

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By FRANK RICHARDS.
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against the captain. Captain Hobbs was on the bridge when the boatswain came up, and he hailed him.

"Got over it, Joe Cutts?"

Cutts gave him a venomous look.

"Ay, ay; I've got over it!" he said.

"You'd better let the rum alone after this."

"I'll let your rum alone, Captain 'Obbs," said Joe Cutts.

The skipper burst into a roar.

"Haw, haw, haw! Do you still think that you were pizened last night, Cutts?"

"I know what I think," growled the bo's'un.

"It was the rum, you fool!"

"I never tasted rum like that afore, skipper."

"Oh, you're a fool!" said Captain Hobbs.

And he turned away.

Joe Cutts was in a very bad temper that morning, but he was less brutal to the stolen schoolboys than he had been the day before. A great deal of his strength and energy was gone, and his cursing and rope-ends fell off in consequence, and the juniors were very glad of it.

Not that they were not kept hard at work.

The men of the Pomerania did not seem to fancy labour themselves, but they were all willing to lend a hand in making the boys work.

Harry Wharton & Co. had certainly never worked as they did now as members of the crew of the tramp steamer.

But they were beginning to get used to it, and in the intervals of their labour they thought a great deal about the steamer and its destination, and about its mysterious voyage.

They had not discovered yet for what purpose Captain Hobbs had put to sea with that lazy and ill-conditioned crew. Certainly the steamer was not a trader. That there was some object in view was certain, and the juniors knew that it was connected with the "gold ingots" the boatswain had mentioned, but they could discover nothing further.

They observed that a good look-out was kept from the bridge either the captain or the mate scanning the sea through the binoculars almost constantly.

And more than once the course of the Pomerania was altered to avoid some other vessel, resulting in loss of time.

In the afternoon watch the crew of the tramp-steamer began to show signs of some activity. They joined in scanning the sea, and they talked together in low tones, and more than once the juniors overheard the words "ingots" and "Red Earl."

They felt that they would know soon. When the crew of the Pomerania got to work the secret could no longer be kept.

The juniors knew well enough now the cause of the desertion of the six men at Pegg. It was evident that Captain Hobbs had had some decent sailmakers among his crew, and that they had fled from the ship on learning upon what errand also was engaged. The men who remained were a gang of rascals equal to anything.

"Coming to business now," Bob Cherry remarked to Harry Wharton in the afternoon watch.

Wharton nodded. The rascals of the Pomerania were getting busy now. A pump was rigged up on the deck, and a couple of diving-suits brought up from below. The juniors looked at them with great interest. It was clear that the Pomerania was to be engaged in diving operations, but where and why they did not yet know.

Captain Hobbs called to the boys.

"You see them pumps?" he asked.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Bob Cherry.

"You're goin' to work them pumps."

"Sprung a leak, sir?" asked Nugent.

The captain grinned.

"No, you young fool! Them are air-pumps."

"Oh!"

"They're for pumping air to the divers," the captain explained. "You have to keep 'em goin'." You understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"You are going to send divers down?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Mind your own business!"

And that was all the satisfaction the juniors could get on that subject. They listened eagerly to the scraps of talk among the men.

The Pomerania had slackened speed now, and the work of the schoolboy stokers was lighter. Captain Hobbs was taking observations on the bridge. There was a sudden hail from the look-out man in the bows.

"Land ahoy!"

There was a rush of the crew to look.

The juniors stared ahead, eager to see what land it was.

Where the ship was they had no idea, excepting that it was still in the North Sea.

Over the curling waves ahead of the tramp steamer a bluff rock rose into view, rising more and more distinctly as the steamer churned on.

The faces of the ruffians of the *Pomerania* were very keen and eager now.

"That's the Anchor Rock, my lads," said the skipper—"that's it! And that white curl to starboard of it is the sunken reel, where the Red Earl went down."

"I guess so," said the mate; "and there's nobody on the spot, skipper."

The captain nodded with much satisfaction.

"Not a soul!" he said.

"I guess they don't know we're after the ingots."

"Not yet."

"I guess we'll have time to lift them before there's a salvage ship here, sir."

"I guess so, Buck."

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances.

They knew the truth now.

The *Pomerania* was upon a salvage voyage, but she was not entitled to salvage the Red Earl.

It was an attempt to steal a valuable cargo before the regular salvage men could get to work upon the sunken ship.

It was all clear now.

Somewhere under the curling waves that broke on the Anchor Rock lay the hull of a ship, a victim of some storm on the North Sea.

Assignment of gold was a part of the Red Earl's cargo, and Captain Hobbs and his men were hurrying to the place to lay their thiefish fingers upon it before it could be saved by the owners or the insurance company.

It was sheer robbery—robbery as barefaced as that of a highwayman on the King's highway.

No wonder Captain Hobbs had been enraged by the desertion of the men who would have no hand in his dishonesty, and had been glad to kidnap any hands he could for the work.

It was a question of time with the sea-thieves.

Ever long the salvage ship must arrive, and if the *Pomerania* were found there arrest and imprisonment would be the lot of Captain Hobbs and his crew of rascals.

Their only chance was to get to the spot quickly and raise the sunken gold, and carry it off before the salvagers arrived.

If they succeeded, it meant perhaps a fortune for every rascal on board the tramp steamer.

The juniors understood now that the tramp would not be likely to return to a British port. After such an audacious robbery, Captain Hobbs would head for a foreign harbour, where he would be able to dispose of his booty, and to escape discovery.

And what would happen to the juniors of Greysfriars then?

They would be landed in some distant foreign country. Indeed, for the sake of securing themselves, the rascals might maroon them in some lonely spot from whence there would be no escape. It was more than possible; it was quite likely. If Captain Hobbs succeeded in his lawless salvage, the juniors had a very unpleasant prospect to look forward to. And they had to lend a willing hand in the work which was to lead to that unpleasant result for themselves.

"We're in for it," said Bob Cherry, in a low voice; "but we may get a chance. By Jove, I'd scuttle this rotten old craft if I could rather than be taken away to a foreign port."

"Yes, rather!"

"But just now we've got to toe the line," said Nugent. "Better make the rotters think we've knuckled under—they'll be less on your guard."

"Alice lighter!" murmured Wun Lung. "Beastie lascal in long lun! What you think?"

"I wish I could be sure of that," said Johnny Bull. "They're too many for us."

"Me savvy."

"Hyer we are," said the skipper on the bridge, "and not a soul in sight on the sea, my lads. I guess this is a soft thing for us."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Bill Haddock.

"Let go the anchor."

And the tramp steamer anchored within a biscuit's throw of the big rock on the calm and sunny sea.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Diving for Gold.

HARRY WHARTON stood silent and grim while the ship was brought to anchor, and the crew made their preparations for their thievish work.

But the juniors were not left long undisturbed.

The unpleasant voice of Joe Cutts was heard. The big boatswain seemed more himself again now. The famous

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"licker" was in his hand, and he was evidently in a temper to use it.

"Hands to the pump!" he called out.

The juniors looked at one another. They had no choice in the matter; their kidnappers were too many for them.

But to lend a hand in work which was open robbery went very much against the grain with the chums of the Greysfriars Remove.

"You 'eave me?" roared the boatswain.

Captain Hobbs shouted from the bridge.

"Set them 'ands to work at the pump, Joe Cutts!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Bill Haddock had donned the diving-dress, and he was already being lowered over the side. It was necessary for air to be pumped through the tube into the helmet of the diving-dress, when the diver descended below the surface of the sea.

The boatswain took a tighter grip on the rope's end.

"Pump!" he said grimly.

Harry Wharton turned to the skipper.

"You have no right to touch the cargo of the ship sunk there, Captain Hobbs," he said, in a clear and steady voice.

The skipper stared at him.

"By James! Are you gitting your ears up agin?" he roared.

"It is stealing."

"What?"

"We want to have no hand in it," said Harry Wharton steadily. "We will work the pumps if we are forced to, but we protest against it, and we shall give evidence against you when you are taken up for this and brought to justice."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

The skipper seemed to choke with wrath for a moment. The seamen cast black and surly looks at the captain of the Greysfriars Remove.

"Set 'em to work, Cutts!" spluttered the enraged skipper at last. "Make 'em pump! By James, I'll cut the skin off their backs if they give me any more jaw!"

"Lash!"

The rope's end descended upon Harry Wharton's shoulders, still sore from the castigation of the previous day.

The junior swung round with blazing eyes and clenched fists.

Hicks and another man leaped at him at once, and he was borne to the deck.

The boatswain stood over him with flourishing rope.

"Now then," he roared, "are you goin' to work or not, young shaver?"

"I will work," said Wharton quietly; "I've said my say."

"Then you'd better turn to!"

Wharton was permitted to rise, and without further words he took a hand at the pump.

The juniors did not demur again. They were at the mercy of the salvage stealers, and they had made their protest, and their consciences were clear. They worked at the air-pumps quietly, and there was no need of the rope's end.

Bill Haddock disappeared over the side, and sank with his load-loaded boots drawing him down into the calm waters.

The rope and the tube were paid out. The water closed over the huge diving-helmet, and the man disappeared.

The juniors pumped away steadily.

Bill Haddock was under water for some considerable time, but at last came the signal, and he was hauled up.

The diving-helmet was open, and his rough face was seen, with a grin of satisfaction upon it. The skipper eyed him eagerly.

"You've spotted it?"

"Right over the spot, sir," said Haddock. "It's down there in fifteen fathoms. It will be easy as winkin' to get at the strong room, but it will want axes."

"Good!"

The captain rapped out orders. Three of the men donned diving-dresses, and went down with Bill Haddock. All hands were now at the ropes and pumps. The juniors of Greysfriars had no respite. Even the engineer had come to lend a hand.

Wharton glanced round the deck of the ship.

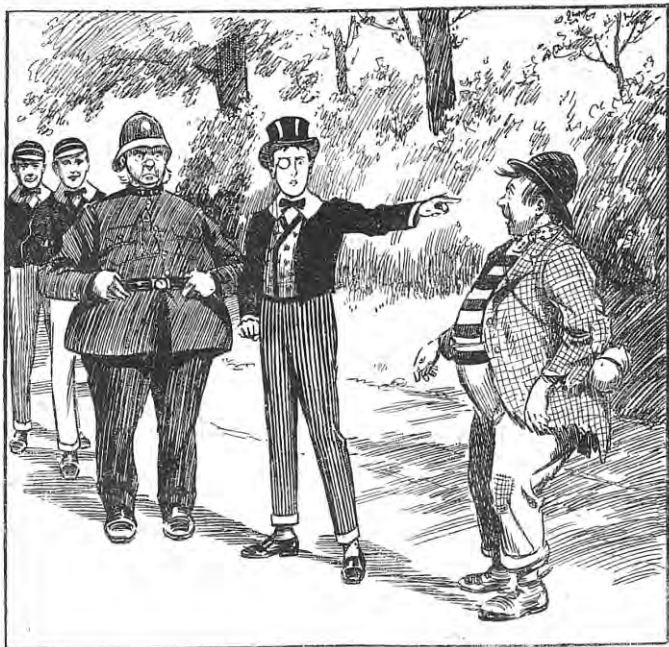
Four men were below the surface now, and on the ship there remained four more, including the boatswain, and there were in addition the captain, mate, and engineer, and themselves.

Four men, at least, must attend to the pumps, or it would mean death to the divers in the depths below them.

If the juniors chose this moment for a struggle, they would therefore have only three foes to encounter; and there were five of the juniors.

The thought came into their minds all at once, apparently, and they exchanged quick and eager glances.

But probably the skipper guessed what was passing in



"Wascal!" said D'Arcy, with his right hand raised to denounce the tramp. "Wascal! You are speaking untruthfully, and I am utterly disgusted with you. Mr. Crump, that is the man, and I call upon you to awrest him!" (For the above incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, entitled "AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR!" by Martin Clifford, which is contained in "The Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.)

their minds. He drew the revolver he had threatened Curtis with the night before.

"You'll keep at them pumpos, you yonkers?" he said. "You see this Barker? If there's any hanky-panky, you get it, dead sure."

And the new-born hope of the stolen schoolboys died away. They knew that the scoundrel would shoot, rather than risk losing the plunder he had come so far to win; and against a deadly weapon they had no chance.

"No go," murmured Bob Cherry.

Wharton nodded.

"Stick to it!" he said.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. Sunken Gold!

BURBLES rose to the surface of the sea beside the anchored steamer. Deep below, the axes of the divers were crashing upon the woodwork that protected the precious emerald.

The captain watched the water anxiously; and at times THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 231.

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY."

By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

he turned his binoculars upon the horizon. It was evident that there was a strong fear upon him that at any moment the salvage ship might heave in sight, or one of the gunboats patrolling the North Sea might come stealing by. If the work were interrupted now, it meant failure to the desperate venture—and the juniors wondered what it might mean to the men below the surface of the sea. Would their comrades stay for them if they were threatened with capture? But no steamer came in sight of the lonely rock. Once or twice, afar in the distance, a white sail glanced on the sea, but that was all. The Red Earl had been driven out of her course by a fierce storm when she ran upon that lonely rock and sunk, and the place was not in the regular route of steamers.

There was a signal from below, and the captain uttered an exclamation.

"Pull away!"

For Curtis and his men were ready. They dragged upon a rope passed over a pulley, and slowly up through the blue waters came the find of the plunder of the wrecked steamer.

It was an oblong case with metal corners, and as it swung in over the ship's side, and descended upon the deck, there was a heavy thud.

Captain Hobbs sprang towards it. He had an axe in his hand, and he hacked quickly and fiercely at the metal-bound case. But it was strong, and it required half a dozen heavy crashing blows to break it open.

And when it opened, there was a gleam of yellow.

"Gold!"

The exclamation came sharply from every man on deck, and they caught their breath. It was the glimmer of gold!

Captain Hobbs caught the heavy ingots in his hands, and held them up, his eyes gleaming, his face flushed with exultation.

"Gold!" he said. "Gold ingots! We've scored, boys!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Urray!"

"By James!" said Joe Cutts. "By James!"

"Pull away, you beasts!" said the captain.

Case after case was swung up from the depths of the blue waters.

The divers were busy below, and the men on deck were equally busy, and there was not a moment's respite for anybody. The Greyfriars juniors kept at the pumps. The work went on steadily, till the hardest of the ruffians was fatigued, but it hardly slackened.

Fatigued as they were, the sea-thieves seemed hardly to feel it, in their delight at capturing the unsalvaged gold of the Red Earl.

Case after case was piled on the deck. The juniors wondered what was the value represented by those cases of solid gold ingots.

Greed and savage eagerness were in every face now. For the moment the ruffians were thinking only of winning the gold which belonged to others. When the time came for division of the spoil, there would very probably be trouble.

The afternoon sun was sloping down in the west, towards the distant shores of old England, when the signal was given that the work below was finished.

Diggs, the engineer, went down to the engine-room, calling to Bob Cherry to follow him.

The other juniors were busy at the pumps. A black column of smoke soon rose from the funnel of the tramp steamer. The sea-thieves did not mean to linger upon the spot when their nefarious work was once done.

"It's a pity—a damned pity!" Wharton heard the captain remark to the mate. "There's a good valuable cargo down there, if we had the time for it!"

"I guess we've done well, skipper; we've got the yellow!" "Ay, ay, that's so! It's a pity to leave the rest, but we haven't risk it! A gunboat now would ruin everything!"

"By gum! It would."

The divers were hauled in.

The diving-dresses were taken off, and the pumps stacked away, and in a very short space of time only the cases of gold packed on the deck remained to show the work the lawless salvagers had been engaged in.

The crew were worn out with labour—unaccustomed to most of them.

But there was no respite.

The moment the divers were on board the Greyfriars boys were ordered into the stokehold, where they were soon as black as negroes with shovelling coal.

The Pomerania began to move through the water.

Captain Hobbs had a very anxious expression on his face. A blur of smoke showed against the sunset towards the coast, and it showed that a steamer was approaching, and the blur was getting larger and blacker.

The mate regarded it anxiously through the glasses.

"What do you make it, Buck?" asked the skipper.

The mate shook his head.

"Nothing yet, sir."

"Not a passenger steamer?"

"Oh, no."

"A gunboat!" almost whispered the skipper.

"I guess it's possible."

"By gum!"

The captain called to the weary ruffians.

"Get those cases stacked away below. Look lively there,"

Bill Haddock growled.

"We're wore out, skipper. Give us a rest."

And a growl from the rest of the ruffians backed him up.

The skipper poured out a volley of savage oaths.

He raised his hand, and pointed to the blur of smoke in the west.

"Do you see that?" he roared.

The seamen looked.

"Wot is it?" growled Hicks.

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"A steamer."

"There's plenty o' steamers in this 'ere sea, skipper,"

The skipper raved.

"It's a gunboat, you fools!"

"Gosh!"

"We've got to look as innocent as we can," growled the skipper, whose face was pale under his tan. "Then they won't search us. If they do—"

His hand jammed on the bridge telegraph.

"Full speed!" he roared.

The engines were throbbing loudly.

There was no more talk among the men of slacking. They carried the cases below one by one, with quick alertness. The danger of capture banished every other thought.

One by one the cases disappeared.

Captain Hobbs looked anxiously at the blur of smoke, now larger and larger to the view, and rolling in a cloud against the sunset.

Through his glasses he could now make out the ship.

"By James, it's a King's ship!" he muttered thickly.

"There must be some suspicion abroad, Buck. Them scallywags who deserted at Pegg—"

The mate nodded, gritting his teeth.

"They've talked," he said.

"Must be that!"

"Or else the underwriters have got uneasy," said Buck; "though, if that's so, they might have seen about it sooner. No; I guess it's them cuss at Pegg who's peached on the game."

The skipper clenched his hands.

"I wish I had 'em in front of my barker now," he said.

"No good wishin' that, skipper. My word! Listen to the engines! Biggs will crack them scrap-iron chunks if he piles on the speed like that."

"Better that than Portland Prison."

"We can't beat a King's ship in speed, skipper."

"The night's coming on, and thank our luck there's no moon. We've got a good chance for a run."

Down below the Greyfriars juniors slaved at the stoking.

They understood.

The engineer's face alone was enough to tell them that there was danger. The furnaces roared, and the engines throbbed. The schoolboy stokers were aching with fatigue, grimy and foul with coal dust, breathless with heat. But they worked on. But there came a time when they could work no more, and they sank under the task. The engineer yelled to the deck.

"Hands—hands for stoking!"

"Make them youngsters work."

"They're dead beat!"

And the ruffians of the tramp steamer, much against their will, had to turn to at the stoking. Harry Wharton & Co. staggered on deck, black as sweeps, and sank down there, too exhausted to move, or sleep, or think.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Tracked on the Sea.

BOOM!

A heavy, dull echo over the darkening sea.

Harry Wharton started up.

He held on to a rail, and looked over the sea. The darkness had now almost fallen, and through the dusk came the glitter of lights from the gunboat, and the thick column of smoke was losing itself in the darkening sky. The boom had come from the gunboat, and it was the boom of a heavy gun.

Captain Hobbs gritted his teeth.

He shook a brawny fist at the distant ship.

"That's a signal to heave to, Buck."

The mate nodded.

"They've got a description of the craft, skipper," he said. "We're far enough away from the Anchor Rock now. But they've got a description of us."

"Sure as a gun!"

"And the fact that we're running—"

"That makes 'em certain. They know what we're after. The skipper clenched his hands. "But they shan't have the gold back. Hang 'em—hang 'em!"

"They can do two knots to our one, sir, or pretty near."

Said the mate, regarding the dim shape of the gunboat in the

ANSWERS

gloom, and blinking at the dancing lights, "and they can sink us if they want to."

"Not when it's dark."

"If they overhaul us, sir!"

"The gold will have to go," said the skipper, with a groan. "We shall have to jettison it. Jettison ten thousand guids! Oh!"

"Just as good as having it collared by them scallywags."

"Better," said the skipper savagely. "If we can't have it they shan't—that's a cert. And the diving outfit, and the pumps. All of them will have to go, if we're to be searched."

The mate grunted.

"You've forgotten one thing, skipper."

"What's that?"

"The boys."

"Oh, by gum!" said the skipper, with a deep breath. "By gum!"

The juniors, lying near the bridge ladder, heard every word. And they listened with painful intensity now. What was being said concerned them very nearly.

"The boys!" repeated the skipper.

"I guess they'll talk, sir. It's no good shifting the gold and the diving outfit overboard, with five young beasts there all ready to give evidence against us."

"Buck—" the skipper's voice was low and hoarse—"they ain't give evidence."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Never mind—never mind! It mayn't come to that," said the skipper. "We're not going to lose the gold if we can help it. 'Nuff said."

The juniors lay silent with horror.

They knew what the scoundrel meant. If the gunboat came up near enough to search the tramp steamer, the Greyfriars fellows were not to be on hand to give evidence against the sea-thieves. They were to follow the gold to the bottom of the North Sea. Murder most foul was in the mind of the skipper of the Pomerania.

"Do you hear that?" muttered Wharton.

"I heard," said Johnny Bull.

"The scoundrels!"

"The murderous villains!"

"If they come for us," Wharton muttered tensely, "fight for your lives! Lay hold of anything you can, and hit your hardest, if you kill them. It's our lives we've got to think of now. And let's get hold of some kind of weapons. We may have the villains upon us any minute."

It seemed to the juniors as if, already, the shadowy wings of the Angel of Death hovered over them on the darkening sea.

They moved quickly away from the bridge, even their fatigue forgotten in the horror that thrilled every nerve in their bodies.

Boom!

It was another shot from the gunboat.

This time the ball dropped heavily into the sea, within a cable's length of the tramp steamer.

It was the second signal to stop—closer than the first. The skipper's teeth were hard set. Down below the ruffians, all thought of slacking banished now, were slaving like demons, and the furnaces roared, the engines throbbed. Speed and darkness alone could save the sea-thieves from justice.

The tramp was tearing through the water. The whole ship seemed to shake with the thumping of the engines. Every now and then there was a strange, whirling shiver. The engines were old and foul, and the juniors knew as well as the crew that there might be an accident at any minute.

And if the engines failed, the steamer would be a helpless log upon the sea, to be overhauled by the gunboat at its ease. And then—

The juniors knew what would happen then. The only chance the sea-thieves had of escaping prison was by jettisoning the gold and the diving outfit, and the boys who could betray them would be silenced by the only possible means. And the juniors nervred themselves for a terrible struggle that might come at any moment.

Darkness lay upon the sea now.

Through the hot July night the tramp steamer sported and puffed on her way through the shadowed waters.

Boom!

"We only want a shot in her ribs, and we're done," muttered the skipper.

"She's got the range," said the mate. "A point or two (3) port—"

"Ay, ay! Not a gim to be shown."

The course of the tramp changed a point or two. Not a light gleamed upon the Pomerania; if she had met another craft in the waste of waters, there would have been a terrible collision. But fortunately the sea was clear.

Boom!

The report echoed again over the sea.

But the tramp steamer was now invisible to the gunboat, and the change in her course, though it caused her to lose ground, had taken her out of the line of fire.

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EVERY
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ONE
PENNY.

The heavy shot whistled by a dozen fathoms from the ship.

"We shall dodge her yet!" the skipper muttered.

"I guess it will be close."

"A miss is as good as a mile. Hallo, what's the trouble?"

Bill Haddock came staggering on the deck. The ruffian had been refreshing himself for work in the stoke hole by copious draughts of rum, and he was now in a state of raging intoxication. The skipper yelled to him.

"Get to work, man!"

Haddock grunted.

"Get to work yourself," he said. "I've 'ad enough!"

"Do you want to be taken?"

"You git to work," said Haddock thickly, as he came clambering unsteadily up the steps of the bridge. "You take your turn."

The skipper's hand went into his pocket.

"Get back, Bill Haddock."

The man clambered on. The skipper drew the revolver, and grasped it by the barrel. As Haddock reached the bridge, the skipper's powerful arm swung up, and the butt of the revolver crashed upon the ruffian's head. Haddock gave a low groan, and crashed down to the deck, and lay there insensible.

Boom!

It was another shot from the pursuer.

But this time the whistling of the shot was not heard, and it flew away into the distant darkness. The tramp steamer throbbed on.

Suddenly, from the darkness of the sea, came a gleam of white clear light. The skipper grasped the rail of the bridge, and a groan came to his lips.

"The searchlight!" muttered the mate.

"By James, if it reaches us—"

"We're lost!"

"Done, by gum! Then the gold—and the outfit—and—"

"And the boys, I guess—"

"Ay, ay!"

"And then how'll you account for running?" asked the mate. "You'll have to give some yarn for that, skipper."

The skipper muttered a curse.

"Oh, any lie for that! We thought they were German, if you like, or the skipper was drunk, and did it for fun. Any old story for that! They won't be able to prove anything. If they find nothing on board, they can't prove that we saved the Red Earl, even when they know the ingots are gone."

"That's true, I guess."

The two men on the bridge watched the white light on the sea.

It came in a long white arm from the unseen gunboat in the dark distance, and moved round in a circle upon the waters.

The end of it was approaching the Pomerania. If the searchlight reached the tramp steamer, she would be shown up to view to the King's ship as clearly as if it were broad daylight upon the North Sea.

In a fever of anxiety the sea-thieves watched the searchlight as it circled round, closer and closer.

Would it reach them?

The Greyfriars juniors watched it, too, with bated breath. Would it reach them? Only a little time before they had been wishing that the gunboat would overhaul them. But now they wished still more keenly, as keenly as any man on board, that the searchlight might fall short. For if the light revealed them, it meant a fight against odds for life or death—a desperate struggle, and a grave in the deep waters!

Would the light reach them?

Closer and closer it came, travelling round slowly and steadily, till the white arm of light was pointing directly at the tramp steamer.

When it fell the sea was brilliantly lighted, but outside the radius of light the darkness lay black and thick, all the thicker from the vicinity of that bright light.

The skipper gave a gasp that was almost a sob.

"Short—short, by thunder!"

The searchlight fell short.

The tramp steamer was beyond the radius of it—but a little beyond, but far enough to be unseen by the watching eyes on board the gunboat.

The circling light passed on—on, and travelled further away.

They were saved!

"Safe!" muttered the skipper.

"Safe!" muttered Harry Wharton.

The tramp steamer throbbed on through the darkness. Afar in the distance the searchlight faded into the sea.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Man Overboard.

"BY James, we're well out of that!" The skipper gasped out the words. The tramp steamer throbbed on at full speed, still showing no lights, and for more than an hour the same speed was kept up, and the ship bore no lights. Then the speed slackened down, and the lights were set going.

The gunboat was doubtless searching the waters for the vanished steamer, but her commanders could not know in which direction to look, excepting that it was improbable that the ocean tramp would make for any English port.

The men of the Pomerania, worn out with work, came up to the deck, and lay about there in dull and heavy rest.

Bill Haddock raised his head, and looked blindly round him. His head was aching from the terrible blow the skipper had dealt him, and his hair was thick with clotted blood. He rose to his feet, and without a word staggered away to the fore-castle.

The skipper came out of the chart-house with a bottle in each hand.

"Safe and sound, my hearties!" he said. "Drink up, every mother's son of you!"

"None of your rum for me, skipper," said Joe Cutts.

Captain Hobbs glared at him.

"You'll drink with the rest, Cutts."

"Not your rum, cap'n."

"You'll get yourself laid out with your lip one of these days, Joe Cutts!" said the skipper sulphurously.

"I ain't drinking your rum!"

"Go without, then, hang you!"

The rest of the men drank readily enough. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were sent down to assist the engineer. The tramp steamer glided on swiftly, though the engines were now less strained for speed. Through the darkness of the night the steamer churned on, while the men slept about her decks; but all the time the captain or the mate kept watch on the bridge.

At dawn, Joe Cutts came out of the fore-castle. He had been drinking overnight, from some supply he deemed safer than that from the chart-house, and his eyes were red, and his nose burning, his throat dry. He looked out over the sea, and came towards the bridge, and the other ruffians gathered round him. Captain Hobbs was on the bridge; the mate had gone into the chart-house to sleep.

"What do you want, Joe Cutts?" asked the skipper, with his hand in the pocket where the revolver reposed.

"It ain't only wet I want, but wet all this 'ere crew wants, skipper," said the boatswain sullenly.

"That's so!" said Bill Haddock, who looked a terrible object, with a blood-stained bandage fastened round his head, and his bloodshot eyes looking out from under it.

The skipper looked down at them with a sneering grin.

"Well, and what does all this crew want, then?" he demanded.

"Their whack!"

"The gold!" called out Tom Hicks, from the rear of the crowd.

"The gold's safe enough," said the skipper coolly. "We've got it on board. What more do you want?"

"We want to whack it out, skipper."

"No time for that now. We whack it out when we get to land, as agreed," said the skipper.

"You 'ear what I say—me, Captain Hobbs?"

"That ain't good enough for us," said the boatswain sullenly. "You've tried to poison me, and you've nigh brained Bill 'Adcock."

"Werry nigh," said Haddock.

"And I'll brain any drunken bound that tries to get on this hyer bridge," said the skipper threateningly. "Go about your business."

"We want to share out the loot."

"You'll wait till we get to port."

"Wot port are we goin' to, then?" demanded the boatswain. "You ain't told us that yet. I'm sick of this 'ere voyage, for one."

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"Same 'ere!"

"Ay, ay."

"Wot's the port, skipper?"

"It ain't safe to keep in English waters," said the skipper musingly. "Likewise, it won't do to get to port in Germany or France. We shall 'ave to keep steady on."

"But where?"

"Spain is the nearest place where we can git ashore safe, and take the gold with us."

There was a growl of dissent.

"That's too fur!" said Bill Haddock. "I'm going to spend my money in a place where I kin speak the lingo, for one."

"You walleyed slabsided son of a swab!" roared the skipper. "You won't be spending your money, you'll be going to chokify if we stay in English waters."

"We'll risk it," said the boatswain, doggedly. "I'd rather chance the police than chance you, George 'Obbs. You're goin' to do us out of our whack if you can, but we're watchin' you, don't you forget it."

"Keep off this bridge," said the skipper, as the boatswain made a step forward. "I'll shoot the first man that comes."

"Look 'ere, captain!"

"Belay that," snarled the skipper. "Get back to your work. We ain't out of danger yet. That gunboat is still looking for us, and we've got five witnesses on board to send us to prison if we're overcautious."

"We'll soon stop their mouths," said the boatswain, grimly, "and mind you, George 'Obbs, we're a-watching you."

And the men suddenly retreated.

"There'll be trouble on this craft before long," Wharton muttered to Frank Nugent, "we may get a chance then."

Nugent nodded.

The juniors thought it over. Their lives hung on a thread so long as they were about the salvage stealer's ship, they knew that. But a struggle against such odds as were arrayed against them was hopeless. But if there were division in the crew—if the captain and his rascally gang flew at one another's throats—the juniors might have a chance then.

The morning wore on.

The seamen of the Pomerania whispered and muttered together sulkily, as the steamer glided through the sunny waters, and the Greyfriars juniors took their turns at stoking. Now that the danger was passed the crew did not, evidently, think it worth their while to work.

Harry Wharton had just washed off the soot and coal dust, as well as he could, in a bucket of water near the fore-castle, when there was a shout from one of the seamen.

Splash!

Wharton looked round quickly.

He was just in time to catch a glimpse of a white face in the wide waters as the ship rushed on. The mate came tearing out of the chart room as the cry rang out.

"Man overboard!"

"The skipper!"

"Ay, ay!"

The mate signalled to the engineer. Harry Wharton ran along the deck. He had been strangely touched by the glimpse of a white-stricken face in the sea—and hands that were thrown up helplessly for the aid that was not there. He had not seen the skipper fall over-board—whether it was drink, whether he had been pushed over the side by one of the crew, he did not know. But there was only one thought in Wharton's mind now, as he looked towards the sinking man—to save him! The man was his enemy—and had treated him cruelly—but Wharton did not think of that at this moment. As he ran along the deck his intention was, perhaps, to be seen in his face, for Joe Cutts yelled at him and made a spring towards him.

"Stop, you young cub!"

Wharton took no heed of him. The burly boatswain raced on after him, but he could not reach the nimble junior.

Harry Wharton threw his hands together, and dived.

Splash!

There was a shout from the crew—a shout of admiration at the boy's pluck, in spite of themselves.

Wharton did not hear it. He was swimming with steady strokes towards the struggling man, while the ship, not yet obedient to the mate's orders, surged on.

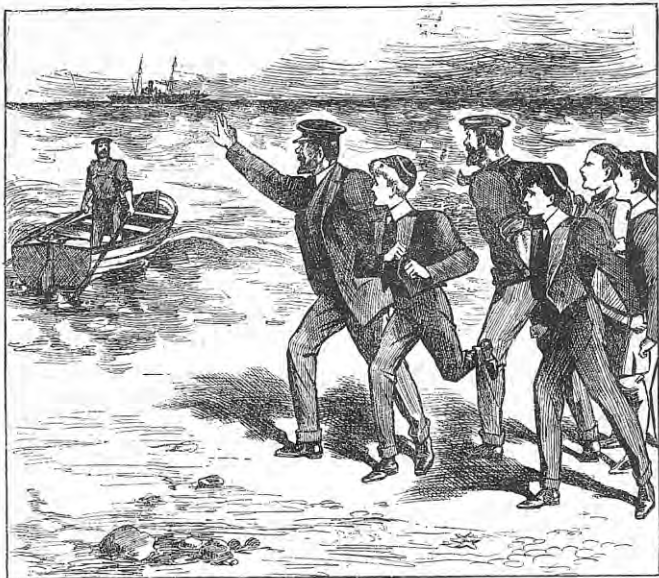
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In a couple of minutes Harry Wharton and Co., helpless in the power of the press-gang, were rushed down to the waiting boat. "Let us go!" roared Wharton, struggling in the grasp of the big boatswain.
(See Chapter 2.)

"Elo!" gasped Captain Hobbs.
And Wharton's grasp closed upon him, and dragged him up to the surface as he was sinking for the last time.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER. A Narrow Escape.

FROM the deck of the steamer, the sea looked smooth and calm—but in the water it was different. A wave rolled over Wharton's head as he grasped the skipper, both went deep under. They came up again, the grasp of the boy firm upon the burly skipper, and their faces came out of the water. Wharton, holding the captain with one hand, struck out with the other, and kept himself afloat.
"Old on, Buck," gasped the captain, under the impression, in the confusion of the moment, that it was the mate who had jumped in for him. "I'll shoot that villain Cutts when we get back. 'Old on.'"
"Can't you swim?" asked Wharton.
"Thunder! It's the kid."
"Yes," said Wharton, grimly. "It's the kid! Can you swim?"
"No—only a stroke or two," said the skipper, panting.
"Old me, for mercy's sake! Don't let me go because I've
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been 'ard on you. I didn't reely mean it—it's only my way—Captain 'Obbs's way. I'll stand by you arter this."
"I'm not going to let you go," said Harry. "Put your hand on my shoulder, and let me swim. That's right."
He swam easily, with the captain holding on. The sea whirled them over, but they kept afloat. Wharton tried to look towards the ship, but the steamer was rising and falling on the sea, and he could only catch glimpses of her. She seemed terribly far away.
"Ave they stopp'd?" spluttered the skipper.
"I think so."
"Can you see a boat?"
"No."
Captain Hobbs swore savagely.
"Buck will get me out if he can," he muttered. "Him and me are together in this—we sink or swim together, we drown. Cutts chucked me in—he will make 'em leave me to drown if he can. Hang him. Buck will pick us up if Cutts and the rest don't stop him."
Wharton felt a chill.
He realised that there was a very strong chance that the tramp steamer's crew would make no attempt to pick them up.
The captain cleared the salt spray from his eyes, and looked towards the steamer. The Pomerania had stopped, that was certain, but a boat was not yet lowered.

"Did they chuck you over, kid?"

"No."

"Ow did you come in the water then?"

"Jumped."

"What for?"

"To pick you up."

The captain stared at him.

"You jumped in the water after me?" he gasped.

"To save me?"

"Yes."

"By James! What did you do that for?"

Wharton grinned; he could not help it, serious as the situation was.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "You're not worth it, I know that. But I did it, and here we are."

"Don't leave me," said the captain. "Old on, and I'll stand by you on board the Pomerania after this. You're a plucked 'un."

"I wish the boat would come," muttered Wharton.

"Lowering the boat."

Wharton raised himself a little out of the water, and stared anxiously towards the ship. He could see the mate standing by the davits, with a revolver in his hand. The men were standing sullenly back. Four Greyfriars juniors were casting the boat loose. The men had evidently refused to do so, but they dared not interfere, with the revolver in the mate's hand ready for use.

"Not are they don't?" muttered the skipper.

"Lowering the boat."

"Is the mate in it?"

"No."

"Good for him! If he came in the boat the others would leave us together, and get off with the gold. He knows that. Buck is a cute 'un! Who's in the boat?"

"My pals."

"The kids? The men won't handle her, I guess! They want the ingots all to themselves, the mean skunks! They guess that I was going to— Never mind! Is the boat in the water yet?"

"Yes."

"That's good!"

The captain was exhausted, and more than once his grasp upon Wharton's shoulder relaxed, but he tightened it again. The boat was lowered now, and the Greyfriars juniors were in the oars, and little Wun Lung was in the stern.

The splash of the oars sounded across the blue waters very pleasant to the ears of the man and the boy floating there within an ace of death.

"They're coming!" gasped the skipper.

"Yes; they're coming!"

"Hail 'em!"

Wharton shouted.

"Boat ahoy! Buck up!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came back Bob Cherry's cheery hail. "We're coming! Keep your pecker up, Harry, old man!"

The Greyfriars juniors rowed hard. The boat shot across the water, and loomed over the captain and the swimming junior. Bob Cherry laid in his oar and reached out for Harry Wharton, and grasped him by the collar.

"Help the skipper in first!" gasped Wharton. "He's about done!"

"Right-ho!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull grasped the skipper and dragged him into the boat. Captain Hobbs clambered on the thwart and gasped and gasped. Wharton clambered into the boat, dripping with water, and took an oar.

From the stationary ship the mate was watching them. The revolver was still in his hand, and he had one eye on the sullen crew.

"Pull away!" gasped the skipper. "They'll rush Buck if they get a chance, and then we shall be done in!"

The juniors pulled with a will for the ship.

As they drew nearer, they could see clearly the group of sullen seamen, with Joe Cutts at their head, looking at the mate like wolves about to spring. But the mate faced them with perfect coolness, his finger on the trigger. None of them had a firearm, or it would have fared hard with the mate of the Pomerania. The revolver held them at bay, in spite of their savage looks.

The boat jarred against the ship's timbers.

Whiz!

An iron pin whirled through the air, and missed the mate's head by a few inches as he dodged. The mate's eyes blazed, and his revolver swung round a little, and he pulled the trigger.

Crack!

Tom Hicks rolled along the deck, shrieking.

There was a savage movement of the rest of the crew, but THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 231.

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the smoking revolver was levelled, and the mate's cool, defiant eyes gleamed behind it.

"Come on, my buckoes!" he said between his teeth. "The first man forward gets it through the head! Come on!"

And the ruffians growled and leapt back. Captain Hobbs recovered a little by this time, clambered up the side, and the Greyfriars juniors followed him. The juniors gathered round the captain and mate. For the moment, at least, their lot was thrown in with that of the officers of the Pomerania.

Tom Hicks lay on the deck, groaning, his hand clasped to his shoulder. His face was as white as chalk. No one even looked at him. The two parties faced one another with savage looks.

The skipper felt in his pocket for his revolver, but he remembered that it was soaked with water, and withdrew his hand with a curse.

"You put me over the side, Joe Cutts!" he said.

"You tried to poison me!" growled Cutts.

"Lead me your shooter, Buck."

Cutts dashed along the deck to the forecabin, and ran in. The seamen followed him, and the wounded man was left groaning alone upon the planks.

"Soft, skipper!" said the mate. "We're short-handed now, and I've had to dish Hicks. We don't want to navigate the ship alone."

"I'm going to settle Cutts!" roared the skipper. "It's him or us!"

The forecabin scuttle was closed. The seamen had retreated to it as to a fortress.

The mate shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll have to git at him first," he said.

Captain Hobbs uttered an oath.

He did not reply to the mate, but went into the chart-house to change his clothes, and to clean and reload his revolver. The mate ordered the juniors below to help the engineer, and remained himself upon the bridge, on the watch. The Pomerania moved through the water again, towing the boat at her side.

Wun Lung looked reproachfully at Wharton as they went down to stake.

"No gooder!" he muttered. "Why not lettee skipper down?"

Wharton laughed.

"You must let us!" said the Chinaco. "No gooder lettee skipper come boarder again. Bettee lettee down!"

"The skipper will be a better friend to us than the men, Wun Lung."

"The brute is bound to feel a little gratitude to you for saving his life, I should think, Harry," Nugent remarked.

"He said he would stand by us."

"Perhaps he will."

"Nottee lettee suittee him!" growled Wun Lung. "Hoo great iscal! Bettee lettee down!"

"Hark! They're at it!"

There was a shout and the crack of a revolver from the deck. Then came the skipper's stentorian tones:

"Come out of there, Joe Cutts! Come out, you swab!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Desperate Dive.

THE forecabin remained closed. The skipper, revolver in hand, raged outside. He had had a draught of rum as the skiff recoiled, and his face was flushed with drink as well as with rage. The hard voice of the boatswain replied from the fore-cabin:

"We ain't coming out, skipper! You can navigate the ship by yourself. We ain't coming out unless you come to terms!"

"You pitched me overboard, you swab!"

"You tried to poison me!"

"I didn't, you swab! I didn't, you son of a slash-buck!"

You were drunk, you dirty gin-swiller!" roared the skipper.

"Come out!"

"We ain't coming out!"

Crack—crack!

Two bullets buried themselves in the thick wood. But the scuttle was fastened, and the skipper could not get at the rufous seamen. He tramped back to the bridge fuming.

"I guess it ain't good enough, skipper!" said the mate coolly. "We can't work the ship without the hands, and you can't shoot the whole crowd!"

"I'll make an example of Joe Cutts!"

"You won't get at him," said the mate. "He won't come out. We can't cross the Bay of Biscay in this style, captain. I guess you'll have to make terms with them."

"Not with Cutts!"

The mate shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, with the others, then. Tell 'em you'll overlook

what they've done, all but Cutts, and they shall have his share of the gold, and Hicks's, to divide."

The skipper grinned.

"Good enough!"

He went forward again.

"Aho, you skulking lubbers," he shouted—"ahoy! You can all come out 'ceptin' Cutts! I won't hurt you, on the word of Captain 'Olds! Cutts is my mate, and if he comes out of the fore'st'le I'll shoot him as dead as a smoked herring! Cutts is out of this game now, the mutinous dog, and you swabs shall have his share to divide—his and Tom Hicks's! Now come out!"

"It ain't good enough, skipper!" replied Cutts. "We stands together!"

"Ay, ay!" growled Bill Haddock.

"Then I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said the skipper. "The mate and Mr. Higgs and Joe'll take the boat and the gold, and leave you the ship."

There was a buzz in the fore-castle.

The threat had its effect upon the savage ruffians there. The influence of the boatswain was not strong enough to overcome their fear of losing the stolen gold.

"I guess we can get afore ourselves with the ingots," said the skipper. "Mind, I give you five minutes. If you ain't all on deck in that time we go in the boat, and the gold goes with us. With the schoolboys, we've got enough hands for the boat."

He returned to the bridge.

"I reckon that'll fetch 'em!" he chuckled.

He was right. In two minutes the seamen came sullenly out of the fore-castle, leaving the boatswain there by himself. Captain Hobbs glared at them from the bridge.

"Pretty set of deck seamen you are, ain't you?" he roared. "Wanting to leave your skipper to drown—hey? I don't know why I don't drill the hull crowd of you!"

The seamen did not reply. The captain had the whip-hand of them, and they knew that he was reckless enough to begin shooting at a word. And the two men on the bridge could have swept the deck with their revolvers.

"Got 'em in pretty good order now, I think," the skipper chuckled to the mate. "As for Cutts, he can skulk there as long as he likes. I'll wing him if he comes out!"

A couple of seamen carried the wounded man into the fore-castle, where his groans could be heard at intervals.

"Swing up that boat, you swabs!" shouted the skipper.

The seamen obeyed without a word. The boat was swung up. Then the men stood sullenly about, Cutts still keeping out of sight.

The day was waning. The steamer throbbed on to the southward. As the dusk of evening deepened once more over the sea, a shade of anxiety came upon the mate's face.

"There'll be trouble after dark, I guess," he said to the skipper, in a low voice.

Captain Hobbs nodded.

"I reckon so," he assented.

And they were right, though the trouble that was coming was not of the kind exactly that they had anticipated. In their calculations they had not given a thought to the Greyfriars juniors, least of all to Wan Lung. The inoffensive-looking little Chinese was, however, the most dangerous foe on board the Pomerania for the sea-thieves. Wan Lung had left the other juniors stoking, and crept away. The juniors imagined that the little Celestial was worn out and had gone to rest. He rejoined them after an hour, looking very dusty. Harry Wharton went on deck for a spell of rest, and the little Celestial followed him. He drew Wharton aside into the shadow of the boat.

"What's up?" asked Harry rather uneasily. He could tell by the glitter in the little Celestial's almond eyes that Wan Lung had a scheme in his mind which he had very likely carried out before consulting the others, for fear of opposition.

"Wan Lung gave his soft, silent chuckle.

"What you tinkee?" he murmured. "Skippee say we go to Spain."

"Yes."

"No wantee go. I'laps they chuckee us overboard to keepee tongue quietee," said the Chinese slyly.

"Not without a tussle," said Wharton.

"Too manee fol us."

"What have you been doing, Wan Lung?"

"You lookee out! I'll be others when engine'er not lookee," whispered the little Chinese. "No gooe to Spain."

"How do you know?"

"Steanee kinkee."

Harry Wharton started.

"The ship sink!"

Wan Lung nodded.

"You—you young nes!" murmured Wharton. "What have you done?"

"Me stealie hammel and chisel flog galley," said Wan Lung. "Me use hold in ship, deep, deep down undee way—in hold. Timbels all lettin; quietee easee."

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Wharton looked at him in amazement and horror. "Wan Lung, you've scuttled the ship!"

Wan Lung nodded.

"Water comes in slow, slow, but soonee quietee," he said composedly. "Shippee no gooe to Spain. We no thievee overboard. If downee, all downee togetheer."

"Good heavens!"

"Allee light! Takee to boat. Two boatee, and we have one."

"You—you really made a hole in the timbers below the water-line, Wan Lung?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"What you tinkee?"

"Great Scott!"

Wharton rejoined his chums below. A whisper was enough to convey to them what the Chinese had done.

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "The young villain! We shall all be drowned now, as sure as a gun!"

"No downee," murmured Wan Lung. "Downee if gooe to Spain, to keepee tongue quietee. No downee now. Lascals too bussee takee gold and escapee to tinkee of us. What you tinkee? Allee light?"

The juniors could not help seeing that the little Celestial was probably right. They would never have thought of taking so desperate a step; but now that it had been taken, it was quite probable that it would work out to their advantage. At all events, they would be no worse off than waiting to see what would happen. For in the event of the steamer being overhauled and searched, they knew what the ruffians intended for them.

Captain Hobbs's gratitude would be a very frail reed to lean upon then. He had shown no signs of gratitude since he had seen safe to let the ship again. And when the ruffians reached land with their booty, what were they likely to do with the stolen schoolboys? The best Harry Wharton & Co. could expect was to be marooned in some lonely spot, where they might never be found. Certainly if Cutts and his followers succeeded in getting the upper hand in the ship they had no mercy to expect.

But it gave them a strange thrill to think of the water gurgling into the hold below and the crew as yet unaware of the fact.

How long would it be before they learned the truth? Darkness lay thick upon the sea. One by one the stars came out and gleamed over the desert of waters.

The steamer was moving more slowly now, as the water filled the hold and the vessel was settling deeper into the waves. There was a sudden alarm from the bridge. The juniors heard the startled voice of the mate. The skipper was in the chart-house, asleep, and the mate was shouting in to him.

"Skipper, wake up! Wake up, man!"

The captain leaped from his bunk, and grasped his revolver.

"What's the trouble? Those mutinous hounds again?"

"Worse than that, sir."

"What?"

"We've sprung a leak!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

On The Sinking Ship.

THERE was wild confusion on the deck of the tramp steamer.

The men were talking all at once, and there was a hubbub of voices. The alarm that the vessel had sprung a leak had brought Cutts out of the fore-castle, in spite of his fear of the skipper. But all strife was suspended now between the sea-thieves. The common danger drew them together once more.

The captain's voice bawled orders. The well was sounded, and a murmur of horror went along the deck as the announcement was made.

"Six feet of water!"

"By James!" said the captain, gritting his teeth. "By James, that isn't a leak! One of those skulking swabs has done this!"

The mate gave an impatient shrug.

"I guess that's not likely, skipper. They're as fond as we are of their lives. She's a crazy old tub, anyway, and she was bound to go at last."

"Hands to the pumps!"

The seamen obeyed readily enough. Only the groaning seaman in the fore-castle remained idle. Joe Cutts directed operations, the skipper taking no notice of him. There was no time for quarrelling now. If the steamer was to be saved, every hand would be required for the work.

"Call them kids up and set them at the pumps!" said the skipper.

Harry Wharton & Co. were called on deck. They were weary with long labour, but there was no respite for them now. The engineer followed them to the deck. The water would soon be invading the engine room.

A scared silence had fallen upon the sea-thieves.

Only a short time before they had been brooding over mutual hatred and enmity and the thought of the gold they had stolen from the wreck of the Red Earl. They were suddenly brought face to face with fearful peril. Only the timbers of the ship stood between them and the depths of the sea, and the timbers had failed them now and the sea was pouring in.

The gurgling and splashing of the water below could be plainly heard. The creaking of the pumps sounded through the quiet night.

All hands worked at the pumps, taking turns, with grim determination. There were two boats on the steamer, and the sea was calm. The steamer was still in the narrow seas, and land was not far out of sight, perhaps. But to land upon English or French soil did not suit the sea-thieves. The description of their vessel was known, and a crew of rascals with a golden booty would be looked for everywhere. To land with the gold was to court arrest; and to land without the gold—after they had striven and struggled for it, stopping at nothing, they were not likely to think of abandoning their plunder unless they were driven to it.

They slaved with frantic eagerness at the pumps, but it was useless.

When the well was sounded again, the announcement caused the sea-thieves to look at one another with blanched faces.

Nine feet!

The captain ground his teeth.

Nine feet of water mean that the ship was sinking. It had gained three feet while the pumps were going at full force.

Bill Haddock drew back from the pump he was working, with a savage oath.

"It's no good!" he exclaimed. "Mates, this 'ere ship is doomed! It's no good!"

"Hands to the pumps, you fools!" shouted the skipper.

"I guess it's all up!" said the mate, in a low voice. "She won't float till morning, skipper."

"By Jams, I s'pose you're right! But—"

"It's no use distress signals on the boats, skipper."

The skipper uttered a furious oath.

"Distress signals! Are you mad? Can we be picked up with the gold ignora? How are we going to explain them?"

"The boats, then!"

The skipper clenched his hands furiously.

"The boats—the boats! And where are we to land? We're in the Channel now. The moment we get the gold ashore—"

"I guess we're not going to stay here to drown, skipper."

"No," said Captain Hobbs, with sudden rage. "It must be the boats."

And he called the men away from the pumps.

"You keep on pumping, my hearties!" said Joe Cutts, with a glare at the Greyfriars juniors. "Don't you leave the pumps. That's your work."

There was a loud hissing and sizzling below. The water had invaded the engine-room. The men of the Pomerania hurried to prepare the longboat. Water and provisions were brought up hurriedly and stacked into the boat. Then the cases of ingots taken from the wreck of the Red Earl were brought out.

Captain Hobbs directed the stowing of the boat, and when it was ready he shouted to Harry Wharton & Co.

"Tumble in, you rascals!"

There was an oath from Joe Cutts.

"We don't want them, Captain 'Obbs!"

"Hold your tongue, Joe Cutts! Tumble in, lads!"

The juniors left the pumps and hurried towards the boat. The whole ship was now awash, and it was evident that the Pomerania would not last long.

Harry Wharton & Co. had intended to take the second boat themselves, for it was certain that the crew would all resolve to go in the longboat with the gold. They were not likely to trust the lot into the hands of their comrades or their captives. The smaller boat would have held the juniors, quite easily. But Captain Hobbs and the mate had their own schemes in their minds. Joe Cutts and the rest of the ruffians of the Pomerania had served their turn, and Captain Hobbs and the American mate had no further use for them. It was the skipper's object to keep them out of the longboat if he could, and Cutts already suspected his intention.

THE MARSH LIBRARY.—No. 211.

The juniors looked at one another, and muttered together. They would have chosen rather to take the second boat, but it was impossible to disobey. The captain had his revolver in his hand now, and his face was set and desperate. The mate also was armed, and evidently ready for anything. The juniors tumbled into the boat. Biggs, the engineer, followed them in, and the captain called to the crew to lower away.

The seamen hesitated, but the revolver in the captain's hand enforced obedience.

The boat was swung down to the calm, dark waters.

Then the mate dropped into it, and muttered to the juniors.

"Get the oars ready, and push off when the skipper gives the word."

Wharton looked at him steadily.

"Are you going to abandon the men on the ship?" he asked.

"Hold your tongue, you young fool!" the mate muttered fiercely.

"There is a wounded man in the fore-castle—"

"Let him stay there!"

"You cannot leave him—"

The mate, his face gleaming with rage, thrust the barrel of his revolver into the boy's face.

"Silence!"

Wharton stepped back, silent. The man was desperate enough for anything, and he had no weapon.

The crew were preparing to leap into the boat. Captain Hobbs thrust himself in their way.

"Get Hicks out of the fore-castle," he exclaimed. "Are you thinking of leaving your mate to drown?"

"Lively, too! We'll get him out!" said Bill Haddock.

Haddock and two more men ran into the fore-castle for the wounded seaman, who was shouting and shrieking for help in deadly fear of being abandoned upon the tramp-steamer. The Pomerania had a heavy list to starboard now, and was rapidly settling.

Haddock and his comrades came out with the wounded man in their arms.

"Lend them a hand with that man, Cutts!" rapped out the skipper.

The boatswain obeyed.

Captain Hobbs made a spring into the boat. The mate was standing ready with an oar, and so was his engineer. As the captain landed in the boat they shoved it off together, and the boat parted from the side of the steamer.

The action was so sudden that the men left on the deck had no chance of intervening. But Cutts came springing to the side a second later, his face black with rage. He was calculating the distance for a jump, but the captain raised his revolver.

"Jump, and you get a bullet, Joe Cutts!" he said grimly.

Cutts shouted hoarsely.

"You ain't going to leave us 'ere, skipper!"

"There's the other boat."

"But—but— Hang you, you villain—"

The mate and the engineer were bending to the oars now, and the boat was pulling away into the slabs.

On the deck of the sinking ship the abandoned seamen sped to and fro, hurling curses after the retreating boat.

But a sudden lurch of the tramp steamer warned them of their peril, and they made a rush for the second boat.

The boat swung down to the sea, the ruffians scrambling furiously into it. Hicks yelled for aid, and Haddock heaved him into the boat. Then the ruffians seized the oars, and pulled after the longboat. But the sinking ship was between them, and they had to keep wide from her to avoid the vortex as she went down. They pulled desperately, but the windows of night were thick upon the wide waters, and the longboat had not been idle. Under Captain Hobbs' revolver the Greyfriars juniors were rowing, and the longboat made good before the other boat had a chance of reaching her.

The desperate rascals pulled to and fro in the gloom in search of the longboat, but they searched in vain.

"She ain't showing no lights," said Haddock, with an oath.

Cutts ground his teeth.

"And she won't, when they're tryin' to dodge us," he said bitterly.

"They've got a sail on that boat, too," said another seaman. "We're done! Cap'n Hobbs made all along to keep the ingots himself."

"I didn't mean to give 'im a chance," muttered Cutts.

There was a shout.

"Look! She's foundering!"

There was a last lurch from the Pomerania. The stern was raised in the air, and the bows plunged under. Down into the sea the tramp steamer plunged, and the boat pitched and danced in the vortex of waters.

The tramp steamer was gone!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Last Fight.

DAWN flushed up over the sea. In the longboat no one had slept. The mast had been stopped, and the sail was drawing in the breeze, and the oars were laid in. The little crew of the longboat rested, but they did not sleep. Sleep was not likely to visit the eyes of the Greyfriars juniors.

They understood their peril. Danger from the sea there was little. The longboat was strong and well-provisioned, and the sea was calm. They were in the narrow zone, and land could be reached ere many hours, and when daylight came they would see continued passing vessels. It was not danger from the sea that they had to fear.

The danger was closer than that. Besides the five juniors of Greyfriars, there were the captain, the mate, and the engineer in the boat.

In the case of a struggle the Greyfriars fellows were five to three, but two of the scoundrels were armed with revolvers, and all three were grown-up and desperate men. What had the juniors to expect? The men who had abandoned their comrades on the sinking tramp were not likely to be merciful to the stolen schoolboys.

What did the sea-thieves intend?

They had robbed the crew of the Pomerania of their share of the plunder. There was no doubt that Captain Hobbs would have left his men to drown on the Pomerania if he could have contrived it. They had taken the second boat—without water, without provisions, without their share of the red gold nuggets. They would probably be picked up in the morning; they would have no other chance of escape from death, and when they were picked up the truth would come out, and they would be arrested. And certainly they would tell everything they could to increase the chances of Captain Hobbs' arrest. After the treachery he had shown towards them he must know that they would do all they could to deliver him from the ill-gotten gold of the Red Earl.

Captain Hobbs would not dare to land upon British soil—at all events, if he had to take the Greyfriars juniors with him. It would be inviting arrest within an hour after his feet touched the dry land.

What had they to expect, then? The juniors drew together in the bow of the boat, in a grim temper. They had armed themselves as they could with boathooks and bars, and they were prepared for trouble.

Captain Hobbs stood up in the boat as the dawn strengthened on the sea and scanned the rolling waves.

The sun of July glistened on the waves. Three or four trails of black smoke could be seen against the sunny sky, and sails glanced in the sun. There were two sails within a mile of the boat.

"Easy enough to be picked up, I guess," said the mate.

The skipper grinned.

"Too easy," he said. "We've got to think it out, Buck. We can get ashore in England or in France quite easy."

The mate made a gesture towards the juniors.

"Five tongues to wag," he said.

The captain frowned thoughtfully.

"They saved my life," he muttered.

The mate shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll have no hand in it, Buck," said the engineer.

"Leave the youngsters alone. They were dragged on the Pomerania against their will. You awful villain, man!"

"If they talk, it means prison for the lot of us!" growled the mate.

"Cutts and the rest will talk, and they'll be picked up before noon—if they're not picked up already."

"But we've got to land," said the mate savagely. "As soon as we land, they land, and the first policeman they meet—"

The skipper nodded.

"But it's too thick," he said. "I don't want to put my neck in a noose for one. You are an awful villain, Buck! I can't be hid."

"I tell you—"

"And I tell you I'll have no hand in it," said Biggs.

"You awful villain! You will get us all hung if we let you have your way!"

The mate relapsed into sullen silence. The man was evidently more desperate and unscrupulous than his associates, and was prepared to go to any length for his own security. The juniors heard every word of the muttered talk, and they grasped their weapons hard. But no movement was made by the three rascals aft. The skipper was plunged into deep thought, and the mate was sullenly silent. The engineer was sipping rum from a bottle.

"Well, you've got us into a zipping fix, Wun Lung," granted Johnny Bull.

The little Chinese grinned.

"Alice bettee than on 'shippee," he remarked. "On The Magnet Liberator, No. 231."

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ONE
PENNY.

shippee we have big clowd to fightee, when we gettee near Spain. Hele we fightee only three."

"That's so," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "We're no more likely to have to defend ourselves on this boat than we were on the ship, you fellows. And the odds are on our side, at all events."

"And all we've got the best of a scratch lot here, anyway," said Nugent. "That ruffian Cutts would have chucked us overboard without thinking twice about it. The skipper seems to think first, anyway."

"Yes, rather."

"We're better off here," said Bob Cherry. "Wun Lung did quite right. And, at all events, we shall remain in English waters."

"Or under them!" granted Johnny Bull. "The skipper, ordered us into the boat because he had to have hands to row away when he deserted his men. Now we've served his turn, we're in the way; and he reckoned we should be easier to deal with than Cutts and his gang."

"We shouldn't be so very easy to deal with," said Harry Wharton. "The boat is smaller than the ship, and at close quarters we should have a good chance with those bars and boathooks."

"Hullo, hullo, hullo! Here comes the skipper!"

The captain made a movement towards the juniors.

Harry Wharton & Co. rose to their feet at once, their weapons in their hands. The skipper grinned.

"We ain't going to hurt you kids," he said. "I ain't forgotten that you pulled me out of the water when those skunks left me to drown. I've paid 'em back in their own coin for that, I guess."

The juniors were silent.

"There's too many of us in this lyer boat," the skipper went on. "Buck reckoned we chucked you into the sea."

"It wouldn't be so easy," said Bob Cherry. "You haven't a gang of rascals at your back now, Captain Hobbs."

"No fear!"

The captain chuckled.

"I reckon it would be easy enough to wing you first," he said. "But never mind—that ain't the game. We're going to put you asleep."

"Good!"

"We'll sight some land soon," the skipper explained.

"Then we'll shove you ashore, and keep to the boat ourselves. Understand?"

"Yes, that's all right."

"Good enough."

And the skipper returned aft, and held a muttered conversation with the mate and the engineer. The two nodded their heads in approval. The Greyfriars juniors exchanged anxious glances.

"They're up to some villainy," Nugent muttered.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's quite plain," he said; "but—"

"Me savvy?"

"Well, what do you savvy, you riddy heathen?" demanded Bob Cherry, looking inquiringly at the little Celestial.

"They stick us ashore on some rock."

"Some rock, do you mean?"

Wun Lung nodded.

"What you tinkee? They stick us on lockee, and sail away, and we no gettee ashore. We stay on lockee many days, and no talker talker."

"Oh!" said Bob Cherry.

"By gum!" said Johnny Bull. "I believe the heathen's right! If they maroon us on some rock along the coast, we may be there for days before we get to land, and they will be able to get clear before we can give information to the police."

"That's the game, for a cert.," said Nugent.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Are we going to stand it?" he demanded.

"No!" muttered Frank, between his teeth. "They may stick us on some lonely rock where we may starve to death before we're picked off."

"Velly likely."

The juniors whispered together with anxious faces. The scheme of the rascals at the other end of the boat seemed only too clear. And it was soon certain. Captain Hobbs had changed the course of the boat, and towards the north high grey cliffs were seen looming up against the sky. That they were English cliffs was certain, though in what part of the southern coastline of England the juniors did not know. The shore seemed lonely and deserted, and out at sea, with the waves curling round them, several masses of brown rock showed above the water.

Captain Hobbs rose to his feet and scanned the rocks and the shore. The masses of rock were too far out for a

rimmer to leave them and reach the land, and this was evidently a place chosen for setting the juniors down from the boat.

"Take in the sail, you lads!"

The juniors obeyed.

The boat glided on towards the outermost of the rocks, a little islet of perhaps fifty yards in diameter, with sea-birds flying about it. The captain pointed to it.

"There you are, my lads," he said. "That's where you're going ashore. You'll make signals, and you'll be taken off by a fishing-smack in a few hours. You can take some grub ashore with you, and you'll find water in the rocks, and plenty of sea-birds' eggs. You'll be regular Robinson Crusoes."

The juniors looked at one another grimly. Doubtless, in the long run, they would be taken off from the lonely rock. But if they had been certain to be taken off in a few hours, Captain Hobbs would not have intended to land them there—they knew that. Their imprisonment on the rock might last days, or weeks—certainly long enough to allow these three rascals to get clear.

But the juniors did not speak a word. Their minds were made up, and a single look of intelligence passed between them; it was signal enough. They did not want to put the sea-thieves on their guard.

The crisis was coming.

They felt that there must have been a struggle sooner or later, and, owing to the scuttling of the ship by Wun Lung, the struggle would come with the advantage of numbers, at least, upon their side. They had a better chance of saving the boat than they would have had upon the Pomerania, with Joe Cutts and his gang to turn the scale against them.

They sat at the oars, and pulled the boat in towards the big rock. The sea was calm, and the longboat floated up to the low, rocky shore as to a quay.

The juniors rose, the oars in their hands.

Harry Wharton uttered one whisper, the faintest of whispers, to his comrades.

"Follow me, and knock them into the sea!"

That was all!

But the juniors understood, and they grasped the oars almost convulsively, pushing the boat close in to the rock. Captain Hobbs and the mate and the engineer were standing on the shore, not dreaming of the desperate thoughts in the minds of the juniors.

The boat jered against the rock.

"Now, then, ashore with you!" said the skipper, turning towards the boys. "I—Oh!"

Wharton made a sudden spring, lunging out with the oar he held. The end of it crashed upon the captain's chest, and he went flying over the gunwale of the boat, and splashed into the sea.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER The Schoolboys' Victory.

SPLASH!

Bob Cherry was not a second behind Wharton, and the oar struck the mate under the chin before the rascal knew that an attack was coming, and the mate was fairly lifted off his feet by the sudden charge, and hurled over the side.

Splash!

The engineer humped back, but as he did so, the oars wielded by Nugent and Johnny Bull struck him together, and he went staggering over the side, and disappeared head-first into the water.

It had all passed in a flash.

The Groyriars juniors stood alone in the boat. Little Wun Lung had a boat-hook in his hand, but he had had no chance to use it. The oars had done the work, in the hands of the Famous Four.

The juniors panted, with beating hearts.

Three heads rose in the water near the stern of the boat. The captain's face was white as death; he could not swim. He grasped the gunwale of the boat, and Bob Cherry raised his oar.

"If you try to climb in, Captain Hobbs, I shall brain you with this oar," he said quietly.

The captain gasped.

"You young 'ounds! Give me a 'and into the boat. You 'ear me, Captain 'Obbs."

"You'll stay where you are, Captain 'Obbs!" grinned Bob Cherry.

The engineer and the mate were swamping. The former had evidently been hard hit by the crash of the oars, and he had all he could do to keep himself afloat. But the mate was swimming towards the boat, and he caught hold with his left hand, and with his right he dragged out his revolver.

The weapon had probably been wetted by the sea-water, and was useless; but the mate did not have a chance to try.

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Wun Lung sprang forward, and the boat-hook whizzed in the air. It descended upon the mate's right arm with a crash, and the man uttered a howl of pain. The revolver disappeared into the sea, and the ruffian's arm hung useless at his side.

A volley of curses pealed from his lips.

"Hold your tongue," said Nugent sharply. "Give him a rap on the head if he doesn't shut up, Wun Lung."

Wun Lung grinned.

"Me give lappes," he said.

"Keep off, hang you!" panted the mate, holding on to the boat with his left hand, his face strained with pain. "Keep off."

"No talkee talkee."

"You pigtailled swab!"

"No talkee."

Wun Lung raised the boat-hook threateningly, and the mate was silent, his eyes gleaming with rage.

The engineer had made an attempt to approach the boat, and he caught Bob Cherry's eye fixed on him, and saw the oar poised ready, and he swam to the rock instead, and dragged himself out of the water. He sank down exhausted upon the rock.

Wharton came towards the clinging captain.

"Get away!" he said.

"I—I can't swim."

"You can scramble ashore. The water's shallow here."

"I can't."

"Try, or you're going to get hurt. Rap his fingers with the boat-hook, Wun Lung."

"Allee righte."

Wun Lung came across with the boat-hook, and swung it into the air. The captain let go the gunwale of the boat, and scrambled ashore upon the rock beside the engineer.

"You will follow him," Wharton said to the mate.

The mate ground his teeth.

"If I'd had my way you'd be food for fishes now," he muttered.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You wouldn't have found that so easy," he said. "We should have met up a fight, you know, and you mightn't have got off so cheap. You ought to be glad to be left alive. Get ashore at once."

The mate suddenly let go, and scrambled to the rock.

Captain Hobbs raised himself to his feet, dripping with water, and gasping for breath. He cast an appealing glance at the juniors. They had shaken out the sail, and the stiff breeze had caught it, and the boat was gliding through the water.

"Don't leave us here!" howled Captain Hobbs. "We shan't be picked up for days."

"You said in a few hours, you know," grinned Bob Cherry.

"I—I—I was mistaken about that. We may get left here for weeks."

"No, you won't," said Harry Wharton. "The police will come and take you off before that."

"You—you ain't going—"

"Yes, we are."

"Hang you! Hang you! I—"

But the boat was gliding away fast, and the captain's words were lost in the breeze.

The rascal shook his clenched hands after the boat, and dragged out his revolver. He snapped the trigger twice after the juniors, but the revolver was soaked with water, and there was no report.

"Go it!" called out Bob Cherry encouragingly. "This is where you get left, you know. I say, you chaps, I rather think we've come out top dogs this time."

"Yes, rather."

"Toppee doggee!" grinned Wun Lung. "Allee right. And we gottee allee gold."

"My hat! I'd forgotten that," said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath. "There's ten thousand pounds' worth of gold on this boat, you chaps."

"Hurrah!"

Crack!

It was a revolver shot from the rocky islet. The captain had found a dry cartridge, and got it into his revolver. But the distance was too great. The bullet did not go anywhere near the boat, and the juniors laughed in glee.

"We've done 'em brown—done 'em fairly in the eye," said Bob Cherry.

"This is where Groyriars wins. Hurrah!"

And the juniors' loud cheer rang over the sunny waters.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"I SAY, you fellows—"
"Shut up, Bunter!"
"But I say—"
"Shut up!" roared Bulstrode. "Go on, Brown!"

Tom Brown was standing in the midst of a group of juniors in the Close at Greyfriars, reading aloud from that morning's "Daily Mail."

Fellows had gathered round from all sides to hear him. For there was news in the paper—news of the juniors who had been absent from Greyfriars for many days, and of whose fate the Greyfriars fellows had long been uncertain.

True, the school knew before this that Harry Wharton & Co. were safe. For some days there had been no news of them, and the anxiety of the school had been great. Gosling had reported their going down to bathe that early morning, and Bunter was able to tell where they had gone. As they did not return search had been made for them.

But no trace had been discovered. The Head's fear was at first that they had been drowned while bathing; but it was too extraordinary that five good swimmers should be drowned. And then, no clothes had been discovered on the beach, and during the subsequent days no bodies had been washed up. It was known that a tramp steamer had lain off the shore during that night—and her men who had deserted in Pegg told how the skipper, bound upon a lawless voyage, had been left short-handed. And so the authorities suspected at last that the five juniors had been "shanghaied" by the tramp steamer's captain. But for days there was no news.

Then came news suddenly. It was a telegram from Harry Wharton to the Head that told first that the missing juniors were safe. After that came more particulars, and now the juniors had an account of it in the daily papers. The "Daily Mail" had the first full account, and Tom Brown, who had cycled over to Courtfield that morning early to get a copy, was reading it out to the crowd in the Close.

Juniors and seniors gathered round him to hear. It was a thrilling story for the Greyfriars fellows. The "Daily Mail" account told of the raiding of the wrecked liner, of the sinking of the *Pomerania*. It also told of the rescue and arrest of Cutts and his companions, and finally of the picking up of a ship's longboat by a steamer in the Channel—a longboat containing the five juniors of Greyfriars, and the stolen ingots from the wreck of the *Red Earl*.

A gunboat had visited the rock upon which Captain Hobbs and the mate and engineer had been left, and all three had been arrested, and now were in custody.

Harry Wharton & Co. were on their way back to Greyfriars. They were coming home covered with glory.

They had been the means of defeating the schemes of the sea-thieves, and of restoring the stolen ingots to their owners. The Greyfriars fellows heard the news with deep interest.

"Oh, ripping!" said Bulstrode. "I wish I'd been there."
"I say, you fellows!"
"Shut up, Bunter."

"But I say we ought to give Wharton a reception when he gets back," said Bunter, blinking indignantly at Bulstrode through his big spectacles. "I was going to suggest standing a ripping feed."

"Good egg!" said Mark Linley, laughing. "I suppose you're going to stand it, Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, really, Linley! As a matter of fact, that's exactly what I was thinking of," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity. "I'm expecting a postal-order to-day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"But if it doesn't arrive in time, you fellows might find the mere cash, and 'I'll make the arrangements for the feed with pleasure," said the Owl of the Remove. "I really think we ought to give them a reception."

"So we will," grinned Tom Brown. "We ought to bring 'em home with a brass band, same as if they'd won the Cup."

"Hear, hear!"
"Anyway, we'll give 'em a rousing reception," said the New Zealand junior. "They're arriving this morning."

"Hurrah!"
"I—I wonder if they'll bring any of the gold with them," said Bunter.

"Ass! It's not theirs."
"Well, they ought to have some of it—a reward, at any rate."

"I shouldn't wonder if the owners come down handsome," said Bulstrode. "They ought to. Wharton and the other chaps have saved them ten thousand quid."

"They're giddy heroes, and no mistake," said Penfold. "When are they coming?"

"Some time this morning."
"The Head will let us off from lessons when they come," said Russell. "and we'll meet 'em and march 'em in."

"Good!" said Hoskins, of the Shell. "I'll strike up the 'Conquering Hero' on the piano as soon as they arrive."

"THE MAGNET LIBRARY," No. 231.

"Hallo, there goes the bell for classes!" growled Bulstrode. "I don't think there ought to be classes this morning."

Lessons were done in a very desultory way in the Remove-room at Greyfriars that morning. But Mr. Quelch was very easy with his Form. As a matter of fact, the Remove-master was a little excited himself, and very proud of the way the boys of his Form had distinguished themselves at sea.

Morning lessons were nearly over when there was a sound of arrival in the Close. Mr. Quelch turned a smiling face to his eager class.

"Dismiss!" he said.
And the Remove poured eagerly out of the Form-room. The heroes had arrived!

Harry Wharton & Co., looking very sunburnt and very fit, came cheerfully into the old Close of Greyfriars, and there was a rush of the Removites to meet them.

"Here they come!"
"Here they are!"
"Hurrah!"

The heroes of the hour were surrounded, and the fellows shook hands with them, and clapped them and clapped them on the back, and yelled.

"Draw it mild, you news!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I've only got one set of bones, and they've got to last me a long time yet. Ow! Hands off!"

"Hurrah!"
"The hurrahsing is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Hurrah, my worthy chum! You have returnfully arrived covered with the honourable and esteemed glory."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Wen Lung. "Me hungry!"
"This way to the tuckshop!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Gentlemen, it's my treat! Roll up and order what you like!"

"Hurrah!"
The Remove rolled up.

Harry Wharton & Co. had arrived with a good appetite, and they were marshalled into the school shoe, and the best things that the kitchen could provide were spread out lavishly before them.

Sitting in the tuckshop, they discussed the good things and their adventures at the same time.

Billy Bunter, with a jam tart in one hand, and a cream puff in the other, and a little of each in his capacious mouth, sidled up to Wharton.

"I—I say, Wharton, how much have you got?" he whispered mysteriously.

"Er?"
"What did you bring home?"
"I don't quite understand. How much what?"

"Cash, you ass!"
"None at all. We had to borrow the money for our railway fares here."

Bunter blinked at him.
"You don't mean to say you came away empty-handed after—after having ten thousand quid in the boat?" he gasped.

Wharton burst into a roar.
"Ha, ha, ha! I say, you chaps, Bunter wants to know whether we stole any of the ingots in the boat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I—I didn't mean exactly that, you know," stammered Bunter; "but—but—"

"Oh, put that tart into your silly mouth, and shut up!" said Bob Cherry. "You are a silly ass, Bunter!"

The juniors crowded out of the tuckshop at last. They took the Head of Greyfriars, and met them as they entered the School House, and he shook hands warmly with Harry Wharton & Co.

"We're sorry to have taken French leave like that, sir," said Wharton, "but we couldn't help it."

The Head smiled.
"Quite so, Wharton. I was very anxious about you at first, and I am very, very glad that you have returned home safe and sound. You have acted well and nobly, and you are a credit to your Form and to the school!"

And the juniors shouted a hearty assent to the Head's remarks.

"Hear, hear!"
And that afternoon the vacant places in the Remove Form-room were filled, and the old roof of Greyfriars sheltered once more the Stolen Schoolboys.

THE END.
(Next Tuesday's splendid new, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards, is entitled "THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY!" Order a copy of "The Magnet" Library well in advance—Price 1d.)

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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

"BY FOUL MEANS OR FAIR, I'LL WIN."

Nathan Gore, millionaire and jewel-collector, clenched his hands furiously and raved like a madman on the deck of the liner Coronation. He had started specially from America in order to be present at the sale-room in London where the costly diamond, "The World's Wonder," was to be put up for auction, and now it seemed that this thick fog which had suddenly fallen over the Channel was the great foe to be taken place at midday, and already the captain had told Nathan Gore that it would be impossible to reach Southampton before that time. "A telegram for Mr. Gore," a voice rang out through the darkness. The American was told the message, and, as he listened, his face came over deathly pale, and he gave vent to a terrible oath. The message was: "Ferrers Lord purchased 'The World's Wonder' privately. No bidders. Price unknown." "I'll win yet," shrieked the man. "By foul means or fair, I'll win!"

"THE WORLD'S WONDER."

In the magnificent drawing-room of Ferrers Lord's house in Park Lane was assembled a varied collection of individuals. First of all there was the celebrated millionaire himself, and close to him sat Ching-Lung, a Chinaman, busily engaged in making paper butterflies. Hal Huxford, the great engineer, was sipping tea, and Rupert Thurston yawned in a chair. "How much did you pay for that great diamond?" presently asked the latter. The millionaire smiled. "Money and fair words, Rupert," he replied. "By the way, you have not seen it yet?" The priceless gem passed from hand to hand. A thousand fires burned in its crystal heart: a thousand colours, ever changing, leaped from every facet. "I guess it would have been more money and less fair words if old Gore had turned up," remarked Ching-Lung sagely.

"I'LL TAKE THE CHALLENGE!"

The millionaire's house was wrapped in silence. A faint light shone from the drawing-room. Ching-Lung pushed open the door, then a cry broke from him. A man lay face downwards on the floor. There was a ghastly crimson stain on his collar. The man was Ferrers Lord. "Ching—the diamond!" came a hoarse voice. Ching opened the drawer which Lord indicated, but there was no diamond there. But a message had been left behind: "To Ferrers Lord.—Knowing that you would not sell 'The World's Wonder,' I have taken it. Do your worst. I defy you. The stone is mine.—Nathan Gore." The millionaire rose to his feet. "I take the challenge, Ching," he said. "I'll hunt him down and win back my diamond." He travels down to the cave where the Lord of the Deep is hidden, only to find that this wonderful submarine vessel has been destroyed by Nathan Gore. He begins the chase after the diamond thief in his steam yacht, The Night Queen, and while he is standing at the wheel, Barry & Co. are in the fore-castle drinking what they think is champagne. They soon find their mistake out, however, and while they are groaning over many interlarded pains caused by the turpentine, they hear Gan-Waga laughing heartily at their misfortune.

(Now go on with the story.)

Gan Waga is Tried by Ordeal—In Quarantine.

It is not nice to drink turpentine—in fact, it is nasty. To be laughed at for doing so—especially by a person with a laugh like Gan-Waga possessed—added a hundredfold to the nastiness. Naturally they felt certain that Gan had prepared the delightful concoction for them, and they made up their minds to be very grateful.

They began to show their gratitude at once in actions which speak louder than words, according to the proverb. If they had spoken louder than some of the words used by Prout and O'Donoghue, they would have spoken very loud indeed. The victims gripped the side of the hammock, and jerked it down with a force that shot Gan out.

Their loving arms caught him and lowered him tenderly to the floor.

"Hoo, hoo, hoo!" screamed the Eskimo.
"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Barry.
But it was not an open or pleasant laugh.
"Hoo, hoo, hoo!" tittered Prout.
"Ho, ho, ho!" sniggered Maddock.
"Hi, hi, hi!" added Joe.

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The only honest laugh was Gan's. The others were not exactly laughs. It is hard to produce even a healthy chuckle after drinking turpentine. Turpentine is good for mixing with paint or beeswax, but as a beverage it is a failure.

They glared at Gan wildly and wickedly.
"Gentlemen," said Barry, "Oi feel sick."
"So do I!" groaned Joe, who looked it.
"Wan thing alone kapes me from loosing down on the floor and expiring immedjit." Wan thing, fellow-sufferers, I repeat, kapes me from doin' on the spot, and prevents the awful pizen administered by a fiend in human form from carryin' out its foul work. "That thing, gint, is re-revenge!"
"R-r-revenge!" hissed the three victims.
"R-r-revenge!" grinned Gan.
"Solence!" roared the Irishman. "Are yoz agin' torture?"

"No, no!"
"But the spalpeen'll yell."
"Gag him!"
Barry shook his head.
"Whisht! Oi am tinner-hearted!" he said. "Oi think a swift ditch good enough. Will it do?"

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"Hunk!" gasped Gan, his eyes beginning to roll.
 "A swift death will do!" hissed the judges.
 "Hangin', thin. Thomas, down wid that hammock!"
 Prout took the hammock from its hooks.
 "Saze him, me boys!"
 Gan began to kick and struggle.
 "Hallo!" said the voice of Ching-Lung. "Is this a dog-fight?"

Barry explained the situation.
 "Oi don't deny, sor," he added, "that Oi horrored the woin whin yer honour wasn't lookin'; but the Eskimo's crime is just as bad, for all that."

"Attempted murder by poison!" said Ching-Lung. "Terrible, terrible! Oh, Gan, Gan, how I have been deceived in you! An assassin—a black, villainous assassin!"

Ching-Lung, in an agony of grief, sobbed into his handkerchief.

"I not 'snessin! I not touch dems! Oh, I not, Chingy!"

"Very good," said the prince, wiping his eyes. "You deny it. Your guilt or innocence shall be proved by a trial by ordeal, such as took place in the old days. Hang the prisoner on that hook."

"Which way up, sor?"

"In the most convenient position," said Ching-Lung.

Gan squealed like a sucking-pig and kicked like a colt; but numbers prevailed. They spiked a hammock-hook through the seat of his trousers, and Gan hung there helpless.

"What's a horrid, sir!" asked Maddock.

"Wait, Ben."

Ching-Lung slid away, and returned with a bucketful of tar. Gan squealed in a higher key when Ching placed the bucket exactly below him.

"The trial by ordeal," said the prince, "is very simple. A person is accused of a crime. You can't say exactly whether he's guilty or innocent. Very well. Get, for instance, a bucket of scalding water. Let him stick his arm in, if it scalds him, he's guilty. If it doesn't, he's innocent."

"A mighty fine kind of trial that!" grinned Barry.

"Beautiful," said Prout.

"Well," laughed Ching-Lung, "if Gan's trousers hold for five minutes, he's innocent. If they don't—well, there you are!"

"Ow, ow, ow!" moaned Gan. "Let me down, Chingy!"

"Never, cut-throat!" said Ching-Lung.

"But the bucket, sor?" whispered Barry. "He'll not let his head—"

"Shut up! Leave that to me!"

Gan stopped wriggling as he stared down with glassy eyes at that bucket of tar. The cloth of his trousers began to give out threatening sounds.

"Two minutes!" said Ching-Lung, who held the watch.

"O-oh, o-oh, ew!" moaned Gan.

Oh, that horrid, awful, ghastly tar! The four sailors grinned and grinned, until it seemed that nothing on earth would pull their faces into shape again.

"Four minutes!"

"O-oh, o-oh, o-o-o-o-oh!"

"Time!" roared Ching-Lung.

There was a fearful yell and a crash, followed by howls of laughter. The bucket of tar collapsed as the horrified Gan fell on it. It was only made of painted cardboard.

"Guilty!" said Ching-Lung. "That proves it!"

On deck the wireless telegraph was sending inquiries far and wide. At last one of his Majesty's ironclads, thirty miles away, gave an answer:

"Private yacht, painted white, making for Cuxhaven. Captain Sir Wilfred Hornby sends compliments. Delighted to be of any service to Mr. Ferrers Lord."

The millionaire smiled grimly, and the Night Queen was headed for Cuxhaven. At dawn the port was in sight. The Night Queen displayed the burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron—a flag that, in time of peace, gives the vessel the right to enter almost any port in the world.

"A signal to heaven, to sir!" said the keen-eyed Prout.

"What signal?"

"Officer of health, sir."

Ferrers Lord bit his lips. A launch came puffing out. The Night Queen was brought up, and a man in uniform scrambled aboard.

"It is my duty to inspect your crew," he said, in German. "A mere formality. We have had several cases of smallpox lately."

"Carry out your orders, Herr Doctor," answered Ferrers Lord.

Far up the tideway he could see the white yacht. The launch was made fast, and the assistant followed the doctor. The delay maddened Ferrers Lord. Above all, one of his men was ill. He paced up and down the deck, and at last the German official returned and bowed low.

"I deeply regret, sir," he said, "that I shall be compelled to put you in quarantine. One of the crew shows distinct symptoms of smallpox."

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NEXT

TUESDAY: "THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY."

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And then the man reeled back, as Ferrers Lord's revolver flashed in his face.

"That for your quarantine, Herr Doctor!" said the millionaire grimly. "That for the man who bribed you! Withdraw your threat if you wish to leave this vessel. I am not a man to talk, but a man to act. As sure as you live, I'll take you into the very heart of the Pacific and maroon you on some desert island! Right about face and march below! I will tell you something there!"

"Nathan Gore is Six Hours Ahead of Us!"

None but Ferrers Lord and the doctor knew how that interview ended. Honour, Thurston, and Ching-Lung could guess the truth. It was a startling truth. Nathan Gore had bribed the official to keep back his dreaded pursuer. But the Night Queen sailed on, and soon after midday the millionaire, Rupert, Ching-Lung, Gan-Waga, Prout, O'Rourke, Joe, and Maddock, were in the bustling town of Hamburg.

They had no luggage. They drove to the railway station. Ferrers Lord vanished for a moment. He came back smiling.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "Nathan Gore is six hours ahead of us, on the way to Warsaw."

"What on earth will he do in Warsaw?"

"Who knows? He may be going across two continents to Vladivostok. This train is ours. We shall drop the driver at Zieberg, and you must drive then, Hal. Entrain, lads!"

There was another surprise in store for them. Though they had brought no luggage from the yacht, there was ample luggage in the train. Ferrers Lord had performed another of his miracles.

"Oh, pip!" said Ching-Lung. "This is a mad kind of game! I don't know which side I am up to!"

"Just how I feel," said Rupert.

"Have a tangle!" It do you goods!" remarked Gan-Waga, generously extending a bunch of tallow-dips.

"Pouf! Take them away! I hate the smell of tallow!"

"You got me no taste," said Gan. "Tally lobly and butterful. Try one, Tommy Sprouts."

"If you put one near me," growled the steersman, "I'll—"

"I'll—"

"Custer-oil!" grinned Gan-Waga. "Wot yo' put on yo' hair!"

As Prout was quite bald, the sally raised a laugh.

"Why yo' got no hair, Tommy?" asked Gan.

"Because, when I was a boy," explained Prout, "I was so good that people kept patting me on the 'ead so often that they wore all the 'air clean away. Now yer've got at the truth!"

"Whist, whist!" grinned Barry. "Oi heard a different tale to that wun. I'll tell it yez another day."

"Tell it now."

"Not Oi," said Barry. "O'll go and prowls instead."

Barry's prowling brought several hampers of provisions to light. Gan-Waga helped him in the search. There were several cold roast chickens, so beautifully plump and brown that Barry and Gan shared one between them on the spot, and picked the bones with gusto.

German trains never seem in a hurry to get to anywhere in particular, and this one, though a special, was no exception to the rule. Maddock suggested getting out and pushing it.

"How long does it take to get to Wire Saw?" inquired Prout.

"You mean Warsaw," said Rupert.

"Any saw you like, sir. I only want to know how many years."

"About a century by a train like this," sighed Ching-Lung. "We shall get out of this hearse old, and grey, and toothless. Why doesn't he hurry? Is he frightened of slowin' the old pot he calls an engine into scrap-iron?"

Presently the pace began to quicken. They rushed through queer little German villages and over level-crossings, where white-aproned women instead of men opened and shut the gates.

Gan-Waga went to sleep, and Prout, Maddock, Joe, and Barry began playing cards. Barry grinned when he picked up the ace, king, queen, knave, and ten of clubs.

"Nap!" he chuckled. "Git yer money riddy!"

"Wellington!" said Joe.

"And Blucher!" added Prout triumphantly. "That'll be eighteenpence from each of yer, for you can't beat that lot—not in a lifetime!"

Prout, rosy with delight, laid down his unbeatable hand—ace, king, queen, knave, and ten of clubs. Barry and Joe began to scratch their heads and stare. Joe put down an exactly similar hand, and so did Barry.

"Murder!" gasped Barry. "Did yez ever see the like?"

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Three aces of clubs, three kings, itsctery, in wan and the same pack!"

They turned and glared at Ching-Lung, but Ching was sleeping like a babe. Barry hurled the pack out of the window at a fat man who was eating sausage beside the line. They had a second pack.

"Cut for deal," said Prout.

"Surely," said Barry.

The deal fell to Maddock. Barry picked up his cards and began to scowl blackly and hideously. He had four twos and a three.

"Pass," he said.

"Pass!"

"Pass!"

"What cards?" growled Barry. "Four twos and a dirty three!"

"That's what I had," said Joe.

"Me as well!" put in Maddock.

Barry snatched up the pack. It consisted entirely of twos and threes. Barry howled it at a donkey, and Ching-Lung snored on. Under the circumstances card-playing was out of the question.

"O'm goin' to ate!" growled Barry. "Let's all ate!"

"Hear, hear!"

Two hampers were brought.

"Hallo," said Barry. "Where's the fowls?"

"There was bread, butter, celery, cheese, and claret in each hamper, but no fowls. An examination of the other hampers revealed the amazing fact that the roast chuck-chucks had flown. And Ching-Lung slept on.

"Drat him!" said Barry. "Where's he put 'em? He can't have allowed 'em!"

"Try under the seats."

Joe, Prout, Benjamin, and Barry got down on their hands and knees in search of the missing poultry. There were four wild snooks and four wild hons. Each man thought that someone had hid him with a club. They rolled out, clutching themselves and dancing.

And still his Highness slumbered.

"All roight," said Barry—"all roight! Bedad, I'll not forgit!"

Only a cold shrike, that came to the gatehouse, said Ching-Lung did not stir.

Only a cold shrike, that came to the gatehouse, said Ching-Lung did not stir. Only a cold shrike, that came to the gatehouse, said Ching-Lung did not stir.

"Why don't you speak the truth?" said a voice from the end of the carriage.

Barry howled and staggered back as a black liquid shot in a thin stream from the centre of the sleeper's blouse. Every drop of it hit Barry in the face, and in an instant he was as black as coal.

The others screamed as Ching-Lung stretched himself, yawned, and sat up.

"Are we at Warsaw?" he asked drowsily. "Great Scotland, have you been sweeping chimneys?"

"He's been washin' in ink, sir," grinned Joe. "He says it's good for the complexion! Here— Oh, chuck it!"

Joe grinned no more. Barry had whipped the carpenter's best silk handkerchief from Joe's neck and was wiping his face on it.

"Thank yez, Joseph," said Barry, handing back the ruina.

"Thank yez kindly. I'm sorry to dirty's ut, but yez can git the stains out easy enough yow burnin' ut!"

In Hot Pursuit—Facing Death.

Ching-Lung patched up the peace by presents of cigars. They began to find the journey dreary and monotonous as the little tin stations whirled by. They were all alike, the scenery never seemed to vary; they appeared to see exactly the same men, the same women, the same cows, horses, pigs, and donkeys.

"O' belave we're runnin' round in a ring, bedad! I do!" growled Barry. "Av we haven't passed that big-nosed mulpoon wid the ginger whiskers twenty toimes, O'll never ate porrik again!"

"Let's get out and push it," said Maddock.

"They must have hitched a steam-roller on instead of a locomotive," sighed Prout. "Kindly look out of the window, Joe, and make sure that we ain't slidin' back'ards."

Joe opened the door and stepped on to the footboard.

"Where are you off to, Joe?" asked Ching.

"I'm going to show the driver this," said Joe, taking a knife with a blade a foot long, and as he him as a personal favour to put a bit more coal under his old kettle."

"Look out, there's a train coming!"

The carpenter sprang back. The signals were against both drivers, and they came to a halt. The new-comer was in THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 231.

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goods train, and Ching-Lung clambered into one of the trucks to investigate. The truck was loaded with red pickling cabbages. They did not interest him, so he took a stroll along the roof of his own train.

They had not noticed his departure. Uttering a piercing whistle, the train began to move. Ching-Lung threw himself flat down and waited. Then he cautiously lifted the lamp out of its hole and peered down.

Prout's shiny bald head was immediately below him. A quick search in one of those mysterious pockets of his brought to light a huge and ferocious-looking spider, with glaring eyes and hairy legs. It was a splendid imitation of the poisonous tarantula.

Ching-Lung tried the clever toy as he held it up suspended by a piece of fishing-gut. It crawled up and crawled down again as if alive, uttering hisses as it moved. He fastened the gut to the lamp, and replaced the lamp.

A sudden tapping at the window of the compartment where Honour, Rupert, and Ferrers Lord sat caused Thurston to turn. A small foot in a felt slipper was dangling to and fro before the glass. A second foot followed it, then two legs, the lower part of a human body, and finally the complete Ching-Lung.

Rupert lowered the window, and his Highness vaulted in.

"Sorry to come this way," he grinned, "but I've lost my dog-ticket, and I want to dodge the collector. I'll hide under the seat when he comes along."

"You'll break your little yellow neck one of these days," said the millionaire.

"Yes, on the gallows," added Rupert. "Ching, hang it, don't do that!"

Rupert was clutching his ear, for Ching's pigtail had curled round like a whip and given him a playful cut.

"Sorry," said Ching-Lung. "There's air! Don't mention gallows to me, sonny, for it makes my throat tickle. Old Hal looks as gloomy as a tombstone on a dark night, and the joy on Lord's face would do credit to a funeral. Hallo, what sounds are those upon the breeze?"

They heard the murmur of a voice.

"Barry reciting, I'll bet," said Rupert.

"What-ho! That's a treat I can't miss."

Ching pushed back the sliding door a little way. Barry was standing at the end of the carriage, reciting a thrilling poem to a spellbound audience. Gan's eyes rolled as he listened.

"So he sowled his sowl to the devil black,

Poor goold he sowled his sowl;

And iv'ry night whin the clock struck twilve

There came to him a ghoul—"

"What him?" asked Gan-Waga breathlessly.

"Shut up!" cried angry voices.

"Oh, fit him alone, boys," said Barry. "It's a sort of demon that feeds on dead bodies."

"U-ugh!" shivered Gan.

"Go on, Barry, go on."

And iv'ry night whin the clock struck twilve

There came to him a ghoul.

Sometimes ut was a shankie wid wings,

Sometimes a beetle wid horns and a wings,

And sometimes a spider wid orful eies

That droppod from the ceilin' wid hisses and

croies—"

Barry stopped there. He had happened to look up. His own eyes bulged from their sockets, and his great mouth opened. No sound came from it. Barry was dumb and speechless.

For there was the ghastly spider itself—a spider as big as his fist, crawling up and down a glistening thread.

The others followed his fixed and glassy stare. Up and down crawled the loathsome reptile, and in the great stillness—for the train was again motionless—they could hear the monster hissing and squeaking.

They got under the seats as fast as they could scuttle. Most sailors are superstitious, and at such a moment the superstition was enough to frighten anyone. They felt sure that the ghoul who was in the habit of visiting the gentleman who had sold his soul to Old Nick had come to pay them a call.

"Don't lave me, Gan—don't lave me!" groaned Barry, with both arms clasped tightly round Gan's neck. Moans, groans, gurgles, and the noise of kicks rose from under the seats.

"I'll be good!" sobbed Prout. "Oh, I'll be good! I've lived a careless life, but I'll be good now!"

"Akitchek! Akitchek!" wailed Gan.

A sea-spirit, believed by the Kalmucks to appear in the form of a huge walrus and other shapes and prey on infants.

The spider crawled up and down, quite heedless of the sensation it was causing.

"Is—is it gone?" murmured Joe.

"Of daren't luk."

"Neither darsen't I," said Maddock.

Just then Ching-Lung opened the door softly and beckoned to Hal and Thurston. They saw rows of kicking feet. Ching pointed to the spider.

"They all think they've got 'em again," he whispered.

"It's one of the smartest clockwork toys I ever struck." A roar of laughter rang through the compartment as Ching-Lung sprang up and secured the spider.

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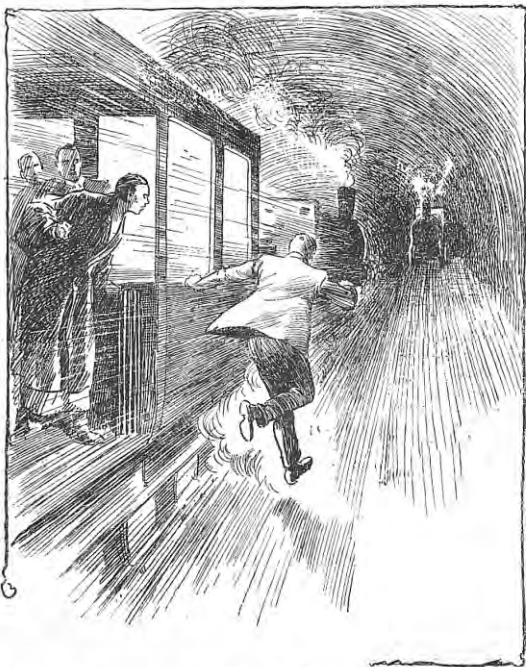
ONE
PENNY.

"O'll help yer," said Joe.

"And we'll all be happy to attend the funeral, drat him!" growled Maddock.

Prout spat upon the palm of his hand, and, with a fendish calmness, began to sharpen his knife on the strap of the window.

"That's for his pigtail," he said, feeling the edge with his thumb.



Hal Honour's voice rang clear above the roar of the trains. "Jump! For your lives, jump! A runaway on the same line!" Doors were flung open, and men threw themselves on the line.

"Hallo," he said, "are you fellows after a minute, or has somebody dropped a sixpence?"

The feet and legs vanished, and white, dust-smear'd faces began to appear. Even Hal Honour, who seldom gave way to mirth, was exploding with laughter.

"Found the sixpence?" asked Ching-Lung.

There was no answer. Ching placed the spider on the floor. "Come along, whiskers!" he grinned. "Come with your daddy and have a nice bluebottle."

The spider crawled after him, and he shut the door. They looked at each other wildly.

"Bloys," said Barry. "O'll murder him yet!"

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Gan commenced on the other strap. All round it looked healthy for his Highness.

"No hurry!" said Barry. "Swear at!"

"None!" hissed Joe and Maddock.

"Not a ha'porth," said Prout. "We'll spider 'im this trip, drat him—by hokoy, we will!"

The train stopped. They had to travel over another line. Hal and Ching-Lung took their places on the last-plat.

"You'll make her rip now, old chap, I guess."

"Perhaps, Ching."

The brakeman took his place. It was raining slightly, and there was a hint of coming fog.

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY." By FRANK RICHARDS.

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"Great Scott!" said Ching-Lung amazed. "What's Lord doing that for?"

The millionaire in person was testing the wheels with a hammer. It seemed a curious action.

"Pip!" muttered Ching-Lung. "Who is Nathan Gore? Is he Old Nick in person?"

"Right away, Hal," cried the millionaire, flinging down the hammer, "and don't spare your coal. We are only four beetles behind him now, for he burst his gauge-glass at Kenheimer."

"Good biz!" said Ching-Lung. "We'll soon nail him." Ferrers Lord frowned as he glanced at the rainy sky.

"A fog may upset our chances, and a fog is coming," he answered.

The train steamed out. Hal Honour stood on the swaying plates, peering ahead. A movement of his hand was enough to direct the stoker. He kept the furnace cranked to the very top. Faster and faster still raced the train, to the consternation of the sleepy level-crossing keepers.

"How much?" shouted Ching-Lung, his hands over his mouth.

"Fifty-eight."

"Don't blow us up!"

Hal Honour waved his hand, and the furnace was flung open. Still more coal was flung into its greedy maw. The engine rocked and danced.

"Now!"

"Sixty-one!" said Hal Honour, with a chuckle.

"And a clear line?"

The engineer nodded. He longed to get seventy miles an hour out of the engine, but it was beyond her powers. He gave up the attempt, and slowed down to fifty. For all that he kept his fireman busy. The driving rain blurred the locomotive windows.

They began to climb, and then rushed down a long grade at a speed that made the people on the platform rub their eyes. Ching-Lung had lashed a Union Jack to the tender.

"Mad English," grunted the Germans—"mad, always—"

Kenheimer they paused to pick up water. An icy water to be obtained was cold. It meant a weak head of steam for some time. Ferrers Lord swung out.

"Pump what you want out of that locomotive in the siding," he said. "Heer Stationmaster, bring that engine alongside."

He spoke in German.

The stationmaster replied.

"Impossible!" he cried—"impossible. It is the train to Happing, and full of passengers!"

"Let the passengers wait or walk. Read that!"

The man took the paper and changed his tone at once. He read:

"Herr Ferrers Lord, travelling with engine 1170n, has complete control of the line until midnight of the twenty-second, and his orders are to be obeyed implicitly."

There were four signatures attached.

The engine of the slow train began to blow off steam furiously. She was uncoupled and brought beside No. 1170n, and drained of water. Then 1170n moved out. Prout, Maddock, Barry, Joe, and Gan hurling sarcastic remarks at the infuriated passengers, who raved and kicked their heels on the platform.

They were left to rave and kick until another engine could be procured.

But what men had the millionaire paid for twelve hours' control of the system? What was spurring him on in pursuit of Nathan Gore? Not the mere loss of the great diamond. It could not be that alone. Diamonds, whatever their value, were only baubles to this man of vast wealth, the man who owned ranches, coalfields, railways, oil-springs, goldmines, fleets, and pearl-beds. With every breath he drew more riches were being added to his store.

There was some mystery behind it all, but he kept the secret locked safely in his own heart.

The mist did not close down until after sunset. Even then it was not dense enough to hide the signal-lights.

Hal and Ching-Lung feasted plainly on tea, bread, and cold meat. Both men were black and oily.

They coaled up at a tiny place with a tremendous name, and the men stretched their legs. Barry had an argument with the innkeeper about the price of some lager beer. The man said something about "zwei marks," or two shillings, and Barry threatened to mark him for life if he used such language to as "Oirish gintlemen." He settled the argument by bonneting the landlord with one of his own pails, and leaving half-a-crown on the table.

A ghostly moon shone through the fog as they raced away. The men were almost tired out. The cushions began to feel

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as if they were stuffed with bricks, old tins, nails, and broken glass. Gan was very bad-tempered. He was hot and wanted the windows open, while the others wanted them shut. There was plenty of excuse for him, for the carriage was stuffy, and he loathed heat. At last he smashed the window, and then they rose in their wrath. Four revolvers were pointed at his head in a twinkling.

"Git!" roared Barry.

"Scout!" hissed Joe.

"Fly!" yelled Prout.

"Hop it!" thundered Maddock.

Gan crawled into the millionaire's compartment, and, curling himself up like a dog on the rug at his master's feet, he went to sleep. Prout stuffed up the hole in the glass.

"Who was it invited railway-engines?" growled Barry dearly.

"A chap called George Stephenson," said Prout.

"Is he alive?"

Barry's voice was quite eager.

"I think not, Irish."

"Faith, that's bad!" said Barry. "Oi was hopin' to make him. Av Oi did, Oi'd—Oi'd—Oi'd—"

"What?"

"Oi'd lue at his soize first," said Barry, after a moment's reflection; "and av he was littler nor me, Oi'd knock the paddin' out of him. Troth, that Oi wud!"

The train rushed on. Suddenly the brakeman uttered a guttural cry.

"Tunnel ahead!" said Honour.

He slackened speed, and Ching-Lung clambered up and wiped the glass. They thundered into the tunnel.

"Look out! Look out! For Heaven's sake, Hal, look out!"

Ching's voice was almost a scream. A light seemed suspended on the wall of blackness before them. It grew in size.

Like a madman Honour shot off steam and sprang to the brakes. Sparks flew from the wheels, and the train quivered from end to end. The shock hurled the men from their seats and rudely awakened the sleepers. And then, clear and steady, but loud as thunder, the engine's tones rang through the tunnel:

"Jump! Jump! For your lives, jump! Run for it, lads—run for it! A runaway on the same line! Jump! Jump!"

It was a moment of wild terror. Ching-Lung, Honour, and the fireman sprang from the engine. Doors were open, and the men were flinging themselves out. The flashing light rushed through the darkness, accompanied by the deafening roar of flying wheels and thrashing cylinder-rods.

"Run!" cried the millionaire.

His voice was perfectly calm. They fled wildly over the sleepers.

Crash!

They were out under the pale, watery moon. A mighty roar leapt through the tunnel, and a great red glare dispelled the darkness for an instant as the two iron monsters met, and the glowing fire of the furnaces was flung far and wide.

Crash! Crash!

The boilers had exploded. Scalding steam was wafted into their faces. Still another shuddering roar, and then all was blotted out.

The tunnel had collapsed.

"Count your men, Ching," said the millionaire's quiet voice.

"All safe, Lord!"

The millionaire laughed softly.

"Even the greatest of men can make fools of themselves," he said. "Why does a man who means murder turn an engine adrift with its head-light burning?"

"Do you mean that Nathan Gore did that?" gasped Thurston, horrified.

"I am certain of it. He may not have been so foolish, after all. An engine without lights must have been noticed."

"I thought I saw a man aboard her."

"A dummy, Ching—nothing else."

Barry blew his nose.

"Tom," he murmured.

"Barry," said Prout shakily.

"Oh, his name is Nathan Gore, And, he'd, he'll as no more, When I knock at his front door, And bang him on the fire, And make him mighty sore, For that is what O've sworn, And, sure as me name's O'Rooney, O'll do it, or call me a looney."

Prout wiped his eyes.

"Stow it, stow it," he muttered. "I'd sooner have the railway innocent than that, Barry. By Lookey, I would!"

"Forward!" cried Ferrers Lord.

Before them lay a wide stream.

The mist rolled apart, and the bright moon poured down her yellow light; not a house was to be seen. The tunnel went under the river. In the distance signal-lights blipped feebly.

"This is cheerful!" said Thurston. "What shall we do?"

"Light a fire first—and a big one," answered Ferrers Lord—"to warn any train that the tunnel has collapsed. Spread out there, and find wood."

The men scattered. They were in a country of pines. They tore down great resinous branches, and heaped them into a pile. Ching-Lung stumbled across a little plank but, it was pulled down, and the planks added to the heap. A match sent the flames shooting up.

"Now to cross the river," said Ferrers Lord. "Search the banks."

Again Ching-Lung experienced his usual good luck.

"Coo-ee, coo-ee, coo-ee!" came his musical cry.

They ran in the direction of the sound. He had found a little steam-launch moored in a creek, with a boat swinging at its stern.

"Any coal?" asked Ferrers Lord.

"A little. And, by Jove, a keg of petroleum!"

"We'll reconsider it, and leave a five to pay our passage," said the millionaire. "Gather bracken and soak it with oil. We must tow two of you in the boat."

His orders were quickly executed. The owners of the launch could not have long left, for the boiler still felt warm. The paraffin-soaked bracken blazed fiercely, and coal was flung in. Twenty minutes passed, and Honour watched the flame.

"Enough!" he said. "She'll travel!"

Barry and Gan were crowded out, and took their places in the little boat. It was a ramshackle craft. Gan sat in the bow, Barry astern. The little screw beat the water, and the launch breasted the stream. By inches Ching-Lung drew in the towing-rope. He had a pin between his finger and thumb. He tickled a tender part of Gan's anatomy with that pin.

Gan gave one howl of pain, and sprang to his feet. Ching-Lung had pulled away. The boat could not stand such treatment. It lurched, and shot Gan into the bosom of the great Barry. The prow rose into the air a yard, and Gan and Barry, locked in each other's arms, lay kicking and squalling in the stern. At last they were hoisted up.

Gan-Waga thought less of a ducking than he thought of a pinprick. The water was never too cold for him. There was momentary consternation on board the launch, and then one laughed as the head of Mr. O'Rourke showed black above the water in the moonlight. And when Barry had coughed himself into a condition that rendered speech possible, he said:

"Don't you worry about me, for, bedad, Oi did it a purpose! It's been a habit wid me, iver sin' Oi was old enough to shoot grandias in the nick wid a porgun, to take a dip at night. Slow down and Oi'll jine yez. Av any gentleman has a fat Eskimo, will he kindly kape him for me. Oi'm lakin' for wun, wid the intention of twistin' his carcass into shirtee jigs big enough to make tails for a small kellee."

Proust and Maddock dragged the dripping Irishman into the launch. Barry shook himself, sprinkling everybody so generously that they threatened to throw him in again.

"Where's Gan?" said Rupert.

"Gan!" roared several voices.

"Good 'nough, I all butterfles," lisped the Eskimo. "I had go fetch my pipes out o' mades. Beasly ole cel him want smoke him. I bring him back for ole Barry. Take nice butterfles eels, Barry."

Gan had made a find. It was a wicker cat-trap which he had discovered at the bottom of the stream, and it was full of the slimy fish. Gan bit the string of the lid, and as Ching-Lung assisted him into the launch the Eskimo tilted the trap and poured a wriggling mass of slimy eels over Barry's head.

"Pink murther!" howled Barry, who was as fond of eels as a cat is of cayenne pepper. "Dang them off me afore Oi dole and convulsions! Ow, take them away! Serrra and suicide, wun of them's bodin' me ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" laughed Joe.

"Ho, ho, ho, ho!" screamed Proust. "He's afraid of a pere armless eel!"

"Do yez loike thin, thin, yez 'airless hachnule?" yelled the Irishman.

"I could kiss 'em, Barry!"

"Thin do, yez giffin' haythin!" shrieked the son of Erin.

Barry took his courage in his hands, and also as many of the eels as he could scoop up. Knocking off Proust's hat, he banged the squirming heap down on the steersman's polished cranium, and rammed the hat over them. Then he drove the hat home with his fist, converting the great Thomas into a kind of mace-line Gargon with locks of hissing snakes. And quick as thought Gan drove the eel-

EVERY
TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

basket over hat and eels too, and the laughter that followed was more than deafening.

By the time Tom had freed himself of his unpleasant headgear, and rid himself of a couple of eels that had strolled down his back, the launch was close to the bank.

Ferrers Lord had taken no notice of the horseplay. He liked to see it, for he knew that men who could play best could work and fight best. The defeat of Proust put Barry into his most perfect temper, and he shook hands with Gan, and forgave him for the ducking. Proust was rather surly as he scraped the slime off his face.

"One minute by the clock, Mr. O'Rourke," he said, as Barry was preparing to spring out.

"See to yourself, sir!" said Barry.

Proust scowled terribly.

"We meet again!"

"We do, do jokers!"

"Name your wrappings!" blazed Tom.

"Eels!" said Barry. "And to the di!—Conger eels, silver eels, mud eels, electric eels—"

"And bust 'em!" granted Proust, shooting forward his foot and giving Barry a push.

There was a squelching sound and a mean. Barry found himself sitting in six inches of black and clinging mud.

With a deep laugh Proust cleared the jump, gained the hard ground, and hurried after the others.

"Methinks," muttered the steersman gleefully, "I had him there! And, by hokey, I left him there into the bargain!"

Barry floundered back into the water. Swimming was the simplest method of removing the mud. He landed on a strip of eelgrass gravel. His eels were beginning to chatter. Back could not bear the cold and damp as Gan could. He started to run in order to make his blood circulate again.

The fire at the end of the caved-in tunnel burned brightly behind them, but, so far, it had attracted no attention.

They hurried over the sleepers. Lights were few and far between. They had covered several miles before a signal-box came into view.

"You speak German, Hal?"

"Yes."

"Then give the alarm. We'll go on to the little town and get O'Rourke some clothes."

They were descending a steep hill into the sleeping town when the engineer's long strides brought him up with them.

"Well!"

"It's all right, Lord. They'll soon have a gang at work. But they may want to keep us for the inquiry."

"When did Gore's special pass?"

"Hardly an hour ahead of us, with one engine. We know the started with two."

The millionaire was silent. Gore must have known how close on him his pursuers were. He had unaccounted and reversed one of his engines to check them at any cost. He had failed, but there was an uneasy thought in every bar. The man had attempted to quarantine them. He had tried to bar them to eternity in the black depths of the tunnel.

What would he do next?

The inn was closed. Thurston hammered at the door. A nightcap head appeared at length from an upper window, and a hoarse voice asked in German what they wanted.

"Wine and horses, Herr Innkeeper," said Ferrers Lord.

"There has been an accident on the line."

"Wine you may have, but I have no horses."

"Can we get horses here?"

"No, no. The Government-buyer has bought all but the farm horses for the cavalry. It is just the time he comes, pardon, and I will be with you."

After a short delay a lamp gleamed through the window, and the door was opened. The fat innkeeper bowed the illustrious strangers into the sanded kitchen. The men were glad enough of the salted bread, sausages, and lager-beer. Hal, Ching-Lung, and Rupert shared a bottle of Moselle, but Ferrers Lord touched nothing. Barry sat and shivered.

"Herr Innkeeper," said the millionaire, "I need two suits of clothes for my men there."

The polite landlady was almost fearful. He would have given his very life to have supplied his Excellency, but, alas! his own clothes were too small.

"Then we can obtain none?"

"Ach, yes, yes! Where is my poor head?" said the innkeeper, brightening up. "There is in my barn a man who is a strolling player. He has many costumes. If your high Excellency—"

"Go and see what you can do!" said Ferrers Lord, cutting short the host's chatter.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial by Sidney Drew in next Tuesday's "Magnet" Library. Order a copy now. Price 1d.)

My Readers' Page.



GRAND,
NEW,
WEEKLY
FEATURE.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY.

"THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY."

by Frank Richards, is the novel and amusing complete story of the chums of Greyfriars which will appear in next Tuesday's *Magnet* Library. My readers will, I know, thoroughly appreciate the amazing feats with which the new boy astounds the whole school—the sensation when he knocks the heads of two high and mighty seniors together, and when he holds the weighty Bunter over his head as easily as if the fat junior were a six-months-old infant! Nobby Nobbs proves himself a distinct acquisition to the Remove Form all round, and when the truth about him eventually comes out, under exciting circumstances, all Greyfriars parts with

"THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY"

with the greatest regret.

"MAGNET LEAGUES."

All over the country readers have taken up the idea of forming "Magnet Leagues" among themselves with wonderful energy and enthusiasm, and the promoters of a number of such leagues have forwarded to me copies of their rules and other information, which I have been able to approve of heartily in every case. As an example, I will give three rules of THE MAGNET League existing in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire, sent me by a loyal reader, Harold S., of 101, Old Street. These rules read as follows:

- (1) That we will help on the progress of THE MAGNET as much as possible, as loyal Magnetites should.
- (2) That we will not do anything that will in any way adversely affect the paper, but will always help it.
- (3) That we will give away as many MAGNETS as we can, on condition that the recipients pass them on, with instructions that they are to be passed on again, and so on.

Three very good rules for "Magnet Leagues"! A London "Magnet League" is that presided over by Master Harold Stredwick—it is a coincidence that the Christian name and initials of the correspondents are the same—of 3, Upwood Road, Lee, S.E., who invites any reader interested to write to him with a view to becoming a member. Master Stredwick adds that the League will be equally interested in THE MAGNET's companion paper, "The Gem" Library. It is evident that thousands of MAGNET readers all over the country are making a splendid and combined effort to help on their favourite paper and its companion journal, and I wish to express my heartfelt thanks here to you all, my loyal friends, for the way you are thus standing by me and supporting me.

FISHING (continued).

Barbel, Dace, and Roach.

Another good fish for sport is

THE BARBEL.

although it is coarse, and not much use for the table. When caught large, it struggles violently, and it is best to fish for it from a boat or punt. This fish draws the bait down quickly, so the tip is to strike as soon as the movement of the float is perceived, if the fish is hooked. Then lower the end of the rod and let it run. If the fish is played with carefully until it is quite spent there should be no difficulty in landing it.

Much better sport can be obtained if the spot is well ground-baited previously. The bait should consist of boiled grooves, bran, and clay, and it may be thrown into the water now and again during the fishing.

The best baits to use for barbel are red-worms and greenies.

THE DACE

is somewhat like the chub (see last week's issue), but usually affords much more sport. For a bait, it will sometimes take a caddis, or an ordinary worm.

It is mostly found in rather rapid streams, which are also shallow, and may be fished for with flies.

If the ground is well baited beforehand with clay, bread, and bran-paste, with a few gentles placed in each bait, fairly fast sport should be the result.

THE ROACH

is our most common fresh-water fish, and frequently falls a prey to the young angler. It is not worth fishing for until July, when it will be found in moderately shallow water. Good baits for the roach are caddies, small red worms, gentles, or almost any small grub or natural fly. These are suitable for below and surface fishing. Some other good baits are bloodworms, the larvae of the trout, and the tail end of a lob-worm. The latter is much more effective when the water is slightly discoloured. Wheat or malt, when boiled in milk, sometimes make an attractive bait, but will not always answer.

In September, when the roach retires to the deeper waters, and is in the pink of condition, it provides much more sport.

First of all, discover the depth of the water, and take the finest gut-line you have, and fix it to the rod. It is best to use a quill float, with just sufficient shot to bring the upper cap of the float on a level with the water. Throw the line in at a spot where the ground is firm, and clear from weeds.

A good ground bait for roach is made from bread and bran-paste, rolled into small balls, which are thrown at the top of the "swim," or, if the water is still, round the float. In this latter case the paste should be made looser by using more bran, and less of it should be thrown in. In fishing for roach, a small hook must be used. During the later months paste-bait is killing for roach, and if used, it should be placed carefully on a short-shanked hook, so as to cover it completely.

If fishing in a strong stream strike at the slightest motion of the float; but if in still water, it is safest to wait until the float is in a different position altogether. Then strike gently, because of the slenderness of the line, and play the hooked fish very carefully.

If fishing from a boat or punt, a rod of from 10ft. to 12ft. is of sufficient length, but if from the bank an 18ft. rod should be used.

BACK NUMBERS OFFERED AND WANTED.

C. Copping, Victoria Cottage, Green Lane, Chislehurst, Kent, wishes to obtain the first twelve numbers of "The Magnet," and any halfpenny issues of "The Gem," free of charge.

C. H. Bennett, 147, Ladbroke Grove, Notting Hill, London, W., wishes to obtain No. 153 of "The Boys' Friend" Threepenny Library ("The Silent Three").

J. Burnett, 63, Main Street, Barnsford, Falkirk, Scotland, has 70 "Gems" and 20 "Magnets" to sell, or exchange for anything of use to amateur actors.

A. Sparkes, 31, Redcar Street, Highgate, N., has 69 "Gems" and 14 "Magnets" for sale at 2s.

R. Thomson, 56, Preston Street, Glasgow, has Nos. 209 to 213 of "The Gem" and "The Magnet," which he is willing to give to any reader needing them.

T. Shires, Woodley Moor, Chapelthorpe, near Wakefield, has Nos. 1 to 216 of "The Magnet," and Nos. 150 to 216 of "The Gem" Libraries to sell at half-price.

F. Jones, 2, Virginia Villas, Westhampton, Ellesmere, Salop, wishes to obtain back numbers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries free of charge.

G. Stanley, Cole, 211, Bristol Street, Birmingham, has from No. 53 of "The Magnet" to dispose of cheap.

R. H. Pipon, Kai Ora, 53, Ridley Road, Garden City, Leitchworth, wishes to obtain Nos. 121 and 60 of "The Boys' Friend" Threepenny Library.

W. W. Neale, 2, Laudowne Road, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, wishes to obtain back numbers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries.

THE EDITOR.

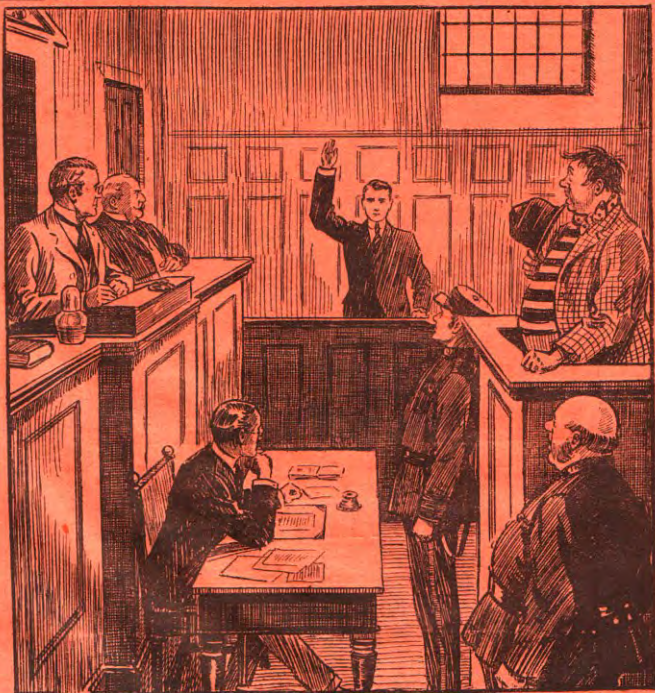
The picture reproduced below appears on the cover of this week's issue of our popular companion paper, "The Gem" Library, which contains a splendid, new, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, entitled "AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR," by Martin Clifford, and a long instalment of our grand new serial story of Gordon Gay & Co., "The School Under Canvas."

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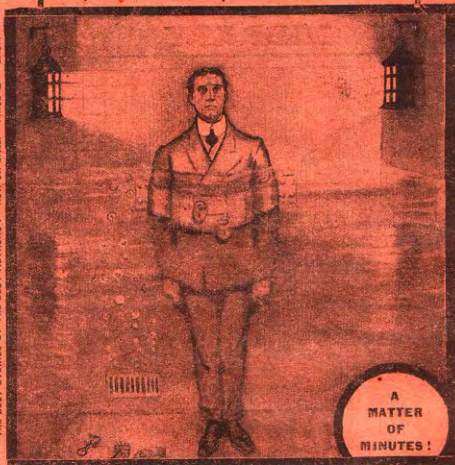
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