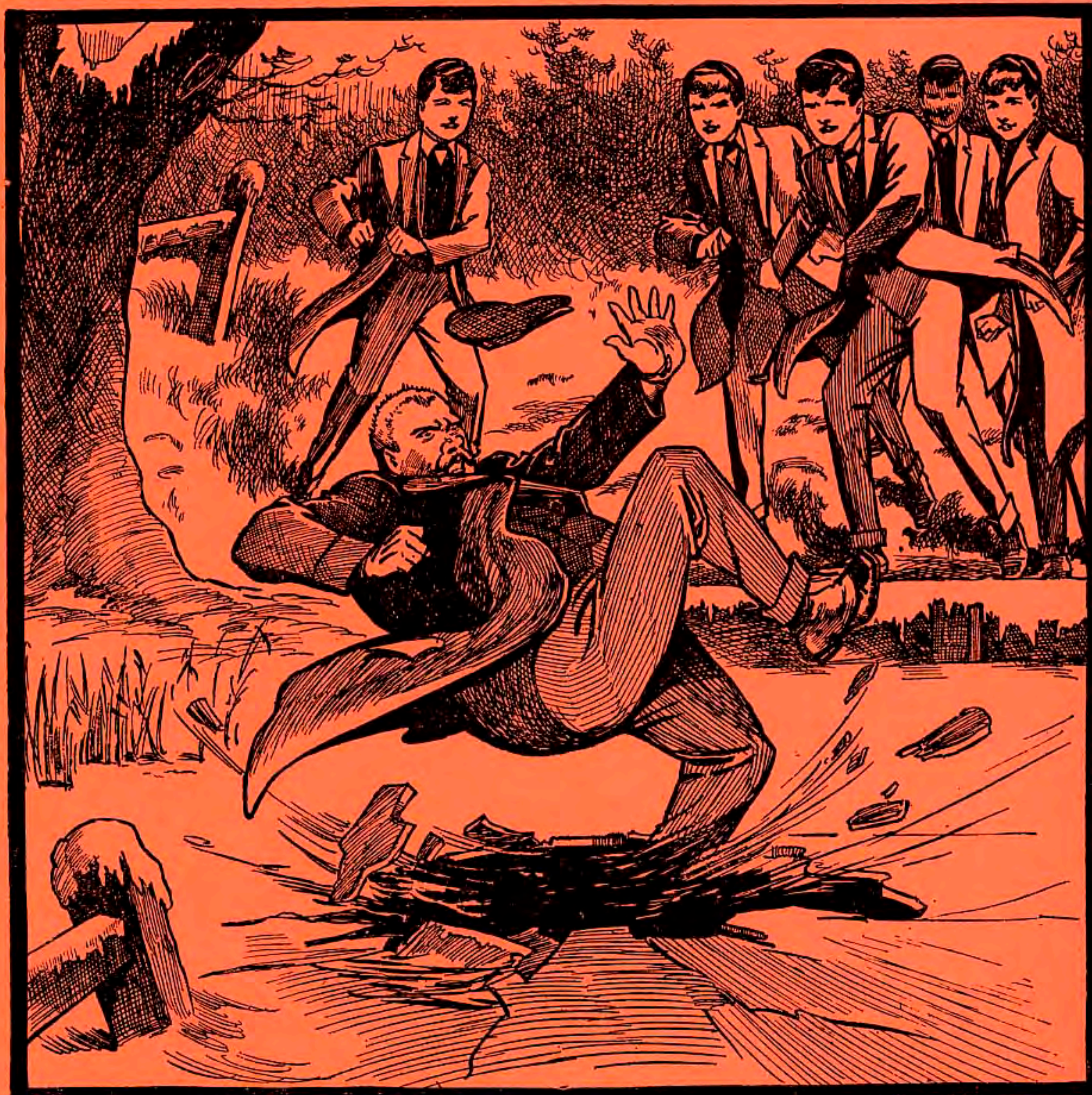


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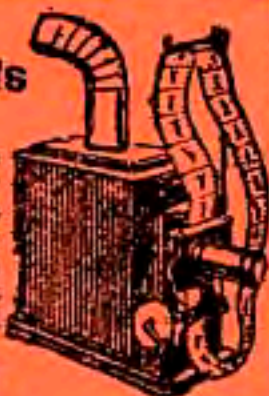
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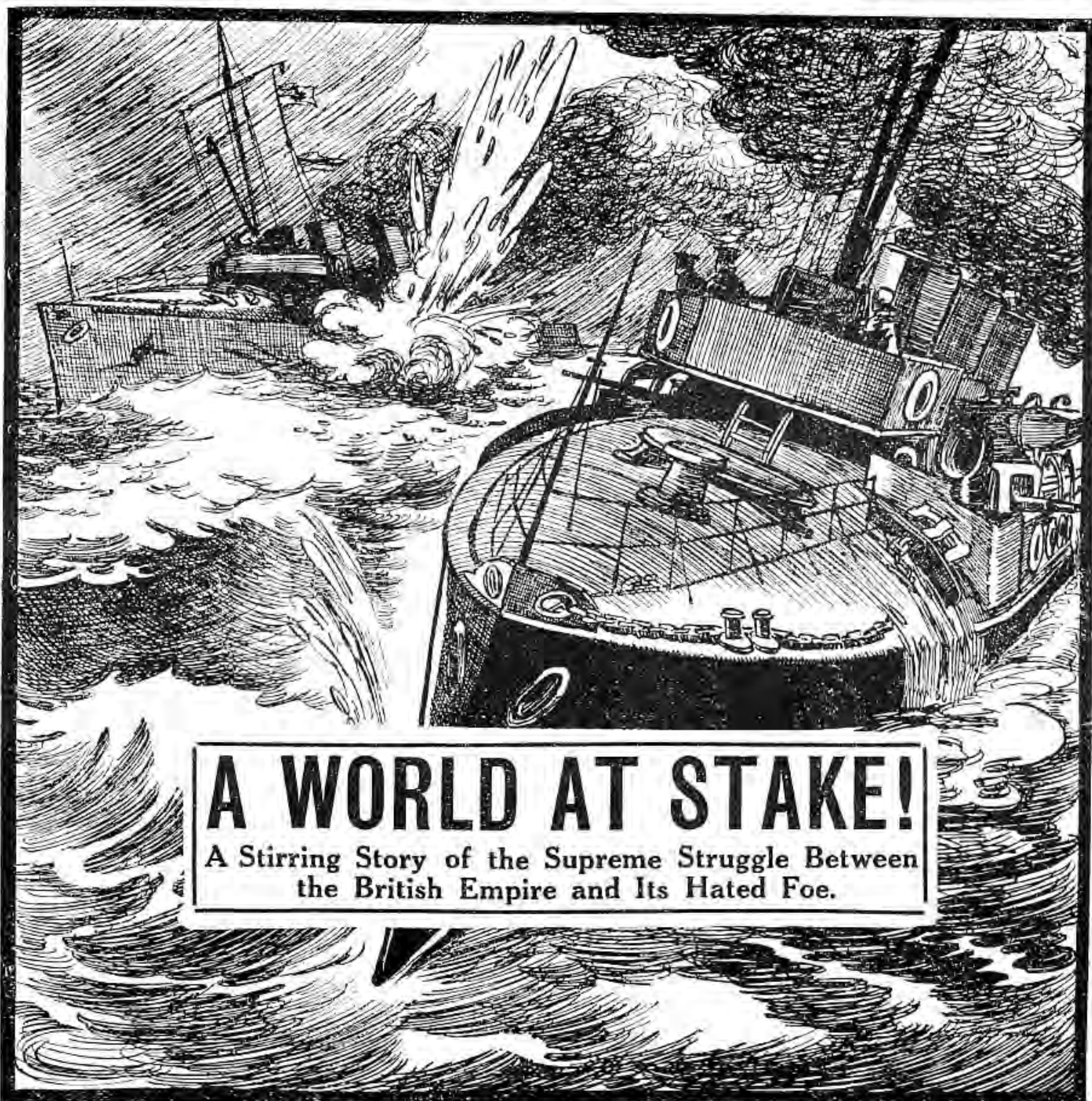
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(Now go on with the story.)

In a Tight Place!

"Hullo! What's this? Who are you? Why did you attack my sentries?" demanded the officer in French.

The anxiety Thorpe Thornhill felt did not show itself in his voice as he replied laughingly:

"I am afraid I have made a bit of an idiot of myself, sir. I am a tourist, who entered the Kremlin by another way, and was coming out when your sentries stopped me. I could not understand what they said, and, fearing to be detained, acted with more vigour than discretion. However, I dare say a couple of roubles each will act as a salve to their bruises."

At the mention of money Thorpe saw the ill-paid Russian's eyes glitter avariciously, and he knew, or thought he knew, that it would now be only a question of bribery to escape.

For a moment the captain scanned him intently; then, turning on his heel, entered an adjoining guard-room, beckoning the sergeant and a couple of stalwart grey-coated infantrymen to follow with their prisoner.

Seating himself at a table before which Thorpe Thornhill was placed, the captain gazed upon him with a swift, piercing glance.

"We can speak openly before these ignorant hounds; they

only know their own tongue," began the captain. "I do not know who you are, I care less; but you have been found in the precincts of a Russian citadel, under suspicious circumstances, also you are English. That means imprisonment if detected, how long I know not, or—fifty pounds, money down!"

"Fifty pounds! Nonsense! It is blackmail!" Thornhill cried indignantly.

"Have it as you will, or—"

The officer stopped speaking, sprang to his feet, his evil face growing fallow with fear, as he raised his hand to his forehead in salute, and, turning to the door, Thorpe saw a man in the uniform of a Russian general enter the room.

"Who have you here, Captain Petrovsk?" asked the general.

"A foreigner, sir, who was stopped for passing under the Saviour's Gate without removing his hat."

"A foreigner? Ah, probably he did not know our customs. You have, of course, sir, a permit to visit the Kremlin?" he demanded, turning to Thorpe.

"Very sorry, but I did not know one was necessary," replied the Englishman nonchalantly.

The general shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly.

"At least you have a passport?" he asked.

For a moment Thorpe hesitated.

"I am sorry to say that I neglected to provide myself with one," he returned confusedly.

A look of keen intelligence flashed into the general's eyes, the courtesy with which he had hitherto spoken dropped from him as though it were a garment.

"You have no permit, you are in Russia without a passport! You are an English spy!"

"Spy, general! I beg to state—" began Thorpe, when the general interrupted him by turning to the sergeant, saying curtly:

"Search him!"

Immediately Thorpe Thornhill's fur overcoat was torn open, revealing the khaki uniform he still wore beneath.

"Great thunder!" roared the general. "The assurance of these Englishmen! It is the first time that I have ever heard of a spy entering a foe's citadel in uniform!"

It was a forlorn hope, but Thorpe Thornhill jumped at it.

"Amongst civilised nations, sir, a man is not considered a spy, even though caught in a foeman's lines—and I have yet to learn that Russia and England are at war—wearing his uniform."

"Perhaps not in actual warfare," admitted the general; "but here—well, a man's right hand scarcely knows what happens to his left. Continue your search," he added to the sergeant.

Thorpe felt fairly confident whilst his captors went through his clothes. Not so much for fear of discovery, but lest he should lose it, he had left his pocket-book, with what, under the circumstances, would have been incriminating papers, on board the Avenger, and he watched with confidence the miscellaneous pile of articles—pipes, cigar-case, tobacco-pouch, watch, and other articles piled on the table before him, until suddenly he saw with alarm a dirty crumpled piece of paper laid amongst the other things.

It was Lord Roberts's order to bombard Kiel, which he had thrust carelessly into his pocket, and had forgotten.

On the Road to Siberia.

As an unknown Englishman, suspected of being a spy, Thorpe knew that imprisonment at the very least would await him; but as Thorpe Thornhill, the world-famed inventor of airships, he doubted not but death or Siberia would be his portion.

Scarcely daring to breathe, he watched the Russian turn over the contents of his pockets. The piece of paper, caught by some wandering breeze, fluttered from the table to the floor, and Thorpe's spirits rose accordingly; but the very next moment they fell to zero as the sergeant, picking it up, handed it to his superior.

Thorpe watched the general anxiously. Every moment seemed an hour as he cast his eyes carelessly over the writing within.

Hitherto, he had only spoken in French. Did he know English? If so, Thornhill's fate was sealed; if not, he might think a piece of paper so carelessly guarded could contain no information of importance. But as he saw the look of surprise, then gratification, which sprang into the Russian's eyes, he knew the worst.

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"Mr. Thornhill, I see. I am delighted to meet you, sir, but wish it had been under any other circumstances."

"Why, general," asked Thorpe, trying to brazen it out, "are not England and Russia allied to check the insatiable ambition of the German Emperor?"

"That is as maybe," was the cautious answer. "Unfortunately, your indiscretion compels me to detain you until I have communicated with my superiors."

Remonstrance was useless, and a few minutes later Thorpe found himself imprisoned in a small cell beneath the solid wall of the old fortress.

Slowly the remaining hours of daylight passed, and night had set in ere he heard footsteps approaching, and the ring of brass-bound butts on the stone flags without his cell told that an escort had been sent to carry him from his prison.

But whither? Before his judges—an already condemned prisoner—or to death, without even the farce of a trial?

It was the captain who had arrested him who opened the door.

"Come out, Britisher, and follow me!" he said in coarse, rough tones.

And, guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets, Thorpe Thornhill stumbled along a dark, narrow passage, until, passing through a stout oak door, he found himself on the brink of a swiftly rushing river, beyond which was a cluster of quaint, Asiatic houses, and above all the clear, starlit sky of an autumn night.

Close to the door, moored to a rotting wooden landing-stage, was a six-oared galley, into which Thorpe and his guard entered, and the next moment the boat, rowed by strong arms, was flying swiftly over the water, whither Thorpe could not tell.

An hour's rowing brought them to where the River Yansa flows into the Moskva; and, forcing their way against the current, they landed near a large building, adjoining which was a railway-station.

Here the prisoner was ordered to alight, and, still closely guarded, escorted to a railway carriage, where all the guard left him except the captain and two men, to the wrist of one of whom he was handcuffed, despite his protestations against so great an indignity.

Believing that he was being taken to Petrograd, Thorpe felt but little uneasiness while the train carried him through the night.

In the midst of a heavy snow-storm, the train stopped at a large town. He was told to alight, and marched down the platform to where a train consisting of cattle-trucks and a carriage full of soldiers was waiting. Then a door in one side of a truck was slid back; and, before he knew what was happening, he found himself precipitated headlong into the midst of a crowd of miserable, unkempt, evil-smelling men.

Barely had he regained his feet ere the train moved on.

One of his comrades in misery spoke to him in Russian. He replied in French.

"Aristocrat!" retorted the man, striking him full in the mouth.

But the next moment he wished he had not been quite so ready with his fists, for it seemed as though he had struck a small battering-ram, as Thorpe Thornhill, glad of any exercise to warm his chilled limbs, gave him there and then as sound a thrashing as ever man enjoyed.

"Well done, brother. We owe you a debt of gratitude for the beating you have given Black Michael. I, Michael Drubovski, say so!" said a man at his elbow.

Thorpe looked round, and, by the thin streaks of daylight which came through the laths of the truck, saw a tall, intellectual-looking man standing by his side.

"Well, I am glad I have done a little good. Besides, I was getting most awfully cold," laughed Thorpe. "But who are these men? Where are we being taken to?"

"These will be our comrades for many weary months, ay, years!" said the other, speaking in a sad, heartbroken tone. "Murderers, thieves, robbers, suspects, and men who, like myself, have dared to have thoughts of their own. We have incurred the displeasure of the Tsar, or broken his laws, and are being carried to Siberia."

"Siberia!" repeated Thorpe, aghast.

It was as though an icy dagger had been plunged into his very heart.

"But I cannot be doomed to that awful living death!" he cried. "I was only caught in the precincts of the Kremlin without a passport. Besides, I am a British subject!"

"Pardon me, but it is as well you should know your fate at once, and learn—as we have all to learn—to submit where ye cannot rebel. Your past is dead. You are no longer a Briton—ay, for the matter of that, you are no longer a man. You are merely a number!" returned the other.

"Hanged if I will be, though! They shall learn what it is to lay hands on a Briton!" cried Thorpe angrily.

"Be advised, my friend, and do nothing rash. Others have done so before, and—well, their bones are rotting by the side of the telegraph-poles which mark the frozen road to Siberia."

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Thorpe was silent. He knew the other spoke the truth. Besides, he realised that his confinement could not be for long. Sooner or later Dick would find out where he was; then rescue must come.

But would he find him? He had been moved so stealthily during the night that it was very probable Dick was still looking for him in the vicinity of Moscow.

The fate of the Siberian convict has been greatly improved by the building of the great railway to the China Seas. Still, it is a fearful journey, penned in cattle-trucks, through which the keen, biting wind whistled as through a sieve. Frozen, jarred, half suffocated, they were carried over the rough roadway at a speed that seldom exceeded fifteen miles an hour.

Bad food, bad air, the companionship of the scum of Russia—for Drubovski, to whom he had first spoken, was the only educated man present—and on the top of all the knowledge that he was being carried each day further and further from his brother, all combined to make the weary days which followed the most miserable in Thorpe Thornhill's life.

At Tomsk the convicts were detained; and, whilst some continued their journey eastward, others—amongst whom was Thorpe Thornhill—were sent by road to the northern mines.

A Fight in the Snow.

Numbed in body by the bitter cold, in heart by dull, hopeless despair, Thorpe Thornhill and his nineteen brother-convicts plodded their weary way along the snow-covered road which was leading them to the fearful quicksilver mines, from which none ever emerged alive.

A Britisher takes the blows of Fortune as he does her greatest favours, with equanimity, and Thorpe Thornhill trudged bravely and uncomplainingly along, until, on the third day after leaving Tomsk, when a Cossack, maddened by copious draughts of vodka, procured at a wayside post-house, urged his horse amongst the helpless prisoners, and, making his whip hiss in the keen, frosty air, brought it down with vicious force over Thorpe Thornhill's shoulders.

It was the last blow he ever struck. Manacled though he was, Thorpe sprang at his assailant, grasped him by the throat, and tore him from his horse. Then, gathering the heavy iron chain which held his wrists together in both hands, he brought it down with crushing force upon his assailant's forehead, knocking him senseless. Then, snatching the fallen man's sword from its scabbard, he rushed at the astonished Cossack guard, crying:

"Up, men! Up, fellow-prisoners! Die like men if you would not live as dogs!"

His appeal was immediately translated into Russian by the exiled merchant.

But Thorpe scarce heard the repetition. A crash, and his curved sword struck down the officer in command. Then his blade flashed again in the winter's sun, and a third Cossack fell to the ground.

Enraged at the fearful havoc the Britisher had already made in their ranks, the remainder wheeled round their horses, and, with loud, fierce, vengeful yells, rushed upon him.

But even as they did so the other prisoners dashed to his help, and the next moment he found himself surrounded by his late comrades in chains, rendered fearless by the memory of the cruel treatment to which they had been subjected whilst on the march.

"Entangle the lances in your sheepskin coats!" cried Thorpe, his order being rapidly translated by the Russian.

The men, their slow wits sharpened by danger, grasped their leader's meaning; and as the sharp, glittering points of the Cossacks' lances flashed for a moment before their eyes, each man raised the wide skirt of his coat and waved it before his would-be slayer, with the result that, although three of the seven lances went home in a prisoner's body, the other four were entangled and broken in the thick skin garments worn by the convicts. Then, two—at times three—to one, the unarmed convicts sprang upon their guards, pulling them from off their steeds, and striking them again and again with the thick iron links of their chains.

"Seize them, men! Let not one escape, or you are doomed!" cried the merchant.

A howl—it could scarcely be called a shout—of acquiescence answered him; but in their mad rage the convicts thought more of killing their foes than taking them prisoners. And one Cossack, weaponless and wounded, managed to burst from out the press, and, cowering for his life, scurried like a frightened rabbit across the snow-laden plains.

"Hurrah! We are free—free—free!" cried the merchant, the long links which bound his wrists together clinking as he waved them in the air.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" returned the Russians, as, mad with joy, they clustered round Thorpe Thornhill.

"What is it they say?" asked Thorpe of the merchant, as the convicts clustered around him, all speaking at once.

"They hail you as leader, and ask for orders, saying that you first started this revolt, and you must lead us to safety!"

"It is a great responsibility you would put upon my shoulders, Mr. Drubovski," replied Thorpe, "but I accept it; and, with Heaven's help, not one of these men shall return to captivity! However, we must not linger here. Can anyone lead us to the nearest forest? At least, it will offer some protection from the biting cold winds?"

Drubovski turned to the convicts, and said something in his own tongue. Immediately a dark-browed Tartar stepped forward and pointed towards the west.

Thorpe nodded. Then, with a bunch of keys found in the dead officer's pocket, every prisoner was relieved of the iron links.

The majority of the horses ridden by the escort had galloped away, but four had been secured, and upon these Thorpe mounted unarmed men, and sent them off, north, south, east, and west, with orders to return at once on the approach of a foe, and also to watch the air, and also if a flying-machine was seen to summon it to their help.

Just as the short autumn day drew to a close they came to the edge of a large pine forest, looking inexpressibly dreary and forbidding, with its black branches half hidden by masses of snow.

By this time his men were too worn out to do more than partake of a hasty meal; then, flinging themselves down beneath the trees, were soon fast asleep.

Another day dawned, and when his men had eagerly devoured the last remnants of food in the camp, Thorpe sent forth his scouts once more.

But barely had they gone ere, to his alarm, he saw them scurrying back in all directions, whilst distant reports reached his ears, and he saw one of his men throw up his arms and fall heavily from his horse.

It needed not the frightened cry of the foremost scout of "The soldiers are on us! Fly, brothers—fly!" to tell Thorpe what new danger menaced them.

Springing to their feet, the convicts looked wildly around them, and it took all Thorpe Thornhill's recently acquired influence, backed by Drubovski's entreaties, to prevent them from abandoning the zareba without a struggle.

Again, when stretched out in skirmishing order, a squadron of Cossacks appeared, moving slowly over the snow towards them, the convicts showed signs of bolting.

But Thorpe had them better in hand by this time. And when, scarcely deeming it possible that the escaped prisoners would dare to show fight, the Cossacks came within range, they were met by a well-aimed volley from the zareba, which sent them scuttling away with more than one empty saddle in their ranks.

This initial success infused fresh courage into the convicts' hearts; and when the officers, having rallied their men, led them forward once more, they were met with a staggering fire, which sent many a soldier writhing on the blood-stained snow.

But this time the Russians would not be denied, and, despite their heavy losses, pressed nearer and nearer the zone of fir-trees.

Suddenly Thorpe looked up, and as he did so a loud, stirring "Hip, hip, hurrah!" burst from his lips, for growing each moment bigger and bigger as she cut her way through the air was the Avenger.

"Fight, men—fight for your lives! Help is at hand!" he yelled.

But there was no repetition of his order; and, looking round, he saw Drubovski stretched by a Russian bullet on the ground close beside him.

The next moment a Russian captain led his men over the branches; and, with a moan of terror, Thorpe's disheartened followers, half their number already stretched in death within the zareba, threw down their arms, and waited with Eastern fatalism the doom they knew would now be theirs.

But, although his comrades had deserted him, Thorpe Thornhill was determined not to be taken alive, and, as the Russian captain sprang at him, he aimed a cut at his head which would have ended that officer's career for ever, had he not guarded it off with the hilt of his own blade.

The next moment the two leaders were engaged in deadly conflict.

Fortunately, the Russian soldiers who had entered the zareba were too busy with the escaped convicts, or Thorpe's career would have ended then and there. As it was, a quick feint and a rapid lunge rid him of his enemy. Then, looking round, and seeing that all was indeed lost, he waved his sword above his head, and avoiding the rifle-armed infantrymen,

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sprang over the zareba to a point where a number of Cossacks were awaiting to cut off any who attempted to seek safety in flight.

Evidently believing the fight over, the leader of the Cossacks had sprung from his horse, which was being held by an orderly close at hand.

It seemed as though the Cossack captain had dismounted on purpose to oblige the young Britisher, and, unwilling that his kindly attentions should be wasted, Thorpe, instead of continuing a straight course to where a number of Cossacks with drawn swords were awaiting him, wheeled smartly to the right, thrust his sword beneath the orderly's upraised arm, and, springing on the officer's horse, struck the frightened animal across the flank with the flat of his blade, then charged straight at the weakest portion of the Cossack line.

So sudden and unexpected had been the Briton's movements that he was through the Cossack line ere more than a few hurried cuts could be levelled at him.

Then, leaving the pine forest on his right, he sped towards where he had last seen the Avenger.

Expecting each moment to be his last, Thorpe Thornhill urged on his steed to even greater efforts, until suddenly, immediately behind him, a tremendous report rang out, and, looking round, he saw the Russian soldiers fleeing in all directions from where, round a huge gap in the snow, a dozen or more of their comrades were stretched, whilst the welcome and familiar beating of fans told him that the Avenger was at hand.

A minute later, as he pulled up his fear-maddened steed, something fell over his shoulder, and, reaching up, he grasped a rope his brother had thrown to him.

Clinging to this with all his might, he was lifted from the saddle, and a minute later stood uninjured on the Avenger's deck.

"Any more of your lot behind there?" was Dick's greeting, as he grasped his brother by the hand.

Thorpe shook his head.

"The brutes were bayoneting them in cold blood as I left the zareba?" he said, with a shudder.

"Then it's no use going back?"

"No, no! Head straight for England. I have that to disclose to the Government which I fear will plunge England into war again!"

"Hallo! There's somebody calling us up on the Marconigraph!" cried Dick, as they flew a thousand feet above the low-lying, fruitful plains of the North of France, on the way home to England.

"Probably we have come within range of the French station at Chillon," returned Thorpe, yawning lazily as he approached the chart-house, in which the Marconigraph instruments were placed, and leaned idly over the keys.

"Thornhill, Avenger," he repeated, reading off the clicking of the instrument. "No, by Jove, it's intended for us!"

And, grasping the telegraph-handle, he clicked forth the code word "Forward," which would tell whoever was signalling him that he had received the warning message.

Immediately came back the answer:

"Attacking airship off Dover. Starboard wing injured. Fear Falcion will escape."

Immediately the indolence he had hitherto shown dropped from Thorpe Thornhill as a garment, and he sprang to the speaking-tube.

"Put on every pound pressure you can get!" he roared to the engine-room.

Then, hastening on deck, he gave the order for the ship to be cleared for action, for already, far away in the distance, could be seen a glittering streak, which he knew to be the English Channel. Even as he gazed upon it the deep, sullen roar of artillery reached his ears.

Like a stone from a catapult the Avenger dashed forward, as her engineers put on her full power, until those on deck had to turn their backs in the direction they were going, for they could not face the swift, constant rush through the air.

Louder and louder grew the sound of conflict, until a hurried glance before them showed two airships engaged in deadly conflict in mid-air.

"Three-quarter speed!" ordered Thorpe, for at the rate they were going aim, or even moving about on deck, was almost impossible.

Immediately the engines slackened, and through his glasses Thorpe scanned the fight in mid-air raging before him.

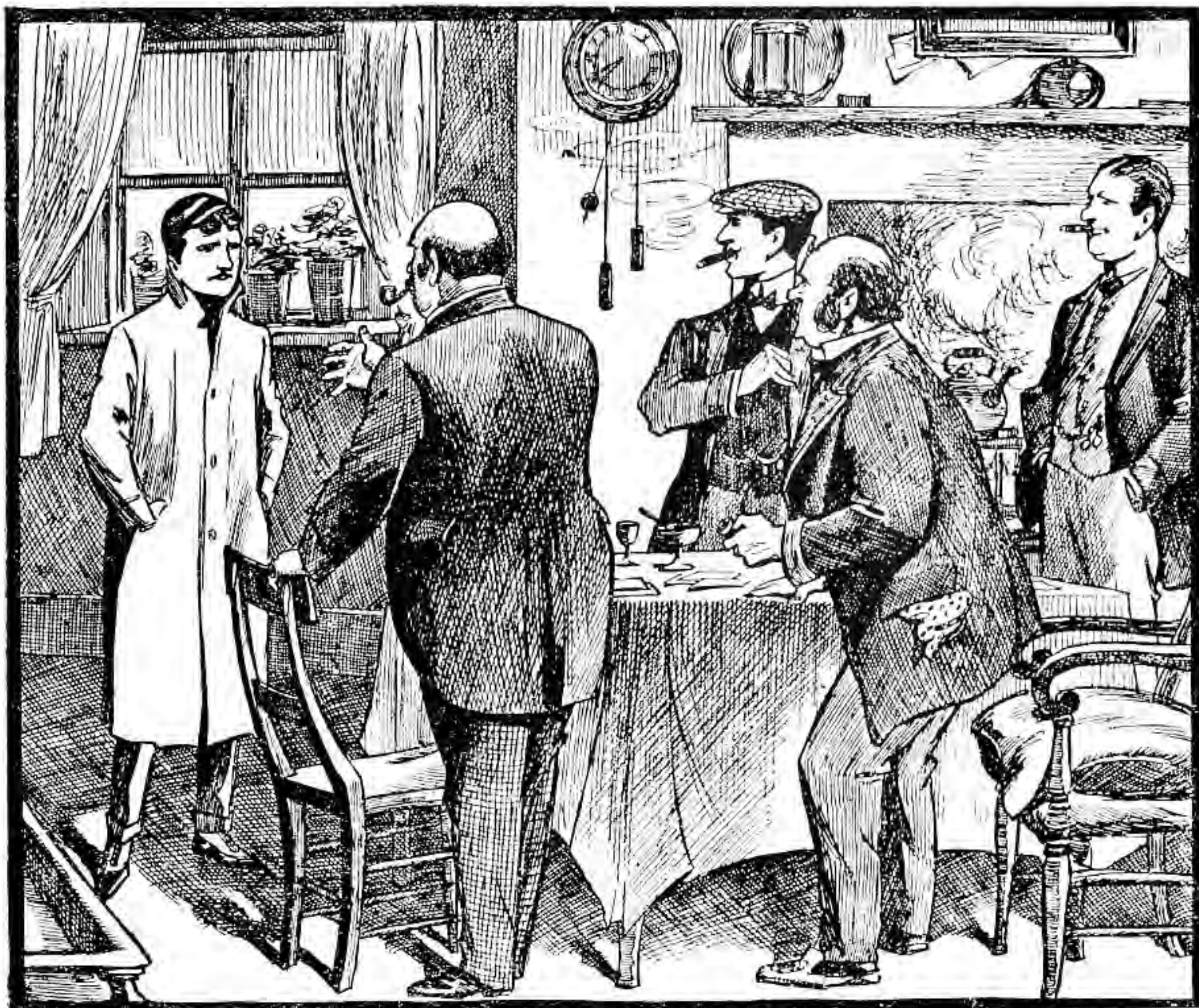
As he did so a cry of dismay burst from his lips, for a thousand sparks seemed to fly from the Night Hawk's hull, and the next moment she was seen to be settling slowly towards the sea.

(The conclusion of this fine yarn will appear next week.)

THE LAST PLUNGE!

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.



"'Ere's our old chum back again!" exclaimed Mr. Banks, giving Vernon-Smith a flabby hand to shake. "Where 'ave you been all this time—wot? Desertin' of your old pals!" And Mr. Banks wagged his bald head reproachfully. (See Chapter 2.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Johnny Bull's Celebration!

"COME on, Smithy!"

The door of Vernon-Smith's study, in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, was thrown open, and Harry Wharton & Co. looked in with cheerful smiles.

The Bounder of Greyfriars started to his feet, and hastily threw a half-smoked cigarette into the fire.

His face flushed red under the eyes of the juniors in the doorway.

The Bounder was supposed to have given up all his bad old ways; but he had evidently fallen from grace on this occasion, and his look showed how confused he was at having been caught in the act.

"What—what is it?" he stammered. "What do you want?"

Harry Wharton & Co. had seen the cigarette, and the THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 367.

Bounder's hasty action, but they affected an elaborate unconsciousness. That evening was a great and joyful occasion for the chums of the Remove, and they did not want to mar it with any disagreement with the Bounder.

"We want you!" explained Wharton.

"It's a celebration," added Bob Cherry. "Johnny Bull is the founder of the feast. Johnny Bull's uncle has played up like a Trojan. He's sent Johnny ten quids—ten whole quids—and Johnny is blowing it like a man and a brother. Come on!"

"The festive board groans in the stately halls!" said Frank Nugent. "In other words, there is a topping feed in the Rag, and everybody's coming!"

"So come on, Smithy," said Wharton.

The Bounder hesitated.

"The—the fact is—" he began.

"Oh, how wow!" said Bob Cherry. "You're coming, my

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son. You've got to come. The whole Remove will be there!"

"And the presence of the esteemed Smithy will be honorific for his chums," added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "So come on, Smithy!"

But the Bounder did not come. He was looking more confused than ever, and his unwillingness to join in the great celebration in the Rag made the Famous Five look at him in surprise.

They had been very chummy with Smithy lately—ever since he had dropped those questionable manners and customs which had earned him the nickname of "the Bounder," and they were surprised and a little hurt at his reluctance to join them in "blowing" Johnny Bull's magnificent tip.

"The—the fact is," said Vernon-Smith hesitatingly, "I—I can't come—not this evening."

"Bow-wow-wow!" said Bob Cherry, with increasing emphasis. "Why can't you come? You needn't do your preparation yet."

"N-no; but—"

"I say, you fellows," squeaked a voice from the passage, "I'm ready to begin, you know. What about that feed?"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, you know," said Billy Bunter, coming along the passage, and blinking into the study through his big spectacles, "the fellows are all there, you know, or nearly all, and—they're hungry. Of course, I'm not thinking of myself; but I think you might as well come, and—"

"We're persuading Smithy to come," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, blow Smithy! What does he want persuading for?" demanded Bunter, in astonishment. "I didn't need persuading, did I?"

"Ha, ha! No. Come on, Smithy!"

"I'm sorry," said the Bounder. "I'm much obliged; but I can't come. I—I've got another engagement!"

"Please yourself," said Johnny Bull, a little gruffly.

"Blow your other engagement!" said Bob Cherry. "You can't be going to tea with anybody in the Remove, because the whole Form's coming to the feed in the Rag. If it's one of the Fourth, you can send him a polite note, requesting him to go and eat coke. You can't be going out, because it's after locking up. So come on!"

"I say, you fellows, never mind Smithy. Smithy can go and eat coke. Those chaps will be starting," said Billy Bunter anxiously.

"Shut up, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "Now, Smithy, don't be a beast!"

"It's a special occasion, Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "Johnny Bull's uncle's come home from Australia, and he's sent Johnny ten quids. So we're killing the fatted calf. Do come, like a good chap!"

"Yes, do," said Johnny Bull. "We're going to make a regular entertainment of it, and we want you to give us your imitations of the Kaiser. You haven't got to go to tea with a master, have you?"

"N-no!"

"Then why the deuce can't you come?" demanded Johnny Bull, a little testily.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Here, I'll bring him along!" said Bob Cherry. "It's all rot about the other engagement! The other engagement can go and eat coke! Kim on, Smithy!"

Bob Cherry took Vernon-Smith's arm, and marched him towards the door. The Bounder resisted a little, but Bob's grip on his arm was like iron. He was marched out of the study, half laughing and half exasperated.

The Famous Five gathered round him, and he raised no further objections, and allowed himself to be marched downstairs into the Rag.

The Rag was crowded.

Nearly every fellow in the Remove was turning up to that great feed. It was not often that a ten-pound note was expended on an entertainment for the whole Form, and the Greyfriars Remove rose to the occasion. Johnny Bull usually had plenty of money, for he had an affectionate aunt who kept him well supplied; but on this occasion he was simply rolling in it, and he was spending it in a princely manner.

Two tables had been put together in the Rag, and covered with tablecloths borrowed from all quarters, and the piles of good things made Billy Bunter's mouth water—and other mouths as well.

The Remove had been playing footer that afternoon, and it was now well past the usual hour for tea, so there were good appetites ready for the great feed.

More and more fellows crowded in, Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth coming to honour the occasion with their presence, and Hobson coming in with a crowd of Shell fellows. But, numerous as the company was, the supplies of all kinds of "tuck" were more than abundant.

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Our Companion Papers: "THE GEM" LIBRARY. "THE DREADNOUGHT," "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 1d. Every Wednesday. Every Thursday. Every Friday. Every Saturday. 2

Squiff, the Australian junior, pushed Johnny Bull into a seat at the head of the table—a seat which had been raised by means of a couple of cushions, to give the founder of the feast a commanding position.

Every chair and stool round the long table was taken, and there was a row of fellows standing behind the chairs.

Johnny Bull bestowed a hospitable grin upon the numerous company who had turned up to honour his feed.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it's a great pleasure to see you all on this auspicious occasion. Pile in!"

"Hear, hear!"

No speech could have been more to the point. The innumerable guests piled in. Billy Bunter secured a whole pie, and started upon it without bothering about a plate. As he explained, between big mouthfuls, there was no need to waste time mopping it out into a plate, when he meant to finish the lot.

"Pile in, my esteemed Smithy," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who sat beside the Bounder. "Buck up and look cheerful on this suspicious occasion!"

The Bounder grinned. He had been looking very thoughtful and a little worried; but Hurree Singh's English was quite enough to make him smile.

"Right-ho, Inky! Pass the tuck!"

"Pass the tarts!"

"Take this way! I say, Skinner, do you want all that cake?"

"When you've done with that pie, Fishy——"

"Grooh! Don't drop gravy down my neck, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, pass the mince-pies. I didn't say one, Ogilvy; I said the mince-pies. You can pass the lot!"

"Go it, Bunter! We'll roll you home!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The great feed proceeded amid chatter and laughter and the highest spirits on all sides. New-comers who dropped in found it a little difficult to get at the table; but good things were passed to them over the heads of the feasters, with occasional warm remonstrances from fellows who felt gravy spilled down their necks, or jam-tarts dropped on their heads. But little things like that could not be helped, and only added to the general hilarity.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Coker!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the great Horace Coker of the Fifth strolled in, with a smile of lofty patronage upon his face. "Give Coker a biscuit, somebody! Make him sit up and trust first!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you'd got a chair for a fellow I shouldn't mind joining you," said Coker of the Fifth loftily.

"Chairs are at a discount," said Bob. "Surely your feet are big enough to stand up on? What's the good of number eleven boots if——"

"You cheeky young ass, I don't take elevens!" howled Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My mistake—I meant twelves——"

"Here, take my place for a bit, Coker," said Vernon-Smith. "I'd as soon stand."

And the Bounder slipped out of his chair, and Horace Coker, with a gracious nod, slipped into it. Vernon-Smith mingled with the crowd round the table, and the chums of the Remove—who were quite busy just then—lost sight of him.

But when the feed slackened down a little there was a call for the Bounder. The more solid part of the celebration was to be followed by an entertainment, and the Bounder was greatly in demand. He had a great gift for comic renderings of famous persons, and his imitation of the Kaiser was very popular in the Remove, and always elicited yells of laughter.

"Smithy!"

"Ready for your little bit, Smithy?"

"Where's Smithy?"

But the Bounder was called for in vain. He was not in the Rag, and Johnny Bull's celebration had to proceed without him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Last Plunge!

OUTSIDE, the winter night had set in cold and dark. There was a light powdering of snow on the ground, and a bitter wind blew from the sea. While the merry celebration was proceeding in the Rag, Vernon-Smith was tramping down the dark lane towards Friarhole, with his coat-collar turned up, his cap pulled low over his brows, his head bent against the wind.

Vernon-Smith had told the truth when he said that he had another engagement that evening, but it was not an engagement that he could have explained to Harry Wharton & Co.

As he tramped down the lane there was a half-sullen, half-ashamed expression upon his face, usually so cool and determined and inflexible.

The Bounder of Greyfriars was experiencing a new sensation—he was ashamed of himself!

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently as he realised what his peculiar sense of discomfort meant. True, he had done a good many things to be ashamed of in his time, but it was new to him to feel ashamed.

It was not so very long since the Bounder had been the blackest sheep that was to be found within the walls of Greyfriars. He had been as reckless as it was possible for a fellow to be; and yet somehow he had always been cunning enough to cover up his traces, and his good luck had never failed him. Fellows with less coolness and less nerve would have been expelled for half what he had done. But a change had come over the Bounder; his old enmity with Harry Wharton & Co. was a thing of the past, and their friendship meant a great deal to him.

They knew that he had turned over a new leaf, and they had faith in him.

And it was the knowledge that he was betraying that faith which brought the new and unaccustomed feeling of shame to Vernon-Smith's breast.

He had stood well by his new resolutions, he had stuck to the straight path. But his restless nature, always seeking excitement and adventure, had been too much for him at last. It was the danger, the thrill of excitement, in his old life that had most appealed to him. He missed it; and now the temptation had grown too strong for him, and he was dipping—for once—into what he had sworn to leave behind him for ever. He had said to himself that it should only be for once; that he would have one "plunge," and then drop it all for good.

But the enjoyment he had anticipated did not seem to come. He had cleared off by way of the school wall; he was safe until bed-time, and he meant to be cautious. His old associates at the Cross Keys expected him, the "little game" would be ready for him; but somehow he had a foreboding that he was not going to enjoy himself, after all. The sense of broken faith worried him. But he would not listen to the still, small voice within, and he tramped on determinedly, angry with himself for feeling what he called "soft."

The lights of the inn on the outskirts of the village gleamed through the foggy night. The Bounder left the lane and crossed a field-path to reach the garden at the back of the inn—the old way he knew so well. Many a time, in his reckless days, he had stolen out of the dormitory at a late hour, while the other fellows were asleep, and joined the select circle at that disreputable public-house, and Mr. Cobb and his friends had always warmly welcomed the millionaire's son.

The Bounder mounted the wooden verandah at the back of the house and tapped upon the old green shutters that covered a window there. Through a chink in the crazy old shutters he could see into the lighted room, and he could see two or three horsey-looking men gathered round a table, upon which were glasses, ashtrays, cards, and little heaps of money.

Mr. Cobb, the fat landlord of the Cross Keys, opened the window at once and unfastened the shutter. Vernon-Smith pulled the shutters open and stepped into the room. Mr. Cobb gave him a nod and a smile of welcome, and closed the window and the shutter again.

There was a chorus of welcome from the others in the room, Mr. Banks, the bookmaker; and Percy Higgs, a local "nut," who was "seeing life" with the kind assistance of the sporting circle at the Cross Keys, and finding it a somewhat expensive process.

"Ere's our old chum back agin!" exclaimed Mr. Banks, giving Vernon-Smith a flabby hand to shake. "Where 'ave you been all this time—wot? Desertin' of your old pals!" And Mr. Banks wagged his bald head reproachfully.

"Just in time for a new deal, kid," said Mr. Higgs, who affected an air of superior knowledge towards the schoolboy. "Try one of these."

Vernon-Smith accepted a cigarette, and Mr. Cobb gave him a light. The Bounder sat down, and Mr. Cobb resumed his place and shuffled the cards.

The Bounder was in the old circle—at the old game—and he tried to feel that he was enjoying it. He told himself that this was "something like," that it was better than a feed and a sing-song in the Rag at Greyfriars. But his brain was too cool and clear to allow of self-deception; he knew that he had lost the taste for blackguardism, and that his plunge would be without enjoyment for him. The change in him had gone deeper than he had suspected. But he affected his old manner, though with an inward resolve that the sporting gentlemen of the Cross Keys would never see him again.

"Gent coming in this evening that you'll like to meet," said Mr. Cobb, as he dealt the cards.

"Someone I know?" asked the Bounder carelessly.

"No; a stranger 'ere—a gent from Australia," said Mr. Cobb.

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Cobb. "He's staying at the Friardale Arms, but he's been in 'ere. I used to know him when I was out there—that's a good ten year ago—but I knew him at once when I met him to-day. He was a sportsman, if you like—name of Falke."

"Falke!" said the Bounder. "That's a German name."

Mr. Cobb nodded.

"Naturalised British," he said. "He's an Australian now, and got a thumping good berth in Melbourne. But he's come to England with his guv'nor on business."

"What the dickens is he doing here, then?" asked the Bounder curiously. "What business can a Colonial chap have in a sleepy hollow like this?"

"Some business for his guv'nor," said Mr. Cobb. "E's secretary or something to a big man out there—name of Bull."

The Bounder started.

"Bull!" he repeated. "His employer's named Bull, and he's just come from Australia."

"Yes," said Mr. Cobb. "How many do you go?" That was a polite hint to the Bounder to get on with the game.

Vernon-Smith was wondering whether this Mr. Falke's "guv'nor," Mr. Bull, from Australia, was possibly connected with the uncle Johnny Bull had mentioned as having just come home. But the game was going on now, and he dismissed the matter from his mind.

About half an hour later the door opened, and a new-comer entered.

"Ere you are, Falke!" exclaimed Mr. Cobb hospitably. "This young gentleman is skinning us, as usual."

The Bounder was introduced to Mr. Falke, and regarded him somewhat curiously. Falke was a man of about thirty—a stout but muscular German with frizzled, fair hair and a light moustache, and pale-blue eyes that had a steely look. The Bounder mentally set him down as a hard customer.

"I am glad to meet you," said Falke, in perfect English. "Mr. Cobb mentioned that you were coming, and I have been quite looking forward to seeing you. We shall have a pleasant game."

"Don't you find it a bit queer being in England now?" asked the Bounder curiously, as Falke sat down.

"Why?" asked the German.

"While the war is on, I mean."

Falke shrugged his shoulders.

"But I am not a German; I am a Briton," he said. "I have it written down upon paper. And I am not likely to change back from the winning to the losing side—hein? Shall I deal?"

The Bounder smiled quietly.

Mr. Falke might have his new nationality written down upon paper, but it was pretty clear that that paper was the only British thing about him.

The game went on. The Bounder had been winning, but his luck changed after the addition of the German to the party. He began to lose; but he cared little for the loss, and he played on coolly.

Mr. Cobb filled the glasses, but the Bounder left his untouched. He was there to smoke and gamble, but there he drew the line.

The German glanced at him, with a slightly mocking expression.

"Ach! You are careful; you will not lose your wits," he remarked. "And, besides, you are too young."

The Bounder flushed, and emptied the glass. He was angry with himself for allowing the German's taunt to move him; but it moved him, all the same. And, with the wine in his head, he played on more recklessly.

The Bounder was accustomed to being completely master of himself, but this evening he was in an unusual mood. The secret gnawing of his conscience troubled him. The feeling that he was deceiving his friends, that he was acting like a blackguard, without even enjoying himself, weighed upon his mind. The "plunge" was not panning out well. The smoke-laden atmosphere, the greed in the face of Mr. Cobb, the vacant stare of Percy Higgs, all got on his nerves. After a time he rose to his feet to go, much earlier than he had intended.

The German raised his eyebrows.

"You are not going?" he asked. "Not so early? But perhaps you do not wish to lose more. You have lost—several pounds."

"That's nothing," said the Bounder curtly.

"Nothing! You are very fortunate—you, a schoolboy, to be so very flush with money," said Falke, very politely, but with an undercurrent of incredulity that angered the Bounder. He already felt vague dislike towards the German, and his back stiffened at once at the imputation of being afraid to go on with the game. He dropped into his seat again.

"I'll play you as long as you like," he said. "I must leave

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at nine, or I shall get the sack; but there's plenty of time yet."

"Ah! That is plucky—British pluck!" said Falke, with a smile.

The Bounder did not reply. He knew only too well how much British pluck there was in gambling among a crowd of blackguards. But his pride was roused, and he would not allow the German to score over him. He suggested raising the stakes—a suggestion that was agreed to at once—and played on recklessly. He was well supplied with money, and he gave no sign of dismay as gold followed silver, and bank-notes followed gold.

The German was certainly a clever player; and if he was using unfair means, he was doing it too cleverly to be detected. And the Bounder prided himself upon his sharpness of vision. He was accustomed to holding his own—to more than holding his own. Indeed, on more than one occasion he had found sardonic pleasure in skinning some sharper who had set out to skin him. But he had to admit that he had met more than his match in the cool, smiling German. With a few occasional streaks of luck, he lost—and lost—till the last bank-note was changed, and his last silver pieces were gone.

"That does me," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "give you best, Mr. Falke."

The German laughed.

"Bah! What is that—a few pounds! Do not go. Have your revenge before you leave us, my young friend. Be a sport."

"Stony!" said the Bounder.

"Among gentlemen, a word is as good as a bond," said Falke. "Take the money and give me your I O U."

The Bounder hesitated for a moment. But the fever of the game had caught him now. He was keen to go on, if only for a chance of turning the tables upon the German. Falke pushed four five-pound notes towards him, and Vernon-Smith tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and wrote out the acknowledgment for the amount. Falke slipped it carelessly into his pocket.

The Bounder, excited now, and with gleaming eyes, played on, recklessly. But the German's luck held good, and the money passed over to his side of the table again. Cobb and Higgs were simply looking on now. The Bounder's last coin was gone when he remembered the time. He started to his feet. It was nearly half-past nine!

"You must go?" asked Falke.

"I shall be sacked if I don't," said the Bounder. "I—I'm late already."

"Your revenge any time you please," said the German. "I am staying in this delightful village several days."

The Bounder nodded, and hurried on his coat and cap, and with a nod to the gamblers, quitted the room the way he had entered it. A glance was exchanged between Falke and Mr. Cobb as he went, and the German smiled.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Squiff Chips In!

"SEEN Smithy?"

Skinner of the Remove looked into No. 1 Study with that question. Skinner was Vernon-Smith's study-mate. It was getting towards bed-time, and Wharton and Nugent were hurrying to finish their prep. The entertainment in the Rag had lasted a long time, and prep had been left a little late.

"No," said Wharton, looking up. "Isn't he in his study?"

"Haven't seen him," said Skinner. "I've done my prep. He hasn't touched his. He seemed to vanish while the feed was on, and I haven't seen him since. He'll get into a row with Quelch in the morning of he doesn't do his prep."

"He can't have gone out," said Nugent.

"Can't find him anywhere, though," said Skinner, and he strolled away.

Harry Wharton and Nugent went on with their work. They finished their prep, and the rest of the Co., who had also finished, strolled into the study to consume roast chestnuts before going to bed. Squiff, the Australian junior, came in with the Co. He had a thoughtful expression upon his face.

"You haven't seen Smithy?" he asked.

"Skinner's just been asking after him," said Wharton. "He must have gone out. Skinner says he hasn't done his prep."

Johnny Bull gave an expressive grunt.

"Of course he's gone out. He cleared off while we were having the feed, and he hasn't been seen since."

"But he couldn't get a pass out till this time of night," said Wharton. "It's a quarter-past nine."

Another grunt from Johnny Bull.

"He's out without a pass."

"Phew! There will be trouble if he doesn't turn up soon."

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said Wharton. "I suppose that's the other engagement he was talking about. I thought he looked rather sheepish about it."

The Co. looked at one another rather curiously. Vernon-Smith's "engagement" outside the walls of Greyfriars, which had kept him out so late, was very odd, to say the least of it. They did not like to think that the Bounder was "on the ran-dan" again, after his pledges on that subject. But it was certainly very curious.

"It's all right," said Squiff, after a pause. "Don't think anything rotten about the chap. But he's over-doing it, and if he doesn't get in before half-past nine, he will be missed, and there will be a row. Wingate is seeing lights out to-night, and there's no squaring Wingate. I've been thinking about that. It will be bad for Smithy."

"He will have to explain where he's been, anyway," said Johnny Bull.

Sampson Quiney Ifley Field, whose initials had been shortened into the less lengthy name of Squiff for everyday use, nodded his head thoughtfully.

"We don't want to think any harm of him—" he began.

"Looks to me like the old tricks," growled Johnny Bull. "He was smoking, I remember, when we went to fetch him to the feed."

"Well, even if he is playing the giddy ox, he's a pal, and we don't want to be down on him," said Squiff tolerantly.

"Give him a chance, you know. It looks to me as if the silly ass is over-doing it, and mayn't be in by bed-time. Whatever he's up to, he will find it a bit difficult to explain to a prefect why he was out of bounds up to bed-time. I've got an idea for seeing him through."

"Oh, go it," said Harry Wharton. "We don't want him to get bowled out, certainly."

"I'm going to make up his bed in the dorm," said Squiff. "It will look as if he went to bed before the others, that's all, unless Wingate should specially look at his bed when he trots in. You fellows pass the word round."

The juniors nodded, and Sampson Quiney Ifley Field left the study on his good-natured mission. It was just like the cheery Cornstalk junior to bother himself about keeping another fellow out of a scrape, and all the Co. were willing to help. But Harry Wharton & Co. were looking very thoughtful. They did not like to think any harm of the Bounder, certainly; but it was not easy to imagine what good reason he could have had for avoiding the feast in the Rag, and staying out after bed-time.

But they were loyal; and they abandoned the chestnuts, and proceeded to give the "tip" to some of the Remove fellows, that Smithy was understood to be in bed early. Half-past nine struck, and there was no sign of the Bounder, and the Remove fellows went up to their dormitory.

Squiff was already there. He was sitting on the edge of Vernon-Smith's bed, which certainly looked as if it had a sleeper in it—from the skillful arrangement of pillows and coats under the bed-clothes. Squiff was apparently chatting to the figure in the bed, and when Wingate looked in, he saw nothing suspicious.

"Tumble in, kids," said the captain of Greyfriars good-naturedly. "Back in five minutes."

Billy Bunter blinked at Vernon-Smith's bed.

"I say, Smithy, where have you been?" asked Bunter curiously. "What did you slither off for?"

There was no reply from Vernon-Smith—naturally. The other juniors were turning in. Most of them knew the little secret, but Bunter had been left out of it. His propensities as a chatterbox were too well known. But the Owl of the Remove was curious. Inquisitiveness was almost a disease with William George Bunter.

"Asleep, Smithy?" he asked. "How long have you been in bed?"

No reply. Some of the juniors grinned. Billy Bunter rolled towards Vernon-Smith's bed, and a pillow whizzed through the air. It caught William George Bunter on the chest, and he sat down with a roar.

"Bob Cherry, you beast—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, tumble in," said Bob Cherry gruffly. "Wingate will be back in a minute."

"I'm going to speak to Smithy if I like," howled Bunter. "I know he's only pretending to be asleep. Yow-ow! Look here—"

Another pillow caught the Owl of the Remove as he rolled towards the Bounder's bed. He sat down again, and roared.

"Squiff, you beast—"

Wingate looked in.

"Now, then, not in bed yet?" he exclaimed. "Turn in, Bunter, do you hear?"

"That beast Field—"

"Oh, turn in!"



The Bounder stood unsteadily, gripping the back of his chair. The German turned away from him, blowing rings of smoke from his cigar, and staring out indifferently into the old High Street of Friardale. (See Chapter 8.)

Billy Bunter grunted and turned in. Wingate put out the lights and quitted the dormitory, much to the relief of the chains of the Remove. If he had discovered the dummy in Vernon-Smith's bed, it would have meant not only trouble for the Bounder, but trouble for those who were seeking to conceal his absence.

Squiff sat up in bed when Wingate's steps had died away down the passage. There was a buzz of voices in the dormitory.

"Where on earth can Smithy be?" said Skinner. "Did he fix it up with you about putting that dummy in his bed, Field?"

"No," said Squiff.

"My hat! Then he won't know that you've covered up his tracks, and he'll come blundering in thinking it's all up, anyway!" ejaculated Skinner.

"Not if I have time to stop him," said Squiff. The Australian junior was already out of bed and dressing hastily.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you up to, Squiff?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"You know where Smithy will get in over the wall, the same old place," said Squiff. "I'm going to wait for him there, and give him the tip. Otherwise he'll think it's all up, as it's just bedtime, and he'll give himself away."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Push it off!" said Nugent. "You're running the risk of getting mixed up with what he's been doing, whatever it is, Squiff. If you're found out of the dorm, it'll be supposed that you and Smithy were in this together!"

"I'm going to risk that!"

The Australian junior crossed to the door, and opened it cautiously. The passage was dark, and Squiff slipped out silently and closed the door, and scudded away towards the box-room. There was a considerable amount of excitement now in the Remove dormitory.

"I say, you fellows, is Smithy out?" asked Bunter, for the tenth time.

"Yes, ass!" said Bob Cherry. "Shut up!"

"Oh, really, Cherry? I don't think Smithy ought to be looked after in this way," said Billy Bunter, with virtuous indignation. "If he's up to his old games again, he ought to be bowled out, you know. Why, the rotter wouldn't cash a postal order for me to-day, a postal order I'm expecting shortly. I suppose he was keeping his money to play cards with. I think it's rotten!"

"Oh, please it!"

"Of course, I don't expect you fellows to look at it as I do," said Bunter, with a sniff. "You haven't the same sense of honour that I have!"

"My hat!"

"I disapprove of this," went on Bunter. "I think it's rotten of you fellows to back Smithy up in his goings-on. I'm afraid you're going out later yourselves to meet him at the Cross Keys, what? Yow ow ow!—what beast threw that bomb?"

"I did!" said Bob Cherry sulkily. "And I've got another one handy, if you don't shut up, you fat brute!"

"Look here, Cherry. I consider —"

NEXT
MONDAY—

"CAPTURED AT LAST!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
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"Do you want the other boot?"

"Yow! No!"

And Billy Bunter, with his high moral attitude quite spoiled, sulkily shut up. But the buzz of voices continued in the Remove dormitory—the juniors were not thinking of sleep. They were all curious about Vernon-Smith—and some of them were extremely uneasy about Squiff. For it was quite possible that the generous Cornstalk, in his good-natured attempt to save the Bounder from the consequences of his folly, would find himself in serious trouble.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

VERNON-SMITH tramped along the dark lane to Greyfriars with a savage frown on his face, his teeth set, and his eyes gleaming. He was in a savage and bitter mood—but all his anger was directed against himself. The money he had lost mattered little to him—and the debt of twenty pounds was of little consequence. He knew that he could get all he needed from his father, without questions being asked. It was not that. But he had departed from his resolutions—he had broken faith with his friends—he had acted in a way that he could only regard himself as "rotten"—and for what? For nothing—worse than nothing.

The "last plunge," which was to have been a time of glorious excitement, to compensate for the twinges of conscience, had been a rank failure.

He had not enjoyed himself in the least. He had fancied that he longed for the thrill of excitement of his old life—and he had plunged once more—only to discover that the change in him had gone more than skin deep; that he had, in fact, lost the taste for the dingy blackguardism that had once attracted him so strongly. The thought of the little room at the Cross Keys, with its smoke-laden atmosphere and smell of whisky, the dingy cards, the greedy faces, filled his breast with the sickness of disgust.

He felt that he had lowered himself in his own eyes, and that was a decidedly uncomfortable feeling.

And that wretched "plunge," which had been so wretched a disappointment, seemed likely to lead him into more trouble than it would have been worth if it had more than fulfilled his greatest expectations.

For he heard half-past nine strike before he was half-way home to Greyfriars.

Bedtime for the Remove was half-past nine, and the Bounder realised that he had, in his folly, rendered it impossible for him to get back without discovery.

When he reached Greyfriars, now, he would have to answer questions; punishment he did not mind, for he was hard as a nut; but he sickened at the thought of the complicated falsehoods he must invent to conceal the fact that he had been "plunging." And, however skilfully he lied, the truth might come out all the same; and if his conduct was discovered, it meant the "sack." There was no doubt about that. The Head had only to learn that he had been gambling in the Cross Keys, and he would not be allowed to remain another day at Greyfriars. That was the price he had to pay for a plunge that had been utterly without pleasure or satisfaction of any sort.

The Bounder's feelings were very bitter as he tramped on through the cold wind.

He reached the school wall, and stopped at a spot where certain well-known cavities in the stones made it possible to climb—a spot well known to the juniors. He climbed the wall, and looked over into the darkness of the Close. The lights of the School House glimmered in the darkness, through the leafless trees within. The third quarter chimed out from the old clock-tower. It was a quarter of an hour past bedtime, and he could have no hope that his absence had not been discovered. Mr. Quelch would be waiting grimly for him to come in, and before he presented himself, he would have to prepare a yarn he was to tell; to invent some falsehood to put the Remove-master off the scent. But under the keen eyes of Mr. Quelch, he knew that that would not be easy.

He dropped down into the darkness of the Close, from the wall.

"Smithy!"

The Bounder started violently, as his name was whispered in the darkness. He stared round him blankly.

"Who—who's that?"

There was a chuckle, as a shadow moved close to him.

"It's all right!" came the whisper. "Don't shout!"

"Field!" breathed the Bounder.

"Yes, I've been waiting for you. It's all serene—you're not bowled out!" said Squiff.

The Bounder drew a deep, almost sobbing breath.

"Squiff! How—how on earth—"

Squiff chuckled again.

"I rigged up a dummy in your bed, and it passed muster. After lights-out, I scooted out to wait here for you. Savvy?"

Vernon-Smith leaned against the wall, breathing hard, almost overcome with relief.

Squiff peered at him in the darkness.

"It's all right, Smithy," he whispered. "I didn't want you to get nailed."

"You—you know where I've been?" stammered the Bounder.

"Not in the least! But I know where Quelch would think you've been, if he spotted you," chuckled Squiff. "This is frightfully risky for you, Smithy, old man. You see, you've got a record that isn't quite forgotten yet, and the Head let you off once; but they'd jump to the conclusion that you'd been painting the town red, in your old way, you know, and you'd get it in the neck. So I thought I'd see you through."

"It's jolly good of you, Field!" said the Bounder, his face flooded with crimson in the darkness. "You—you don't suspect me of—of—of that?"

"No, fear!" said Squiff.

"I—I say, Squiff—"

"Better come on," said the Australian. "The sooner we're in the dorm the better!"

"Yes—yes; but I must tell you!" said the Bounder desperately. "It—it's not as you think. I—I've been to the Cross Keys!"

Squiff's face changed.

"My hat! Are you joking?"

"No. That's where I've been—the old game," said the Bounder miserably.

"What did you go for?"

"Because I'm a silly fool and a blackguard, I suppose."

Squiff peered at him in the darkness.

"You don't seem to have enjoyed your little razzle," he remarked.

"I haven't," said the Bounder. "It's jolly odd, but when I got fairly into it, I—I found I didn't care a dashed rap for it, and I wished I'd stayed in the Rag with the fellows. It's the last time, Squiff—I'll never make a fool of myself like that again."

"You've said that before," said Squiff drily.

"I know I have," muttered the Bounder. "Don't rub it in—if ever a silly ass felt ashamed of himself, I do now."

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There was a ring of sincerity in the Bounder's voice, and Squiff's face softened again.

"Well, it's no business of mine," he said. "You're jolly lucky not to get nailed—it would have come out, I suppose. You couldn't have spoofed old Queleh."

"You've saved me from telling a haul of beastly lies," said the Bounder. "I should have had to pile in a yarn about losing my way, or something—and—and I don't like telling lies. I'm much obliged to you, Squiff, and—and if it's any interest to you to know it, I sha'n't ever get into a fool's fix like this again. Let's get in!"

"Come on!" said Squiff.

The two juniors crept away through the darkness, and skirting the buildings, reached the back of the School House. In a few minutes more they had climbed in through the box-room window, and were making their way silently to the Remove dormitory. They breathed more freely when they were once inside the dormitory, and they began to undress hastily in the dark.

"Where have you been, Smithy?" asked a dozen voices.

"Out!" said Smith briefly.

"You didn't get spotted?" asked Skinner.

"No."

"I guess you're jolly lucky," said Fisher T. Fish. "Did you plunder them at the Cross Keys, Smithy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith made no reply to Fish's question. He knew that the whole dormitory suspected what he had been out for, but he did not intend to tell them what he had told Squiff. Without replying at all to the questions rained on him, he turned in, and the curiosity of the Removites had to remain unsatisfied.

He did not speak a word after he was in bed—but it was long before he slept. His thoughts were busy. The Australian junior had saved him from danger, if not from complete exposure and ruin—and he shivered as he realised clearly the risk he had run. The resolutions were made now—on the morrow he would obtain the needed money from his father, and pay his debt to Falke, and so regain the paper he had given the German—and, after that, that chapter in his life would be closed and finished for ever. The last plunge should indeed be the last—the lesson would not be lost upon him. And somewhat comforted, at last, by his good resolutions, the Bounder fell asleep.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Blow for Blow!

"JOHNNY, old chap!"

Johnny Bull grunted.

"I say, Johnny, old fellow!" went on Billy Bunter affectionately. "I suppose it's another banknote—what? I say, I'm expecting a postal order—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Johnny Bull. "It's not cash this time, and you can go and eat coke!"

Johnny Bull walked away with his letter in his hand. It was a couple of days after the great feast in the Rag, and Johnny Bull had found that letter waiting for him after lessons. He joined the Co. in the Close.

"News from nunky!" asked Bob Cherry. "Is the old chap coming to see you, Johnny? We'll give him a thumping welcome! Ten-quid uncles ought to be encouraged!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. cordially.

"If you're looking for a chance to swop, Johnny, I'll trade my Aunt Jemina for him!" said Bob, in a burst of generosity.

"Bow-wow!" said Johnny Bull. "I'm blessed if I quite understand this! My Uncle George sent me ten quids and a nice letter. I thought he'd be coming down to see me pretty soon—but I understand he's a bit off-colour after the voyage from the other side of the world. He's rather an ancient mariner, I think—I've never seen him—he was out there years before I was born. He's staying with my Aunt Bull now—his sister, you know. He's not coming down yet, anyway, and he's sending somebody to see how I'm getting on—his secretary. At least, he says that his secretary, a chap named Falke, will call and see me to-day."

Johnny Bull shook his head in a puzzled way.

"I'm blessed if I quite get on to it," he said. "If my uncle's a bit seedy, the Head would give me leave to go home for a bit and see him. Though I don't quite see why he should take any interest in me at all, as he's never seen me. I daresay my aunt has written him a lot about me—she's awfully fond of me; no accounting for tastes, you know—and she's awfully fond of him, too. She's often jawed to me about him, and talked sometimes of going out to Melbourne to join him. The old chap's first letter to me was quite affectionate—"

"Ten quid!" murmured Nugent.

Johnny Bull laughed.

"Yes; and there was that ripping tip in it—uncles don't send you ten quids every day, do they? But he doesn't seem to want to see me—and he's sending this chap Falke—"

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EVERY
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ONE
PENNY.

I can't quite see what for. I don't want to be bothered with his secretary. Sounds to me like a German, too!"

"Perhaps he'll bring another tanner with him!" grinned Squiff. "Better be polite—in case he does."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose I shall have to be civil to him," grunted Johnny Bull. "But I don't see what he's coming for, all the same."

"Well, your uncle seems a good sort," said Harry Wharton, "and if this Falke chap is his secretary, you may as well give him the glad hand, as Fishy says. We'll all stand by you, and we'll have him to tea in the study—what?"

"Oh, all right!" said Johnny Bull. "You're very good. He'll be here soon after lessons to-day. May be here any minute now, in fact!"

"What did you say his name was?" asked Vernon-Smith, who was near at hand, and had heard the talk of the chums. He had started at the name of the German.

"Falke!" said Johnny Bull. "Some blessed German, it sounds like."

The Bounder knitted his brows a little. There was no doubt in his mind now that Mr. Bull's secretary was the German he had met in Friardale a couple of nights ago. He could not help thinking it curious that the secretary of a Colonial magnate should have been playing cards at a place like the Cross Keys, with a gang like Mr. Cobb and his friends. And if Falke was down there to see Johnny Bull on his uncle's behalf, why had he remained in Friardale for two or three days without coming to the school? It was scarcely possible that he could have any business in such a quiet and out-of-the-way place.

"Is he in Friardale now?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"I suppose not—my uncle says he's coming to see me, that's all," said Johnny Bull, a little surprised at the interest the Bounder was taking in his affairs. The Bounder coloured a little.

"I've seen a German chap in Friardale, that's all!" he said.

Johnny Bull sniffed.

"You're not likely to have seen my uncle's private secretary in the places you visit at Friardale!" he said.

The Bounder grew crimson. Since his adventure on the evening of the feed, there had been some little coldness between him and the Famous Five. Squiff had not said a word of what the Bounder had told him—but the Famous Five could not help drawing their own conclusions. For Vernon-Smith had not uttered a word in explanation of his escapade.

His late return, and his narrow escape from discovery through Squiff's kind intervention, had been the talk of the Remove, and a good many fellows had asked Smithy questions about it. He had declined to say a word. And it was pretty clear that, if he had been able to explain, he would have explained. The only conclusion to be drawn was that he had been mixed up with his old associates, and Harry Wharton & Co. decidedly did not like it. The Bounder had broken faith with them—and it was not pleasant to think that they had been deceived, and they could not feel very friendly towards a fellow who had broken his word.

But nothing had been said to him on the subject—it was not their business to preach. Johnny Bull's remark was the first hint that they knew that the Bounder was at the old game again.

"Cheese it, Johnny!" murmured Bob Cherry. "No bizney of ours, you know!"

"Oh, let him rip!" said the Bounder bitterly. "Field knows where I was that evening—"

"I haven't said a word!" said Squiff quickly.

"I know you haven't," said the Bounder. "But I'm not keeping it dark. At least, I don't care a twopenny rap whether it's kept dark or not. I'm not answerable to Bull for what I do!"

Johnny Bull gave an emphatic snort.

"A chap's answerable to anybody he's made a promise to," he said. "You promised the Head, when he let you off last time—and you promised us, that it was all over. If it wasn't exactly a promise, it was as good as one. If you were keeping up that kind of thing, you had no right to pretend to us that you'd given it up. It was getting our friendship on false pretences, if you want plain English!"

"Hang your friendship!" said the Bounder angrily. "Keep it till I ask for it!"

Johnny Bull shrugged his shoulders.

"I won't bother you with it again, you can be sure of that," he said. "I don't like being taken in, and I don't like associating with gamblers! And the other fellows think the same, too, only they're too jolly civil to say so!"

The Bounder looked at the uncomfortable faces of the Famous Five with a sneering smile on his lips—quite his old smile.

"Do you all say the same?" he asked. "Have I shocked your propriety too severely, Eric & Co?"

Wharton bit his lip.

"You needn't call us Erics because we're down on beastly blackguardism," he said warmly. "You can do as you like without consulting us—but it's not cricket, to take us in as you've done. If you want to play the giddy ox, you can do it, I suppose—but you know what our opinion is about it!"

The Bounder's eyes glittered.

"So I'm a disgraceful rascal?" he demanded.

Johnny Bull looked him squarely in the face. He was a plain speaker, and he was not given to mincing his words.

"If you were gambling at the Cross Keys on Wednesday evening, you are a disgraceful rascal!" he said bluntly.

"Well, I was!"

"Then you know what I think of you," said Johnny Bull. "And now I've told you my opinion, I don't want any more to say to you. You've taken us in, and broken your word, and disgraced the school you belong to, and you're not the kind of chap I want to talk to!"

"Draw it mild, Johnny!" said Squiff. "Smithy explained to me—"

"Never mind what I explained to you," said the Bounder sourly. "I'm not on my defence before that fatheaded ass!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Johnny wrathfully.

"You've called me some pretty names," sneered the Bounder. "Mustn't I call you a few? And as for your uncle's precious secretary, whom I'm not likely to see in the kind of places I visit at Friardale, I met him there and played cards with him!"

"Liar!" said Johnny Bull, without ceremony.

"I tell you—" shouted the Bounder.

"And I tell you it's a lie!"

Smack!

Vernon-Smith's temper had been rising, and it quite failed him now. Johnny Bull staggered back as the Bounder's open palm smote him across the cheek with a crack like a pistol-shot.

"Why, you—you—" stuttered Johnny Bull, almost speechless with wrath.

He wasted no more time on words. He leaped at the Bounder like a tiger, and in an instant the two were fighting hammer and tongs.

"Chuck it, you duffers!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, in dismay. "If the Head looks out of his window—"

"And here comes a giddy stranger," said Wharton, as a blonde-complexioned young man walked in at the gates. "Johnny, chuck it! This'll be your uncle's secretary!"

But Johnny Bull was too infuriated to listen. He was pummelling the Bounder for all he was worth, and the Bounder was hitting back hard. The German paused as he saw the fight, and stood looking on curiously.

Harry Wharton & Co. made a rush at the two combatants, seized them, and dragged them apart by main force. Johnny Bull struggled furiously in the grasp of Wharton and Bob and Nugent.

"Lemme go! I'll pulverise him!" he roared.

"Let go, Squiff! Let go, Inky!" yelled the Bounder.

"Peace, my infant!" murmured Squiff soothingly. "We're jolly well not going to let go. Must keep up appearances before visitors, you know."

"The esteemed visitor is looking at you, Smithy," urged Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Come with us walkfully, my esteemed friend!"

"I tell you— Leggo!"

But the Bounder had to go, as Squiff and Hurree Singh walked him away.

Meanwhile, Johnny Bull had calmed down a little. The sight of a somewhat mocking smile on the face of the German irritated him, and he realised that he was not making a very favourable appearance before his uncle's secretary—if this was the man.

"Excuse me," said the German, addressing Harry Wharton & Co. "I have come here to see a young gentleman named Bull—John Bull. Perhaps you can tell me where to find him?"

"I'm Bull!" growled the owner of that name.

The German looked curiously at the flushed and somewhat damaged face of the sturdy junior.

"Ach! You are Master Bull?" he asked.

"Yes," granted Johnny.

"My name is Falke," said the German. "I am your uncle's secretary. I have come to see you by Mr. Bull's directions."

"Well, here I am," said Johnny, whose temper was still edgewise. "Take a good look!"

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Falke coughed. Johnny Bull's manner could not be called courteous; but Johnny was just then in a state of exasperation, and he did not like Germans, anyway. And the lurking smile on Falke's face, caused by the damage the Bounder had done to Johnny's features, irritated him.

"Cheese it, Johnny!" whispered Bob. "Honour the guest that is within thy walls, you inhospitable Yahoo!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"We are glad to see you, sir," said Harry Wharton, putting on his very best manner to compensate for his chum's shortcomings. "We have been planning to ask you to tea in the study, sir, if you will honour us. It would be a great pleasure for us, and you would be able to talk to Johnny, who will be in a better temper by that time!"

Falke smiled.

"You are very good," he said. "I accept with pleasure!"

And Falke walked into the School House with the juniors, Johnny Bull scudding away to a bath-room to bathe his injured countenance before he turned up to tea in the study.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Under His Thumb!

THE winter dusk was falling on Greyfriars.

From the window of No. 1 Study streamed a ruddy glow of light.

Vernon-Smith, pacing to and fro under the trees in the Close, glanced several times towards that lighted window.

The Bounder was in a black mood.

The discovery that the German he had gambled with at the Cross Keys was the secretary of Johnny Bull's uncle surprised him; but he was glad he had come to Greyfriars. The man held his I O U for twenty pounds, and Smithy was anxious to receive that paper back again.

He had received a generous remittance in answer to his application to his father, and he had the money in his pocket to settle the debt; but he had hesitated about going down to the Cross Keys to settle it. He could have sent it by post, but he wanted to make sure of receiving his I O U back, and he had a very natural disinclination to putting anything in writing on the subject. He was waiting in the Close now to see Falke as he came out, and settle the matter immediately.

He felt that he was lucky to have that chance of getting clear of the matter, without having to visit the German in the village, or to put anything in writing. And he was almost feverishly anxious to get that tell-tale paper back and burn it.

The German was not likely to lose it, or part with it, as it was worth twenty pounds to him; but, in case of any unforeseen accident, the mere sight of that paper would be enough to earn Vernon-Smith the "sack."

In his wilder days the Bounder had run such risks without thinking of them; but now he was anxious to have done with everything that could remind him of that unfortunate "plunge."

The last plunge had already borne unforeseen fruit. It had led to a fight with Johnny Bull, and the cessation of his friendship with Johnny Bull's chums. The Bounder would never have admitted in words how much that friendship was worth to him; but now that he had lost it he felt it keenly enough.

He could not expect Harry Wharton & Co. to trust him again. He had betrayed their friendship, and they would naturally keep him at a distance. And the Bounder did not want to be on his old terms with the Famous Five. Their cheery friendship was worth a good deal more to him than "plunges" among the sporting set at the Cross Keys.

But how to make up the ground he had lost was a puzzle, and he was far too proud, and too obstinate as well, to make a bid for anybody's friendship.

If they gave him the cold shoulder he would recede into his own shell, as it were; but he knew that he would feel it all the same.

He glanced impatiently towards the lighted window of the study.

The Famous Five were there, with the German, and they were entertaining him to the best of their ability. The study window was open, and Smithy could hear snatches of cheery talk. The German was apparently making himself agreeable.

The Bounder wondered sardonically what the juniors would have thought of him if they had known that he was one of the sporting set at the Cross Keys. The Bounder's statement on that point they had not believed for a moment. They were not likely to credit that the trusted secretary of Johnny Bull's uncle was a man of that kind. Indeed, the Bounder himself felt that it was hard to believe. It was pretty clear that the German was deceiving old Mr. Bull as to

his true character, or he would not be in such a trusted position.

It was odd that Falke should have risked letting one of Johnny Bull's schoolfellows see him drinking and gambling with Mr. Cobb & Co. The Bounder had a feeling that there was somehow more in Mr. Falke than met the eye. He had a vague dislike and distrust of the German, and it made him keener than ever to get his paper back from Falke's hands.

But the German seemed in no hurry to leave. It was quite a pleasant little tea-party in No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton & Co. felt that it behoved them to be more especially civil to the visitor, as he was a German, in order to show that the war with his country made no difference to their hospitality. And Falke had explained to them that he was a naturalised Englishman.

Johnny Bull, too, regretted that he had been so exceedingly brusque to the man, and he tried to make up for it by being extraordinarily polite—so that, as Bob Cherry told him afterwards, he was barely recognisable.

The Bounder waited impatiently in the dusky Close.

But at last the light was out in No. 1 Study, and he bent his glance in the direction of the School House doorway. The figure of the German appeared in the light there, and the Bounder gritted his teeth with annoyance as he saw that the chums of the Remove were coming out with him, doubtless to see him down to the gates.

Vernon-Smith hurried down to the gates first, and out into the dusky road. He could not talk to Falke in the presence of the juniors.

He waited at a short distance down the road. Falke shook hands with the juniors at the gates, and walked down in the direction of Friardale. Harry Wharton & Co. went back to the School House.

The Bounder stepped out into the road from the shadow of the trees as the German came by. Falke stopped, and nodded to him.

"I rather expected to see you!" he remarked.

"I've been waiting for you," said the Bounder. "I've got the money here."

"What money?"

"The twenty pounds I owe you, of course."

The German looked at him curiously.

"You are well supplied with money for a schoolboy," he said.

"My father's a millionaire," said the Bounder. "I have as much money as I want—within reason, of course. This isn't much for me. Here it is."

"There was no hurry—"

"But I've got the money, and I want my paper," said the Bounder.

"Ah," said Falke slowly, "you want your paper, Master Smith?"

"Yes. You've got it with you, I suppose?"

"Unfortunately, I have left it at my hotel."

The Bounder uttered an angry exclamation.

"You see, I did not expect you to raise such a sum of money so easily," said the German smoothly; "and such papers are better kept locked up. It would not do you any good if it should be seen at Greyfriars."

"I'd better come with you, then," said the Bounder. "I shall get lines for missing call-over, but I want that paper."

"What is the hurry?"

"I want it," said the Bounder. "Dash it all! I suppose you want me to pay up, don't you?"

The German laughed.

"That is a matter of complete indifference to me," he replied. "You are not bound to pay gaming debts at your age, you know."

"I want to pay, all the same."

"You mean that you are anxious to have back the paper with your signature on it?"

"Certainly."

"Suppose I have lost it?"

The Bounder started.

"You—you wouldn't be such a fool!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Why, if that paper were found—if it were seen—"

He checked himself abruptly. He did not want to betray to the German how utterly he was in his power. But the slow, snakelike smile on the blonde face made him realise that Falke was quite aware of as much as he could have told him on that point.

"It would mean—what do you call it?—the sack!" smiled Falke. "Your headmaster would expel you from the school."

"Well, what then?" growled the Bounder.

"You see, I know your country and your customs," smiled the German. "After you had been expelled from your school for disgraceful conduct—excuse me—you would never be able to gain admittance to another school like Greyfriars. The disgrace would cling to you all your life, and spoil your whole career— isn't it?"

"Well," said the Bounder, gritting his teeth, "suppose it is so? That isn't your business, I suppose? I owe you twenty pounds, and I'm ready to pay."

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"It may not suit me to sell that valuable paper for twenty pounds," said the German coolly.

The Bounder smiled bitterly and contemptuously. He thought he understood.

"You mean you want to make something on it?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"Is that your German idea of fair play—to play cards with a chap, and keep his I O U to blackmail him with?" asked the Bounder, with a bitter sneer. "I didn't know I was playing with a plotting thief. It serves me right, though, for coming to such a place at all. Not that Cobb or Banks, blackguards as they are, would ever have been guilty of such a dirty trick. They'd never have thought of it. But name your figure. I'll pay you."

The German listened calmly to the stinging words. The bitter scorn in the Bounder's voice did not seem to penetrate him at all.

"But I have said that I do not want your money," he answered. "You may keep it in your pocket, my young friend."

The Bounder stared.

"Then what the dickens do you want? Are you going to give me my paper for nothing?"

"I am not going to give it to you at all," said Falke deliberately.

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands. But he was more surprised than angry. He could not fathom the motives of this man, evidently a cunning and unscrupulous rascal. Falke was a stranger to him. Why should he seek to hold him in his power, if not for the purpose of extracting money from him? And he had said that he did not want money.

"What is your little game?" asked the Bounder between his teeth. "If you're thinking of showing that paper to my father, he wouldn't give you a penny for it."

"I am not thinking of that."

"Then what do you want to keep it for?"

"To show to your headmaster—if necessary."

"To—to Dr. Locke! Why, you scoundrel!" burst out the Bounder fiercely. "What harm have I done you, for you to want to ruin me?"

"Ah! It would be ruin?" said the German, with a smile.

"So bad as that?"

Vernon-Smith bit his lip.

"You know it would," he said sullenly. "What do you want? What do you want to keep this hanging over my head for? If it isn't money—"

"It is not money."

"You want to ruin me for the pleasure of the thing—me, a stranger to you," said the Bounder. "Are you mad?"

"I shall not ruin you if you make it worth my while not to do so. I have no enmity towards you. You are only a pawn in the game," said the German quietly. "But refuse to do what I require, and I will ruin you as I would crush a fly!"

"Oh!" muttered the Bounder. "You want something of me? And you played with me—to get that paper out of me—so that I should be under your thumb?"

"You are beginning to see?" smiled the German.

"I see that, but I don't see what you want me to do. If it's anything in reason, I'll do it to get my paper back. But what can I do? What rascally game are you up to? You are old Mr. Bull's secretary. I suppose you don't want me to open a window and let you in to rob the school. If you're a German spy, there's nothing I can do to help you—not that I would. What is your game?"

The Bounder was utterly puzzled. He was in the power of the German, and the rascal meant to use his power without mercy, but what his object was the Bounder could not fathom.

"I am not your enemy," said Falke quietly. "As I have said, you are quite indifferent to me. When I came in to-day you were fighting with someone—hein?"

"Yes, Bull—hang him!" growled the Bounder. "What has Bull to do with it?"

"You do not like Bull—hein?" asked the German, peering at him closely in the gloom.

"Hang him!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Good! You do not like him? He was hitting you very hard—hein? You are enemies, perhaps?"

"We were friends," said the Bounder sullenly—"at least, we were on fair terms with one another—but he ragged me to-day. He's down on me because I had a plunge the other night, when I was idiot enough to come to the Cross Keys. Hang him! It's not his business to preach to me."

"Then I am right. You do not like him?"

"No, I don't."

"All the better. Suppose"—the German glanced round in the shadows, and lowered his voice, though there was no one near—"suppose what I wanted you to do was something that would be to the disadvantage of this Johnny Bull—hein?"

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THE EDITOR.

Vernon-Smith stared at him blankly.

"Your employer's nephew?" he exclaimed. "What the dickens have you got up against him? You never saw him before to-day, I understand?"

"Quite so."

"Yet you want to injure him?"

"Perhaps."

"Then you can look further for somebody to help you," said the Bounder savagely. "What do you take me for, you skulking hound? If I were on speaking terms with the beastly prig I'd go and warn him of what you've said."

"And he would not believe you," smiled the German. "He has already mentioned to me what he calls your slanderous statement that I was playing cards in the Cross Keys with you."

"Slander!" said the Bounder, gritting his teeth. "The— the rotter! I'll—"

"And if you should betray me, my young friend, I should send your little paper to your headmaster," said the German. "You would not like that—hein?"

"And suppose," said the Bounder, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes—"suppose I should tell your employer the kind of blackguard you are? The sack for you as well as for me—hein?"

Falke laughed.

"I do not fear that. I have a full explanation to make to the worthy Herr Bull. But I see that you do not like this boy Johnny. Neither do I. A true English bulldog, blunt and plain—hein? The kind of English bulldog that we shall crush under our armed heel when—"

He paused. "So that's how much your naturalisation's worth!" sneered the Bounder. "I knew it well enough. You can't make a silk purse out of a pig's ear, nor an Englishman out of a German. You rotten traitor!"

"We are not here to talk politics," said the German smoothly. "I have said what you must do. You are in my power, my young friend; and what I ask of you is to help me against a person whom you dislike as much as I do. Surely that is not much to ask? But if you refuse I will ruin you."

The German did not raise his voice, but the concentrated, unscrupulous determination in his tones made the Bounder shiver. He realised that the man meant every word he said. He possessed the power, and he would use it to the uttermost.

"But what am I to do?" the Bounder muttered hoarsely.

"Come to me to-morrow, and I will tell you," said Falke. "Come and see me at the Friardale Arms, and we will have a little talk. It is not much I ask. The boy is not to be hurt. I do not ask you to run risks or to commit a crime. It is a little trick—simply a little trick—hein! Come to me to-morrow afternoon. You have a half-holiday on Saturday, I understand. Come, and we will talk."

"I don't want to come."

"But I want you to come, and that is sufficient," said the German coolly. "I have the honour to wish you good-evening, my young friend!"

He walked away without another word. The Bounder stood rooted to the ground, staring after him, till the darkness swallowed him up. Then, with a clouded brow, Vernon-Smith strode savagely back to Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

On the Football Field!

"I SUPPOSE Smithy's playing?" Squiff made that remark in a rather doubtful tone the next afternoon. Harry Wharton & Co. were standing in the passage after dinner, discussing the afternoon's match—the Remove eleven were going over to Redclyffe. In all the principal matches of the Remove, Vernon-Smith was an indispensable player, but his recent disagreement with the captain of the eleven made some of the fellows doubtful whether he would be included in the list.

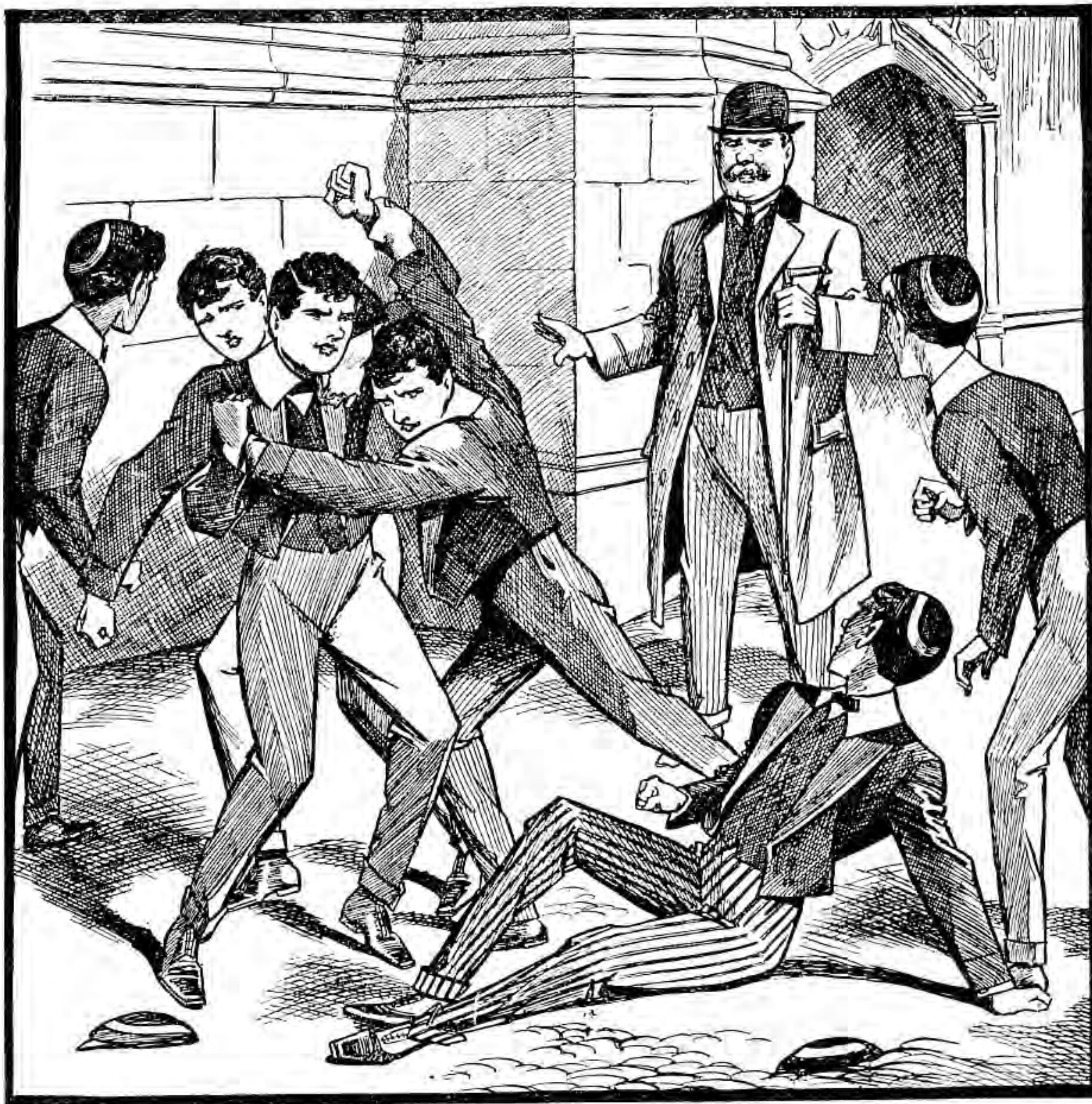
But Wharton nodded at once.

"Of course," he said. "We can't leave Smithy out. That is, of course, if he chooses to play. He may not want to, and in that case—"

"Give him a chance!" said Bob Cherry. "After all, Squiff says it was only a—only a little break, his going out the other night. Don't give a dog a bad name and hang him."

"Here he comes!" grunted Johnny Bull.

The Bounder was looking a little red as he came up. Since his fight with Johnny Bull he had not spoken to any member of the Famous Five. Their friendship of recent date seemed to be a thing of the past now. Still, the Bounder was a first-class winger, and personal matters could not be allowed to



Johnny Bull was pommelling the Bounder for all he was worth, and the Bounder was hitting back hard. The German paused as he saw the fight, and stood looking on curiously. (See Chapter 5.)

interfere with football. Harry Wharton was quite willing to keep all disagreements outside the Form eleven.

"We start in half an hour, Smithy," said Wharton.

"That's what I want to speak to you about," said the Bounder, his colour deepening. "I sha'n't be able to play this afternoon."

"Oh, you know we want you!"

"I'm sorry."

"Please yourself, of course," said Harry shortly.

Johnny Bull gave an expressive grunt. His nose had not yet quite recovered from the rough treatment Vernon-Smith had subjected it to. The Bounder looked at Johnny with a gleam in his eyes.

"You won't miss me much," he said bitterly. "Bull will be glad to be rid of me, at any rate."

"Can't say I shall be sorry, as you mention it," said Johnny Bull bluntly. "Going on the razale doesn't agree with footer. You'd crack up, too, if you've been smoking. If you expect me to shed tears because you're not coming, you'll be disappointed."

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The Bounder clenched his hands, and Johnny Bull promptly clenched his in return, but Vernon-Smith changed his mind and walked away, his brow very dark. He reflected bitterly that it was Johnny Bull who was most "down" on him for his unfortunate "plunge," and at a time when he could only ransom himself from ruin by helping the German secretary to carry out his scheme, whatever it was, for the injury of the unsuspecting junior. It was as if Fate were driving him into the German's hands. Squiff joined him in the Close as he strode moodily away.

The Australian junior was looking concerned.

"Smithy, old man—" he began.

"Well?" said Vernon-Smith, stopping.

"Hav'n't you better come?" urged Squiff. "Wharton doesn't want to keep you out of the team. Come over to Redcliffe with us. We need you. Penfold can't play this afternoon, and there isn't another chap good enough to take your place."

"I can't come!"

"No good putting your back up," said the Australian

pacifically. "You can't wonder at the fellows being a bit down on you. But it will blow over all right—if you don't get into the sulks. Come on, Smithy!"

"You're a good chap, Squiff, but I'm not in the sulks," said the Bounder, with an effort. "It isn't that—but I can't go to Redclyffe."

Squiff's handsome face grew a little stern.

"You don't mean to say that you've got a precious engagement?" he exclaimed.

"I have!"

"Oh, then I needn't say any more!" said Squiff, and he turned on his heel.

"That's right!" said the Bounder bitterly. "Go for a chap when he's down."

Squiff turned back at once.

"You know I wouldn't do that," he said directly. "I concluded from what you said that you were playing the giddy ox again. If it isn't that—"

"It isn't that!"

"Then why can't you come to Redclyffe?"

"I've got to see a man," said the Bounder. "I—I lost money the other night, and I've given an I O U. I've got to get it back."

"Oh!" said Squiff. "Wouldn't any other time do?"

"He's ordered me to see him this afternoon."

"Ordered you!"

"Yes, and held that paper over my head if I kick," said the Bounder bitterly. "You see, I'm in his hands. If he gave me away to the Head I should be done for here. It's no good talking about it; I've got to get that paper. I've made a precious fool of myself, and no mistake."

"You've got the money to settle?" asked Squiff. "I could lend you, if you like—"

"I've got the money," said the Bounder. "That's all right." He wondered whether he should confide the whole matter to Squiff for the moment, but he remembered the threat of the secretary, and he held his tongue. "I—I've told you that much, Squiff, because—because I don't want you to think I'm going to play the fool again. But I'm not going to make excuses to those fellows. If they choose to be down on me, let them—I don't care."

He nodded to the Australian, and strode away towards the gates. Squiff returned thoughtfully to the footballers. The Cornstalk was just as much "down" on the Bounder's folly as the Famous Five were, but he could not help feeling sorry for the fellow who was paying dearly for his fault.

"He's not coming?" asked Wharton, as Field rejoined him.

"No; he's got to go out," said Squiff.

Johnny Bull's lips curled.

"It's all right, Bull," said Squiff, a little tartly, "and I don't think you need rub it in quite so much as you've been doing. Smithy made an ass of himself, and he's sorry for it, and he's got himself into a mess, and if we're too much down on him it will only get his back up, and perhaps make him chuck up being decent altogether. A fellow who's trying to do his best ought to be encouraged a bit."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry. "You talk like a giddy gramophone, Squiff. Where did you learn to be so eloquent?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, about the team," said Harry Wharton. "I'll put in Hazeldene instead of Smithy. We shall miss him, though, if Redclyffe are in form."

But Vernon-Smith was soon dismissed from their minds as they prepared for the journey to Redclyffe. Hazeldene was glad enough to play—being on his good behaviour just now—and the brake rolled away with the team and half a dozen fellows over.

Harry Wharton had said that the Bounder would be missed, and he was right. Redclyffe juniors were at the top of their form that afternoon. Redclyffe had a good many defeats to make up for, and they had been preparing for that match, and they put an unusually strong team into the field.

The Greyfriars eleven had all their work cut out to hold their own in the first half, and the interval came without a score.

In the second half they had a keen wind against them, and the Redclyffians pressed them hard.

The Removites played up well; but their attack was not what it would have been if the keen, cool Bounder had been in the front line. Hazeldene did his best, but he was

nowhere near Smithy's form. A hot attack on the Redclyffe goal failed through the outside-left letting the ball go into touch, and the Removites did not have another chance. The Redclyffians swept them back down the wind towards their goal, and attacked hotly in their turn.

Bulstrode, in goal, did his best, but the ball came in, and the Redclyffe crowd yelled with glee.

"Goal—goal!"

Harry Wharton frowned as they walked back to the centre of the field. The teams were very nearly evenly matched, but with the Bounder in the Greyfriars ranks, it would have made a great difference. Wharton could not help feeling exasperated at being left in the lurch just when the winger was wanted. Hazel was puffing and blowing by this time, and it was as good—or as bad—as playing a man short.

"Play up, you chaps!" said Wharton. "Don't let them beat us!"

The Removites played up as hard as they could, but they could not make up the leeway. When the whistle went, the Redclyffians were still one goal ahead.

The Greyfriars fellows came off the field beaten, and most of them feeling exasperated. The match had been so close that the addition of Smithy to their ranks would have turned the scale easily.

"It's rotten!" growled Johnny Bull, when they sat in the brake, rolling homeward. "The fellow ought to have played. He's lost us this match. He was keen enough to shove himself into the team at one time, and now we depend on him he leaves us in the lurch while he goes hanging about with a set of sporting blackguards!"

"I don't think he's doing that," said Squiff.

Johnny Bull snorted.

"What is he doing, then? One of his precious engagements—I know what that means. And when we get back I'll jolly well tell him what I think of him. He's lost us this match, and if I were skipper I'd never let him play for the Remov again. Anyway, I'll give him a bit of my mind."

"No good ragging," said Todd.

"Oh, rats!" said Johnny Bull crossly.

And the expression on his face showed that when he met the Bounder again the "piece of his mind" that he intended to give him would not be pleasant or complimentary.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Schemel

"COME in, my young friend!"

The German was smoking a cigar in his room when Vernon-Smith was shown in. He did not rise, but he gave the junior a smile and a nod.

Vernon-Smith came towards him, and stood with a sullen expression on his face. His feelings were bitter, and there was an uneasy dread and foreboding in his breast. He was utterly in the German's power, and the knowledge that he owed it to his own folly did not make it any more pleasant. Since his last meeting with Falke, he had been in the gloomiest spirits. He knew that it was some act of rascality the German required of him, though he could not guess what it was, or what the motive was. And he knew that if he refused the demand it was ruin for him. The worn look on his face did not escape Falke's keen, steely eyes.

"Sit down," he said agreeably.

The Bounder sank into a chair.

"No need to jaw," he said sullenly. "I've come for my paper. I've got the money in my pocket."

"I do not want your money, my young friend. Keep it in your pockets. I have given you time to reflect. Have you decided to do as I ask?"

"That depends on what it is. You know you've got me under your thumb."

"Exactly. But I do not seek to hurt you. Do as I require, and I hand you back your paper, and fifty pounds along with it."

"Keep your money!"

The German shrugged his shoulders.

"The paper, then, without the money," he said. "I dare say you are somewhat surprised that I seek to harm the boy Bull, as I am his uncle's secretary?"

"I suppose you have some rotten game on!" growled the Bounder. "I can't guess what it is."

"There is no need for you to guess," said Falke. "Suffice it that I require a certain thing done to a boy whom you dislike, and who has been unjust to you. You help me, and revenge yourself at the same time. You do not like this boy?"

The Bounder's eyes glittered as he remembered the scornful curl of Johnny Bull's lip. After all, why should he demur, when his own safety, his whole future, were at stake, and he had nothing to expect from Bull but scorn and dislike? Who

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was Johnny Bull that he should sacrifice himself to spare him?

"Tell me what you want," he said.

The German nodded as if satisfied. He could read the junior's feelings easily enough.

"You have simply to carry out my instructions," he said. "This boy—this Bull—is in my way. Never mind how he is in my way, but he is. He must be disgraced. When his uncle comes to see him at Greyfriars, he must learn that his nephew is a boy with a bad character—a very bad character."

The Bounder began to understand.

"You want to make trouble between Bull and his uncle?" he said slowly.

"Quite so."

"I think I begin to tumble," said the Bounder. "Old Mr. Bull is very old, and very rich. You are his secretary, and you've got him under your influence, and you're making a good thing out of him?"

"You are very keen, my young friend."

"And you're afraid his nephew may step in and spoil your game? I don't see why. Old Bull will only see him for a day, and Bull isn't likely to say anything against you. I don't see how a school kid could influence him against you."

"It is not necessary for you to see," smiled Falke.

The Bounder looked at him keenly, and he forced the frown from his brow. It came into his mind that he would learn the whole game, whatever it was, whether he helped the German or not. Falke evidently regarded Vernon-Smith simply as a schoolboy with blackguardly tastes, who could be influenced and threatened. He did not know the keen mind and the hard, obstinate character of the Bounder.

In the first round between those two hard, resolute characters, the German had had the advantage, simply because the Bounder had not been on his guard. He had not suspected that the man, a stranger to him, had a secret scheme up his sleeve. But now that his wits were fully awakened, Vernon-Smith was fully a match for the German.

You can tell me as much or as little as you like," he said. "But if you want me to help you you'd better make it pretty clear."

"Ach! You have decided to help me and earn your IOU!" grinned Falke.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"I've got no choice," he said, lighting a cigarette. "Now, what's the game?"

"I have told you. Johnny Bull is to be disgraced in his uncle's eyes. Ach! If his name were upon that paper instead of your own, it would be worth a thousand pounds to me! Tell me"—the German bent forward eagerly—"is there a chance of that—of getting the boy to visit Mr. Cobb's little parlour—hein?"

"About as much chance as of getting him to the moon," said Vernon-Smith.

"Ach! He does not share your tastes—hein?"

"No!" growled the Bounder.

"That is unfortunate. That would have been excellent. But I judged him so," said the German, with a nod. "I have—what you call—sized him up. He is not that kind of boy. But it could be made to appear that he was so, and that is where you come in, my young friend. Mind, it is not dangerous. I do not ask you to run risks. If he should be expelled from your school, that would be good; but even that is not needed. Only his character must be bad—very bad." Falke grinned. "An old gentleman with high moral ideas must not be able to regard him as a youth suitable to adopt, and make a son of, and trust. You understand?"

"I think I do," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "Old Mr. Bull is thinking of adopting his nephew, and no doubt leaving him his fortune, and you don't want a rival on the scene. You are making too good a thing out of the old donkey, and you hope to step into dead men's shoes when he's gone, if the nephew doesn't interfere. I think I understand. And now," said the Bounder, with a glitter in his eyes, "what's to prevent me from going to Mr. Bull and repeating every word you've said to me?"

"A scrap of paper," smiled the German.

"Good! And if you use that scrap of paper against me, what then? Suppose, after I'm sacked from Greyfriars, my first visit is to Mr. Bull, to give him some points about his secretary? I think I've got you as tight as you've got me."

The German did not seem disturbed.

"That is where you are mistaken," he smiled. "I have got you, but you have not got me. I will explain so much, so that you shall see that you cannot defy me. My playing at the Cross Keys, and so forth, not suitable for a secretary—hein? But in case you should be tempted to make a fool of yourself, my young friend, I will tell you so much—Herr Bull knows already. What I do I do by his instructions."

"I don't believe you!" said the Bounder. "And unless you jolly well prove it I shall think that you are bluffing, and I defy you! You are bluffing, you rotten German!"

"No names, please. But I will prove to you that I am not—what you say—bluffing. Only to prevent you making one

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fool of yourself, for if you defy me you are ruined, and then you will be no use to me. Listen! I am sent here by Mr. Bull to learn what his nephew is like, and to report to him. I make acquaintances with Mr. Cobb and his friends, to learn whether the good Bull does any disreputable actions. You see? All I do I can explain to Herr Bull's satisfaction."

"I don't believe he has sent you here to spy on his nephew."

"But it is true—so! Observe that the old gentleman has never seen his nephew, but he thinks to adopt him, and to take him back to Melbourne, to be—what do you call?—the prop of his declining years. But he is old. He is wary. He is even suspicious. If he shall see the boy, he shall not know what he is like. But he thinks of a good plan. He sends his secretary to make secret inquiry—hein? I make the inquiry, and I report to my beloved master, who trusts me absolutely. But when I shall make my report it must be backed up by proof, which you will provide. Have I made myself clear?"

The Bounder nodded silently.

The brief hope had died in his breast. It was clear enough now.

The suspicious old man, trusting his secretary to the full, was employing him to discover whether Johnny Bull was worthy of what he intended for him, and it was only too evident that the rascally German enjoyed the old man's entire confidence. The Bounder might go to the old man, tell him all he could, and the cunning German had his answer ready—all he had done was in pursuit of his investigations. And if the Bounder repeated the rascally proposition that had been made to him, of what use would his unsupported word be—the word, too, of a fellow proved guilty of disreputable conduct and expelled from his school for it? The German had nothing to fear from him, he realised that. The rascal was far too cunning to place himself in the power of the junior he intended to make use of.

Falke watched the varying expressions on his face, smiling. He was sure, now, of his victim.

"You see?" he said. "You understand? You say what you like to Herr Bull. What you can prove I can explain away, and what you cannot prove would not be believed. And you, my young friend, you are ruined. You are kicked out of your school and disgraced for ever. Can you afford to quarrel with me—hein?"

"No!" muttered the Bounder huskily.

There was despair in his heart. He had learned as much as he wanted to know, but it was of no use to save him.

"So now you carry out my orders, isn't it?" said Falke.

"It is very easy. The boy shall be found to be a young rascal—like you, my young friend, but worse. He shall smoke, he shall drink, he shall gamble. He shall do all those things, which shall make his uncle see that it is impossible he should be taken to his heart, and brought up to follow him in his big business. And then that business in Melbourne shall be Bull & Falke, I think—and afterwards Falke alone. Hein? It is only this fancy of coming home to see a nephew that has stepped into my way—"

The German checked himself abruptly. "But I talk too much. What do you say?"

"I can't help you," muttered the Bounder. "I tell you, Johnny Bull isn't that kind of chap. Nothing would make him do any of the things you have mentioned."

"But he shall be made to appear to do them," smiled Falke; "that is enough. Is it not said that in your country appearances are everything? Suppose there are cigarettes found in his box and his pockets? And playing-cards shall be discovered; and he shall be found suffering from intoxication. Hein? You shall have tea with him, and slip something that I will give you into his tea, into his ginger-beer, and he shall go to sleep, and you shall leave a flask of spirits near him. Hein? And in his pockets shall be bank-notes that you have missed. You make a hullabaloo about the money that has been stolen, and when this Bull is found intoxicated, it shall be discovered in his pockets. Hein?"

"You infernal scoundrel!" shouted the Bounder, springing to his feet.

"Ach! But it is a good little game, and you shall help me," said the German, unmoved. "Do not excite yourself, zen."

"Never!"

"Never? Zat is a long word. But please yourself, my young friend. If you choose not, you walk away now. And I send by register-post a scrap of paper to your headmaster, and I find another to help me. Hein? Good-evening!"

The Bounder stood unsteadily, gripping the back of his chair. The German turned away from him, blowing rings of smoke from his cigar, and staring out indifferently into the old High Street of Friardale. But the Bounder did

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not go. Falke looked back in a few moments, and appeared to be surprised to see him there.

"Ach! You have not gone?" he said pleasantly. "But we have finished to talk."

"You—you villain!"

Falke pointed to the door.

"I—I can't do it!" muttered the Bounder. "It would mean the sack for him."

"But the sack, as you call it, is better for the boy you hate than for yourself, isn't it? For that is the choice, my young friend."

"I—I must have time to think," muttered the Bounder hoarsely. "I—I can't face the sack; but—but I can't do what you want."

"That is the choice."

The Bounder groaned. Ruin for himself, or black treachery and ruin for another. It was a bitter price to pay for the last plunge.

"You will do so?" murmured Falke softly. "You are not so particular; you shall break bounds and drink and gamble—a little more will not hurt you. Hein? And this boy—he has ill-used you. And if you require money—then, fifty pounds—a hundred pounds—what you shall ask. I am generous."

"I—I can't!"

Falke shrugged his shoulders.

"Then go, my young friend. I do not urge you. I find some other way. Hein? You will not be in the school then to be in the way."

"I—I— Give me time; let me think," muttered the Bounder. "I—I can't decide all at once. I must have time."

"So. I shall see you, then, on Monday; but not later, for I cannot waste time. If you are no use to me, I must find other means," said the German coolly. "You shall write to me, and tell me on Monday where I see you. I will bring you the powder. Have no fear—it will not harm. Ach! I have only one neck! You shall see me taste a little to assure you, if you have fear. To Monday, then. Auf wiedersehen!" he added mockingly, as the Bounder staggered towards the door.

When the door had closed behind the wretched boy, the German smiled softly, and lighted a fresh cigar. Matters were going very well for Herr Friedrich Falke.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Fight!

"THERE is the rotter!"

Johnny Bull grunted out the words as the juniors came into the common-room after the return from Redclyffe. Vernon-Smith was there, seated—or, rather, huddled—in an armchair, and staring at the fire. A good many fellows had looked curiously at the Bounder, wondering what was the matter with him, but his look was so forbidding that no one ventured to inquire.

Since his interview with the German, Vernon-Smith's brain had been in a whirl. To carry out the rascal's demand seemed impossible; but to refuse, it was impossible, too.

The Bounder was in a cleft stick. He felt his utter helplessness, and for once all his cool cunning and resource had deserted him. He was crushed and beaten. He did not look up as the juniors came in. He had forgotten all about them and the football match at Redclyffe. He was not likely to be thinking of football at this moment. Johnny Bull's remark passed him unheeded.

"Hallo, Smithy!" said Squiff, a little more genially than Bull. "You're looking down. We've been licked."

Vernon-Smith roused himself with an effort.

"Eh? What?" he said.

"We've been licked to the wide!" said Sampson Quincy ffley Field. "And all because you weren't there, Smithy."

"I'm sorry," said the Bounder dully.

"Yes, you look sorry!" growled Johnny Bull. "It's one up against the Remove, and goes down in our record for the season."

The Bounder burst into a sardonic laugh. At the moment when he was hesitating between crime and ruin, it struck him as grimly humorous that he should be expected to care about the Remove's football record for the season. His laugh irritated Johnny Bull. He was far from understanding the terrible struggle in the Bounder's heart.

"You can cackle!" he exclaimed. "But I said I'd give you my opinion about it, and I will. You left your team in the lurch to go playing the blackguard with a set of rascals, and I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The Bounder looked at him oddly. It seemed like Fate. This was the boy he was to harm, if he was to save himself from ruin; and while he was struggling against the tempta-

tion, this very fellow seemed to be doing all in his power to banish his scruples.

"Pile it on," said Vernon-Smith. "Is that all?"

"That's enough, anyway," said Bob Cherry. "Cheese it, Johnny! Smithy has a right to please himself."

"Oh, let him run on!" said the Bounder. "I like to listen to him. Let the silly idiot run on."

Some of the juniors laughed, and Johnny Bull flushed with anger. He shook a big fist towards the Bounder.

"If I were your skipper," he said, "I'd give you a hiding."

"Why not do it, anyway?" suggested the Bounder mockingly. "You seem to have bungled the match, and you want to put it on to me. If I were skipper, I wouldn't play such a pigheaded duffer!"

That was enough for Johnny Bull. He had come there to slang the Bounder, not to be slanged by him. He strode towards Vernon-Smith with his fists clenched.

"You rotten cad!" he exclaimed. "Put up your hands."

"Certainly. I'll lick you if you like," said Vernon-Smith, putting up his hands at once. "You've chosen to pick on me and make a quarrel, and you can take the consequences—all of them, hang you! It's your own fault."

"Oh, come on, and don't jaw!"

"Look here, there's nothing to rag about," said Harry Wharton uneasily. "For goodness' sake don't start scrapping!"

"Rats! I'm going to lick that cad, unless he's afraid."

The Bounder laughed again, a laugh that was so strange and strained that some of the fellows looked at him in surprise.

"I'm not afraid," he said. "Come on! It's your own fault."

"Chuck it, Johnny!" said Squiff, who was staring at the Bounder curiously. He could see that there was something very wrong with Vernon-Smith, under his cynical and mocking manner. "Chuck it, I tell you!"

"Oh, rats! Why doesn't he come on?" growled Johnny Bull angrily. "I didn't think he was a funk before, though I knew he was a rotter."

The Bounder hit out as the last word left Bull's lips. The next moment they were fighting. Bolsover major closed the door of the common-room quickly, in case any masters or prefects should pass along the passage. Then the juniors gathered round the combatants in an excited ring.

A fight between Johnny Bull and the Bounder was a "sporting event" of unusual interest. The Bounder was a first-class boxer, and as hard as nails; and powerful fellow as Bull was, Smithy was probably his match. At all events, he would have been his match at any other time, but just now he seemed decidedly off colour. He fought fiercely, and Johnny Bull received a good deal of punishment, but from the start the fight was in favour of Bull.

Johnny was very angry, and he hit hard, and the Bounder did not guard with his usual skill. He seemed to be less keen than usual, as if another matter were in his mind all the time. There was a crash as a heavy right-hander from Johnny caught him on the chest and flung him to the floor.

"I guess that was a regular sockdolager!" said Fisher T. Fish admiringly. "Smithy's out!"

Johnny Bull stood panting, while the Bounder lay gasping dazedly on the floor. Bolsover major ran to pick him up.

"You're not licked, Smithy?" said Bolsover encouragingly. "Dash it all, you're not going to let yourself be licked in one round? Go for him!"

The Bounder staggered to his feet with Bolsover's assistance. His face was deadly white, and his eyes were burning.

"I'm not licked!" he muttered hoarsely. "Hang him! I'll make him smart for this!"

"Oh, use your hands and not your tongue!" snapped Johnny Bull.

The Bounder rushed at him furiously. There was a buzz of excitement as they went at it again, hammer and tongs.

Johnny Bull had to give ground before that fierce attack; but he soon recovered himself, hitting out hard. The Bounder fought resolutely, but he was evidently out of sorts, and he was knocked right and left. He went to the floor again at last, and lay panting.

"That's enough!" said Harry Wharton.

The Bounder raised himself on his elbow.

"I—I'm finished," he muttered. "But you'll be sorry for this, Bull."

Johnny Bull sniffed contemptuously, and turned away.

The Bounder rose unsteadily, and went to the door, followed by curious glances. He had put up a very poor show, though he had been plucky enough. It was evident that he was not his usual self.

He went to bathe his face, his nerves throbbing, his heart filled with anger and hatred. The die was cast now. Johnny



The Bounder rose to his feet. "That's all; I'm done here. Good-bye!" "Where are you going?" asked Wharton, with a start. "I'm going to clear off. I'm not going to stay and be sacked. That's a treat I shall deprive the fellows of," said Vernon-Smith, with a sneer. (See Chapter II.)

Bull had sealed his own fate! To spare him the Bounder had to sacrifice himself, to spare the fellow who had knocked him right and left, whose heavy blows had left marks on his face. He laughed savagely at the thought. His long hesitation was over. The German's threats, and his own revenge, pushed him in the same direction, and Johnny Bull's fate was sealed!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Cross-Roads of Life!

SQUIFF paused to speak to the Bounder, the next morning after service. It was Sunday, and the juniors were free for the day. The Bounder was going away by himself with a clouded brow, when the Australian joined him.

"Coming for a little trot?" asked Squiff genially.

The Bounder's brows lowered.

"Aren't you going with that little crowd?" he asked bitterly, with a nod towards the Famous Five, who were strolling away together.

"I'm coming with you, if you'll have me," said Squiff pleasantly. "What the dence! You don't want to go meeching off alone!"

"Yes, I do!" said the Bounder abruptly. "I'm not fit company for anybody just now. I'm feeling down."

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"Just so," agreed Squiff. "I could see that something was the matter."

"And you're taking pity on me—what!" snarled the Bounder. In his present mood, Vernon-Smith was willing to quarrel with anyone. It fortified his new and terrible resolution, to feel that everybody was down on him.

"How jolly touchy you're getting," said Squiff, determined to be good-tempered. "We're pals, in a way, Smithy, and if you're down, then you want cheerful and pleasant company to buck you up—mine, for instance! Come on, and don't be ratty!"

"You'd better leave me alone," said the Bounder sullenly.

"Well, I will, if you like, of course; but—" Squiff looked at him hard. "Look here, Smithy, you can treat me as a pal, you know. I believe what you told me the other night—the other fellows think you were on the razzle yesterday, when you cut the footer-match, and you can't blame them—but somehow I don't. It looks to me as if you've got yourself into trouble, and if I could help you—"

"Nobody can help me!"

"Then you are in trouble?"

The Bounder was silent.

"I don't want to be inquisitive, Smithy, but two heads are better than one, you know," said Squiff. "I'd do anything I could."

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"You're a good chap," said the Bounder huskily. "But—but you can't do anything. You—you saw how that rotter piled on me yesterday—he didn't care a rap that I was worried almost out of my mind—"

"Well, he didn't know," said Squiff, "and he's not a rotter, Smithy; he's a jolly good chap, only a bit hasty in his temper. I felt rather rattly myself when the Redclyffe chaps licked us, because you were not there. But what has Bull to do with it—he's got nothing to do with the trouble you're in surely?"

The Bounder flushed.

"No, no; I don't mean that!" he said hastily. "But if he'd been decent— Never mind. It's no good talking. Squiff; I've got myself into a hole, and I've got to get out of it by myself. You can't help me."

And the Bounder strode away, leaving Squiff looking decidedly concerned.

What was in Vernon-Smith's mind could not very well be confided to anybody else. He had made up his mind to save himself at the expense of Johnny Bull, and his conscience was at work, gnawing; but he hardened himself as he thought of the treatment he had received at the hands of the junior he meant to injure. But for that, he told himself, he would have refused Falke's demand, at any risk; he would have faced ruin rather than yield. But why, now, should he make any sacrifices for the fellow who had been hard, unjust, unfriendly? In the hour of his struggle with his bitter temptation, Johnny Bull had had only hard words and blows for him, and with that thought the Bounder hardened his heart.

He spent the rest of the morning tramping in the frosty fields by himself—he was not in a mood for company. At the dinner-table he was silent and morose. In the afternoon he avoided the other fellows, going out for a long tramp by himself.

He came in tired and dispirited, his resolution unshaken, but his conscience was at work, remorse gnawing his heart even before the evil was done. He passed the Famous Five as he came into the house. They were chatting in the hall, and the Bounder glanced towards them, struck bitterly by the contrast between their cheery spirits and his own black mood. He caught Johnny Bull's eye turned upon him, and noted the curl of his lip. He knew what that meant—the juniors had noted that he had gone out by himself, avoiding companionship, and they had drawn the conclusion that he had been "pub-haunting" again.

It was not unnatural, but the injustice of it made the Bounder bite his lip with anger and resentment. And if his grim resolution had wavered, it hardened more than ever now. Johnny Bull had no mercy to expect from him.

In his study that afternoon, the Bounder wrote a line to Falke, and dropped the letter in the school letter-box. He had told the German where to meet him, outside the school walls, and at what hour. The die was cast!

Then the unhappy junior strove to dismiss the matter from his mind.

But that was not easy.

If he had been on his old terms with the chums of the Remove, friendly and cheery with Johnny Bull, he felt that he could not have borne it; the boy's utter unsuspectingness of the plot against him, his ignorance of his danger, would have gone to the Bounder's heart with an appeal he could not have resisted. But he was on terms of enmity now with the intended victim, and he felt that Bull had been unjust to him. For that injustice he should suffer.

But he could not drive the matter from his mind; it haunted him, and he wondered drearily whether, after he had saved himself at so terrible a price, he would ever know peace of mind again.

He joined the crowd of fellows going in for evening service, in a wretched mood.

The hush in the old chapel of Greyfriars, the deep notes of the organ, had a soothing effect upon his troubled spirit.

The Bounder sat like one in a dream, while the doctor was speaking.

Never had the service impressed him before as it did then. He had gone through it always carelessly, as a part of the day's duty.

Now it affected him strangely.

In his present mood, he seemed to see clearly meanings in words that had hitherto passed from his mind, leaving no impression.

The low but clear voice of the doctor seemed to penetrate to his very soul, as he listened. The good old doctor was not a bore in the pulpit; his sermon was short, clear, and in simple language. It was more like a friendly talk with his boys than a sermon.

"Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath!"

That was the text the doctor had taken.

Vernon-Smith listened with a numb feeling.

It seemed to him that a cloud was clearing from his mind.

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He had let the sun go down upon his wrath; he had nourished his sense of injury against the junior who had been unjust to him; he had hugged his injuries to his bosom, in order that he might feel some justification for the treachery he was to be guilty of.

The flimsy pretences with which he had sought to satisfy his conscience seemed to be torn from him in shreds now.

When the service was over, and the last deep tones of the organ had died away, the Bounder walked unsteadily out with the other fellows.

In the dusk outside the chapel, Johnny Bull had hesitated, instead of following his friends, he seemed to be waiting.

"Come on!" called out Bob Cherry.

"I'll follow you," said Bull. "Don't wait!"

The Bounder passed him, and Johnny Bull touched him on the arm. Vernon-Smith looked at him dully.

"What do you want?"

Johnny Bull's face was red, but he spoke out in his direct way.

"I—I want to speak to you, Smithy. I—I've been thinking. And—and I'm sorry—. I think I was a bit too down on you, and—and if you like to look over it, there's my fist!"

He held out his hand.

Vernon-Smith felt a strange throb in his heart. He understood that the influence he had felt himself had been felt also by Johnny Bull. And he knew, too, that if he took the hand that was so frankly offered, he could not keep to his base resolution of the previous day; he knew that it meant that he must play the game, and face the consequences.

He stood silent, trembling. It was a moment charged with Fate for him. He was at the cross-roads.

Johnny Bull waited.

"There's my fist—if you choose to take it," he repeated. "I can't say more than that, Smithy."

Vernon-Smith took his hand.

"I'm glad you spoke," he said, in a low voice. "That finishes it. You've been harder on me than you know, Bull, and you don't know what might have come of it. But I don't bear any malice."

He dropped Bull's hand and turned away.

Johnny hurried after his chums, wondering. The strange earnestness in the Bounder's manner had impressed him curiously. But he was glad that he had spoken to the Bounder. He little dreamed how much reason he had to be glad.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Clean Breast of It!

THE Bounder's mind was made up.

His resolution brought peace to his troubled soul.

The next day he felt a calmness that he had not experienced since the night of that foolish "plunge," which had been the beginning of his troubles.

He realised all that it meant to him.

The German, disappointed at the loss of the tool he needed for his rascally scheme, would have no mercy upon him.

It was ruin for the reckless junior.

Once his IOU was placed in the doctor's hands, he was done for at Greyfriars. His expulsion from the school would follow immediately.

He had been pardoned before on his promise of reform. He would not be forgiven a second time.

But he had resolved to face it.

He had come out of church on Sunday evening with his heart torn with conflicting emotions, still hesitating; but Johnny Bull's frank word and action had decided him. He could not, after that, nourish the miserable animosity that had strengthened him in his intended wrongdoing. He saw his conduct in its true light. If now he acted as Falke demanded, he would be deliberately guilty of the basest treachery towards a fellow he had no quarrel with—to save himself! And he knew that he could not do it.

The game was up at Greyfriars. But he did not intend to wait till he was expelled. That final disgrace, at least he could escape, by leaving the school before his enemy betrayed him to the Head.

But the German's words were fresh in his mind. If he was gone, and Johnny Bull still unsuspecting, the plotter would find other means. He had taken the Bounder as the easiest tool; but he would find others, or change his plan and contrive to gain his end in some other way. What chance had the unsuspecting junior against that cunning and unscrupulous man? Before he left Greyfriars for ever, Vernon-Smith had one duty to do—to open Johnny Bull's eyes to his danger. He knew that the junior would be incredulous. But somehow or other he had to be convinced, to be put upon his guard.

During that day the Bounder thought the matter over, while he went mechanically through his work. It was his last day at Greyfriars, and the thought of that made his heart

ache. Never had the old school seemed so dear to him. Even the dusky old class-room, the chipped desk where his initials were cut, the dog-eared Latin grammar—everything seemed twined with his very heart-strings.

But it was to be, and the Bounder had regained his courage and his nerve. What he had to face, he would face like a man.

After school Bob Cherry hailed him cheerily in the passage. The Co. knew that Johnny Bull had "made it up" with the Bounder, and they were glad of it. They were willing to accept Squiff's assurance of what the Bounder had told him. That the reckless junior had made his last "plunge," and that it was for once and once only. They did not want to be hard on him, or to set up to judge him. If the Bounder meant to play the game, they were more than willing to let bygones be bygones. Bob linked his arm in Vernon-Smith's, and walked him off.

"What's up?" asked the Bounder uneasily.

"Feed in the study," said Bob cheerfully. "You're coming."

"Oh, good!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Squiff, glad and relieved to see his friends on good terms again. "And I'm bringing a pot of jam, Smithy."

Vernon-Smith laughed.

He joined the cheery circle in No. 1 study, in something like his old spirits. But Harry Wharton & Co. noticed several times that a cloud gathered on his brow, and that his thoughts seemed far away.

"Penny for 'em, Smithy," said Bob jocularly.

"I want to speak to you fellows after tea," said Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Go ahead," said Harry Wharton. "About the footer, do you mean? Of course, you're playing on Wednesday."

The Bounder smiled bitterly.

"No, I'm not playing on Wednesday," he said.

"Oh!"

"It's not another engagement," said Vernon-Smith, with a curl of the lip. "I'm not going pub-haunting."

"Nobody said you were, old chap," murmured Squiff.

"But I've got a good reason," said Vernon-Smith. "You fellows will keep it dark, of course, if I tell you."

"Oh, all right. But I don't see—" began Wharton.

"I can't play on Wednesday, because I sha'n't be here," said the Bounder evenly.

"Going home for the half-holiday, do you mean?"

"Rather more than that—I'm leaving Greyfriars."

The chums of the Remove stared at him.

"Leaving Greyfriars!" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment.

"Yes."

"What on earth for?" asked Squiff.

"To save the Head the trouble of sacking me."

"Smithy!"

"I say, don't be an ass, Smithy," said Johnny Bull uneasily. "What the dickens have you been doing?"

"The esteemed Smithy is talking out of his honourable neck," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We will not let him go."

"No fear!" exclaimed Nugent. "Don't be an ass, Smithy. If you've got yourself into a fix, we'll help you out of it. You don't look as if you've been enjoying yourself."

"I haven't," said the Bounder; "but I'm not asking for sympathy. I'm speaking to you because I've got something to tell you before I go. I hope you'll believe me. If you don't—"

"Of course we shall believe you," said Harry Wharton. "But what is it? What has happened?"

"I'll explain. On Sunday night Bull made it up with me. He gave me his fist, and that settled it. But for that, very likely, Bull would have been sacked instead of me."

"I!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "You're dotty! What have I done?"

The Bounder looked at him with a cynical smile.

"Nothing, that I know of," he said. "It isn't what you've done, but what you'd be made to seem to have done. You needn't stare at me as if you thought I'd gone off my rocker. It's just as I say."

Johnny Bull grunted.

"Well, you'll have to make it a bit clearer," he said. "I'm blessed if I understand what you're driving at. Do you mean to say that there's somebody got his knife into me, and laying a scheme like that against me? Bow-wow."

"It sounds a bit thick," said Wharton. "But if there's anything in it, it's jolly decent of you to tell us, Smithy. Only—only it's a bit hard to swallow, you know. Let's have the particulars."

"I told you that the other night, one of the rotters I was playing with was that German, Falke. I lost money to him, and gave him my I O U."

"My uncle's secretary!" said Johnny Bull. "Look here, Smithy, you said that before, and we had a row about it. You can't expect me to believe that my uncle would be idiot enough to employ a man like that as a confidential secretary."

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PENNY.

"Your uncle doesn't know the kind of man he is. He's taken him in," said the Bounder.

"But my uncle thinks a lot of him," said Johnny. "He's told me so in his letter. This man Falke is his right-hand man in business, and he's thinking of taking him into partnership. He's asked me to be very decent to Falke for that reason. He says the chap has been like a son to him, and that he had thought at one time of making him his heir."

"I guessed something of the sort," said Vernon-Smith, "and now the old man has a sudden idea of coming home to England to see you, and if he takes to you, Falke can see that the game is up for him. He has pulled the wool over Mr. Bull's eyes, and sucked up to him, but if you came between, it would be good-bye to what he expects, especially as a young fellow like you would most likely soon tumble to his real character, and open the old fellow's eyes to it. Falke's game is to see that your uncle doesn't take to you—to make trouble between you. I've got that straight from the horse's mouth—from Falke himself."

"Oh, come!"

"You can believe me or not, as you like," said the Bounder, shrugging his shoulders. "I felt that I ought to put you on your guard before I clear off, or I shouldn't be saying a word. Falke has my I O U. I offered him the money to settle it, and he refused to take it. He chooses to keep the paper in his hands, so that he can rain me at any moment he pleases. He knew Cobb, and I suppose he made it worth his while to help him. They got me there on purpose to play into the German's hands, and I never suspected—in time. Now I am under his thumb. He won't part with the paper, and, unless I do as he wants, he is going to send it to the Head. That means the sack for me. Dr. Locke won't be easy on me a second time."

"And what does he want you to do?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Help him in his little game. I saw him on Saturday afternoon, and he told me what I was to do. Old Mr. Bull is thinking of adopting Johnny, and taking him out to Australia and putting him in his business, to succeed him in it later on. It means a big fortune—which Falke has been scheming for for a long time. Well, the old man wants to know what sort of a kid Johnny is, and he's sent his secretary to make secret inquiries about him; he's afraid of being imposed on, and he means to know what his nephew is like before he has anything to do with him. He trusts Falke absolutely, and Falke's making the investigations for him."

Johnny Bull flushed angrily.

"If that's true I'll jolly well tell my uncle what I think of him!" he exclaimed.

"Go on, Smithy!" said Squiff.

"If Bull turns out to be any kind of a rotter the old man won't have anything to do with him. It's Falke's game to make him appear a rotter. The scheme is to fix a charge on him of being what I used to be—and worse. He's to have smokes planted on him, spirits hidden in his box, cards in his pockets—"

"Great Scott!"

"Falke is going to give me a powder when I meet him that I'm to put in Bull's drink some time when I have an opportunity of catching him alone. It will make him unconscious. Then I'm to splash him with whisky, leave a flask near him, and put some banknotes into his pocket. Before that, of course, I've got to miss the notes, and raise a cry that they've been stolen. Johnny Bull will be found drunk, with the stolen money in his pocket. And if I'd carried out that scheme," continued the Bounder, with perfect coolness, "Johnny Bull would have been expelled from Greyfriars, and every fellow in the school would have thought we were well rid of a blackguard."

Johnny Bull sat aghast.

"I can't believe it!" he ejaculated.

"You mean to say that the villain proposed to you to do that?" exclaimed Squiff.

"He ordered me to do it."

"And you knocked him down, I hope?"

The Bounder smiled bitterly.

"I couldn't afford to knock down a man who could ruin me if he chose. I asked for time to think. Bull chose that special time for making an attack on me; it wasn't a wise thing to do just then, for I decided to save myself, and let him go to the wall. It was the sack for me or for him, and I made up my mind to let it be him."

"Smithy!"

"Then what are you telling us for?" demanded Nugent. "You've changed your mind?"

The Bounder nodded.

"Yes, I've changed it. I don't know that I could have kept to it, anyway; but so long as Bull set himself against

me I felt that I had some excuse, anyway. But since yesterday it's different. I've changed my mind."

"It's impossible!" muttered Johnny Bull. "I can't believe it! You've been dreaming, Smithy!"

"I've told you now," said the Bounder calmly. "You can do as you choose. I've settled myself with Falke. I'm to meet him outside the school walls this evening, when he is going to give me the powder. Well, I shall meet him; and I shall take a stick with me, and give him as good a hiding as I am able. Then I shall clear off without coming back. My I O U will be in Dr. Locke's hands to-night, and I should be sacked in the morning if I stayed."

"But—but—" stammered Wharton. "You—you're going to get it yourself, instead of Johnny. Is that what you mean?"

"That's it."

"The awful villain!" said Squiff.

"I can't swallow it," said Johnny Bull, shaking his head.

The Bounder laughed.

"Please yourself about that. I'm going. To-morrow it will be announced to all the school that I'm expelled. I've put you on your guard. After this Falke will try a different sort of game—what, I don't know. But he's as cunning as a fox; and unless you keep your eyes open you'll be caught in the trap. After this muck-up he may not try again to get at you through a Greyfriars fellow, but there are other ways. You might be kidnapped and drugged and left outside the gates with a flask in your pocket. He's capable of anything. He's chosen this as the easiest way, and the safest for himself. But he will try other ways. And it's not much good speaking to your uncle, for he's quite under the thumb of that cunning scoundrel. He would not believe a word of it. Falke has worked that out. The accusation would rest on my word—the word of a fellow already expelled from his school for bad conduct. He's deep, you see."

The Bounder rose to his feet.

"That's all. I'm done here. Good-bye!"

"Where are you going?" asked Wharton, with a start.

"I'm going to clear off. I'm not going to stay and be sacked. Half an hour after I tell Falke that I won't do as he asks my paper will be in Dr. Locke's hands. Before that I shall be gone. I'm going to be sacked, but I'm not going through it personally. That's a treat I shall deprive the fellows of," said Vernon-Smith, with a sneer.

He opened the study door.

Bob Cherry jumped up and kicked it shut again, and pushed the Bounder back into the study.

"You're jolly well not going!" he said. "We're going to think of some way out of this!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Laying the Snare!

VERNON-SMITH stood silent.

There was silence in No. 1 Study.

The Bounder's startling communication had taken the juniors' breath away.

They could not doubt him now.

The fact that he was going away from Greyfriars to avoid expulsion was proof enough of the truth of his story. And they knew, too, that he need not have spoken before he went; that he might have left Johnny Bull unsuspecting, unwary, to fall a victim to the next scheme evolved by the plotter's cunning brain.

"The awful rotter!" said Harry Wharton at last. "We'll take jolly good care that he doesn't have a chance at Johnny Bull, anyway!"

"The carefulness will be terrific," murmured Hurrec Singh.

"But—but about you, Smithy!" exclaimed Nugent.

"When that chap finds that you won't help him in his villainy, he's got to be stopped from taking that paper to the Head, somehow."

"He can't be stopped."

"Then—then there's no chance for you?" said Johnny Bull soberly.

"None!"

"Hold on!" said Bob, rubbing his nose hard in an effort of thought. "Something's got to be done! You say he's going to meet you this evening. Suppose we all lay for him and collar him, and get the paper away?"

"He doesn't carry it about him. He's not ass enough for that."

"Oh!" said Bob hopelessly.

"But I'll tell you what," said the Bounder, struck by a sudden thought. "You can come with me, and keep out of sight, and hear his talk with me. It will be a proof, if you want one, of the kind of man he is. It will show Bull that he's got to be on his guard; he only half believes me now."

Johnny Bull coloured.

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"I—I believe you, Smithy," he said. "Still, I'd certainly like to hear it out of the man's own mouth."

"I'm meeting him outside the school walls at eight o'clock. If you choose to break bounds you can be there and see him."

"We'll go—rather!" said Wharton.

"But—but he must be stopped from coming down on Smithy somehow," said Squiff, wrinkling his brows. "Even if we show up the rotter, that won't help Smithy."

"It's too late to help me," said Vernon-Smith. "I've only got myself to blame. I've been in a fix before through signing a paper; but the man I had to deal with then was a man I could handle. Falke is too cunning for me. Still, it would be a satisfaction if you fellows came with me and gave him a ragging."

"We'll do that," said Wharton. "But about you afterwards, Smithy?"

"You needn't think about me; that can't be helped, I tell you."

"Hold on!" said Squiff, who was thinking hard. "Look here, it's not much use us chaps only hearing the rotter; we want to show him up, and kids like us wouldn't be listened to. We ought to get a master to be present and to hear what the villain says—Quelch, for instance."

"Quelch wouldn't," said the Bounder. "Besides, if I tell him I shall be kept here to be sacked, instead of getting off before they can sack me."

He paused.

"I don't care; I'll chance that! I could bolt to-night from the dorm, anyway. And if we could get Quelch to catch the villain he would be fairly shown up. Old Bull would have to believe what Quelch told him about his precious secretary." The Bounder's eyes gleamed. "Tit for tat! He's got me the sack, and I'll get him the sack! One good turn deserves another."

"Then we sha'n't be able to rag him!" growled Johnny Bull. "Quelch wouldn't have that."

"Better show him up than rag him."

"Well, I suppose so."

"I'll go to Quelch," said the Bounder. "If he's got any sense he'll understand that the man ought to be trapped. If he won't take a hand in it we can carry out what we intended without him."

The Bounder quitted the study.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another grimly.

"I—I'm sorry I've been down on him," said Johnny Bull. "He has made a fool of himself, but—but this is jolly decent of him."

The juniors nodded in silence. They agreed that it was jolly decent of the Bounder; but they were troubled by the price he had to pay for being decent. For, though by the Remove-master's aid, the rascally German might be shown up in his true colours, and Johnny Bull saved from all danger, there was no doubt that Falke would revenge himself by the ruin of the Bounder. And that, so far as the chums of the Remove could see, it was impossible to avert.

Vernon-Smith knocked at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered. The Remove-master glanced at him kindly enough. Since the time when the Bounder had been very nearly expelled from the school, Mr. Quelch had had no fault to find with him. And he believed that the improvement in Vernon-Smith's character was permanent.

"Well, what is it, my boy?" asked the Form-master, as the Bounder closed the door, and stood before his table.

"I've got something rather important to tell you, sir?"

"Go on!"

Vernon-Smith went on; speaking with perfect calmness, apparently oblivious to the growing astonishment and indignation in the face of the Remove-master.

Mr. Quelch did not interrupt him once.

He listened until the Bounder had finished, without a word, but with his lips setting in a hard line, and his grey eyes gleaming.

"That is all?" he asked, when the Bounder had done.

"That is all, sir."

"It seems that, in spite of your promise to the Head when he pardoned your transgressions, you have broken your word, and renewed your old practices?"

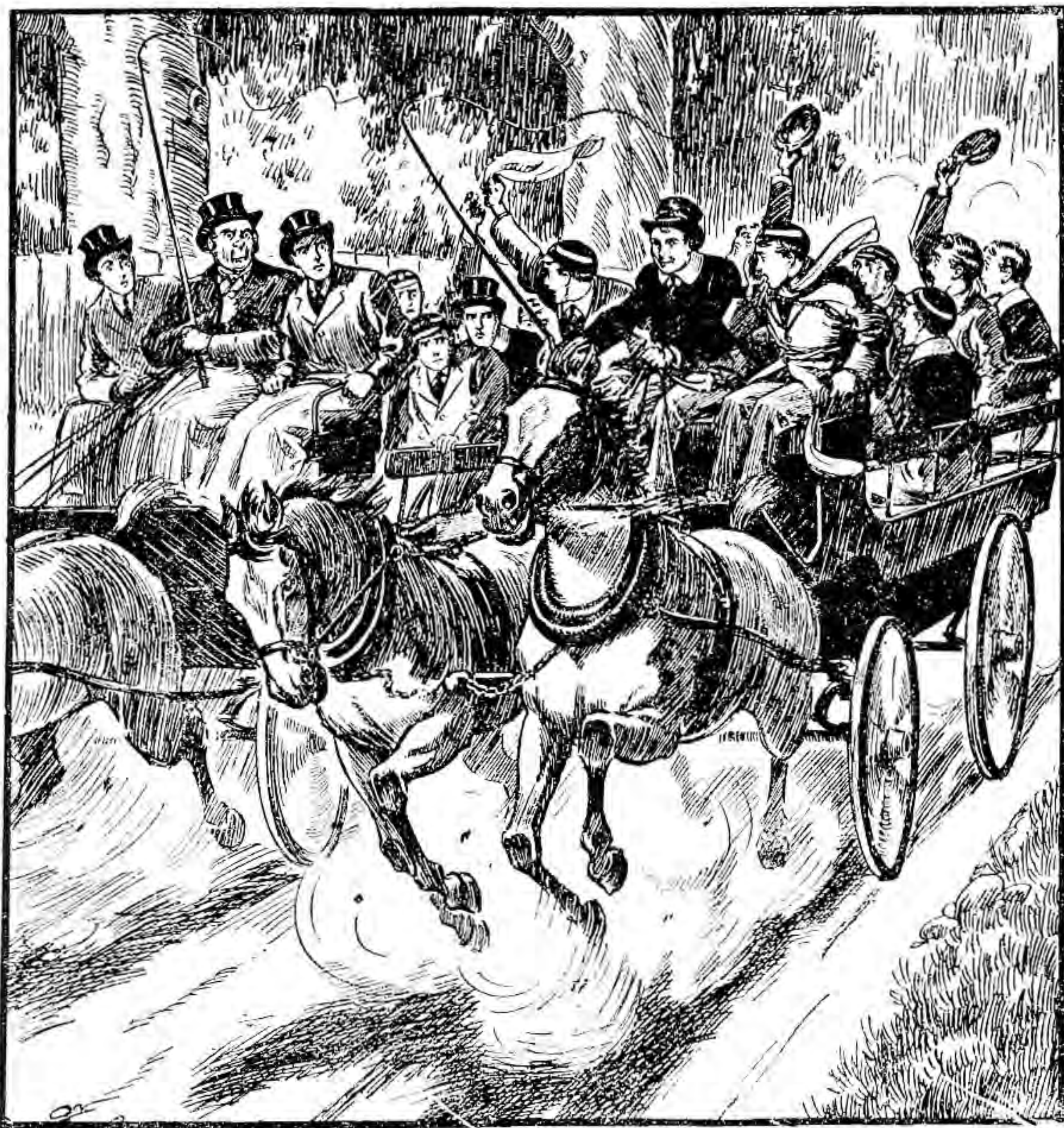
"Yes, sir."

"You do not fancy, I suppose, that you will be pardoned this time?" exclaimed the Remove-master sternly.

"I know that I shall be expelled, sir!" said the Bounder. "I'm prepared for that—and I am not asking to be let off. But before I go, I want Bull to be protected from that German villain. If I had chosen, I could have saved myself—"

"By a crime!" exclaimed the Remove-master. "I am glad, Vernon-Smith, that you hesitated to go to that length!"

"I am glad, too, sir!" said the Bounder calmly. "But



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what I have told you needs proof. My word cannot be taken against that man! When I am gone, he will try another tack unless he is stopped. If you would be present and hear what he says to me, sir, that would be proof enough to convince his employer."

"But he would not speak in my presence!"

"He is going to meet me outside the walls, sir! I can contrive to make him come near to the side-gate. If you were inside the gate, you would hear every word."

Mr. Quelch made a gesture of repugnance.

"You will do as you think best, sir," said the Bounder. "It is the only way of getting proof of his plot against Bull. As for me, I know I am done for here, and I should like to know that Bull is safe from him, before I go."

The Form-master looked at him very curiously.

"May I ask, Vernon-Smith, whether you hesitated before deciding not to lend yourself to this wretch's demands?"

"I decided to do as he asked, sir—to save myself!"

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"You did?" ejaculated the Form-master.

"I did—and I changed my mind. He thinks that I am a cowardly rascal—but he is mistaken. I am only a rascal, not a coward!" said the Bounder, unmoved.

"You are a very strange boy, Vernon-Smith. However, I will do as you suggest, though it is repugnant to me. In order that there may be witnesses to the man's self-incrimination, I will ask Mr. Prout to come with me. At what hour is this man to see you?"

"At eight o'clock, sir."

"Very well; at eight o'clock precisely. Mr. Prout and myself will be there. You have leave to be outside the school at that hour. That is understood?"

"Very well, sir."

Vernon-Smith quitted the study. He returned to the Co. to acquaint them with what had passed.

"Quelch's down on you, of course?" said Harry Wharton.

The Bounder smiled grimly.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"CAPTURED AT LAST!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Like a ton of bricks!" he replied. "But I expected that. But it will be a satisfaction to get that rascal shown up—and shown up he will be. Your uncle seems to be an old donkey. Bull—but he can't doubt the word of two masters of Greyfriars. You fellows will have to keep out of it."

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry emphatically. "What's to stop us from being in the field on the other side of the road? We'll be right out of sight—and we'll chip in after you give a signal. He's not going to get away without a hiding!"

"If you show yourselves it may scare him off!"

"We'll be jolly careful!"

And so it was arranged.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The German Meets His Match!

"**A**CH! You are here!"

Falke spoke in a low, cautious voice.

Vernon-Smith had been waiting a quarter of an hour. But it was not till the last stroke of eight died away, that the German's form, wrapped in a thick overcoat, came through the mist of the winter evening. The glowing tip of a cigar announced his coming. He stopped as Vernon-Smith stepped out of the shadow of the wall.

"I'm here!" said the Bounder sullenly. "I can't stop long—I'm out of bounds, as you know! Get under the trees here—somebody may pass!"

He drew back close to the school-wall, beside the little gate. In that spot, a large tree within threw its branches over the wall, and cast a shadow. The German smiled softly, and followed him.

"You had my letter?" asked the Bounder.

"Ja, ja! I received it this morning. It is good for you that you are sensible," said Falke smoothly. "But there is no need to talk, my young friend. You know what you are to do."

"Have you brought the powder?"

"It is here."

Falke fumbled in his pocket, and produced a little paper packet. He handed it to the Bounder.

"It's not dangerous?" asked Vernon-Smith, leading the German on to talk. For once, the cunning German had to deal with a cunning and unscrupulousness equal to his own. It gave the Bounder a sardonic pleasure to lead the rascal on to betray himself within hearing of the listening ears.

Falke laughed softly.

"Nein, nein! Do you think I would risk my neck! Look—I will taste it!"

"What am I to do with it?" muttered the Bounder.

"I have told you—drop it into a drink that the boy Bull shall take—it will make him unconscious for some hours. It is quite easy. Then you will leave this flask—take this flask—you will leave it beside him, after spilling some of the spirits over him—to make the smell of liquor, you understand. You must do this when he is alone, perhaps in his study—but you will find an opportunity. Then place the cards—the cigarettes—as I have told you. Do not hurry yourself—take a good opportunity, my young friend—there must be no mistake—you know what to expect if you fail me!"

"And my paper——"

"When the boy Bull is disgraced and condemned, that paper you shall have—have no fear of that. You will be of no further use to me, mein—I do not seek to harm you. Money, too—fifty pounds—if you choose. I am generous. But do not omit the first step; you lose some banknotes, you raise a hue-and-cry—you have been robbed—there is much fuss. And when the boy Bull is found intoxicated, the notes are discovered in his pocket! Ach! But you will make him sorry for the blows he has struck you, my young friend! You will get your own back, as you say, mein? What regard should you have for a bulldog boy who has no regard for you!"

"I—I—and—and if I don't do it?"

"If you fail me, my young friend, your I O U is placed in the hands of your Headmaster," said Falke quietly. "I do not threaten in vain. What I have said, I will do! I give you till Saturday to carry out your part. Bah! what is it to you if this brutal boy, Bull, shall be sent away from the school? Have I not seen his blows fall upon your face! You hate him, nicht war? Let him suffer then!"

"And, suppose," said the Bounder, with a mocking note growing in his voice; "suppose instead of carrying out your orders, I go to your master and tell him the whole bizny?"

The German laughed smoothly.

"We have talked of that before, my young friend. This old Herr Bull is an old fool that I have under the thumb—the word of a young rascal turned out of his school for

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gambling would not weigh with him. But that is done with; I made all that plain to you. You will act as you are told!"

"I think not!" said the Bounder.

The German peered at him in the mist, his eyes glinting.

"What! What do you mean?"

"You can show yourselves, you fellows!" called out the Bounder.

The German started convulsively.

From the hedge on the other side of the road, through the foggy mist, came six figures, as the Bounder called. The German gnawed his lips for a moment—then he smiled in a feline way. The juniors across the road had been too far off to hear the words spoken in cautious tones.

"But they did not hear, my young friend!" he murmured. "This little surprise does not serve you!"

"But others have heard!" said the Bounder.

As he spoke, the little gate was dragged suddenly open, and Mr. Quelch came through, with Mr. Prout at his heels.

The two masters, within a yard of the German and the Bounder, had, of course, heard every word that had been uttered.

Friedrich Falke stood rooted to the ground.

Even if the juniors had heard him he would have been little alarmed; he could have denied a schoolboy's tale, but the presence of two men made all the difference. He realised that they must be two masters in the school, and he recognised Mr. Quelch, whom he had seen during his visit. He was taken utterly aback.

That the guilty schoolboy whom he had trapped, threatened, and despised could have laid a plan like this to expose him he had never dreamed. That the Bounder would dare to quarrel with him, knowing the results that must ensue, he had deemed impossible; but that the Bounder should not only defy him, but take these cunning measures to expose him, could never have entered his brain at all. Cunning as he was, he realised that he had been outwitted by this boy, whom he had sought to make a tool of, to use for his base purposes.

He stood with clenched hands, his eyes glittering, his jaw dropping. And Harry Wharton & Co. drew round him in a ring, to see that he did not escape. They did not mean the scoundrel to get away scot-free.

"Ach!" he muttered at last. "Ach! So this is a trick! You shall pay for it!"

"I know that!" said the Bounder grimly. "I know exactly what I've got to pay for it. And I know that you've got to pay for it, too. That's a consolation, Mr. Falke!"

"Scoundrel!" said Mr. Quelch, his voice trembling with anger. "I have heard every word. But for one consideration, regarding this boy, I would place you in the hands of the police."

The German sneered.

"Are you aware that that boy—that Vernon-Smith—is a gambler—that he has played cards at a public-house? That I hold his acknowledgment of debt for money lost at gaming?" he hissed.

"I am aware of it; and Vernon-Smith will suffer for his fault," said Mr. Quelch. "But for you—no words could describe what I think of your baseness! But for the scandal that would ensue, I would have you arrested. But depend upon it, I shall take immediate measures to acquaint your employer with your true character."

"Ach!"

"And unless you are out of this country in twenty-four hours, Mr. Falke, I will, even at the risk of a scandal connected with this school, make a charge against you, and put the police on your track," said Mr. Quelch. "Scoundrel that you are, you have twenty-four hours in which to leave England. Take the chance!"

The German gritted his teeth.

"You boys should not be out here," said Mr. Quelch.

"I was unaware of this. You may go in immediately."

"Yes, sir," murmured Wharton. And he made a sign to his chums.

There was a rush.

Before Mr. Quelch or Mr. Prout could interfere—if they wanted to interfere—the German was swept off his feet in the grasp of Squiff and the Famous Five.

He struggled and cursed furiously.

But the juniors were too many for him. He was dragged over, and came down with a heavy bump on the hard, frosty road.

"Duck him!" yelled Squiff.

"What ho!"

"My boys!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

But for once the chums of the Remove were deaf to the voice of their Form-master.

Grasping the German by his arms, legs, and neck, they rushed him away down the road, in spite of his furious struggles, to the pond at a little distance from the gates of

Greyfriars. There was a thin coating of ice on the surface of the pond, glimmering through the mist.

Falke struggled like a madman as he realised what was in store for him.

But his struggles were of no avail. The juniors gripped him on all sides and swung him off the ground, wriggling frantically.

"One, two, three?" sang out Bob Cherry. "Go!"

Whiz!

The German spun through the air, crashed down on the frozen pond, and crashed through the thin ice.

Splash!

"Grooogh! Ach! Huhhh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Friedrich Falke came up panting and gasping. The water rose to his waist as he stood dripping in the pond. His hat was gone, his hair dripping with water, and water ran in streams down his face.

He scrambled madly out of the pond, breathing fury.

"Now he wants a little run to keep him from catching cold!" chuckled Squiff. "Boot him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rascal turned to run. Six boots helped him on his way, and the juniors pursued him down the road till he out-distanced them and vanished into the mist. Then they halted, breathless and chuckling.

"So much for Mr. Falke, anyway!" grinned Johnny Bull.

And Harry Wharton & Co. returned to the spot where they had left the Bounder and the two masters. Mr. Quelch did not seem to be angry.

"Go in," he said quietly.

The juniors went in. The Bounder accompanied them, and the two masters came in last, and Mr. Quelch locked the gate.

Mr. Prout looked at his fellow-master and coughed.

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Quelch—I do not want to interfere, of course—but Vernon-Smith has acted very well, I think. I hope it will be possible not to visit his fault too severely upon him. He has done what he could to atone for it."

"I have been thinking so," said Mr. Quelch. "I must see the Head at once, and I will say what I can for him."

And the two masters returned to the School House.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Quality of Mercy!

JOHNNY BULL tapped at the door of the Head's study. "Come in!"

Dr. Locke was not alone. Mr. Prout and Mr. Quelch were there, and Vernon-Smith stood before the Head's table, his eyes downcast. Dr. Locke glanced inquiringly at Bull.

"What is it?" he asked. "I am busy now, Bull."

"I know, sir," said Johnny Bull steadily. "I—I want to speak to you, sir. It's about Smithy. I know you're going to sack him, and I suppose he deserves it; but after what he's done, sir, I—I—"

"Well?"

"It was simply splendid of him, sir," burst out Johnny, the tears starting to his eyes. "He knew it meant the finish for him if he defied that rotter—I—I mean, that man—and yet he did it, sir. It was jolly decent of him! He could have saved himself if he'd been rotter enough. You know what he's saved me from, sir. Can't you let him off, sir? It isn't every fellow who'd have done what he did."

Johnny paused, breathless.

He waited, wondering whether the Head would lick him and bundle him out of the study for his cheek. But Dr. Locke did not look angry.

"You may rest assured, Bull, that I shall take into account everything that is in Vernon-Smith's favour," he said. "You may go."

Johnny Bull looked at the Bounder, and looked at the Head, and retired from the study, and waited anxiously in the passage. The rest of the Co. were there, equally anxious. They knew that Vernon-Smith's fate was being decided there in the presence of the masters, and they had little hope.

Vernon-Smith had had no hope himself. He had expected to be expelled, and he had summoned all his courage and determination to endure it without whining. He was the cool and reckless Bounder to the last.

But the look on Dr. Locke's face brought a glimmer of hope to his heart.

Dr. Locke had consulted THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 367

NEXT MONDAY—

"CAPTURED AT LAST!"

EVERY MONDAY,

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ONE PENNY.

with the two masters before the Bounder was called into the study, and Vernon-Smith understood that there had been, at least, a recommendation to mercy.

"What to say to you I hardly know, Vernon-Smith," said the Head, as the door closed behind Johnny Bull. "You have been pardoned before, and you made a promise, which you have broken. Yet there is so much in your favour now that I cannot find it in my heart to deal harshly with you. There is no doubt that you could have saved yourself if you had been wicked enough; and in forcing you to leave Greyfriars I should feel that I was not so much punishing you for doing wrong as for doing right in the end. This makes me hesitate. If I could only rely on your word—"

"Oh, sir," muttered the Bounder, "I—I know it isn't much good my saying anything! I've said it all before. But this time it's different. I—I went to that place for a last plunge. I know I was a fool. I expected to have a good time; but—I hope you'll believe me, sir—I didn't. I found that I hated the whole thing. It was simply sickening from beginning to end. And when I came away I'd made up my mind that I'd never make a fool of myself like that again. And I should have kept to that, sir—I know my word isn't worth much—" he added, with a break in his voice.

The Head scanned his face curiously.

"But I believe you, Vernon-Smith," he said quietly. "You are a boy with a strange character; but I believe there is more of good than of evil in your nature. I shall give you another chance. This time, Vernon-Smith, I will not make you promise; I will only say that I trust you. You may go."

The Bounder almost reeled.

"I—I—I'm let off, sir!" he stammered.

"Yes."

"I—I— Thanks!" stuttered the Bounder. "Thank you, sir! And you, Mr. Quelch! I know you've spoken for me. I—I— You sha'n't have any cause to be sorry for giving me a chance, sir, I swear that!"

"I trust you," said the Head kindly.

The Bounder left the study, hardly able to believe in his good luck.

Harry Wharton & Co. met him with eager looks.

"Smithy, old man—"

"It's all right!" said the Bounder huskily. "I'm let off! I've got another chance! It's all serene!"

"Hooray!" shouted the Famous Five.

And the Head smiled as he heard that cheer in his study.

The next day Mr. Quelch paid a visit to Johnny Bull's uncle, and the astonished old gentleman was acquainted with the history of Falke's treachery.

Falke did not seek to defend himself; he remembered Mr. Quelch's threat only too well, and he had made all haste to get out of the country. Old Mr. Bull never saw his valuable secretary again; but he asked Mr. Quelch to convey a message to Johnny that he was coming down to see him, which the Remove-master duly did.

Johnny Bull did not receive the news with any enthusiasm.

"The blessed old hunk!" said the dutiful nephew. "I'll have a jolly plain talk with him when he comes! Precious lot of mischief he's caused!"

"He only wanted information about your giddy character," grinned Bob Cherry. "He didn't want to take you on trust, Johnny."

Johnny Bull snorted.

"Well, if he can't take me on trust, he jolly well won't take me at all!" he said. "I'll talk to him!"

"Don't forget the millions!" said the Bounder, laughing.

Another emphatic snort from Johnny.

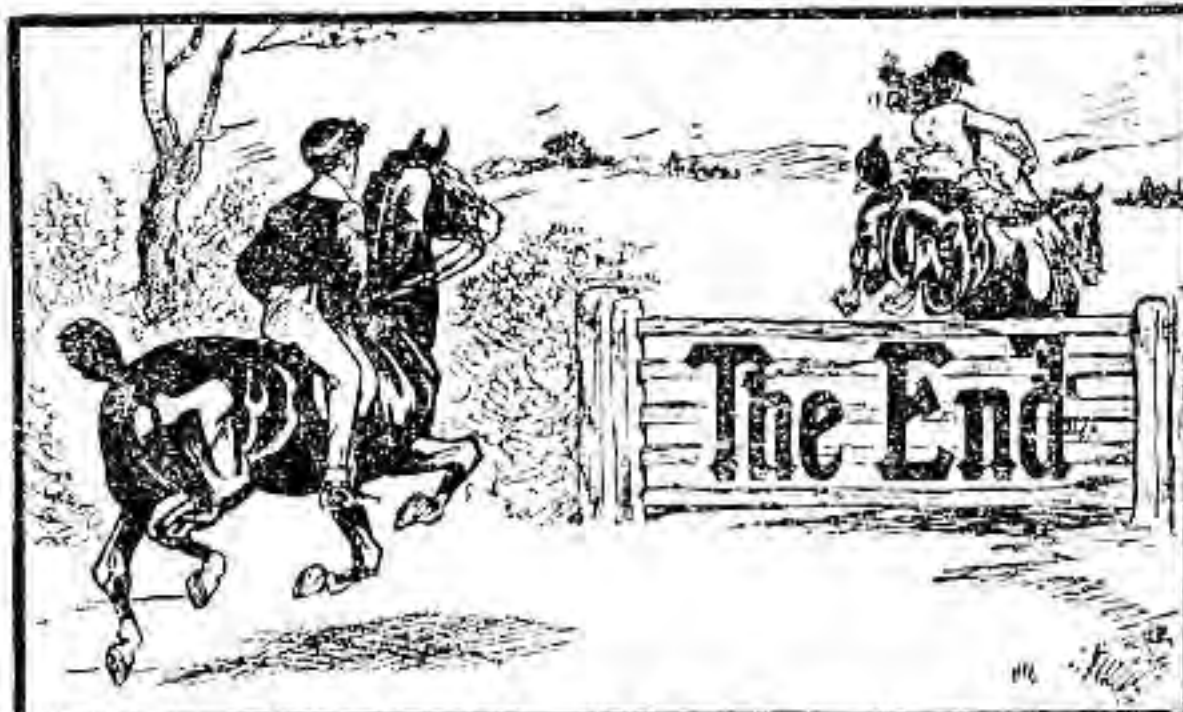
"Blow the millions, if there are any! I'll talk to him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Harry Wharton & Co. looked forward with considerable interest to that visit from Johnny Bull's uncle.

As for the Bounder, he was on the best of terms again with the Co., and there was no doubt that Smith's late escapade would be, in reality, "The Last Plunge!"

(Next Monday's issue of the MAGNET Library will contain a further magnificent yarn dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. Order at your newsagent's in advance, and make certain of getting a copy.)



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FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"CAPTURED AT LAST!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

The interest in next week's grand, long, complete story of Greyfriars School centres around Johnny Bull, the sturdy and straight-spoken member of the Famous Five, who is in momentary expectation of a visit from his uncle, lately returned from Australia. Temple of the Fourth seizes upon this information as a brilliant means of japing Johnny, and, in fact, the whole of the Remove. Attired as a ferocious old gentleman, he poses as Bull's avuncular relative, and the masquerade gives rise to some screamingly funny incidents. Meanwhile, the genuine Uncle Bull sets his matured wits to work and evolves a plot to take his nephew away from Greyfriars—temporarily, at any rate. So completely does the old gentleman's scheme succeed that the heroes of the Remove, so seldom caught napping, are compelled to admit that they, in company with Johnny Bull, have been successfully spoofed, foiled, and

"CAPTURED AT LAST!"

AN UNRIVALLED ATTRACTION.

I know that all Magnetites will be pleased, as well as interested, to learn that the famous group of companion papers are progressing famously, and steadily growing in circulation week by week.

At the same time, I want to make an earnest appeal to my chums not to relax one whit the kind efforts they are making to popularise my papers among their non-reading friends. They have already done much for me, and I am relying upon them doing still more.

Whilst I am on this subject, I am glad to be able to draw the attention of my chums to the

GRAND BUMPER NUMBER OF "THE DREADNOUGHT,"

which is now on sale throughout the kingdom. It is positively the best value for one's money obtainable, for the grand, long, complete story of Harry Wharton's early school-days is alone well worth the charge made for the complete issue. The yarn is entitled

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That great host of Magnetites who have come to look upon Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, and others as their personal friends will be enabled, by reading Mr. Richards' stories in "The Dreadnought," to learn how the characters of these delightful boys were built up; for Harry Wharton was not always the admirable fellow we know at present. It was through the genial influence of two loyal chums that he was schooled into a thoroughly decent fellow and a good sportsman.

So much for "The Phantom Fugitive." It is a really ripping story, and further comment is superfluous.

Next to the school tale, I may safely say that the new serial,

"TWO OF THE BEST!"

will rank the highest in my chums' favour. To some of my older readers it may appeal even more strongly than the

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 Every Wednesday. Every Thursday. Every Friday. Every Saturday. 2

adventures of Harry Wharton; for it is written with a skill and charm of diction that stamp Jack Lancaster, the author, as a master of his craft. There is plenty of scope for romance in a tale of two young people who are roaming the country together, and Mr. Lancaster may congratulate himself on having written a really entrancing serial story.

Space does not permit me to enthuse much longer on the merits of our great companion paper. All Magnetites should see for themselves what a fine budget of fiction is set before them every Thursday morning. To miss such a wonderful attraction were folly indeed.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

D. O. C. (Sydney).—I am much obliged for your kind wishes. I think I can assure you that your favourite papers will arrive just as usual, notwithstanding the war. Kangaroo and Gordon Gay, when they are at home in Australia, both live near Melbourne.

L. H. (Halifax).—The address of the firm you require is the Birmingham Small Arms Co., Ltd. You should be able to obtain an air-rifle from them.

"A British Columbian" (New Westminster).—Thank you very much for your expressions of appreciation, and for your efforts in obtaining new readers. I am glad you like the serial so much.

T. F. Biddle (Sparkhill).—I regret I am unable to send the photos of the Famous Five.

Lillian Maartens.—Many thanks for your most interesting letter. Will you let me have your full name and address so that I can reply to it more fully?

N. Dundas (Narrouine).—Your letter gave me much pleasure. I am always glad to hear from my Colonial readers, and hope you will continue to enjoy our companion papers.

"West Londoner" (Brentford).—Stories by Frank Richards, introducing the girls of Cliff House, will appear in "The Dreadnought" very shortly.

R. Penney (Worcester).—Some time ago a group of Remove scholars, together with Mr. Quelch, was reproduced in the "Magnet." I am sorry this feature cannot be repeated at present.

"An Interested One."—I regret that lack of space prevents your suggestion being carried out.

E. K. (Little Bentley).—You do not state in your letter the sort of career you are anxious to take up. If you will do this, I shall be pleased to forward you some advice on the subject.

"West Norwood."—Many thanks for verses, which are, however, scarcely suitable for publication. To be candid, they are little short of mere doggerel.

B. R. Faithfull (Brondesbury).—The stories you mention have long been out of print. Sorry I cannot help you.

R. Abrahamson.—Many thanks for your letter backing up my Southsea chum.

"A Dundee Chum."—I strongly advise you to stick to your present position. Good jobs are not as plentiful as blackberries nowadays.

D. M. (Glasgow).—I am afraid I cannot do as you propose—just yet, at any rate.

Chris Williamson (Manchester).—Many thanks for your long and interesting letter.

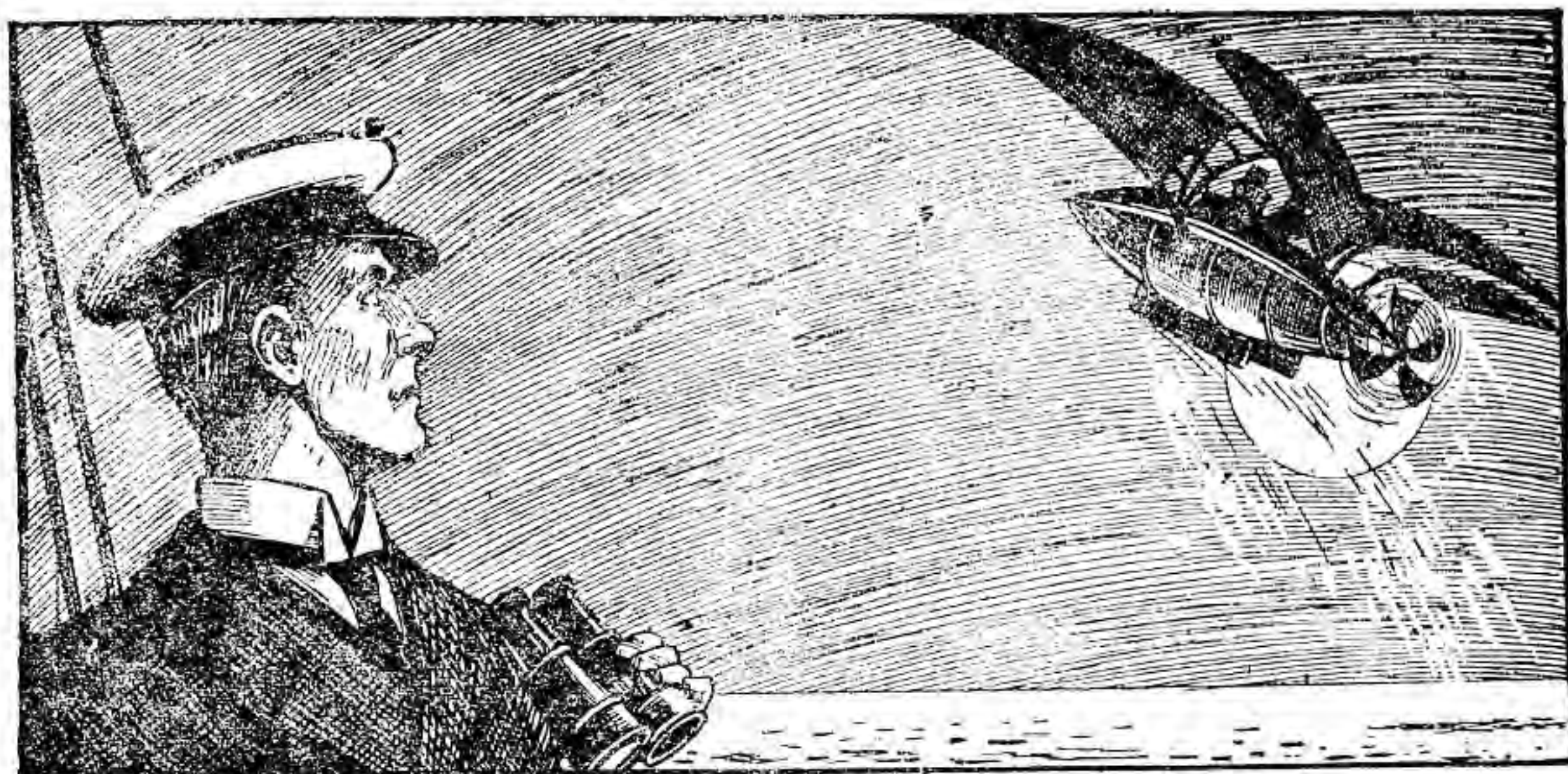
E. Blandford and W. Conning (Gillingham).—Thanks for your letter and the expressions of loyalty it contained.

A. Peel (Sydney).—Thanks for your letter. I am glad the companion papers give you such satisfaction. The characters and places you mention are fictitious. I am sorry I cannot let you have a photo of Harry Wharton.

The Editor

Our Grand **SIDNEY DREW** Serial.

THE UNCONQUERABLE



A Magnificent Story of Thrilling Adventure.

By SIDNEY DREW.

INTRODUCTION.

The well-known millionaire, Ferrers Lord, is the inventor of a wonderful vessel called the Unconquerable. On the trial trip this ship reveals her marvellous abilities by travelling alternately beneath the water and in the air. The Unconquerable is to be entered for the Florida Cup, in competition with a flying-machine built by Ferrers Lord's deadly enemy, Paul Guthrey, a man who will stop at nothing. The latter hires a band of unscrupulous men, who steal the Unconquerable, and reduce the vessel to a total wreck, so Ferrers Lord is compelled to commence the construction of Unconquerable II.

Prout, Maddock, Barry O'Rooney, and Gan-Waga in the meantime go for a cruise in Ching-Lung's yacht with the Chinese prince. They land on a small island, where they meet Martin Arkland, one of the ruffians who assisted in stealing the Unconquerable.

Ching-Lung and his friends are taken prisoners by Martin Arkland and his accomplices, who are mostly half-breeds and negroes. They are put in charge of a negro named Simpson, who packs them in a very small shed, from which they escape by digging the soft ground away. The prince's men then overpower the negro garrison, and their escape is celebrated by an amusing dance by Gan-Waga and Chan-Song-Pu.

(Now go on with the story.)

Food for the Hungry Ones—Gan's Glorious Idea—The Fearsome and Fishy Spectre—A Light from the Sea.

Although Chan-Song-Pu was undeniably stout, and acted like a middle-aged person who loved his ease, few people could have matched that cunning rascal of a Chinaman either in muscle or brain. He waved his hand as the boat heeled over to the breeze. Then he yawned ponderously, for he was tired. One of his henchmen stooped down, and, mounting on his back, Chan rode back to the engine-house on his human steed.

"Hendrick," he said to the blue-eyed Finn. "I go sleep. I velly topsidee knock outee. You look aftel tings. Ol'ri, ol'ri, ol'ri."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 367.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"CAPTURED AT LAST!"

There was little enough to look after, for the negroes had hardly a kick left in them. They were not only ready, but eager to come to heel. Hendrick went out with his gun on his shoulder, and watched his old fishing-boat, with every sail she possessed set, rocking away to the south.

It was nearly a week later when he saw her sails again. Chinamen and niggers alike crowded round eagerly and excited. They had had their fill of fish diet. They cheered as she put about and tacked round the point. Ching-Lung himself sprang into the bows with a coil of rope in his hand.

"Catch!" he cried. "And the top of the morning to you!"

"Yah, yah! I spies ole Hendricks with the whiskers all over his faces, and ole Chan with the tailpig down him backs!" piped Gan-Waga, as he unshipped the tiller. "What a butterfuls mornings it is this afternoons, hunk? Ooh, what a lots of smilings uglifuls faces, Chingy, don't they? We gots cheeses and bacons. Anybody like to kisses me, hunk? Nobody, hunk? Den I kisses my doggie Schwartz."

"There were only five men aboard—the Prince, Barry O'Rooney, Schwartz, Prout, and the merry Eskimo."

"Bake, you lubbers, bake!" cried Barry. "Here's flour, and I know you're longin' for a taste of bread. Aisy, aisy! Wait your turn, badad! Oi don't want a rush. Kape back! Now, Simpson, we'll unload, and then Oi'll share out. Pile the stuff up, and Oi'll do the sharing, darlint."

The niggers cheered at the sight of the kegs of flour and fitches of bacon. Cold nights and fish diet had thinned most of them already. They had not the stamina of the stolid Chinese who had been left to guard them. They laughed and sang like a lot of children, and in less than ten minutes half a dozen different fires were alight.

"I tink we comes abouts soon's 'nuff, Chingy," said Gan-Waga. "De niggers dey alls going to skin and grief. Ho, ho, hao! Dey as fats as herrings, Chingy."

At any rate, to celebrate the season of plenty after the time of famine, the negroes danced and sang songs round their camp fires that night. Gan-Waga did not appreciate either the dancing or their music, for, as he said, both gave him a bad enough awful pain. He whistled to his dog, and marched away to go to sleep.

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Suddenly Gan stopped to sniff the air. There was a peculiar smell, and not a very pleasant one. It grew more pungent as the Eskimo advanced.

"Oh, de wasteful sillinesses!" said Gan. "Dat how dey cure deir fishes, hunk? Ohmi, dey deserve to go hungry if dey do him like dats!"

The perfume emanated from one of the roughly-built sheds in which the negroes had made an attempt to cure their surplus stock of fish. The night was dark, but a peculiar luminous haze surrounded the shed. Gan was not startled. He held his nose and looked in. The place glowed with pale-green light. Each fish that dangled from the poles was a mass of phosphorescence. Gan could have read a book by the light with ease had he possessed the necessary education.

"Ooh, horrors, horrors!" he grinned. "We nots want all dat light to find de smells, hunk? Ho, ho, hoo! Dose de ghost fishes, Schwartz. Dey alls going bads 'cause dose chumpheads not smoke dem properful. How yo' like de perlickous scent, hunk? Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho, hoo!"

To the surprise of the dog, Gan lay down on the grass and rolled about, uttering weird, gurgling sounds. Then, springing to his feet, he hurried down the steps and boarded Hendrick's fishing-smack.

"Hendricks," he cried, poking his head into the caboose. "where yo' keeps de hammer and nails, my butterfuls whiskerful boy?"

Presently a sound of hammering drifted across the landing-stage. It ceased, and a lantern bobbed to and fro behind the engine-house. Again came the tap, tap, tap of the hammer, and then the industrious carpenter was grasped by the ear.

"Shaf! Yet you doing, you plackguard, is ut?" demanded the voice of the cook. "Dell me vy you make all dot horrid noises, yes?"

"Shoo-oo! Yo' nots talks so loudness," gurgled the Eskimo, "or yo' wakes de poor tired policemen at de corners, cooksey. Hoo, hoo, hoo! Come with me, and I make yo' luffs yo' hair off. I gots a butterful nidea. Oh, dears, dears, dears! How yo' laughs! Ho, ha, ha, ha! Ohmi, ohmi!"

"Ud vas ein kite dot you make, yes?" asked Herr Schwartz, peering at the object.

"Den it wasn't, silly, and it wasn't a bicyeles, neithers. Ho, ho, hoo! Put yo' ear closer. I nots bite him. Him goings to be a splectres."

"How you mean a splectres?" asked the chief. "Dere vas no word like dot in der language. Dunder, vat you mean, is ud?"

"Why, a splectres, a snapparition, ignorances," said Gan. "A ghosts. Perhaps yo' knows what a ghost is, hunk? Dey haves big goggle eyes, and dey all whites, and yell 'Br-r-r-r!' Dis a butterfuls splectres. Oh, I makes yo' luffs! Get hold of him legs, and come alongs. Dears, dears! Ohmi, how yo' luffs!"

The cook declined until he had received fuller information. Then he giggled, and seized one end of the framework. It resembled a kite in the shape of a man, the figure having been roughly cut out of old newspapers, and blackened with paint. Such a kite would hardly have flown even in a tempest. The framework was very strong.

"Here we go, ups, ups, ups! And heres we go ups, ups, up! Dears, dears! Dey ats it yet, de niggers, Cooksey? Ohmi, ohmi! How we both luffs very soonfuls!"

Schwartz grasped his nose and shuddered as a whiff of perfume reached him from the curing-shed. Suddenly, what seemed to be a pallid comet rose in the air and descended with a thud beside him. It was followed by a shower of these curious constellations, and finally by Gan-Waga himself.

"Ooh! Dake der horror away! I gannod pear them! Der schmell boison me und choke me!" groaned the cook. "Vere vas der garbolic acid?"

He staggered away to a safe distance. Gan did not find it altogether a bed of violets, but he was very busy with his knife, and tried not to notice the odour. He tapped the nails in gently. Two luminous circles the size of saucers formed the eyes of the spectre, and triangular pieces of fish formed its teeth. Then Gan nailed haddocks down the object's legs and a double row of buttons down its chest. He left the arms as they were, but added a pair of enormous gleaming hands, splitting the fish almost to their tails in order to make the fingers.

"Ho, ho, ho, hoo! Yo' ready, Schwartz, hunk? Comes and looks at de bogie-mans," he gurgled. "Ohmi, ohmi, ohmi! Don't yo' wants to kisses him?"

"Dunder!" gasped the cook, as he gazed at the prostrate horror. "I nefer pelief ud unless I see ud. Ar-r-r-r! Dot vas vunderful!"

"And de longerer we keep hims de morer he shine,

cooksey," chuckled the Eskimo. "Now fo' de butterfuls luffs part. Dear, dears, dears!"

The negroes had ended their revels, but they still squatted round the dying fire. Beyond, the night was like black velvet. Now and again one of the Chinese sentries moved into the circle of light with his rifle on his shoulder. Gan knew very well that the rifles were not loaded. He lifted the ghost, and turned it round. Schwartz stepped back.

"See him?" asked Gan.

"Nein, not mooch," said the cook, retreating a little more. "Dot side round he vas to der naked eye invisible. Ja, ja! Dot vas vunderful, vunderful!"

Gan-Waga stalked away. All at once a low, wailing cry drifted through the darkness. Some of the negroes looked round. Then came a piercing scream that brought them to their feet. It was repeated. Gan-Waga reversed the spectre, and, with another unearthly howl, he dashed forward towards the fire.

They only looked at the hideous apparition once as it bore down on them with glaring eyes and writhing hands. Even in a nightmare they had never seen anything so awful and terrifying. It was the hoodoo at last, the demon of the woods, whose very name had terrified them from childhood. Chinamen and niggers bolted for their very lives, yelling like maniacs, and Prout was the first to hear the uproar.

"Tumble up—tumble up!" he shouted. "The niggers have broke loose! Tumble up, by honey! They're on us!"

While the whites were tumbling up and loading their weapons, the blacks and yellow men were tumbling down the steps. A blue light flared out, and they were met by a line of levelled rifles and revolvers, and a sharp order to hold up their hands.

"Hoodoo, hoodoo!" shrieked the negroes. No shoot, no shoot! Hoodoo, hoodoo!"

"One at a time!" thundered Ching-Lung. "Be quiet! Here, Yen-ho, you fool! What's all this about? Silence! Are you all stark mad? Order!"

Hendrick dashed in among the gesticulating, shouting mob with a rope's-end, and laid about him without fear or favour. His methods proved effective.

"So you've seen a ghost—eh?" said Ching-Lung. "A real hoodoo, have you? I'd like to hoodoo some of you! Light another flare, Tom!"

The blue light had spluttered out. Before the steersman could strike a match, another chorus of howls burst from the negroes.

"Hoodoo, hoodoo! Dere, dere!"

"Bedad, ut's the bogey-man, sure as Oi live!" roared Barry O'Rooney. "Arrah, ut's the Ballybunon banshee, wid illuminated trousers on!"

The grisly object with eyes and hands of fire hung in mid-air above the roof of the engine-house close to the cliff. It was descending slowly. Suddenly it came with a rush, and struck the roof. It bounded off, and they got out of the way. The ground was covered with broken wood, luminous masses, and torn paper, and an ancient and fishlike smell, strong enough and thick enough to be moulded into bricks, poisoned the air.

"Dis ways fo' de lovelifuls bloaters," clunted a voice from far above. "All so fresh and fats. Bloaters! Two a pennies, bloaters! Have some morer, hunk?"

An avalanche of ancient haddocks and codlings, all aglow and blooming, poured over the edge of the cliff, and, bounding merrily from the roof, shed their eerie light and hideous fragrance around.

"Gan, you pig, I'll murder you, by honey——"

A dazzling beam of light shot across the bay, and the siren of a steamer brayed hoarsely.

"The Paravaltas, the Paravaltas!" bellowed Simpson. "Durn, boys, our turn's come round again!"

The Ups and Downs of Gan-Waga and the Cook—Senor Paravaltas Decides to Run Away, and Ching-Lung Decides to Prevent Him.

Senor Diaz Paravaltas shattered the last of the little flotilla of empty bottles with a bullet as it drifted away. The Brazilian was a clever marksman with a rifle. He tossed the weapon to his negro servant, rolled a cigarette, and turned lazily to Ching-Lung, once more his prisoner.

"Your Highness is bored," he said, "and I am sorry. It is the fortune of war, and I cannot help it. I, too, am weary of it, and loathe the place."

"And you do not know when our exile is to come to an end?"

"Frankly, I do not. Caramba! The dreariness of it is beginning to tell on me. There is little to choose between prisoner and gaoler. Our release may come at any moment."

(Continued on page iii. of cover.)

The senor yawned, and then heaved a sigh. "It is hateful. Look, you see I am hopeful. I have ordered your yacht to be ready."

They were on the deck of the Paravaltá, and Ching-Lung's yacht floated at anchor further out. The prince had not thought fit to offer any resistance, or to fire a single shot. The Brazilian had treated his prisoners with every possible courtesy, but he had been very watchful.

"And you are only waiting for certain information to set us at liberty, Senor Diaz?" asked the prince.

"Have I not said so? Have I not been fair?"

"And what are they doing to my yacht? I noticed a boat-load of your men board her about an hour ago. Pray be a little fairer, senor."

Paravaltá gave his moustache a twirl, and laughed.

"They are overhauling the machinery," he answered, "but they have my strict orders to do no damage that your own engineers cannot put to rights. The repairs may take a week, ten days, longer, perhaps. I must have time to show a clean pair of heels, for I do not want to meet with a British gunboat. If you are vindictive, and want compensation, approach the Brazilian Government. It is a far cry from China to Brazil, senor, and I do not think even Brazil is afraid of China. China does not inspire either terror or respect."

"You may be right," said Ching-Lung, rather sadly; "but most of the gentlemen you made prisoners belong to an empire that can inspire both when she chooses. Mr. Rupert Thurston, for instance, might cause you some trouble, senor. A man's liberty is a sacred thing in the eyes of the British law. As you say, it is a far cry to Brazil, and I have no doubt you are an influential person there. Come, we'll drop the subject. I do not know what Mr. Thurston's intentions are, so I will only add that all the wilds of Brazil will not hide you, senor, if British law demands you."

"Or Ferrers Lord," said Paravaltá, with another laugh. "What then?"

"All the wilds of the world would not hide you if Ferrers Lord wanted you, senor," replied Ching-Lung; "but I do not think it likely."

As the Brazilian walked away, Ching-Lung winked at nothing in particular, unless it was the ship's cat. The cat was walking leisurely across the deck, but when Gan-Waga's dog woke up, and came like a shot out of a gun, it took the cat no time to mention to climb the mast. Herr Schwartz gazed up at it. He was fond of cats, and he did not like to see them chased by ferocious dogs.

"Kennel—kennel!" he shouted at his namesake. "Go away, you pad, pad tog! Nice bussy, tear bussy, tear bussy, come town now. I vill not let der pad tog hurt you. Nein, nein!"

Schwartz retreated, like the obedient dog he was, and the cat began to descend backwards, for it knew that the cook was a friend. Gan-Waga, who had been dozing in the shade, opened his little beady eyes.

"Joomp, bussy—joomp!" said the chef. "Joomp town on mine shoulder!"

"Mee-wow-ow! Wa-ow-oo-ow! S-s-s-spt! Wa-wa-wo-wow!" yelled the cat. Instead of leaping gently down, it shot away at right angles from the mast, every hair on its body and tail standing erect, spun in the air three or four times, and then alighted, claws downwards, on the back of the cook's neck. The next instant the cat had vanished below like a grey streak, still shrieking, and Herr Schwartz was clutching his collar-stud with both hands, and dancing to his own music.

"Ar-r-r-r! I am to beices torn!" he howled. "Der glaws of der prute haf to der bone benetrate! Dunder! I plead to death! Ar-r-r-r!"

The negroes who were near enough to witness the sight grinned till they displayed all their white teeth and red gums, and Gan-Waga doubled himself up with mirth. Then he went down on all fours, and imitated the frenzied shrieks of the vanished cat with great skill and naturalness. Herr Schwartz stopped dancing. The cat had made his neck sore, and Gan-Waga's heartless conduct hurt his feelings. Snatching a mop from one of the negroes, the angry chef waved it round his head.

"Look out, Gan!" cried Ching-Lung. "Make way for the avalanche, sonny!"

Gan, warned just in time, got upon his hind legs and sprinted aft for dear life, with the cook behind him.

"Dunder! I haf you now!" bellowed the cook. "Ar-r-r-r! I teach you to mock me! I beat you plack and plue! I haf you, sgoundrel!"

Gan-Waga glanced round, and made a desperate spurt. If he was no runner, he could climb, so he shinned up the mast.

"Goward dot you are, come town!" panted Herr Schwartz. "Bitiful goward of ein Esgimo, come town und pe thrash!"

Schwartz on the Warpath—Ching-Lung Has an Idea.

"Ho, ho hoo! I likes dats," said Gan-Waga. "Yo' comes up and fetches me if yo' wants me, ole ugly faces! Yo'

comes ups, and I knocks yo' sidewayses! How yo' necks, hunk? Does it tickles? Go aways and put some sticking-plasters on it! Yah! Cooksey can't catch me!"

Herr Schwartz took off his coat, and spat on his hands.

"In dree minutes you vas ein dead man," he said. "Yes, I gome oop und vetch you, und ven I gatch you, dunder, I gill you!"

"Oh, do spares my lifes when yo' kills me!" pleaded Gan-Waga, with a grin. "He, he, he! Don't kills me till de washing comes homes, Cooksey, 'cos I nots want to be founded deads widout a clean collars on. Look at de monkey on de sticks, people! Gives him a nut. Dear, dear, dear!"

The chef, to the vast amusement of the onlookers, climbed valiantly till he was within a yard of Gan's bare feet. Gan decided that it was time to make a move. He had recovered his breath, and he promptly increased the gap, but the indomitable cook still came on.

"Be carefuls yo' not falls and bend yo'self," crowed the Eskimo, taking another rest. "Oh, do be carefuls, Cooksey! Oh, here we goes up, ups, upsy!"

"Ar-r-r-r! Ven I bush you off, you go town, towns, townsy mit ein pig, pig plomp!" hissed the pursuer.

Ching-Lung guessed what Gan would do when he reached the yard. It was a long and lofty dive, but Gan was the king of divers. Gan uttered a mocking laugh as he reached to grasp the yard. Then an ear-splitting yell burst from him, and he came sliding down at high speed. As a buffer, the perspiring chef was an utter failure. An anguished shriek broke from him as Gan struck him. Then he hit the deck. Gan was second in the race home, for he was on top. The cook lay still, moaning dismally, but the Eskimo bounded up as if forty bees had stung him at once, and hopped and howled.

"Ooh! I deads, Chingy! I stabbed! I burned to bitses!" he bellowed. "Ohmi, ohmi! Oh, bad 'nuff dreadfulnesses! I murdereds, Chingy!"

Luckily, Gan was far from being a corpse, and lucky also Herr Schwartz was only winded. There was a leak in the electric wire that fed the signalling lamp, and, like the poor cat, Gan-Waga had managed to find the live wire.

"Ohmi, Chingy," he sighed, "dat electricity, him rottenful stuffs! Why dey nots light up wid cangles, Chingy? Ohmi, I feels bads, awfulness bads! But I tink I gets de best of ole Shorts, hunk, Chingy? I satted on him heads proper, hunk? He not haves alls de laffs, did he?"

A faint smile lighted up the Eskimo's sorrowful features, and he limped away to the cook's galley in search of something to comfort him.

"I may go ashore, senor, I trust?" said Ching-Lung.

Senor Diaz Paravaltá, who had been watching the scene with languid amusement, nodded.

"I have no objection, your Highness," he answered. "You will be quite as safe there as here."

"Apparently you consider yourself perfectly safe," said the prince.

"Why not? Some of your friends have given me the slip, it is true; but that accident does not alarm me. Even if I am captured, it will not interfere with the success of our plans. Caramba! I do not intend to be taken if I can help it! News or no news, I shall slip my cable to-night. This is a fast vessel, and the seas are wide. I shall not wait here to be trapped."

"Isn't that rather a sudden change of plans, senor? You told me a short time ago that you could do nothing until you received information."

Paravaltá turned away with a shrug of his shoulders that might have meant anything, and Ching-Lung called for a boat.

"Hang it, this is bad news," muttered the prince, "and it may make a hash of things. The fellow is as nervous as a cat, though he hides it well. Can he have had news? No, that's impossible. I wonder what's happening? Rupert and Ben Maddock ought to have stirred up the fun by this time."

Prout, Barry, and Hendrick were quartered in the engine-house, for the Brazilian had refused to allow them to sleep aboard the Fatality. Chairs, mattresses, a stove, and other comforts had been brought from the yacht for their benefit.

"Hallo, boys!" said Ching-Lung. "I suppose I may come in? Where's the great Thomas Prout, Esquire? Why, you're all alone!"

"Bedad, he's gone fishin' wid ould Hendrick!" answered Barry O'Rooney, with a wink. "They're fishin' mad. Day and night they sit on a couple of rocks like two ugly penguins. And they're moighty bad anglers, or moighty unlucky wans, for ut's little enough the blayguards catch. Oi'm left to be chafe cook, bottle-washer, and gincral sarvent. This is a pudden Oi'm after makin'—a solid slab of spotted dog."

"Paravaltá says he's sheering off at midnight, Barry," said Ching-Lung.

"Phwat?" Barry dropped the bottle he was using as a rolling-pin. "The baste! He's scared then, the rogue!"

"I'm sure he is. We sha'n't be able to get away, for he

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

politely informed me he was attending to that part of the business."

"Well, that was only to be expected, sir," said Barry. "Oi hope he won't give the ingines too much of a twistin', and Oi likewise hope we sha'n't have to lave this place under our own sthame. Ye nivver know, ye know. Be jabbers, though Oi hate this oisland loike Oi hate rattlesnakes, Oi'd give all that's left of ould Ballybunion Castle to stop here wid Paravalt for another six-and-thirty hours. And Oi wish this was his face!"

Barry brought his fist down on the plum-duff with a terrific smite, to show how much he loved the Brazilian. Could Rupert Thurston have failed? Could anything have happened to the little sailing-boat in which he, the bo'sun, and Kennedy had set out on a rough sea for Scarran Island to flash an urgent message for aid to Ferrers Lord? Prout's devotion to sea-fishing was, of course, a mere blind. He was a watcher, not a fisherman, but he had watched in vain. Ching-Lung sat down. Hendrick kicked the mud from his boots, and walked in. He carried his gun on his shoulder, for no one had thought it worth while to take the ancient muzzle-loader away from him.

"Here vas some birds," he said, tossing a string of wild duck into a corner, and unbuckling his belt. "I see nodding else."

Ching-Lung sprang from his chair, and took up the belt. He shook the horn powder-flask that hung from it.

"Hurrah, boys!" he shouted. "I'll do it, if they hang me for it! That yacht isn't going to sail to-night. There's enough gunpowder to do the trick. We'll make a bomb somehow or other, and I'll play Anarchist. If I don't manage to explode it on the tenderest part of her machinery, I'm a Turk, and no Chinee. Off with your saucepan, for we shall want that fire. Now, you villains, to work—to work!"

A Scheme That Failed—The Message Chalked on the Door—At the Eleventh Hour.

Barry O'Rooney and Ching-Lung were not long in arriving at the sad conclusion that it was much easier to think about making a bomb than to carry out the idea.

They made a cylinder of zinc cut from the roof, but zinc was poor stuff for the purpose. The iron pot would have suited their purpose excellently, except for two important weaknesses. Firstly, they had no means of fastening down the lid; and secondly, the pot was too large for even an expert juggler like the prince to smuggle aboard the Paravalt.

Barry flung the zinc cylinder away, and scratched his head. "Couldn't ye steal a dure-knob?" he asked. "Me and Tom did that, and nigh frightened the loife out of poor Job Sanday wid ut."

"I'll take the powder with me," said Ching-Lung, "and see what I can do. They watch me pretty sharply, but I may manage to trick them."

"Der gun!" grunted Hendrick.

Ching-Lung examined the barrel, and shook his head.

"Thanks for the idea, but it won't work," he said. "That barrel is real stuff, not cheap gaspipe. It would tear wide open, and we want something brittle that would blow to bits. They don't make barrels like this nowadays, Hendrick, for it seems to be a lost art, and I don't want to take any chances. I must do the thing properly, or let it alone. Good-bye, boys! Keep a good look-out, and if you see me on the bridge, you may expect something to happen."

The prince rowed back to the yacht. He searched his cabin for something that would suit his purpose. The legs of his bedstead were hollow tubes of brass, but he had neither saw nor drill. Then he wandered into the saloon with no better success.

"Humph!" he thought. "I'm afraid that brilliant notion won't even end in smoke. My hat! I must be out of my senses!"

He tiptoed to the door and looked out. He had seen the very thing he wanted a dozen times, and yet he only remembered it that moment.

It was in the little writing-room, on Paravalt's American desk. The roll-top of the desk was closed and locked.

Ching-Lung did not attempt to force it, for the time had not come. He went on deck again. The electrician was repairing the leaky wires of the signalling, and at the foot of the mast lay his bag of tools.

"This is luck!" muttered the prince, as he kicked a small coil of insulated wire under a deck-chair. "You may not run away, after all, senor."

He secured the wire, and took a glance seaward through the Brazilian's binoculars. Then he looked towards the island, and laughed. The door of the engine-house was shut. Chalked on it, in large characters, was the following information:

"PORTLAND GAOL.
DO NOT TEASE THE PRISONERS."

When Paravalt entered the saloon, Ching-Lung was pre-

tending to read a novel. The Brazilian only remained there a few moments. As softly as a cat, Ching-Lung crept to the desk, and inserted a piece of bent wire in the lock. Then he rolled back the top of the desk and secured his prize.

The object was an unexploded pom-pom shell which Paravalt used as a paperweight. The charge had been removed. Thousands of such shells, dummy or otherwise, flooded the curio shops during and after the South African War.

This happened to be a real one, and Ching-Lung's hopes were high.

"Chingy! Where's yo' wases, Chingy? Coo-ee! Where yo' gotted to, my butterfuls boy?"

Ching-Lung gave an answering hail, and Gan-Waga waddled into the saloon.

"Oh mi! What yo' tink de bad 'nuff rascals do now, Chingy?" he said indignantly. "Dey warping yo' yachts 'longside, and de going to pinch our coals!"

"Sorry, dear, but I can't do anything to stop them stealing our coal," said the prince. "They're in possession, you know, so we can only smile and bear it."

To empty the coal-bunkers of the *Fatality* and fill those of the *Paravalt* would keep most of the hands fully occupied.

Ching-Lung fastened himself in his cabin, and began to peel the canvas from the copper wire. The canvas would make an excellent fuse for his bomb.

If the *Fatality* was to be left as helpless as a hulk, Ching-Lung intended her to have company, or know the reason why. He lifted the pillow to obtain the powder-flask, and then stood aghast, for the flask had vanished.

"The hounds!" he gasped. "They must have been watching me all the time. That's the finish of it—the absolute final!"

Overhead, all was clatter and noise and dust. It was a cruel blow to Ching-Lung, and it almost disheartened him. All the same, he took a nap, and awoke quite ready for his dinner. He dined alone, for the Brazilian did not appear, and Ching-Lung did not actually bemoan his loneliness.

"Senor Paravalt beg yo' highness to hab yo' coffee on deck wid him," said the negro steward. "It all swabbed down and clean, sah."

"Do you mean the deck or the coffee?" asked Ching-Lung. "Tell the senor to go to— No, you needn't do that, for I'll tell him to go there myself."

The Brazilian bowed, and muttered a polite "Good-evening!" He pushed his gold cigar-case across the little table.

"It will soon be time for us to part, senor," he said; "and I wish to part with you on good terms if possible. Will you convey my apologies to Mr. Thurston for what happened the night I invited him to dine? I had drunk too much champagne that night. For my treatment of you, I can only plead necessity. You are a gallant sportsman, senor, and a gentleman. I do not profess to always be scrupulous, senor, but I assure you that I have done nothing that I was not compelled to do, for I am not my own master. Caramba! When a man has a loaded pistol pointed at his head he must obey!"

"Strangely enough, I have noticed that before," said Ching-Lung drily. "Had I a pistol, I might be tempted to try the experiment on you."

"Or even a powder-flask," put in the Brazilian, with a quick laugh. "We were too smart for you there. You see how much you are respected. If ever you come up the Amazon, do not fail to pay me a visit, for I promise you a right royal welcome."

"I may take you at your word, and perhaps sooner than you think, senor, to ask for the coal you have borrowed. I have a long memory for debts."

He drank his coffee, and Paravalt sat silently twirling his moustache with nervous fingers.

"You do not know Paul Guthrey?" he asked suddenly.

"Only by reputation. They call him the mad millionaire, I think; and from the little I do know, I should say he deserves the title."

"If a person is mad, senor, who makes up his mind never to be beaten in what he attempts by any mortal man, then Paul Guthrey is a maniac. He has made up his mind to win the Florida Cup. He has his ships on every sea, and he has visions of flotillas of his airships filling the air. Mind you, the airship he has built is a wonderful vessel, as such vessels go. He felt sure that he had solved the problem. I do not profess to tell you how the secret of Ferrers Lord's airship reached him. The result of it is that I am here, and you are here. Guthrey pulls the strings, and we are the puppets. That is your madman."

"And if he wins the Florida Cup he will treble his millions?"

"Exactly! The stakes are nothing to him; it is what comes afterwards. He will be the hero of the world, and he loves notoriety. To win, he must cover the fifty-mile course in the hour without descending. You shrug your shoulders, senor, so it is plain you do not know Paul Guthrey."

(A splendid instalment of this grand serial next Monday. Order your copy now.)

