

THE FINEST SCHOOL, DETECTIVE, AND
ADVENTURE STORIES INSIDE!

No. 816. Vol. XXIV.

Week ending September 29th, 1923.

The Magnet 2^d

Library
of
School & Detective Stories.

EVERY
MONDAY.



A FORCED LANDING!

(An exciting incident from this week's mystery story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.)

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"CONDEMNED BY THE SCHOOL!"

THERE is not the slightest doubt that next Monday's yarn of Greyfriars in the MAGNET will evoke a little surprise among those readers who felt that they understood Harry Wharton's character thoroughly. I am certain this story will be read with interest, and what's more, it will get remembered, for it shows again something we all know, but which none the less is interesting to read about, namely, that though you think you know a fellow's character, there are always undiscovered sections of it to be taken into account.

JUST THAT UNEXPECTED TRAIT!

Life is full of these disillusionments, as one might call them. Now, Wharton's temperament is fairly level. He is by no means a quick, spasmodic fellow. But next Monday's tale throws fresh light on the skipper of the Remove. It is perfectly natural that onlookers should fail to realise the existence of hidden fires. There is always temper somewhere. If it is kept under control, all well and good. Wharton acted splendidly in the old days when the Bounder pressed him sorely. In the new yarn the out-and-out rotter, Snaith—who was expelled from Greyfriars some time back—turns up, and, one way and another, Harry Wharton comes in for no end of a bad time. He suffers eclipse for a spell.

I have good reason to know that MAGNET readers appreciate a story of this description. It is a cut from the joint of real life. You see Wharton passing through the most unpleasant mental sensations. As we all freely recognise, there are infinitely worse things than facing, say, a truculent

bull. You can, at least, hop it over a hedge, and from that fairly secure coign argue matters out with the bovine, or throw a few things at him. But it would beat an out-and-out hero to carry himself calmly when slander gets about, when words are misconstrued, and motives are imputed without a shadow of truth in them, but with all the horrid appearance of being correct. This new story will set you thinking more than ever about Harry Wharton, and about some of the jolly old difficulties of life, which we all have to face.

UNMASKED!

Our serial, "The Brotherhood of the White Heather," sees some curiously impressive developments next week. There is a matter which has to be taken in hand regarding the identity of Red Mask and Count Heinrich. The next instalment is a key to much. It unlocks the door of a veritable castle of mystery. We get a peep at the inner workings of revolutionary committees, but, what is more to the point is this, namely, that Ferrers Locke has a tremendous part to play here. He comports himself like a very brave fellow under conditions which bristle with the dagger thrusts of peril. Don't miss a word of this coming instalment, chums.

"THE HONOUR OF LANGLEYS!"

When a highwayman like Galloping Dick rallies the countryfolk and calls for cheers for the King, some critics who do not know any better—N.B. This is a common enough fault of critics—will be saying the sentiment rings false. But that is just what it does not do in next Monday's yarn in this splendid series. You are convinced all the way, right from the point where the knight of the road spots the device of the grand old family of the Langleys being sported by an upstart, who has about as much claim to the honour as a garden slug to first prize in a cross-country race.

A COUNTRY LIFE SUPPLEMENT!

There is a real magic about those words—Country Life. Take them how you may, they stand for the open, and for pretty nearly all the pleasant, healthy interests of our day, or any day. The "Greyfriars Herald" for next week has the real country atmosphere about it. It teems with interest, and you will say it is good, and quite worthy of the traditions of Greyfriars, where they do know something about the life of the country, and its good sense and freedom.

SNAPS!

It is a sure thing that Magnetites have been busy with their cameras while on holiday. I was thinking of this while riding through one of the southern counties the other day. The camera wielder does not have to go far afield to find tempting subjects for a snap. There was, I remember, a very venerable oak under which Queen Elizabeth sat on a certain celebrated occasion long ago. The Queen left a slipper in the village near by—the homely, interesting, and picturesque village of Northiam, where, in the grounds just beyond the old-fashioned green, stands an ancient mansion where the slipper which was left behind reposes under a glass case. As for the oak-tree, it is a picture in itself—not much more than the broad trunk left, and it has to be supported with chains. But wherever the biking camera artist goes he finds something to make a first-rate photo to add to his collection of snaps in the album at home.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS!

Naturally, I was much interested in a sort of wail which comes from A. C. Johnson, Christchurch, New Zealand. This correspondent has a lot that is fascinating to say about the old times, what was, and the stories which used to be. I am inclined to think that he belongs to the bold brigade of hygone boomers, as it were. Nothing can be said against the old times, but one has to be reconciled to change. Everything changes—people, houses, ways of thought, the whole scheme. People sneeze with a different note to that which prevailed say a decade back; some of them sneeze at alterations which should get praise, not belittlement. It really is not much good adulterating the glorious present—and the opportunities are all to be found in the present, be it remembered—with sad reminiscences dug out of the old past. But my Christchurch chum need not run away with the notion that his letter was unwelcome. It had a pleasant ring, especially his "Long Life to the MAGNET!"

Your Editor.

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THE SEED OF MYSTERY!

An aeroplane crashes on the cliffs, within full sight of Wharton and Nugent, and one of its three passengers is injured. The two juniors race to the village to fetch assistance. Arriving at the scene of the accident later, accompanied by the village policeman and a stretcher party, Wharton and Nugent are amazed to find that all traces of the wrecked machine, and its three passengers, have disappeared.



A long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, with a sensational mystery plot, unfolded by the world-famous author,
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Wrecked Plane!

BETTER be starting back, Franky," said Harry Wharton. "Close on five, and I'm hungry!"

"Same here," agreed Frank Nugent, grinning. "Nothing like sea air for making a fellow hungry. Jove, isn't it top-hole?"

And Frank Nugent drew in deep breaths of the salt-laden sea breeze with keen enjoyment.

Lessons were over for the day at Greyfriars, and the two chums had decided to pass the time before tea in a walk along the cliffs towards Pegg. And they had not regretted it. It was a glorious afternoon, and the invigorating sea-air had been a welcome change. They had gone walking on and on, forgetful of time, until the sight of the little fishing village of Pegg had reminded them that they were far from Greyfriars, and that they were hungry.

Half reluctantly they turned their backs on Pegg, and were soon treading the crisp turf of the cliff path at a brisk pace.

For ten minutes or so they strode on, and then Harry Wharton stopped suddenly in a listening attitude.

But for themselves, the lonely heath near the cliffs was deserted, and all had been silent save for the low whisper of the breeze in the dry gorse, and the eerie croak of stray seagulls.

Now, however, had come a new sound—a queer, droning sound.

"Hallo! An aeroplane!" said Nugent, catching the sound now. "Not often we get them round here, Harry."

"There she goes," remarked Harry Wharton.

They both saw it now—a large plane, flying low towards the sea-board, and

coming from the direction of Wapshot Common. The machine was flying rather erratically, and the roar of the engine came to them in queer, spasmodic gusts.

"Engine misfiring badly!" exclaimed Wharton, watching the machine keenly. "Unless I'm mistaken, that merchant will be forced to come down before he gets far. Mad if he risks crossing the channel like—Hallo! I thought so!"

The roar of the plane's engine fell to a fitful spluttering. Then, with startling abruptness it ceased altogether.

In the tense silence which followed the plane volplaned down, at what, even to the juniors' inexperienced eyes, was a dangerous angle and speed.

Breathlessly the juniors watched it swooping down until it vanished beyond a distant patch of coppice. Then, to their straining ears came a faint, ominous crash.

For an instant the juniors stood as if stunned by the unexpected, and apparently tragic, occurrence. Then Wharton gave a gasp.

"Come on, Franky—quick!"

Full of alarm, the juniors left the grassy path and tore off across the gorse-covered turf at top speed.

As they broke through the patch of coppice, Wharton caught his breath.

Below, in the hollow, lay a stretch of wiry heath, and, beyond that, the expanse of shimmering, blue sea. But in between, seemingly scarcely a yard from the dizzy brink of ocean, was the plane. It had heeled over on its side, with one wing smashed, but beyond that seemed little the worse for such a bad "landing."

Without stopping, the juniors scudded on, anxious concerning the fate of the machine's occupants. They soon saw

them—three men, two of whom were stooping over their companion stretched out on the short, green grass.

So one, at least, was injured!

Then the alarmed juniors got a surprise.

As they ran up, one of the men turned and faced the breathless Removites.

"Well!" he snapped, with a lowering glare. "What do you kids want?"

The snappish greeting rather staggered them.

"I—I thought we might be of some assistance!" exclaimed Wharton, with a glance at the injured man. "If we can do anything—fetch help—"

"We want no help!" was the savage answer.

"But—but that man! He looks badly hurt!" stammered Wharton. "We could run for a doctor—or a stretcher—"

The man gave an impatient gesture.

"I tell you we want neither doctor nor stretcher. Now get!"

"But—but—"

"Clear out, hang you!" muttered the fellow savagely. "If you're not out of here in two ticks I'll send you nose-diving over the cliffs! Clear, you meddlesome little rats!"

Wharton exchanged a quick, bewildered glance with his chum. Then he stared blankly from the man to his companions. The latter were also eyeing the juniors in a far from friendly manner. It was only too obvious that neither their help nor presence was needed.

And yet a glance at the injured man told them that he, at least, needed medical aid. He lay with one leg twisted queerly beneath him, and his features were drawn with pain.

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The juniors did not know what to make of it.

But there was no mistaking the ugly glint in the fellow's eyes, and Wharton decided it just as well not to press their kind intentions on the ungrateful trio.

Without answering the surly fellow Wharton turned abruptly away, his face flushing. Nugent followed, his eyes wide with amazement.

"What's it all mean, Harry?" he gasped. "Nice, amiable sort of chaps, aren't they? Wonder who they can be?"

Wharton grunted. He had not been at all favourably impressed by the three men, and he wondered also. Though quite ordinary types, and fairly decently dressed, there was something about them that did not inspire confidence and trust—quite the reverse, in fact.

"Hanged if I know," he said, wrinkling his brows. "There's something jolly queer about this, Franky. I vote we hang on a bit and watch developments. Can't stop us doing that."

The juniors stopped at the top of the hollow and flung themselves down on the warm turf, with their eyes fixed curiously on the three figures by the wrecked plane.

They were not left to watch for long. Evidently they were being observed, for almost immediately the man who had spoken to them—a lanky, sandy-haired individual, with a crusty, truculent look about him—came charging up to them.

"You little whelps!" he shouted. "What did I tell you? Didn't I tell you to clear? If you're not—"

He broke off and glanced sharply round as a sharp call came from the two below. With a grunt, he went hurrying back, and a brief, muttered conversation passed between the three.

"Better go, after all," muttered Wharton. "No good asking for trouble, Franky. That ginger-headed chap looks a bit of a handful, and—Hullo! He's coming back! Look out for trouble!"

But it wasn't trouble this time. The red-haired man's lanky, freckled face was twisted into a genial smile as he came up to the juniors.

"My friend—chap who's hurt—thinks it'd be as well if he had attention, after all," he said quite amiably.

"Oh!" said Harry.

"He's changed his mind," went on the man. "I'm a rough chap, youngsters, and you mustn't mind what I said just now. Fact is, we're a bit crusty about this smash—bit of bad luck as we're in a hurry. Reckon you wouldn't mind running to the village—Friardale—for help? No need to get a doctor. Just call at the Black Horse, and bring a couple of men and a stretcher. Get me?"

Wharton stood up and nodded. For all his change of front, Harry did not fail to see the glint in the man's eyes.

But he knew the injured man was badly hurt, and, though angry, Wharton did not hesitate.

"We'll go at once," he said quietly. "It's some distance to the village—"

"Perhaps I know these parts better than you do, kid," grinned the red-haired man. "Anyway, don't forget—no need for any fuss. It ain't nothing serious."

"I understand," said Wharton briefly. "Come on, Franky!"

The juniors turned abruptly, and sped away for the distant village. They were puzzled and a little uneasy. Why their

presence should be resented so strongly was quite beyond them. But, after all, it was hardly their business to worry about that. Their job—if not their duty—was to get help to the injured man, despite the unfriendly attitude of those they wanted to help.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Mystery!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! What the thump—"

Bob Cherry was astonished—as also were Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh, who were with him.

The three had just left the village, and were sauntering along Friardale Lane when, hearing hurried footsteps behind them, they had turned to behold an unusual and alarming sight.

It was a procession. First came Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, at a brisk trot; then came two villagers, carrying a folded stretcher between them. Behind these, puffing and panting, his flabby face red with exertion, came P.-c. Tozer, the Friardale constable. And, bringing up the rear, was a crowd of excited, clamorous village urchins.

"What the thump—" repeated Bob Cherry, staring.

"Looks like an accident somewhere," said Johnny Bull.

"Hullo, they are making for the cliffs," said Bob. "Somebody fallen over, most likely."

The party had stopped by the stile leading on to the heath. They clambered over one by one, and went streaming across the heath, obviously making for the distant cliffs. Evidently Wharton and Nugent had seen their chums along the lane, for, as he mounted the stile, Wharton waved to them.

"Come on!" muttered Bob Cherry. "Better see what's up."

Curious and not a little alarmed, the three chums ran back to the stile and dropped over. A brisk run soon brought them up to the tail end of the curious procession.

Wharton and Nugent dropped back to meet them—a proceeding which brought a suspicious gleam into the eyes of P.-c. Tozer.

"Look 'ere, young gents," he puffed, fixing a dark look on Wharton's face, "if this 'ere is a 'oax—"

"It's no 'oax, old chap," said Wharton grimly. "You push on. You'll find it's true enough presently. We're not going to bolt."

The portly constable "pushed on," but he kept a close and distrustful eye on the juniors nevertheless. Though he had accepted Wharton's story, and acted upon it, he had done so with many misgivings. More than once his official leg had been "pulled" by the juniors of Greyfriars.

"What's the matter, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry, as the three ran up. "Been an accident?"

Wharton nodded, and as the five chums ran on together, he explained.

"My hat!" gasped Johnny Bull, with a whistle of astonishment. "It sounds a queer business, anyway. We didn't see the plane go over, though."

"It came from over Wayland way," said Harry. "I don't fancy you would see it from the village, especially as it's so hazy. Old Tozer didn't, either, and the old ass thinks, or suspects, we're spoofing him. He'll know better soon."

But Harry Wharton was quite wrong there.

The shimmering sea came into sight at last, and Wharton and Nugent led the way towards the hollow where the wrecked plane had come down.

As the two juniors came in sight of the spot, they both received the shock of their lives.

The wrecked aeroplane had gone; there was not even a scrap of wreckage on the spot. And the three airmen had vanished also.

Wharton and Nugent were staggered. They halted and fairly blinked at the bare stretch of green turf. The rest of the party also halted, and eyed the two juniors inquiringly.

"Well," demanded P.-c. Tozer, mopping his heated brow, and fixing a steely eye on the juniors, "where's that there airplane, young gents? I don't see nothing of it yet, my lads."

"I don't see no hairyplane neither," puffed one of the stretcher-bearers. "If you young gents 'as bin tellin' lies—"

"It's—it's gone!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Clean vanished," added Nugent blankly. "It was lying on that patch of grass there—just by the cliff edge."

"Ho, was it?" snorted P.-c. Tozer. "Gone, 'as it?"

"I—I can't understand it," muttered Wharton. "It was there less than half an hour ago, with one wing smashed. It couldn't have flown."

"It ain't 'iding behind a blade o' grass, I s'pose?" sniffed P.-c. Tozer, with biting sarcasm. "You—you young himps! So this 'ere is a 'oax arter all?"

Wharton and Nugent scarcely heard the wrathful constable's remarks. They looked at each other, and then they walked down to the spot. Tozer and the two villagers grunted and followed, looking anything but amiable.

Wharton walked quickly to the edge of the cliff and looked over; then he came back and stared round at the trampled grass.

"This beats me," he mumbled, half to himself. "Even if the machine was capable of flying, it couldn't have taken off from a place like this. What do you make of it, Franky?"

"Blessed if I know what to think," said Nugent, shaking his head. "Two of 'em could have carried the injured chap away, I suppose. But what about the thumping plane?"

"Yes, it is what about it?" grunted P.-c. Tozer. "Wot I wants to know is, wot d'you kids mean by bringin' us all this 'ere way for nothin'? You'll find you can't play these 'ere jokes on the law like this, young gents."

"I calls it beyond a joke, Mister Tozer," said one of the men angrily. "Fetchin' us from our work like this 'ere. I don't believe there ever was a hairyplane, and wot I sez is—"

"You can say what you like!" exclaimed Harry Wharton irritably. "We told you the truth. The plane, with three men, one of them badly hurt, was on this spot less than half an hour ago. If you'd got eyes you'd see where it had been. Look at the state of the ground."

P.-c. Tozer grunted. He looked about him pompously, and then eyed the juniors doubtfully. That the juniors' bewilderment was genuine was plain even to him. And the grass certainly bore signs of having been trampled down by a heavy object.

"Well, I won't go as far as to say there ain't bin no machine 'ere, young gents," he granted at last. "But if there 'as,

Look out for "Condemned by the School!"—next Monday's—

then it ain't 'ere now. And it ain't no good our wastin' any more time 'ere. If you're certain this 'ere was the very spot—

“Absolutely certain,” said Harry.

“Then it must 'ave flown away agen,” said the stout guardian of the law. “Anyhow, I'll soon find out if a airy-plane 'as bin seen round 'ere, and if there ain't, you'll 'ear more about this, young gents.”

And with that dark threat P.-c. Tozer led his stretcher-bearers, still grumbling wrathfully, back across the heath. They were followed by the village urchins in a straggling crowd. Being disappointed, these latter vented their disappointment on the Greyfriars juniors by shouting insults and catcalls as they went.

“Well, my hat!” said Bob Cherry, with a grin. “What sort of a game do you call this, Harry? Was it spoof after all?”

“Of course it wasn't!” snapped Wharton grumpily. “Think we'd play a

“Now were we spoofing?” demanded Harry Wharton grimly. “That's the blessed plane right enough—or what's left of it. Those chaps must have wheeled it to the edge and sent it over—two of them could manage it easily enough.”

“But—but why?”

“Goodness knows why!” muttered Wharton. “But that's what they've done.”

“Had we better call old Tozer back?” queried Nugent.

“What's the good? It's gone now, and they'd only think it more spoof,” grunted Wharton. “It fairly takes the biscuit factory.”

He stood up and glanced about him. But there were no signs of the three men; like their machine, they had vanished.

“Well, that ends it, I suppose,” said Wharton, at last. “We can do nothing more as far as I can see. If those queer merchants don't wish what's happened to be known, it's their own business.

“At your service, O captain!” added Bob Cherry.

Wingate ignored Cherry's “cheek.” He frowned, and addressed Harry Wharton.

“I hear you were down by the beach yesterday evening, Wharton?” he exclaimed.

“Nugent and I went along the cliffs; but we didn't go near the beach,” said Wharton. “Why—?”

“You didn't have one of the school boats out?”

“No.”

“Know anyone who did?”

Wharton shook his head.

“I don't think any of the Remove had,” he said, eyeing Wingate wonderingly. “Why, anything the matter, Wingate?”

“Bates reports that one of them—the Joan—was missing from its moorings this morning,” said Wingate briefly. “Anyway, if you chaps hear of anyone who had a boat out last night, let me know.”



Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent passed the remainder of the “Co.” at a brisk trot. Then came two villagers carrying a folded stretcher between them. Behind these, puffing and panting, came P.-c. Tozer, joined by a crowd of village urchins. (See Chapter 2.)

joke like that on anyone? The thing beats me hollow!”

And, wrinkling his brows, Harry Wharton began to scrutinise the ground again. His keen eyes soon picked up something—the trail of wheel-marks in the short grass. He followed them up eagerly, and as he half expected, they led him to the cliff edge.

Throwing himself flat he peered over the brink. He saw nothing at first; then where the water churned at the base of the cliff he saw a vague, half-submerged mass of spars and canvas amid the white foam. And now, to his ears came the measured crash of wood and metal as the wreckage beat itself against the rocks below.

Harry hurriedly called his chums, and they ran up and looked over. They were just in time to see the last of the wrecked plane as it disappeared from sight in the deep water.

Anyhow, it's no good stopping here guessing. I'm ready for tea.”

And the juniors started back for Greyfriars in a mystified group. That they had stumbled upon a deep problem they had little doubt. But as Harry said, it was no good hanging about guessing the answer to it. And they left it at that.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Red-Haired Man!

“JUST a minute, you fellows!”

Wingate of the Sixth called to the Famous Five as the chums of the Remove were walking out of gates just after tea the following day.

The popular skipper of Greyfriars was talking to Bates, the school boatman, by the gates, and the Remove juniors walked over to him.

“Yes, Wingate?” said Wharton.

Wingate turned to Bates again, and the juniors passed on through the gates.

“Another unsolved mystery,” grinned Bob Cherry. “Who pinched the school boat?”

“Hardly likely it's been pinched,” said Harry Wharton. “I expect some silly ass had it out and didn't tie it up securely. Probably the old tub's wandering about the Channel on it's own somewhere.”

“What about those queer merchants last night?” asked Frank Nugent quietly. “Think they had anything to do with it?”

“My hat!”

Wharton gave a start; but after a moment's reflection he shook his head.

“Hardly likely they'd want a tinpot sailing skiff—why should they?” he said slowly. “And yet it's jolly queer for all that. They must have got away somehow, and they could hardly walk with

—magnificent story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars I

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 816.

that fellow injured as he was. I wonder—"

"Oh, don't reopen that problem again, for goodness' sake!" groaned Bob Cherry. "We've already worried it to rags without getting anywhere. The plane's gone, and so have the merchants who were in it; let 'em rip!"

Wharton laughed, and allowed the subject to drop. But for the rest of that walk to Friardale he was looking very thoughtful. Though they had decided not to mention to anyone their adventure of the previous evening, the Co. had discussed it again and again amongst themselves. But the affair remained a mystery to them still. And Wharton, at least, was not at all satisfied that they were doing the right thing in keeping their adventure a secret.

On arrival in Friardale, Harry Wharton, who had some shopping to do, called in at the chemist's, while his chums strolled on to the village tuckshop to await him there.

Harry entered the small village shop, to find Mr. Twigg, the chemist, busy serving a customer with a roll of bandages and several other "first aid" articles.

For a moment or so, Harry idly watched the chemist, and then something curiously familiar about the customer's tall, broad-shouldered figure and reddish hair caught his attention. Then suddenly the man spoke, and Wharton's vague suspicion became a certainty.

"Never mind wrappin' the things up," grunted the fellow impatiently. "I'll put 'em in the bag."

Wharton had no need to see the man's face now—his surly voice was enough. He was one of the mysterious strangers from the wrecked aeroplane—the very man who had treated them so churlishly on the cliffs, in fact.

The discovery quite startled Harry. But he kept his wits, and, strolling casually behind a tall fixture, waited until the man had packed his bag and left the shop. Then the junior emerged and addressed the chemist.

"Surly sort of chap, Mr. Twigg," he remarked casually. "Who is he?"

"Don't know him from Adam," said Mr. Twigg, with a grunt. "He's a surly chap right enough, though, Master Wharton. Just asked him if there'd been an accident, and he fairly bit my head off."

"Might be civil, anyway," said Harry. "I want some toothpaste, Mr. Twigg, please."

Quivering with impatience now, Harry waited until he was served. Then he hurriedly left the shop, and glanced quickly about him.

There was no sign of the big man in the village street. Even as he stood hesitating, however, Harry saw the red-haired man emerge from Brent's, the baker's, across the way. In addition to his black handbag, he now carried a large brown-paper parcel under his arm. He walked away down the quiet street at a brisk pace.

Wharton gazed after him, undecided for a moment, and then, seeing the fat figure of Billy Bunter rolling past, Harry ran across to him.

"Bunter!" he exclaimed quickly. "Just run along to Uncle Clegg's shop, will you? You'll find Bob Cherry and the rest of the chaps there. Tell them I've gone on towards the cliffs, will you? Be quick, you ass!"

Billy Bunter fairly blinked at Harry Wharton's excited face.

"Oh, really, Wharton—" he began.

"Go on, you fat chump!" breathed Harry, gazing impatiently after the fast-disappearing form of the stranger. "Tell them I'm on the track of one of those men we met last night—they'll understand!"

"Oh, really, Wharton," repeated Bunter warmly, "I don't jolly well see why—"

But Wharton was already speeding away along the street. Bunter blinked after him, and grunted.

"Must think I'm a blessed fag!" he mumbled. "Blowed if I'm going to run his errands—no fear! Not for nothing! What's bitten the silly ass, I wonder? He seems jolly excited about something! On the track of somebody—eh? My hat!"

The disgruntled expression left Billy Bunter's fat face, and his eyes gleamed. Billy Bunter was always curious—about other people's business; and he was curious now.

"Something up!" he mused, blinking after Harry Wharton reflectively. "It wants looking into, anyway. Might even be a feed at the end of it!"

And Billy Bunter rolled on hastily—not towards Uncle Clegg's shop to deliver Wharton's message—but on the track of Wharton himself.

Meanwhile, the captain of the Remove—little dreaming that he, in his turn, was being shadowed—had reached the outskirts of the village, and was hard on the heels of his quarry.

He could see the red-haired stranger ahead of him, walking along Friardale Lane with quick strides. But as Harry had expected, he very soon left the open lane, and climbing the stile on to the heath, went hurrying across the heath towards the distant line of cliffs.

Ready to take cover at the first sign of the man looking round, Harry kept steadily on the trail, his eyes gleaming with excitement and expectation.

He himself never even thought of looking round—he had forgotten Bunter's very existence, in fact.

Wharton felt justified in following the man, because the more he reflected upon the matter of the missing school boat, the more certain did he become that the two problems were connected in some strange way.

It was soon plain to Harry Wharton that the red-haired man knew the district well—as he had hinted the night before. He strode on without hesitation, and, to Harry's surprise, made straight for the hollow where the plane had come to grief.

Before reaching it, however, he turned abruptly to the left, and his head bobbed out of sight over the brow of the cliff.

The junior's eyes gleamed, and he broke into a run. He knew where the man had gone. At that spot a series of rocky steps and shelving paths led down to the beach. It was pretty clear now that either the man had a boat waiting on the beach, or that his destination was one of the many caves that abounded thereabouts.

In a moment or two Harry had reached the place. The mystery of how the men had vanished so quickly the night before was not such a deep mystery to him now. He began to descend the path cautiously, with eyes and ears keenly alert for signs of his quarry.

Scarcely had he descended many yards, however, when he stopped suddenly, his heart thumping. The red-haired man had halted, and was talking to someone. They were round the bend in the path just below him—so

near that Wharton could hear their words clearly.

"You got the stuff, then, Porter?" came a voice—a voice Harry did not recognise. "Everything all right?"

"Right as rain!" was the red-haired man's grunted reply. "The chemist chap was a bit inquisitive; but I soon choked him off. Collar this 'ere parcel, Jim, and let's be getting back!"

There was the rustle of paper, and, stepping quickly to a jutting shoulder of rock, Harry peered cautiously over. He was just in time to see the red-haired man—evidently Porter—hand over to his companion the brown-paper parcel he had carried.

Harry watched, hardly daring to breathe. The short man took the parcel, and placing it under his arm was about to lead the way down the path, when something startling happened.

From somewhere above on the pathway there sounded a startled, half-stifled gasp, followed by the sound of slithering feet and the rattle of stones.

What had caused it Harry did not know. Had he known the clumsy Owl of the Remove was tracking him, he would perhaps have guessed. He stood, for the moment, too startled to move.

With alarmed gasps both men wheeled abruptly, and there was a simultaneous yell as they spotted Harry's face peering round the shoulder of rock.

"It's one of them blamed school kids!" shouted Porter furiously. "Arter him, Jim!"

Harry moved then—quickly enough. In a flash he had turned about, and was fleeing for dear life up the steep pathway. As he went he heard the men drop their burdens, and come pounding after him with savage cries.

But luck was against the junior. He had reached the top—was almost within reach of the grassy turf of the cliff-top, when, in his eager excitement, his foot slipped, and he went headlong, sprawling face downwards on the pebbly path.

In a moment the two men were upon him, and the red-haired man's knee was grinding into his back.

"Got you, my beauty!" snapped the giant savagely. "Spying on us, eh—you little rat? Let's have a blink at you!"

He turned Wharton over roughly, and as his eyes fell upon the junior's white face he gave a yell.

"Blowed if it ain't one o' them same blamed kids as came meddling last night!" he said, his eyes glinting. "So we're not so safe as we thought we were, Jim!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter to the Rescue!

"O H dear!" Billy Bunter groaned the words under his breath.

The fat junior was sheltering behind a huge boulder on the little plateau at the top of the rocky pathway. His heart was thumping beneath his fat ribs, and his eyes were wide open with excitement—and fear.

It was Billy Bunter, of course, who was indirectly responsible for the capture of Wharton. Bunter was no good at tracking—unless it was, as Bob Cherry would have put it, tracking down a feed. He had started to descend the steps, but in his clumsy eagerness his

Wharton's hasty temper leads him into a maze of difficulties—

foot had slipped, and the noise of his slipping had caused the trouble.

He had watched the resulting disaster to Harry Wharton in alarmed dismay, and now he blinked cautiously at the group from his hiding-place, hardly daring to breathe.

As Porter turned him roughly over, Wharton stared up steadily and fearlessly into the man's savage eyes. He did not resist—he made no attempt to resist. In the first place, he knew he stood no chance against the desperate pair. And in the second place it was dangerous to struggle there. He lay within a foot of the dizzy brink of the ocean, and he realised that a scuffle would probably end in a tragedy.

The man addressed as Jim did not answer his companion's announcement for a moment. He glared savagely and not a little uneasily down at the white-faced junior.

"Well," he granted at last, "what about it, Porter? We ought to have let the young 'ound go, hang him! No good'll come of harmin' the little rat! Only make matters worse! Let the kid go!"

"Let 'im go!" snarled Porter, amazed. "You fool, Jim! He'll go blabbin'—"

"He knows nothin' yet—"

"He knows enough, and he suspects more—or he wouldn't be spying on us!" snapped Porter. "I tell you we daren't let the kid go. Anyway, we're taking him before the Chief! He'll soon decide what to do with him."

The red-haired man's stronger personality prevailed. With a shrug, the short fellow stooped and dragged Harry roughly to his feet.

Harry glanced wildly around him.

In that lonely spot there was not a soul in sight—no sign of rescue. But he knew that if Bunter had delivered his message to his chums, they would not be far away now. And he had no intention of being taken prisoner if he could help it.

He waited until they had taken a few steps away from the dangerous edge, and then he wrenched himself free, and jumped for the steps.

"Rescue, Greyfriars!" he yelled.

But Red-head was too quick for him. As Harry jumped, his big hand shot out and closed like a vice on the boy's collar.

"Let me go!" panted Harry, twisting and wrenching desperately. "You'll suffer for this, you rascals! Rescue, Greyfriars! Rescue!"

Still in the hope that his chums were somewhere near, Harry yelled at the top of his voice. And it was then that Billy Bunter showed a new side to his character.

He had watched what had happened in blank amazement, without the faintest idea as to what it meant. Though, perhaps the biggest funk in Greyfriars, the sight of his fellow-junior struggling in the grip of the rascals imbued him with a sudden flicker of courage.

For a brief second he blinked round at the struggling trio, and then inspiration seized him, and, forgetting his own fright, he rose to the occasion, and acted.

Next moment, even as Harry's voice rang out, there came answering cries from the rocks around, from the cliff-top—seemingly from everywhere.

"Rescue, Greyfriars!"

"Hold on, Wharton—we're coming!"

"Go for 'em, chaps!"

"Smash the rotters!"



Racing for dear life, Wharton reached the top of the cliff. In his eager excitement his foot slipped and he went headlong, sprawling face downwards on the pebbly path. In a moment the two men were upon him.
(See Chapter 3.)

The chorus of yells rang out, one after another, and the effect on the two men was extraordinary.

They released the junior as quickly as though he were red-hot. For a second they stood, glancing round in alarm, and then Porter gave a yell:

"Run for it, Jim—never mind the kid!"

And, to Bunter's joy, both turned and bolted helter-skelter down the pathway. As they did so Harry Wharton listened a second to their boots clattering on the rocks below, and then he turned and sprang lightly up the steps.

He was astounded. It seemed like a miracle to him—those strange voices coming as they did from everywhere. He had recognised none of the voices—it could not have been his chums who had rescued him.

He was more bewildered still when he reached the top of the cliff and glanced quickly around him. The stretch of downcliff sward was deserted.

It was amazing—to Harry Wharton. To Billy Bunter—the Greyfriars ventriloquist—it was simple enough—very simple. As Wharton vanished over the brow of the cliff, his attitude showing his bewilderment, the fat junior emerged from hiding, his face wearing a fat grin. Bunter's terror had vanished now. He only felt pride in his accomplishment, and in the fact that he had rescued Wharton—had done a plucky thing for once.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "I'll bet old Wharton comes down handsomely for this. Anyway, he'll have to

own up that I'm a jolly good ventriloquist now. My hat! If it hadn't come off those awful brutes would have collared me, too. I think Wharton ought to treat me decently after this—taking the risk I did."

And fairly swelling with pride and smug satisfaction, the fat junior adjusted his spectacles on his fat little nose and started after Wharton.

But before he had taken many steps he paused, as something lying on the rugged pathway below caught his eye. It was a black bag; near it lay a couple of loaves that had burst from their covering when the men had dropped their burdens.

"My hat!" breathed Billy Bunter, his eyes glistening. "Blow the loaves; but I wonder what's in the bag? I'm jolly hungry, and—"

Bunter's eyes blinked over the deserted pathway and the rock-strewn beach beyond. But evidently the men had gone. There was no movement on beach or path.

For a brief moment he hesitated—torn between fear of danger and hunger. But hunger won. Next instant he had slipped down to the spot, and after another cautious blink round knelt by the bag.

It was unlocked, and soon he was rummaging among the contents. There was the parcel from the chemist's, a supply of butter, tea, and sugar and tinned milk. There were also a tin of sardines, a tin of pressed beef, and a tin of lobster paste.

"I don't see why I shouldn't," murmured Bunter, eyeing the latter articles

—which well-nigh break his spirit! Is Wharton true blue?

greedily. "Those chaps have chucked them away, and they belong to anybody. Besides, findings are keepings, so they're mine really, as I found 'em. Here goes!"

And having thus satisfied his—always very accommodating—conscience, Billy started on the tin of sardines.

There was a key with the tin, and Billy soon had the latter opened. Then using a rather grubby finger and thumb Bunter got to work.

He was so busy with this elegant occupation that he quite failed to hear cautious feet on the path below him. He had completely forgotten the existence of the men by this time. But he was very soon reminded in a startling manner.

A slight movement behind him made the fat junior turn his head suddenly, with a startled gasp. Standing scarcely a yard away, eyeing the fat junior with savage glares, were Red-head and his accomplice.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Newcomer!

THE fat junior fairly shook with fright. He blinked at the two men helplessly, a sardine still held between a shaking finger and thumb. But as Red-head, after a sharp glance round, made a movement towards him, he leaped to his feet, with a terrified series of yells.

"Help! Murder! Wharton, come back! Oh dear! Help! Rescue! Whart—m-m-mum!"

Bunter's fierce yells ended in a gurgling sound as a rough hand was clapped over his mouth, and he was held fast.

"You—you fat, thieving little freak!" hissed Red-head furiously. "You'd sneak our thundering grub, would you! Another sound, you little rat, and I'll send you over the cliff!"

Bunter's muffled squeaks stopped on the instant. His fat form went limp with terror in the other's fierce grasp.

"Get a move on, Jim, you fool!" cried Red-head, nodding towards the bag. "Get those things together and let's be off. Those other confounded kids can't be far away. We'll have to—"

The man broke off abruptly. From above them there came a shout—a shout of encouragement and hope to Bunter. At the top of the cliff stood a junior, staring down at them. It was Harry Wharton.

Unwisely, perhaps, Wharton had still lingered in the vicinity, still bewildered by the mystery of the strange voices. He had heard Bunter's terror-stricken shout, and had rushed to the spot on the instant.

But as he stared down at the trio below him he understood from whence the mysterious voices had proceeded. It was well known at Greyfriars that Bunter was a clever ventriloquist, and in a flash Wharton realised it was Bunter who had saved him.

That Bunter, of all people, had risked his fat skin to save him amazed Wharton. He felt a sudden new respect for the fat junior.

But Bunter was now, in his turn, in danger, and Wharton did not linger to ponder over the fact—astounding as it was.

Without counting the odds, he gave a shout, and went down the rough path with a rush. He reached the spot, and before his mad onslaught Porter, grown man as he was, staggered backwards. Harry Wharton could hit hard, and he hit hard now.

His fist caught the red-haired man under the chin, and he howled and released Bunter. That junior, finding himself free, gasped and bolted, taking the easiest way of escape—down the steps to the beach.

But his going made little difference to the result. In any case, Billy Bunter was no fighting man. Wharton scarcely saw him go. He was too busy.

After that first hefty blow, Harry got no chance of a second. Next instant the big man had recovered himself. His arms went round the junior, and despite his desperate struggles he was lifted and flung to the ground with a thud.

Wharton lay there, panting and half stunned. Suddenly he heard a welcome sound—an encouraging shout. Once again it came from the top of the cliff. But this time it was a man's deep voice.

"Hold on, youngster!"

As they heard the voice the two men wheeled abruptly and stared upwards. Then Red-head gave vent to a savage imprecation, a cry of mingled amazement and desperation.

"Hook it, Jim!" he yelled. "Never mind the blamed kid—hook it, quick!"

The stranger, a tall, military-looking man in a dark suit and bowler hat, came hurrying down the path with brisk, athletic movements; and Red-head and his companion stampeded madly.

Without heeding Wharton or their property, they dashed away down the rocky path with a clatter of heavy boots. Next moment the stranger had reached the spot.

He gave the junior a quick look.

"You all right, youngster?" he snapped.

Harry nodded dazedly.

"I'm all right. Just shaken a bit," he said. "Have those chaps—"

But the tall man didn't wait for more. He went speeding in pursuit of Harry's assailants, and vanished from the junior's sight down the steep path.

Harry listened for a moment to his retreating footsteps, and then he staggered to his feet.

For some moments he stood leaning against the rocky wall of the cliff, and then he started slowly down the path. From where he was he could only see a short stretch of rocky beach, and no sound reached him. He wondered what had happened down there, and felt very concerned as to the fate of Billy Bunter.

He soon knew. On reaching the beach he glanced quickly along the glistening sands, and then he saw Bunter.

The fat junior was far away, streaking across the sands, looking like a great, fat cockroach. He was obviously making tracks for home, and had evidently had enough adventure for that afternoon.

Harry drew a deep breath of relief. He looked round for the queer stranger, and then he gave a start.

At the water's edge, some fifty yards away, the tall man was standing alone. His back was towards the junior, and he was staring out to sea.

Then Harry saw it—a small boat dancing on the sunlit sea. In it were two men; one of them—the red-haired rascal—was frantically shaking out the sheet. Even as he looked the small sail belled out before the breeze, and the boat went heeling away at a brisk speed.

The man did not turn as Harry hurried towards him. He stood watching it, a look of disappointment on his face. The boat sped on, and disappeared from sight round the rocky shoulder. Then the stranger turned to Wharton with a grunt.

"They—they've escaped, then?" exclaimed Wharton breathlessly, giving the man a curious glance.

The stranger smiled grimly.

"Yes—for the present they've given us the slip," he said. "They had a boat hidden among the rocks there. I spotted them too late. And now, my boy, what's the trouble? Who were those gentry? I only caught a brief glimpse of them."

There was a curious trace of eagerness in the man's tone, and Harry looked at him quickly. At first sight the man had seemed an ordinary, homely type of man—Harry had taken him for a holiday-maker to the district. Now, as he noted the keen, alert gaze, he revised his impression on the instant.

"I don't really know them," he said hesitatingly. "But one—a big, red-haired man—is called Porter. The other—the short, stocky man—is called Jim. I've only seen them once before."

"Ah! This is interesting—very! You've seen nothing, I suppose, of a third man—a slightly older man, well-built, with an iron-grey moustache, and of somewhat better appearance—eh?"

Harry started. The description fitted the injured airman—the man who had been hurt when the plane crashed—exactly. He looked with deeper interest at the stranger.

"I—I've seen him—yes," muttered Harry slowly. "But he's badly hurt—broken his leg, I think. You—you see, there was a smash. Those three men came in a plane which dropped on the cliff here. We saw it fall, and—"

"So you are one of the boys who reported the story of the wrecked plane to the local constable—eh?" said the man quickly.

"You—you've heard about it, then?" gasped Harry.

"Yes, I heard about it in the village," smiled the man. "It interested me very much. Queer story—very."

"It was true," said Harry briefly.

"I don't doubt it, my boy," was the grim answer. "As it happens, I know a little about those—those men. I'm keen to get into touch with them. I suppose you wouldn't mind telling me the story. I'm curious to hear it at first-hand. It's interesting."

They strolled across the beach back to the cliff-path, and as they went Harry told the story. And the stranger found it interesting undoubtedly. He asked innumerable questions, and his eyes were glittering strangely when Harry finished at last.

"I'm much obliged to you, my boy," he said. "It is a very unusual story, and—Hullo, here are the belongings of those men, I imagine."

The two had reached the spot where the struggle had taken place, and the stranger dropped on one knee and began to examine the contents of the bag.

He stood up after a moment.

"Our friends seem to be camping out somewhere here," he exclaimed. "I suppose there are caves round here—"

"Lots," said Harry. "But—but if they're hiding in caves here why should they want a boat? Why should they sail away like that?"

The stranger smiled queerly.

"They're shy birds!" he said grimly. "Sort of not keen on visitors to their little nest. I fancy that little trip out to sea was to lay a false trail. At all events I think I'll hang round here a bit yet. It's possible they'll return for their property—though it's hardly likely."

He paused and eyed the junior rather thoughtfully.

A meeting, a ballot, a new captain! Who is it?—

"You'd better cut off home now, youngster," he said gruffly at last. "And if you'll take my advice you'll steer clear of this part of the cliffs for a few days. As I told you, I happen to know something of those gentry; they are dangerous men—rascals who would stick at nothing. By the way, have you discussed this affair with anyone?"

"Only my chums," said Harry. "We—we decided to keep it all to ourselves—afraid of being chipped, you know."

"Good—very good! What about the fat boy you spoke of?"

"He's rather a gas-bag," said Harry, smiling. "But he knows nothing—he'll only think the men are ordinary foot-pads."

"Very well. If you should—or—happen to see or hear anything further about the men, I'll be obliged—very—if you'll come along to me. My name's Hart, and I'm staying at the Black Horse in the village."

Harry promised, willingly enough. He was puzzled, but he rather liked the hawk-eyed man, for all his brusqueness of manner. He climbed the steep path swiftly, and a moment later was trotting back to Greyfriars, very thoughtful and still thrilling with excitement.

He had guessed—had known there was something queer behind the mysterious happenings; he was certain now. And he was just as certain that Mr. Hart was not the innocent holiday-tripper he had, at first, imagined him to be.

Harry knew his chums would have given him up by now, and returned to Greyfriars, and he was right. He found them waiting by the gates for him, in rather a puzzled crowd.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry, as he came trotting up. "Here the beggar is. Where the thump have you been, Harry?"

In a moment Wharton was surrounded by his wrathful chums. But their wrath and curiosity soon gave place to disgust and amazement when Harry, rather breathlessly, told them his story.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Bob Cherry. "And we've missed it all. Just our luck! Wait until I get my boot into play on the fat carcass of Bunter. The fat frog never came near the tuck-shop!"

"Oh, we'll let him off that!" smiled Harry. "After all, the fat frog played up well—for once. He saved me, anyway."

Bob Cherry grunted. He was disappointed at missing such an adventure—as were the others. He felt that, had they been there, things might have ended differently.

But, though they didn't know it, the matter was not ended yet. Before very long, the Famous Five were to have more adventure than they wanted.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Another Mystery!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Old Tozer!" Bob Cherry called out the words in surprise.

It was a couple of days later. The chums of the Remove were out for their early morning constitutional, as Bob Cherry put it.

It was a glorious morning, keen, but fresh and beautifully clear. The early morning sun glistened on the dewy grass and sparkled on the shimmering bay beyond the grey cliffs. The chums trotted on, drawing in deep breaths of

the salt-laden breeze, glorying in being alive on such a morning, and with mystery and adventure far from their thoughts.

Then P.-c. Tozer, the portly Friardale constable, hove in sight, and Bob Cherry gave vent to that surprised shout.

The chums met him just as they were about to descend the winding path to the beach below.

Bob Cherry stopped. That mischievous junior never missed a chance of pulling the dignified constable's leg, and he thought he saw a chance now.

"Top of the morning, Mr. Tozer!" he said cheerily. "Lovely weather, don't it? What's made you leave your little bed so early? Brokers in, or are you expecting an invasion?"

Mr. Tozer grunted. In the ordinary way, he would have called the juniors cheeky little "himps," and ordered them to be "hoff." But he didn't now. He frowned; but it was a frown of worry, and not of wrath.

He was about to move on, without answering Bob's "check," when he paused.

The constable looked tired, as well as worried. His trousers and boots were wet, and he had evidently been tramping about a lot.

"Young gentlemen," he began, raising a heavy hand for them to stop, "jest a minute. I suppose you ain't seen nothin' of a gentleman on these here cliffs this mornin'—a visitor he is—tall man wearing a blue suit and bowler hat—looks like a—a military gent?"

"Or a plain-clothed bobby?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

P.-c. Tozer started, and gave the juniors a sharp look. The rest of the juniors grinned. Like Bob, they had recognised the description as that of the man Harry had told them about—the mysterious stranger who had rescued him from the rascals two days ago. And Harry's chums shared his belief—that Mr. Hart was nothing more or less than a detective—a detective sent down, for some reason or other, to keep an eye on the three queer airmen.

"You mean Mr. Hart, don't you?" exclaimed Harry, smiling. "The gentleman who is staying at the Black Horse?"

"You young gentlemen knows him then?" ejaculated Mr. Tozer. "I s'pose he's bin askin' you about that—that—"

"That aeroplane hoax," ended Wharton, grinning. "Was it a hoax, Tozer?"

The portly gentleman grunted. It was pretty plain from his manner that the juniors had hit the nail on the head—that Mr. Hart was, indeed, a detective. Evidently Tozer imagined that Mr. Hart himself had told the juniors, and apparently the dignified constable did not approve of such unofficial confidences.

"I can see you young gentlemen knows something, Master Wharton," he said, a trifle loftily. "I admits I thought you was hoaxing me at first. Afterwards, when I reported it—"

"You discovered we weren't," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"I ain't sayin' what I discovered,"



Wharton's fist caught the red-haired man full on the chin, and he howled and released Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove, finding himself free, gasped and bolted, leaving Harry Wharton to deal with the two ruffians. (See Chapter 5.)

—Let Mr. Richards tell you in his own way next week!

said P.-c. Tozer, frowning at Cherry's levity. "It ain't none of my duty to discuss official matters with the public whatever these 'ere London fellers does. 'Ave you, or 'ave you not, Master Wharton, seen anythin' of the gent I'm askin' about?"

"Not since yesterday," said Harry. "We've seen him hanging about the cliffs often this last few days. But he didn't speak to us, and we didn't speak to him."

"What time yesterday did you see 'im?"

"Last night after tea; he was strolling about the beach just below the other path over towards Pegg—where the plane came down," said Harry. "Why, is anything the matter?"

"There might be and there mightn't," grunted Tozer, mopping a worried and perspiring brow. "He left the Black Horse arter tea last night, and he ain't returned yet. If he don't turn up soon I'll 'ave to report it to the inspector at Courtfield."

The juniors looked at each other, serious at once. The same thought occurred to them all. Harry Wharton frowned.

"It—it looks as if those men have got him," he said, eyeing the constable in alarm. "Do you think—"

"I ain't saying what I thinks," frowned the constable. "You young gents didn't oughter know anything about it. I'm only asking if you've seen 'im. But if you 'aven't you 'aven't."

And P.-c. Tozer tramped away, apparently much exercised in his mind at the thought—quite a mistaken one—that the "London man" had been divulging official secrets.

"Pompous old fathead!" commented Bob Cherry, watching him go. "He fairly asks to have his silly leg pulled!"

"It's serious, though," said Harry Wharton. "If those brutes have collared Mr. Hart—"

"The seriousness will be terrific," finished Hurree Singh, shaking his dusky head. "It looks as if the esteemed Mr. Hart has come a woeful cropper, my chums."

There was little doubt about that, and the chums went down to the beach in a thoughtful group. They didn't like the look of it at all. If Mr. Hart had gone away willingly, it seemed obvious that he would have kept the Friardale constable acquainted with his movements.

"I don't like the look of things, Bob," said Harry gravely. "That chap Hart's in trouble, I'm certain, and if it's left to old Tozer to get him out—"

"You think we ought to do something—" began Frank Nugent.

"Yes; at least, I owe him something, and I mean to chip in!" said Harry grimly. "There's another reason, too, why we should. I only saw that boat in the distance the other day, but I'm certain it's the missing one of ours. I think—Hullo! What's that?"

He stopped in a listening attitude, and the others stopped also.

"Only a kid whistling," grinned Bob Cherry. "You're getting the jumps, and—My hat!"

Bob Cherry himself looked rather startled this time. For just then the sound Harry had heard—a shrill, sharp whistle—came ringing across the sands. But this time it came sharper—more urgent.

"That's no kid's whistle," muttered Harry, staring across the glistening sands. "It—it was more like a police-whistle."

"Perhaps old Tozer's exercising his lungs?" suggested the irrepressible Bob.

"Don't talk rot, Bob!" snapped Harry impatiently. "Don't you see what it means? It's Tozer right enough—calling for help, I'm certain. I'm going, anyway."

And, without waiting for an answer, Harry sped away like the wind. His chums looked at each other, and then they followed hot-foot on his tracks.

The strange call had come from the Pegg village direction—the direction in which the village constable had gone. It did not come again after that second call, but Harry fancied he heard a faint cry as he ran.

Ahead of him a rocky promontory jutted out to sea, its jagged base hidden by deep water—deep at all tides. It cornered off a strip of pebbly beach, strewn with huge boulders. And it was from here that the whistle and cry seemed to have come.

Harry scanned it closely as he ran, but saw nothing. As he dashed among the boulders, however, there came a shout a few yards ahead, and from the shelter of a huge rock a man sprang—a tall, red-headed man.

"Porter!" yelled Harry. "Come on, you chaps!"

The red-haired man looked at the five juniors rushing towards him, and then, with a savage imprecation, he turned and dashed away down the beach.

Next instant Harry had reached the spot. He stopped.

A man lay there on the pebbles—a podgy man in a blue, official uniform. As Harry had expected, it was P.-c. Tozer.

Harry dropped on one knee beside him.

"Hurt, Tozer?" he exclaimed anxiously. "What's happened?"

The portly constable sat up, caressing his jaw and groaning.

"That red-headed raskil'll suffer for this!" he mumbled. "It me, a fair one, he did—like the kick of a 'orse! I 'ad my suspicions of the scoundrel, and—"

Seeing the constable was not badly hurt, Harry sprang nimbly on to a rock, and glanced quickly round. Then he started. In response to a whistle from Red-head, who had almost reached the water's edge, a small boat came round the promontory, in it a single oarsman.

Even as Harry looked it touched the sand, and Red-head splashed into the water and leaped into the boat.

But it was the boat Harry was looking at. He recognised it at once, without seeing the name. It was the school boat—the missing Joan. Harry had used the craft too many times to make a mistake.

He sprang down again, his eyes gleaming.

"They've got our boat, you chaps—as I thought!" he snapped. "You chaps game to try to get it back?"

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry.

"Then come on!"

Harry led the way with a rush down the beach. Had he been cooler, Harry would have realised the madness of such an act.

But in that moment of excitement Harry did not count the odds—or think of them. He went into action with a shout, and his chums followed, just as excited and heedless of consequences. They reached the boat as Porter was attempting to push off with an oar. Splashing up to his knees in the brine, Harry gripped the gunwale.

Red-head raised his oar, with a savage yell.

"Keep off, you young hounds," he yelled, "or you'll get 'urt! D'you hear?"

The juniors heard, but they were in no mood to heed. They swarmed round the boat, and Harry only just avoided the heavy oar as it crashed down.

"We want our boat back, you scoundrels!" snapped Harry, through his teeth. "Collar them, you fellows!"

The juniors swarmed on to the rocking boat. Hardly had Harry spoken when he went floundering backwards, sent there by a savage lunge of Red-head's oar. Bob Cherry, who had just got one leg over the gunwale, yelled and went back with a huge splash as the short, thick-set ruffian's boot took him in the ribs.

The fight did not last long. The juniors were active and plucky, but they were at a disadvantage.

Before Harry and Bob, half-winded and dazed as they were, could return to the fray, Nugent, Singh, and Bull were floundering about in the surf, nursing damaged heads and bodies, and then the light craft was dancing away over the sparkling waves.

"It's no good, Harry!" groaned Bob Cherry. "The beggars were too much for us. We're licked."

There was no doubt about that. Harry, up to his knees in water, watched the boat dancing away, his brow dark.

A mocking laugh came over the water, and Red-head stood up in the boat, shaking out the little sail. Harry turned abruptly, and led the way at a run back to P.-c. Tozer, who was clambering painfully to his feet.

"You young gents didn't oughter have risked such a thing!" he mumbled, shaking his head. "I'd 'ave stopped you if I'd knowed what you was up to!"

"You'd stop a blessed lot, wouldn't you?" grunted Johnny Bull, who was too hurt to measure his words.

"What happened, Tozer?" asked Harry Wharton hastily. "How did you come to hit up against that brute?"

The constable picked up his headgear and put it on his head, his podgy features dark with outraged dignity.

"I was 'unting among these here boulders, Master Wharton," he grunted, "and that red-headed chap fairly ran into me. Knowin' what I knows, I

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hordered 'im to stop at once. He stopped, and afore I knowed what had 'appened, he lands me one. I struggled with 'im, of course, and managed to blow me whistle, 'opin' someone would 'ear. If you 'adn't 'ave come when you did, I believe the villain would 'a' finished me!"

Harry did not answer for a moment. He glanced across the sands to the sea beyond. The boat had not got far—the wind had dropped, and the sail hung limply against the tiny mast.

He turned suddenly to his chums, his face determined.

"Come on, you chaps!" he exclaimed, giving them a meaning look. "Let's be getting back. Cheer up, Tozer, old scout!"

They left the scandalised policeman groaning and muttering dark threats against the red-haired ruffian, and started back along the beach at a brisk run.

"What's the game, Harry?" asked Frank Nugent. "Going to have another shot?"

Harry nodded grimly.

"We'll get a boat out and go in chase," he said, rather breathlessly. "If we can't get the boat back, we can at least follow and find out where they're hanging out!"

"We'll be late," said Johnny Bull. "Quelchy—"

"Blow Quelchy!" remarked Bob Cherry. "Harry's quite right; it's up to us to see this thing through. That blessed kick in the ribs has killed all my desire for brekker, any old how!"

The juniors grinned, and trotted on. They reached the little jetty where the school craft were moored at last, and by that time the boat with the two men in it had vanished from sight round the Shoulder.

The juniors tumbled aboard the nearest boat—a four-oared rowing-boat—and forgetting their hurts in their excitement, they set to work with a will.

Harry and Johnny Bull settled down to the oars, and soon were pulling hard out to sea. They were soon round the Shoulder, and then the boat they were chasing came again into sight.

"Making for Black Rock Island," said Frank Nugent.

"Or just making for anywhere to put us off the scent! Yes; they've spotted us," added Harry.

It was true enough. The fitful wind had dropped again, and the boat ahead was almost at a standstill, her sail flapping gently against the mast. The juniors saw Porter standing up, gazing back towards them. Then he grasped the oars, and began to row hard. The boat fairly flew over the short waves.

Harry and Bull settled to the oars with renewed vigour, and their craft hissed along in pursuit.

"Pull like blazes, Johnny!" panted Harry. "We must see where the beggars land!"

The two juniors pulled hard, putting every ounce of their youthful energy into the work. But the boat ahead, helped by the light gusts of wind, and pulled by stronger arms, drew ahead despite their efforts.

But, to their astonishment, Red-head and his companion made no attempt to land on the island. They turned aside, and began to creep round it, hugging the rocky shore. On the mainland side it was low, the rough, rocky ground rising to miniature, iron-bound cliffs that faced seawards.

The leading boat crept on slowly, at a pace that surprised the juniors. Why



"Collar them, you fellows!" The juniors swarmed on to the rocking boat. Hardly had Harry Wharton spoken when he went floundering backwards, sent there by a savage lunge of Red-head's oar. (See Chapter 6.)

their enemies did not land—why they had slowed down, puzzled the juniors.

They were to be puzzled still more presently. The boat ahead crept on, and vanished from sight round the seaward side of the island.

"Go it, you cripples," urged Bob Cherry, "or they'll land, and we'll never spot 'em!"

But Harry and Johnny Bull were already "going it" for all they were worth. They were abreast of the island now—hissed through the waves past the ever-rising ground of the island.

Another few minutes and the boat had reached the far extremity of Black Rock Island. It rounded the corner, and the line of cliffs facing seawards was before them. As the juniors glanced eagerly across the tossing water, and scanned the white foam below the cliffs, they gasped. Harry and Johnny glanced round and ceased rowing, bewildered.

The sea was empty—no sign of a boat anywhere. With its occupants, it had vanished completely.

"It— They can't have got round in this time!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "Must have landed."

"Nowhere they could land," said Frank Nugent. "And what about the boat?"

Harry shook his head; it was beyond him. He gave the word, and the boat went on—slower now. Past the lonely, forbidding line of iron-bound cliffs they crept, steering clear of the dangerous coast, but scanning the cliffs closely as they went.

But a few startled sea-birds, wheeling

before the cliff-face, was all the signs of life they saw. They reached the end at last, and looked eagerly towards the mainland, feeling that their quarry must have spurted, and got round before them.

But no sign of sail or boat greeted their eyes. The boat and the two men had vanished as completely as though the sea had swallowed them.

"Well, this beats me!" grunted Harry. "They must have landed somewhere, though. Anyway, it's pretty certain now that they're hanging out somewhere about here. We've found out something."

"Better get back now!" growled Johnny Bull. "Who's taking a turn at the oars?"

Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh took the oars, and the boat started back. Bob and the others, like Harry, were perplexed, and they discussed the new mystery as they pulled back. But not until they landed at the jetty did Harry speak, and then his face was set and determined.

"They've spoofed us this time," he grunted, his face showing his disappointment. "But we've not finished with them yet. We're going to get that boat back, and we're going to find out what's happened to that chap Hart, my pippins! Luckily, it's a half-holiday to-day—"

"Hadm't we better report the matter to Quelchy—about the boat, I mean?" said Nugent.

Harry reflected a moment; then he shook his head.

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"No; you know what'll happen if we do? The Head will put the cliffs out of bounds at once when he knows about those merchants!" he said sagely. "We'll see this thing through ourselves. We can take our swimming togs, and if it comes to nothing, we sha'n't have wasted a half, although the water is pretty cold these days."

Harry's chums agreed at once. They were just as keen to "bowl out" the mysterious airmen as Harry himself.

A moment later they were racing hard for Greyfriars and breakfast—if they were lucky enough to be in time for any.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

THE juniors were unlucky, as it happened. Breakfast had been over some minutes when they arrived at Greyfriars, panting and breathless. And instead of breakfast waiting for them, the juniors found a pressing invitation from Mr. Quelch—an invitation to his study.

The Famous Five went, none of them looking, or feeling, very happy. "Cutting" breakfast was no light offence—in the Remove master's view, at all events. For when the juniors left his study they wore expressions of deep anguish, and they hugged their hands tightly under their armpits.

"Ow! Oh, crumbs!" groaned Bob Cherry, squeezing his tingling palms tenderly. "Two on each hand! Oh, my hat! Just for cutting brekker! Ow! Yow! This comes of doing our duty to the school! We try to get that blessed boat back—school property—and this is what we jolly well get! B-r-r-r-rr!"

"As we didn't tell Quelch what made us late, you can't expect him to excuse us on that account," said Wharton, grinning ruefully. "After all, it might have been worse—we might have been gated instead of licked."

There certainly was some comfort in that—not that it comforted their aching palms at all. But a licking was soon over, and by the time morning lessons had commenced, even Bob Cherry had forgotten his aches and pains, and had agreed with Harry that it certainly might have been worse, after all.

When lessons were over at last, the Famous Five were the first out of the Form-room, and the first to leave the dining-room after dinner.

"I've been thinking, you chaps!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as the juniors hurried towards Study No. 1. "Our expedition may turn out a frost—we may not get a glimpse of those rotters."

"Quite likely!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Is that all you've been thinking, old sport?"

"No. Well, it would be a pity to waste a half, especially on a topping day like this. What about doing the thing well—combining business with pleasure? We could take a spirit-stove and some grub, then if our search of the island comes to nothing, we can have a bathe, and finish up with tea on the island. How's that?"

"Jolly good!" commented Frank Nugent.

"Adventure, boating, bathing, and a picnic—quite good," grinned Bob. "Your thinking machine has turned out the goods, Harry."

It certainly was a jolly way of spending the afternoon, and the juniors jumped at the suggestion. In a few

moments they were making preparations for the expedition with a will. They were eager to get on the trail again—to solve the mystery of Black Rock Island—if it was a mystery.

They were ready at last, and in cheerful mood the Co. went down to the gates.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" suddenly exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here's the Bunter bird—the only blot on the merry old landscape. He's spotted these parcels."

"I say, you fellows—"

Bunter came rolling hastily across to them. Obviously he had "spotted" the parcels.

"I say, you fellows," he went on breathlessly, "is it a picnic?"

"It is, Bunt," remarked Cherry cheerily. "But not for you, old top."

"I think I'll come along with you," said Bunter, unheeding. "As it happens, I was just starting up the river myself. Fortunate, what?"

"Yes—for us," agreed Cherry. "You see, we're not going up the river, Billy. Good-bye! Hope you enjoy yourself up the river, old scout."

"Beasts!"

The "beasts" walked on, grinning. Bunter blinked wrathfully after them through his big glasses, and yelled:

"Yah! Beasts! Who wants to come to your measly old picnic? Yah!"

The "beasts" walked on, grinning still more. Apparently they felt they could rub along quite well without Bunter's charming society.

Five minutes later the Famous Five were pulling away from the jetty.

"No good putting the sail up—hardly any wind," said Harry. "We'd better row across!"

The juniors set to with a will. The boat went dancing over the sparkling waves at a brisk pace. The great rocky Shoulder, looking in the haze like a slumbering monster, was soon left behind, and the boat's nose turned towards the desolate barrenness of Black Rock Island.

The juniors had often explored the island, and they had had more than one adventure there. The only safe landing place was a tiny sandy cove facing the mainland, and here the boat grounded at last, and the juniors sprang ashore.

"Well, what's the programme, Harry?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Well, we believe those men are hanging about this place somewhere, though goodness knows where, and we're going to search every inch of the blessed place," said Harry Wharton slowly. "If it comes to nothing, we can have a bathe and tea, and there'll be no harm done."

The juniors held a hurried counsel of war, and in the end it was decided to split up into two parties—Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent to take the boat and explore the coastline, while Cherry, Bull, and Singh explored the gullies and crannies with which the island abounded.

Accordingly, as Cherry and the others tramped away inland, Wharton and Nugent pushed the boat afloat again, and started on their mission.

They pulled steadily round the island until they were below the cliffs, and then the search began. Edging the boat in as close as they dared, wary of hidden rocks, they pulled gently along, subjecting every nook and cranny in the rocky cliffs to a close scrutiny.

It was Wharton's keen eyes that saw it first—a narrow break in the line of white foam at the foot of the cliffs.

"Paddle her in a little nearer, Franky!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming. "I want to have a look at this."

The boat was pulled gently in, and then Wharton gave a cry of triumph as he saw that his suspicion was justified.

Now they were nearer they could see plainly what the break was. It was an opening in the black rock—a low, arched opening through which the incoming tide was lapping unchecked. To the ears of the juniors there came a faint, regular splashing and booming, almost like an echo, and seemingly coming from behind the solid rock.

The two juniors were wildly excited at their astonishing discovery.

"It's just the sort of thing I rather expected, though," said Harry Wharton breathlessly. "We've no need to wonder where those merchants disappeared to now."

"It's a tunnel, or a cave," muttered Frank Nugent. "But—but surely a boat couldn't get in there, Harry?"

"It could, and has done," said Harry grimly. "Listen! From the hollowness of the sounds I should say it's a cavern—and a jolly big cavern, too. My hat! What a discovery! And we've never spotted it before. Franky, are you game to go in?"

Frank hesitated—and he could not be blamed for hesitating. There was something eerie and forbidding about the black, narrow opening from whence proceeded the hollow splash and boom of waters. What lay beyond it?

But it was only a moment's hesitation.

"I'll come, of course, Harry," he said, setting his lips. "It—it's risky, though. The tide's coming in, and we don't want to be trapped and drowned like rats in that awful hole."

And Frank shuddered at the thought.

"I don't think we need fear that," said Harry, shaking his head thoughtfully. "But we need fear those rascals—if they're in there, as I believe. We'd better keep our eyes—What's that?"

The juniors started, listening intently. To their ears had come the sound of voices, and the splash of an oar—sounds that seemed distant, and yet strangely near to them. Then suddenly Harry understood.

"Quick! Pull like the dickens, Franky!" he hissed. "Out of this, quick!"

Frank was gripping the oars in a flash; but he was too late. Before the blades had dipped the other splash of oars ceased. Then from the black aperture there emerged first the prow, and then the rest of a small boat.

It came sailing gently out into the sunlight, and as it did so, the forms of two men that had been crouching low in it straightened up, blinking in the sudden light.

Then followed a sudden yell, and a crash as the two boats collided. It was not a violent collision, for the strangers' boat had been barely moving. But Harry Wharton had been standing up, and the sudden jerk sent him sprawling across the legs of his chum.

The result was that the two men were the first to recover themselves, and though obviously the more surprised, they soon grasped the situation.

"It's them young skool 'ounds again, Jim!" gasped Porter, his lean, freckled face dark and savage. "Don't let 'em get away—quick!"

Even as he spoke, Red-head sprang into the juniors' craft, and, heedless of the rocking and swaying, he grappled with Wharton. The junior was just scrambling

Look out for next Monday's bumper programme!

to his feet at the moment, but as the big man's arms went round him, he stumbled again and fell across the thwarts with Red-head above him.

Crash!

They went down with a thud, and Nugent only just managed to scramble from beneath the two. He turned to aid his chum, but at that moment the other man swung his oar.

It came round with vicious force, and the stout blade caught the junior on the temple with stunning force. He gave a low cry and sank to the bottom of the boat, half stunned and helpless.

"You howling brute!" yelled Harry Wharton, struggling desperately as he witnessed the brutal blow. "Help! Rescue, Greyfriars! Rescue!"

Harry's voice, breathless and hoarse with anxiety for his stricken chum, fell from a feeble shout to a gurgle as Red-head clapped a rough hand over the junior's mouth. Then the ruffian's knee pinned the junior to the bottom of the boat, where he squirmed, helpless and half-winded.

By this time the boat had been swung round by the tide, and was crashing against the cliff, and in danger of capsizing. Realising the danger, Red-head sprang up, and grasped the oar.

"Look out, Jim Cox!" he gasped, fending the boat off with the oar. "You keep clear an' let me get in first. Hang the luck!"

The short man nodded, and pulled clear. Red-head, unheeding Wharton—the junior was helpless in any case—began to work the boat cautiously into the mouth of the cavern.

It was ticklish work, but he got the boat straight at last, and after a few strokes at the oar he dropped flat in the boat.

Wharton was sitting up dazedly at the moment, but just in time he ducked as the boat sailed gently from the light of day into a queer, greenish darkness that seemed to fall on him like a pall.

For several breathless seconds the boat glided quietly into deeper and deeper darkness, and then, with a soft, sliding jar, her keel grounded on sand, and she stopped with a final jerk.

Then Porter's voice, harsh and menacing, sounded in the gloom.

"Out you get, kids; and no games mind, or you'll be sorry for it!"

Neither Harry nor his chum felt equal to any "games" after their rough handling. They were beginning to realise the sort of men into whose hands they had fallen, and their hearts sank. This time there seemed little hope of rescue.

They were soon standing on firm sand in the darkness. Frank Nugent was barely conscious of what was going on about him, and he leaned heavily on his chum's shoulder, his head throbbing wildly, his brain in a whirl.

The gloomy cavern felt damp and chilly, and they shivered. Harry Wharton glanced about him in amazement.

The cavern, echoing to the ceaseless wash and splash of water, seemed limitless. He could see neither walls nor roof, and but for the green sheen of daylight in the low entrance was in impenetrable darkness.

At that moment the second boat, containing Jim Cox, came sailing into the cavern, and as it did so Red-head struck a match, and taking a lantern from a rocky ledge that had been up to then invisible, he lit it, and motioned to the juniors.

"Come on!" he muttered. "And, remember, no tricks, or you'll regret it!"

The juniors could see for some yards about them now. They followed Red-head up a steep, sloping bank of yellow sand, to where the walls of the cavern narrowed to a low tunnel in the rock.

Red-head led the way into the black aperture, and the wondering juniors followed, with Jim Cox bringing up the rear.

With the lantern-light casting fantastic shadows on the rocky walls and floor, they tramped on, and soon the murmur of the swirling water had given place to a deep, eerie silence that the clatter of their boots on the rocky floor seemed to accentuate.

The tunnel was winding, with many sharp turns and twists, and for fully five minutes they tramped on in silence. And then, quite abruptly, they emerged into another cavern—a low-ceilinged, roomy cave, lit by the rays of a single lantern set on the rocky floor.

As they glanced curiously about them the juniors gasped.

The gloomy cave was occupied. On the rough floor were three beds of dried seaweed, and lying full length on one of them was a man—a man they recognised at once. He was the man known as the Chief—the man who had been injured when the plane fell. He lay with his injured leg in rough splints, and raised on a leg-rest made of piled seaweed.

"You're back soon, Porter!" he snapped irritably as Porter entered. "Anything wrong? What—"

He broke off with a savage imprecation as his eyes fell upon the juniors.

"Porter, you fool," he snarled, "what does this mean? I thought I told you to steer clear of trouble. Haven't we enough on our hands—"

"It couldn't be helped, Chief," growled Red-head, with an angry glare at the juniors. "They were nosing round outside. They spotted us coming out. We 'ad to collar them. If we'd let 'em go the game would have been up, sure."

The Chief muttered savagely below his breath.

"Confound the luck!" he said at length, biting his iron-grey moustache savagely. "This'll bring all the police of the county nosing round."

His eyes glinted savagely as they regarded the silent juniors.

"Shove them in a safe place, Porter!" he snapped at last. "They've poked their noses into what doesn't concern them, and they've got themselves to thank if they have to suffer."

He dropped back on to his bed of seaweed. Porter picked up the lantern again, and motioned to the juniors. He turned away, and the juniors followed him with Cox, ever watchful, bringing up the rear.

To the darkness at the back of the cave Porter led them, and through another aperture in the rock. From this branched the black openings of two further tunnels. Along one Porter led the way into another cave. He put his lantern on the rocky floor, and took from his pocket a length of cord.



From behind their shelter Wharton and Nugent saw the three rascals in the cave beyond. Slater was lying back on his rude couch. Squatting near him were Porter and Cox, playing cards in the dim light. "Not a sound!" breathed Wharton. "Come on!" (See Chapter 8.)

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"Hold the little rats, Jim," he ordered. "They've come 'ere searching for trouble, and they've found it."

Just for one moment Harry Wharton felt a sudden impulse to resist and fight for liberty. But at that moment Cox's hand fell on his shoulder, and he realised that resistance was hopeless.

A moment later their hands and feet were being tied, and they were flung on the floor. Then Porter picked up the lantern again, and the two men went out, leaving the juniors prisoners and in deep darkness.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Face to Face with Death!

IN the darkness of the cave beneath the cliffs Harry Wharton moved restlessly.

Since they had been flung down on the rocky floor they had been visited again by Red-head, who had flung them a heap of dry seaweed, obviously to rest upon. They were thankful for this; and when he had disappeared again, they had lain there for hours, it had seemed, discussing their predicament in low tones.

But by now Harry Wharton, at least, was finding the enforced inaction intolerable.

"We've simply got to get out of this," said Harry, through his teeth. "Look here, Franky, let's have another go at the cord round your wrists. I'll try my teeth this time."

Frank Nugent turned on his face, his bound wrists raised behind his back. It was impossible to see anything in the inky blackness that enshrouded them, but Harry soon found his chum's wrists, and next instant his teeth were gnawing at the stout cord.

It was terribly slow work, and intensely painful. But Harry stuck grimly to the task with desperate courage. Again and again he was obliged to rest, but he returned again to the task each time, though his jaws and teeth ached violently, and his mouth and gums were bleeding.

But his grim doggedness was rewarded at last.

As he lay back, exhausted and panting after a particularly long and trying attack on the cord, Frank Nugent, anxious to do his share in the attempt, rolled over and over, wrenching and tugging at his wrists.

As he did so there sounded a sudden sharp snap in the darkness, and it was followed by a cry from Nugent.

"I'm free, Harry!" he gasped joyfully. "You've done it, old chap!"

"Thank goodness!" panted Harry. "I feel as though I've been kicked in the mouth by a mule."

In a moment Frank's pocket-knife was out, and he had slashed through the remainder of their bonds. Both fell to chafing their cramped and bruised limbs.

They were free. But they were not out of the wood yet by any means.

"We've got to get through that outer cave without being spotted," said Harry. "It's going to be ticklish work, but—My hat! What luck!"

Harry suddenly remembered that he had a pocket-torch with him, and he took it out, and flashed the light round cautiously. But it revealed little, only the rocky walls and the entrance of the cave.

"I fancied this would be found useful," said Harry, "and it's going to be. Now, come on, Franky!"

They moved towards the tunnel, and, once inside, Harry shut off the light,

and they went on into the blackness, feeling their way with outstretched hands. In a few seconds they reached the spot where the tunnel branched, and here Harry paused.

"What about that chap Hart?" he muttered quickly. "We're pretty certain he's a prisoner somewhere here. I vote we try this other tunnel. It may be another way out, or it may lead to where Hart is imprisoned, if he is a prisoner here. Are you game, Franky?"

"Yes, rather!"

Instead of making for the outer cave, the juniors pressed on along the second tunnel. But they did not go far. The wall ended suddenly, and as Harry flashed on the light, they found themselves blinking into another cave—a small one, like the one they had just left.

But before they could look round them there came a sudden gasp and a voice from the gloom.

"Who—who is that?"

Harry flashed the light round eagerly. In a corner of the cave was a pile of seaweed, and upon it a man was lying—a tall, keen-eyed man, in a blue serge suit, dusty and crumpled—and his hands were bound behind him.

It was Mr. Hart, the detective. He was blinking dazedly in the sudden light, and in a flash Harry had reached his side and was slashing at his bonds.

The detective had recognised them now.

"Thanks, my boys!" he said, smiling grimly. "That's eased things a bit. But I'm afraid it doesn't help me much."

"But—but—"

Harry Wharton broke off as his eye fell on the detective's left foot. The boot was off, and inside the sock his foot was swollen to twice its normal size.

"I'm crooked," said the detective grimly. "I was chasing our friends Porter and Cox last night, when I slipped on the rocks and did this. I wasn't much use then, and fell an easy prey to them. They brought me across in the boat, and—well, here I am. But how come you boys to be here?"

In a few terse sentences Harry told the story. Mr. Hart nodded.

"You ought never to have taken such risks," he said, frowning. "I warned you to keep clear of these men. They're desperate characters, and especially dangerous now. They've been unable to get food since yesterday morning, and I expect they were just going out to try again when they caught you. You'd better take your chance of escape now, before it's too late. Where are they now?"

"In the outer cave. We heard their voices just now," said Harry. "We were hoping to creep past unseen."

"Well, be careful. Slater—their leader—is armed, and wouldn't hesitate to shoot to stop you. Hurry!"

"But—but you—"

"Never mind me. If you get clear, make straight for the mainland, and get on the phone to Inspector Grimes at Courtfield. Tell him all details; he'll know what to do. Go, and good luck to you, lads!"

The juniors did not like leaving the detective still a prisoner; but there seemed no help for it. They left the cave, and next moment were creeping stealthily towards the outer cave.

From within came the sound of muttered voices, and Harry peered cautiously into the lantern-lit interior.

The juniors' eyes gleamed.

All three of the rascals were there. Slater was lying back on his rude couch,

his white face haggard and drawn with pain, his eyes closed. Squatting near him on the floor were Porter and Cox. The lantern was on the floor close to them, and they were playing cards by its dim light.

It was a strange scene, but it gave the juniors hope.

"Could hardly be better, Franky!" breathed Wharton. "Keep in the shadows, and not a sound on your life! After me."

He dropped on hands and knees, and next moment, hardly daring to breathe, the two daring juniors were worming their way round the shadowy cavern.

It was easier than they had supposed. Once Wharton's boot dislodged a stone, and the juniors stopped, trembling, at the sound it made. But Slater did not open his eyes, and the other two were too engrossed in their game to notice it.

Almost before the juniors knew it, they were safe in the shelter of the dark tunnel beyond.

Only stopping to steady the wild beating of their hearts, the juniors pressed on until a twist in the tunnel gave them a chance to make use of the torch. After that the rest was easy going.

The glaring white light picked out the path clearly before them, and they fairly raced on until they emerged at last in the outer cavern with the splash and gurgle of water in their ears.

But a rude awakening and disappointment greeted them.

Before them, covering the whole area of the cavern and reaching almost up to the tunnel mouth was a wide sheet of swirling water. Harry flashed the light of his torch across it, and gave a cry—a cry of dismay.

The low, arched opening—the entrance to that strange underworld—was hidden from sight, and only a queer, greenish sheen under the water showed its whereabouts.

"The tide!" groaned Wharton. "I'd forgotten all about that. It's been coming in since we came through. We can't get out."

The juniors looked at each other hopelessly.

Frank Nugent's face was white, and he swayed as he stood. He had not yet recovered from that brutal blow of the oar. But he set his teeth now.

"We daren't wait until the tide goes down, Harry!" he muttered. "Those rascals may miss us any minute. Couldn't we dive for it? Our costumes are in the boat there."

"It—it's risky," said Harry, his brow knitted. "But it seems the only way out. Are you up to it, though, Franky?"

"I'm all right," said Frank, though his face belied his statement. "Come on!"

Their boat was swirling about on the disturbed water at the end of the rope which Cox had tied to a projecting knob in the rocky wall of the cavern. The juniors splashed in and waded out to it. They swarmed into the rocking craft, and in a moment were disrobing.

They were into their costumes at last, and then Harry cast off and the boat moved out towards the greenish sheen in the water that denoted the cavern's entrance below.

It was a dangerous task they had set themselves; but the juniors did not falter in their resolve—nor did they speak the thoughts that were in their minds.

Harry gave his chum one meaning look, and then he dived.

What happened after that Harry scarcely knew. He remembered going down through the clear, green water,

Better than ever—next Monday's Greyfriars story!

and then he found himself opposite the arched opening, swimming hard, and fighting for his life against what seemed to be a solid wall of water.

For what seemed an eternity he struggled desperately, his mind a welter of confused thoughts, his lungs nearly bursting with the terrific strain, and then he found himself suddenly on the surface, blinking dazedly, almost blinded by the sunshine—but safe outside and taking deep gasps of pure, salt-laden air into his tortured lungs.

His first conscious thought was of his chum, and he blinked dazedly about him.

He could see nothing of him at first—the sunlit sea was empty near him. Then suddenly, scarcely a yard away, a hand went up. It was followed by a dark head, and then a face, white, with closed eyes.

"Franky!" gasped Wharton.

He was up to him in a flash, and his

turned on his back. Then, gripping his limp chum under the arms, he struck out, swimming strongly on his back.

On and on, past the frowning cliffs he swam, and more than once the thought crossed his mind that he would never reach the end. But he stuck it gamely, though his limbs felt like lead and his senses swam, while he felt himself growing weaker and weaker.

In the boat the line of cliffs had seemed no distance, but now they seemed endless. He swam on, his eyes ever open for a resting-place in the rocky face, though he knew there was none.

The strain of keeping his chum's head above water was terrific. Wharton's strength had gone; he was exhausted, and he knew he was scarcely moving through the water.

But, just ahead of him, he saw the jagged tooth of a rock showing above the surface a few yards out, and Wharton made a desperate bid for it.

its white sail gleaming in the sunlight. Through salt-encrusted eyes the junior saw its three occupants, and their voices reached him clearly.

"Am I, or am I not, the skipper of this blessed craft?" came in a bull-like roar from one of them. "I tell you I saw smoke on the blessed island, George Potter, and we're going to look into it, my pippins."

"But look here, Coker—"

"Shut up!"

"But you'll have us on the rocks, you burbling ass!" came another angry voice. "The way you sail a thumping boat, Coker—"

"None of your cheek, William Greene, or you'll get this oar on your dashed nut! Shut up!"

Harry Wharton's heart leaped with joy.

"Coker!" he breathed.

He summoned all his waning energy,



Clinging to the jagged rock and supporting the unconscious figure of his chum, Wharton felt his strength falling him. Suddenly he saw the sail of a boat. Summoning all his energy, Wharton yelled across the water: "Help! Rescue! Help, for Heaven's sake!" (See Chapter 8.)

arm went round his chum, who was struggling feebly to keep himself afloat.

Frank Nugent's eyes flickered open. "I—I struck my head again—against the rock!" he panted feebly. "I—I think I'm going to—to—"

His voice faltered and died away; his eyes closed, and he went limp in his chum's strong grasp. Wharton, his arm still supporting his unconscious chum, glanced wildly about him.

Before him the iron-bound cliffs rose sheer, without foothold or handhold, forbidding and unscalable. The junior's glance went seawards. The sparkling blue bay was empty, save for a couple of white, gleaming sails far out.

There seemed little hope of help from that quarter, either.

"I'll have to swim round the island," groaned Harry.

It was a formidable task, burdened as he was, but the junior set his teeth and

He reached it at last, and his hand got a hold on the slippery surface. Fortunately the sea was like a mill-pond, and the next moment the exhausted junior was hanging on desperately, the wavelets washing gently over himself and his helpless burden.

But could he hold on? Frank lay like lead in his grasp, and despite his utmost efforts to keep his senses, he felt a deadly stupor creeping over him. And the tide was still on the flow!

The sudden thought struck the junior like a blow. Was all his fight for his chum's life and his own to come to nothing, after all?

And then, just as despair had clutched the junior's stout heart, there came the sound of voices across the water. Turning his head, Wharton gave a gasp of deep thankfulness.

Round the end of the cliffs a boat appeared in sight—a small sailing-boat,

and next instant his voice, hoarse and croaking, rang across the water:

"Help! Rescue, Coker! Help, for Heaven's sake!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Solved!

IT was, indeed, Coker & Co., the genial but somewhat quarrelsome chums of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars.

They had taken a boat out for the afternoon, and apparently Potter and Greene had fault to find with the great Horace's handling of the craft.

But as Harry Wharton's despairing cry for aid rang across the dancing waters, they ceased their wrangling on the instant and gazed blankly across at the solitary stump of rock and the human figure clinging to it.

Watch out for the special "Country Life" Supplement I

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 816.

Then Coker's voice came in a roar. "It's Wharton!" he yelled excitedly. "Well, I'm hanged! Ahoy, there, I'll jolly soon have you out of that, kid!" The sail came down with a run, and the mighty Coker almost capsized the boat in his eagerness to get at the oars. But he grasped them at last, and next instant the boat was being flung through the water with all the strength of Coker's lusty arms.

The rest was easy. By careful jockeying, the craft was edged close enough, and then, by leaning over the side, Coker lifted in first Frank Nugent and then Harry Wharton, and laid them, limp and dripping, in the bottom of the boat.

"Pull for the little cove—far side of the island, Coker," panted Wharton. "Cherry and the others are there."

"Oh! Are they?" said Coker. "Then that explains those smoke-signals we saw."

For once Coker obeyed without question, and, as he pulled, Harry Wharton and the other two started the work of restoring Nugent.

To Wharton's intense relief Frank came round much sooner than he had expected. He had youth and a good constitution in his favour, and by the time the boat had entered the little sandy cove, the junior was sitting up and smiling faintly.

As the little boat grounded on the sandy beach, there came a lusty yell, and three juniors raced down the beach.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came Bob Cherry's cheery hail. "That you, Coker? We're stranded, and— Why, what the thump—"

Bob Cherry's face lit up with joy as Wharton and Nugent landed from the boat. Their chums' continued absence had alarmed them beyond measure. They had searched the island from end to end and watched the sea in every direction, without result. And at last they had built a fire to attract the attention of the few boats in the bay. And it had resulted in bringing Coker & Co.—though they had never expected to see their chums land from the boat as well.

As Cherry, Bull, and Singh swarmed round Harry and Nugent, Harry Wharton waved them off with a laugh.

"No explanations yet, you fellows!" he exclaimed quickly. "Franky's been through the mill, and needs a hot drink

first. If you've not finished off all the coffee—"

"We've touched nothing yet—too worried about you chaps to bother about eating and drinking!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, good!"

Harry and Frank had a quick rub down with towels, and changed into dry costumes; Bob Cherry and Bull lent them their jackets, and they flung themselves down on the sand to rest. And then, over a steaming cup of coffee Harry related the story of their adventures that afternoon.

The three Removites understood at once, but it took some time for the mighty Horace to get a mental grip of the situation. But when he did, at last, he jumped up excitedly, his rugged face set pugnaciously.

"Let me get at the rotters!" he roared. "I'll teach 'em to treat Greyfriars chaps like that! I'll—I'll—"

And Coker was about to rush there and then for the boat, but Wharton restrained him.

"You silly chump!" he exclaimed. "How the thump are we going to get into the cave until the tide goes down a bit? That won't be possible for another hour or so yet. Besides, that detective chap said we were to get the police—"

"Blow the police!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "We can't leave a job like this to fat old chumps like Tozer. We're going to be in at the finish, Harry."

"Yes, rather!" came the chorus.

"I feel like that myself," grinned Harry. "Yes, there's eight of us, and we'll do it on our own. And while we're waiting for the tide I vote we have tea—what?"

There was a chorus of assent, and next moment the juniors and Fifth-Formers were bustling round, getting tea ready. There was coffee and cakes and sardines and bloater-paste—lots of tuck for all, even with the addition of Coker & Co. And soon all were sitting round in a circle, getting steam up, as Bob Cherry put it, for the task before them.

"Steady, you fellows. Wait until I give the word!"

Harry Wharton made the remark in a tense whisper.

It was over an hour later, and once

more Wharton and Nugent were standing in the darkness of the tunnel, gazing stealthily into the lantern-lit cavern beneath the cliffs. But this time their chums were with them, and Coker & Co., and they felt themselves masters of the situation. They had entered the outer cavern and traversed the long tunnel without incident, and now they were waiting, with quickened heart-beats, for the time to make their raid. To Harry and Frank the cavern was much as they had left it—Slater was still lying on his rough couch, as if sleeping, and Porter and Cox were still squatting on the floor, engrossed in the cards spread before them.

But Coker of the Fifth did not wait for Harry to give the word.

"You kids leave this to me," he said loftily, in a whisper that could have been heard half a mile away. "I'm the man for a job like this. Come on!"

And with a wild yell Horace Coker went into action—as he usually did, like a bull at a gate. With a couple of leaps he was across the cavern, and before the rascals could move his fist smacked home, and Cox went head over heels, with a wild howl of surprise and pain.

The next instant the rest of the Greyfriars fellows made their rush, and before the rascals had recovered from their surprise the juniors were swarming all over them.

With Wharton, Cherry, and Coker clinging to him, Red-head staggered about, roaring with fury, and struggling desperately. He flung Wharton and Cherry from him, and as his fist shot out Coker went backwards, howling.

But in a flash the juniors had returned to the attack, and a wild, whirling scrimmage followed. But it did not last long. Quite suddenly there sounded above the uproar a harsh voice, hard and incisive.

"Stop! Another movement, my lads, and you'll regret it. Stop!"

There was such deadly menace in the tones that the boys ceased fighting, and turned their eyes towards the injured man's couch.

On the rough bed Slater had raised himself on one elbow, his haggard features distorted with fury. His right hand was held out, and gripped firmly in it was something that glinted wickedly in the lantern-light.

"That's better, my lads," snapped the chief grimly. "You can now put up your hands, and—"

He got no further.

With startling suddenness something came whizzing through the air—a large chunk of rock. It sped with deadly aim across the gloomy cavern, and struck Slater's wrist with a soft crack. Slater gasped, and his arm dropped limply. The revolver went spinning through the air, and exploded harmlessly on the rocky floor.

There was a moment's breathless silence, and then, before any of the astounded onlookers could move, a figure came limping into the circle of lantern-light.

It was Mr. Hart. Like lightning the detective stooped and snatched up the weapon, and then, balancing his weight on one foot, he turned to face the amazed Porter and Cox. Though his face was drawn with pain, the grey eyes that gazed over the revolver were hard and steady.

"I think it's your place to put your hands up, friends Porter and Cox," he said coolly. "Ah, thanks! Now, boys, you'll find a length of cord on the floor there. Just truss our friends up."

(Continued on page 27.)

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With his heart full of bitterness against Sir Mostyn Frayne, gamester and rogue, who, in one stroke, has robbed him of a brother and the house and lands which had been the property of the Langleys for generations past, Dick Langley turns highwayman. With a price on his head he roams the countryside, seeking his livelihood behind a mask and a brace of pistols.



Galloping Dick!

By
DAVID GOODWIN.

This Week:
**THE KING'S
RIDER!**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Three Bad Guineas.

"WELL, host, why such a long face? Have you been caught watering the ale?"

The landlord of the Hare and Hounds was standing in his tap-room, and looking with a gloomy visage at the three guinea-pieces which were nailed to the counter, just as Galloping Dick entered the inn.

"Why, I doubt not that I wear sour enough face this evening, sir," he said, "for, look you, 'tis a heavy loss for a poor man. There be three guineas that I gave good silver for, to say nothing o' wine and a pair o' fat capons, and not one o' the three is fit for ought but a nail through its middle!"

"Tut, man, is it as bad as that?" said Dick, looking closely at the coins. "No matter, here are three that ring true enough, I'll warrant. Nay, man, take them; you need them more than I."

"Bless you, sir!" said the worthy innkeeper, almost in tears of gratitude.

"A dirty trade, coining," went on Dick. "A knave's trick, in truth. A chicken stealer is an honest man to a coiner methinks."

"You say truly, sir," said a stranger, who had just taken a seat behind him.

He was a big, powerful man, well, but plainly dressed, with a keen but honest and frank face.

Dick wondered for a moment if he had walked into a trap; but the man did not recognise him, and, in fact, like most people, took Dick by his clothes and manner to be what he was before Sir Mostyn Frayne's villainy had ruined him and driven him to the road—a wealthy and hard-riding young landowner.

"We agree, it seems," said Dick, with a cheery smile. "I hope," he added,

with a keen glance at the man, "you will bring the knaves to book. I like not to see bad money about."

"You have guessed my business," laughed the stranger. "Well, sir, I hope soon to succeed—sooner than the rogues think, perhaps. But I will say no more."

"Success to you!" said Dick. And they pledged each other. Then the King's rider went out and rode away. Dick left a little later.

"Egad, Kitty," he said to the mare, "I never drank a toast more heartily than that to the King's man. It would be bad for you and me, lass, if we took purses with naught but forged guineas in them. Softly! There's someone riding ahead. Is it a prize? No; our friend of the inn, by St. George!"

In the twilight ahead, sure enough, the big King's rider was walking his sturdy chestnut along at a slow pace. Kitty stepped so lightly on the turf by the roadside that the horseman did not look round.

"Nay, Kitty," whispered Dick, "he may have a purse of guineas about him, but he could ill spare them, and he earns them hard. None except the rich and miserly have reason to fear us. But, gadzooks, there is someone following him! An ill-looking knave, too!"

Silently as a ghost a dim figure on foot slipped out of the thickets, and tiptoed softly behind the unsuspecting horseman. In his hands was a heavy bludgeon, and one glance was enough to show he meant mischief.

"Egad," thought Dick, "there's murder in the wind here. 'Tis one of the rascals he is hunting, no doubt, and the knave has waylaid him! A King's man is my enemy, but pink me if I'll see a man struck down from behind!"

The horseman rode on, suspecting no evil, and the ruffian stole after him, intent on his task. He was nearly up to his quarry now. Dick touched Kitty on the flank and sent her along faster, until she was within a dozen yards of the man with the club. Neither stalker nor stalked heard her tread.

Three more paces, and the would-be murderer was right behind his victim. He raised his bludgeon to strike.

Then Dick sent Kitty leaping forward in two great bounds, and before the bludgeon could fall he sent its owner rolling on the turf with a blow of his pistol-butt.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Bag of Gold!

"A THOUSAND devils!" cried the King's man, turning sharply and whipping out a pistol. "What now?"

"Why, sir," said Dick coolly, pointing to the rogue who was rolling, half-stunned, upon the grass. "I saw this knave about to try the weight of that bludgeon on your skull, so I tried my pistol-butt on his. If I'm not mistaken, it will be one of the gang you're after."

"Gadzooks! It is indeed!" cried the horseman.

The knave tried to resist, but the powerful captor overcame him easily, bound his wrists behind him, and attached the rope to his saddle-bow.

"It is a poor return making speeches when you have saved my life, sir," he said heartily to Dick. "You have done me a double service. I was keeping a bad look out while thinking over my plans. It will not be long now ere I have the rest. I trust the time will

—and through them all looms the master-mind of Ferrers Locke!

come, sir, when I can repay the good turn you have done me."

"A mere nothing," said Dick, with a cheery laugh. "Say no more about it."

"I never forget a service," said the other. "And now a kindly good-night to you, sir, while I take this rogue into safe keeping. Might I know your name?"

"Let it keep till our next meeting," said Dick, with a smile; "you may perhaps hear it 'twixt then and now."

"'Tis the name of a gentleman, I'll be sworn," said the other. "Good-night to you, and a safe journey."

He rode away, and his prisoner went with him, led by a rope.

Dick put Kitty to the trot, and passed in the opposite direction.

"Faith, a little adventure is well enough," said Dick; "but I must take a goodly purse or two to-night, or I shall find myself with empty coffers. And, after all, this road through the thickets leads to two towns, and should be as good a place as any to find a fat merchant on his travels, or a squire with a fob full of guineas."

Dick patrolled the road for a couple of hours, but not a soul passed. At last he walked Kitty for the third time through a defile, where the road ran between bushy knolls and cliffs and banks of sandstone.

"A gloomy spot enough," muttered Dick. "But what have we there? Do I see a human shape coming from the thicket, or is it fancy?"

He soon found it no fancy. A man came out, as it seemed, from the bushes on the face of the sandstone, and passed within a few yards of him in the gloom.

"Stand!" said Dick commandingly.

The man started violently, and as he turned his head he showed, in the pale moonlight, a sinister, evil face. His clothes seemed to pull upon him as if they were weighted.

"What is your will?" he growled.

"To see what you have about you," said Dick shortly. "Unless you wish a bullet in your hide, hand over your purse swiftly."

"Nay, I have no purse, sir," said the man, altering his manner and cringing. "I am but a poor swineherd, and barely earn enough for my bread."

"Ride on, then, friend," said Dick. "The night is dark, and I took you for a man of substance. Go in peace!"

The man pulled his forelock, and passed on. But before he had gone a dozen yards he stumbled over a root and fell headlong. As he did so a bag fell from under his coat upon the grass, and from it rolled small round objects that clinked together and gleamed in the dim moon-rays.

Dick was beside him in an instant, a fierce light in his eyes, and once more his pistol was laid to the man's ear.

"So you merely fooled me!" he cried. "A swineherd, forsooth, with a bag of guineas at his belt! I have met a wealthy miser in a poor man's garb before! Give me the bag swiftly, or the pistol shall teach you the vanity of wealth!"

The man's face worked and twisted with rage and hatred. He seemed about to refuse. His hand sought his belt, but the click of the pistol-hammer warned him. Then he thrust the bag towards Dick, and turned and fled into the woods.

"Ha!" said Dick, lifting the bag. "I have eased a skinflint of money he has no doubt ground from the poor. Half of it shall go back to them. Let us see what it is."

He rode into a clearing, where the moonlight shone more brightly, dismounted, and emptied the guineas upon the turf. A goodly haul—there were a hundred, at least.

But something in the sound of them as they fell caught Dick's ear. He picked up two, and then rang them together. Then another two, and two again.

Every coin in the bag was bad!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

At the Coiners' Mercy!

"O DD'S blood!" cried Dick. "I've robbed the coiner!"

Many in his place would have raved.

But the young highwayman loved a jest, even against himself, and after the first surprise he threw back his head and laughed till the dark woods rang and his sides were sore.

"A rare tale, i' faith!" he chuckled, mounting Kitty again. "Come, old lass, the joke is against us, and we'd better move away."

He trotted along the path, and as he rode he began to think deeply.

Presently he turned, and, instead of leaving the woods, rode back to the place where he had first seen the man with the false guineas. He stood in the gloom for a long time, watching the side of the sandstone cliff.

"Ay, there's a cave of some sort behind those bushes on the face of the rock," he muttered, "and a way up to it."

He left the wood just as the sun was gilding the trees, and all that day he rested and thought over what he had seen, waiting impatiently for night. When the daylight was gone he rode once more into the woods.

"We'll solve the mystery to-night," he said to Kitty. "Trot smartly, old lass, and let us get there while the night is young, and when—"

He broke off with a sharp cry. A thick wire, stretched tightly across the road between two trees, caught him across the chest, and before he could save himself he was swept from the saddle and dashed with stunning force upon the ground. A thousand stars danced before his eyes, and then all was blank.

"He's comin' to!"

Dick opened his eyes and stared about him in a dazed way. He was not lying on the turf in the open, but in a rocky, dimly-lit cavern, high and roomy, its floor strewn with bracken.

A fire of glowing embers in a carefully-built fireplace of stones burned in one corner. Around it were strange-looking crucibles, moulds, ladles, files, and various tools.

Dick tried to move, but found himself bound hand and foot. Bending over him was an evil-looking ruffian—the very same from whom he had taken the forged guineas the night before. With him was a taller, leaner man, with a hooked nose and beady eyes.

"Ay, we've got him at last," said the latter grimly, "an' it's as well we have."

"Burn me, if I didn't believe it!" the other cried. "But now I see him in the light, I'm sure! It's Galloping Dick, the highwayman. I thought 'twas he last night!"

"You're right!" said the stout ruffian. "Give me the bludgeon, there! Now, my spangled young highwayman, I'll cheat the gallows of you!"

His crafty eyes gleamed with triumph and cruelty as he raised the knotty

cudgel, and Dick braced himself to bear the deadly blow. His eyes flashed scorn and defiance into those of his cowardly captor.

"Hold!"

A deep, commanding voice rang through the cave. The man with the bludgeon started up with a frightened imprecation, and the tall scoundrel turned ashy white.

The stern face of the King's rider, as he entered with a pistol in each hand, and four fully armed men behind him, watched the coiners as a cat watches a mouse.

"Seize and bind the knaves!" commanded the King's man.

And his subordinates obeyed swiftly. The coiners, not daring to strike a blow now the odds were against them, yielded cringingly.

"What! You, sir?" exclaimed the rider, stepping to Dick's side. "You had fallen into the knave's hands, then?"

"They were about to murder me when you entered," said Dick, "and, being bound, I was at their mercy."

"Then I am able to make some return for the service you did me last night," said the rider, stooping to cut Dick's bonds. A sharp ejaculation from one of his men made him pause.

"What now, man?" said his officer angrily.

"It is Galloping Dick, the highwayman!" exclaimed the man, staring at the bound lad in astonishment.

The King's rider caught his breath and gazed at Dick. As the young highwayman met his eye, he read all that was passing in the officer's mind, and, with a beating heart, saw that the man recognised him at last.

"He will have to give me up," thought Dick grimly. "I am bound and helpless. He knows the truth now."

The officer, turning to the man who had first recognised Dick, beckoned to him with a curious look.

"You are mistaken!" he said.

"S-sir!" stammered the man.

"A strange likeness has deceived you," said the officer. "This is a gentleman who saved my life last night from the coiner who tried to murder me. He captured him. It is not Galloping Dick. Do you understand?"

The man looked his officer in the eyes for a moment inquiringly. Then he saluted.

"I understand, sir," he said. "This gentleman is not Galloping Dick. I was mistaken. I apologise."

"And you?" said the officer to the others. "Do you understand, too?"

"We do, sir," they said, with evident relief.

The King's rider stooped again, and Dick's bonds parted under his knife.

"You are free, sir," he said. "Your mare awaits you outside the cave."

Dick rose to his feet, and stood motionless for a moment. There was an uncomfortable lump in his throat.

He turned to the King's rider, and gripped his hand.

"The debt is mine, now," he said.

And Black Kitty bore him away quietly into the night, thinking of his debt.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Gang's Messenger!

"A BASKET of oats for the mare, friend, and the loan of a good currycomb, that's all I need. Have you a clean stall for her in your cowshed?"

Galloping Dick, a little weary from a

"The Honour of Langleys!"—next week's story of the road—

long ride over the Dalton Downs, dismounted at a small crofter's cottage near the wooded slopes of Furze Hill.

"Why, odd's bodikins, man, what's the matter?" he added, as he faced the owner of the cottage. "You look mighty little pleased to see me!"

And certainly, when Dick first came to the door, the crofter did not look as if the visitor was welcome. A sullen, savage look was in his eyes, and he glowered fiercely. The twilight was fast falling, and neither man could see the other plainly.

Then, as Dick came forward, and the crofter saw his face, the man's gloomy scowl vanished, and he looked as relieved as a man relieved from hanging.

"What be it, Measter Dick?" he exclaimed hastily. "Come in, sir—come in! Ay, there's good lodging for the

riddles, good man! Who is Rebecca, and what maidens do you mean?"

"'Tis but a name, sir," said the crofter—"a name of the most cruel and merciless band that ever pillaged a district. And if— Ah, I thought 'twould be so!"

He hurried back into the outer room just as three distinct raps sounded on the door. Dick sat where he was, in the gloom of the inner room, where he could see all that passed.

The cottage door was pushed open, and in strode a large, sinister looking man in a black mask, which concealed only the upper half of a very ill-favoured face. There was "ruffian" written all over the man and his clothes, and he strode in as if the cottage belonged to him, throwing himself into

starved and gone hungry to get it together."

"Give it me!" said "Rebecca's maiden," tapping his boots together. "Be quick about it!"

With a sudden desperate outburst of rage the crofter sprang forward, as if to seize his tormentor by the throat. But the masked man, springing up, held up his hand.

"Fool!" he said. "Do you dare defy Rebecca? Are you so ungrateful for the protection she gives you? She claims her just due from every cottager alike, and she will have it! Do you want your ricks burnt down, your cows loughed, your brooks poisoned, your fields laid waste? You know what has befallen those who refused their dues to Rebecca. Do you desire the same fate?"

"Nay, nay!" groaned the crofter,



mare, and she shall have the best of everything. And if you'll honour my hovel by taking what fare I have—"

"Of course I will, my man!" said Dick, leading the mare to the shed, and starting to groom her—a thing he seldom allowed anyone else to do. "But who the plague did you take me for just now? The bailiff or the tax-collector? Egad, you looked as if you'd have given your skin to stick a knife in me!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the crofter, "but I was expecting a visit from Rebecca, or one of her maidens, and I took you for one of them. 'Tis not a visit to make a man merry, look you."

"Rebecca?" echoed Dick, walking into the inner room of the cottage, when he had tended Kitty's wants. "You talk in

the one armchair, and flinging out his legs with a swaggering air.

"Good man," he said, "Rebecca has come for her due!"

The cottager stood with folded arms and a look of fierce, deadly hatred on his face as he glowered at the man in the chair.

"Rebecca calls for her due," repeated the masked man; "and I, one of her humble maidens, have come to fetch it. So bring in the ten golden guineas you have scraped together, good man, and do it quickly! 'Tis a poor gift, but it must suffice!"

"I cannot give it!" groaned the other. "I cannot! It's all I have to buy seed-corn for the year, and I have stinted and

shivering. "Here, take the money! Remember, it is my last, and that if you come again you must do your worst, for I can get no more!"

"No more will be required from you till the proper time," said the masked man, pocketing the money the poor crofter had brought him. "Rebecca is satisfied. But there still remains the tithe for her maiden. Another half-guinea—"

At this moment, Dick, who had heard and seen enough, thought it time to stride into the room.

"Ha, a visitor, forsooth!" said the masked man, looking at Dick. "He is within Rebecca's district, and must pay his tithe! A guinea from you, Sir Stranger, and quick about it!"

—brings to light the sterling qualities of Galloping Dick I

"Rebecca will wait long before she gathers loot from me!" said Dick quietly, looking the man up and down.

"What?" snarled the masked man. "You refuse? Have a care, sir! I saw a mare that is doubtless yours in the shed. If you would not have her hamstringed—"

He broke off with a yell, for a sounding cut from Dick's riding-whip was the only answer he got. Then, turning savagely, he sprang at the young highwayman.

"Dog!" said Dick, plying the whip with great effect. "Will you tell me to my face that you'll hamstring Black Kitty? Take that, and that, and that! Out with those guineas you stole from the crofter!"

The bellowing ruffian started as violently at the words "Black Kitty" as he had at Dick's stripes, but he pulled out the gold hurriedly, and thrust it on the table.

"Now," said Dick, lowering the whip after one last cut, "begone, knave, and beware how you ever take even the name of the mare upon your lips again! Go to Rebecca, and report what success you have had!"

The man fell back, hugging his smarting shoulders.

"Gallop, Dick, in the fiend's name!" he muttered.

He sneaked out of the room, and Dick turned to the crofter.

"Pick up your guineas, good man," he said. "Why do you allow yourself to be fleeced by yonder ragamuffin, who has crept away like a cur as soon as he has got a stripe or two?"

"Ah, sir, you don't know this district, and you don't know Rebecca and her maidens. I fear harm will come to you for what you have done, and to me, too, although it warmed my heart to see it. This Rebecca, you must know, is a clever and cruel ruffian, who keeps the whole countryside in terror. He does not rob, and he never meddles with those who are rich and powerful. But he keeps himself and his gang of scoundrels in luxury by extorting money from the poor, who, if they do not give, find their houses burnt, their cattle maimed, or their wells poisoned.

"Have a care, Measter Dick—have a care!" pleaded the crofter. "Rebecca will seek her revenge for what you have done."

"Have no fear," laughed Dick, mounting Black Kitty with a spring. "It will be a sorrowful hour for Rebecca and her maidens when they seek their revenge on me!"

Tired of the haunts of men, and wishing for peace and quiet, Dick rode into the depths of the greenwood, and there he let Kitty browse where she wished, and lay down in the sweet-smelling grass. In five minutes he was asleep.

The soft summer night passed into daylight before he awoke. And when he opened his eyes it was with a sense of something wrong. Kitty, a few yards away, had her ears pricked keenly.

Dick was by her side in a moment, with his hand on the pistol in the holster. It was the crofter who came creeping through the bushes, and his face was anxious and white.

"I've had a rare job to track you, sir," he said softly. "I have come with a warning. Rebecca has sworn to take you, for the man you whipped knows who you are, and that there are five hundred guineas on your head!"

"And how will Rebecca take me?" Dick asked.

"My brother has brought me news of

the plot, sir," said the crofter earnestly. "Rebecca and his maidens know that you are only to be taken unawares. Therefore, they will set one of themselves, disguised as a wealthy traveller, on horseback upon the Dalton Road to-night, where you ride to waylay those who hold their gold too close. The rest will be hidden in the thickets, and while you are occupied with the sham traveller they will rope you and make you fast.

"To-night, sir, is the night they meet in Dalton woods to divide the weekly spoil they have wrung from the poor. You are to be bound and set against the tree called Charles' Oak, while they share the gold they have taken. Then they will take you on to Dalton Assizes, and give you up to the gallows, claiming the price on your head!"

"Ah!" said Dick. "Where is this Charles' Oak?"

"No great way off," said the crofter, and led him to the spot.

Dick studied it closely.

"Excellent!" said Dick. "Good man, this night I shall be captured and bound by Rebecca and her maidens!"

"Will you not take warning?"

"Ay, I will take warning. In return, do you take this pair of double-horse pistols and this little knife, and listen carefully to what I say."

Dick spoke low and quickly for some time, and the man listened.

"I'll do it!" said the crofter, with glistening eyes. "You are not afraid, sir, to run your neck in the noose?"

"With these rascals? Pah!" returned Dick. "I would let them capture me twice a week." Do you but creep as cautiously as you did when seeking me just now, good man, and all will be well."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Rebecca Catches a Tartar!

"E GAD!" muttered Dick. "Can this be the decoy-bird? Ay, here he comes, sure enough!"

A poor imitation to pass for a goodly squire on his travels! Why, the fellow cannot even ride like a gentleman!

"Stand, sir!" Dick cried, spurring Kitty across the path, and drawing a long single pistol. "Deliver me your purse with all speed, that we may part the quicker, for I doubt, by the colour of your cheeks, that you may not like my company!"

"My purse—ay, my purse!" stammered the rider, pretending to be in a fright. "Here it is, good sir!"

Dick rode forward to take the purse, and as he did so he heard strange rustlings in the greenwood. But he paid no attention.

He took the purse from the man's hand slowly enough, that Rebecca might have time to do what she chose. At that very moment he heard something whizzing through the air behind him, a horse-roped settled over his shoulders, and he was jerked from Kitty's back to the ground. In a moment the glade was filled with masked men—a dozen, if there was one.

A burly ruffian made a snatch at Kitty's bridle; but she turned on him like a fury, striking him in the chest with her fore-feet and stretching him senseless.

"Home, Kitty—home!" called Dick in a low voice.

The mare heard, and stopped dead. Then, like an arrow from a bow, she burst through the line of men, and gal-

loped away into the woods with a defiant neigh.

"Fools!" cried a hoarse-voiced man, who was the redoubtable "Rebecca." "You have lost a mare worth three hundred guineas! Bind the prisoner's wrists behind him, and tie his ankles, before you slip the noose off. Drag him to Charles' Oak!"

They hauled him like a bag of meal to the oak-tree, a quarter of a mile away, and flung him down at the foot of it.

"Maidens," cried Rebecca, in the same raucous voice, "it is time to divide the week's spoil, and share it among us before we take this stripling to Dalton Assizes, and claim the reward that buys him for the gallows! Not a day or hour must the meeting vary, but remember six shares go to Rebecca herself."

The "maidens" gathered round, their eyes gleaming greedily through the holes in their masks, and even Dick was astonished to see the amount of money in guineas, crowns, and shillings that the gang poured out on the bare ground.

"Will the crofter never come?" thought Dick, as the time passed.

Suddenly he felt a hand steal gently over him from behind the trunk of a tree, and his heart leaped. The gang were still busy dividing their gains.

He felt the blade of a knife touch his wrists, then there was a sharp snick, and his arms were free. He still kept them behind him, and in another moment a pistol-butt was thrust into one hand, and then another into the other. Dick gripped them both and cocked the hammers.

"Well done, crofter!" he whispered.

He smiled grimly. The game was in his hands now. Four barrels would easily cow a motley crew.

The crofter reached out and cut the rope round Dick's ankles, and then it was that Rebecca's watchful eye caught the movement. In a twinkling Dick whipped the horse-pistols forward and covered him, keeping one hovering over the rest of the gang.

"A thousand devils!" roared Rebecca.

And, snatching up his pistol, he fired hurriedly at Dick. But before he could take true aim a barrel of Dick's left weapon spoke, and Rebecca collapsed with a bullet in his head.

"Any man who moves a finger to a knife or bludgeon dies!" said Dick.

And the ruffians, cowed by the fall of their terrible leader, and watching the young highwayman's deadly pistols, remained still as mice.

"Let each man empty his spoil upon the grass before me," ordered Dick, "and then depart down the open glade. The first who looks back will be shot!"

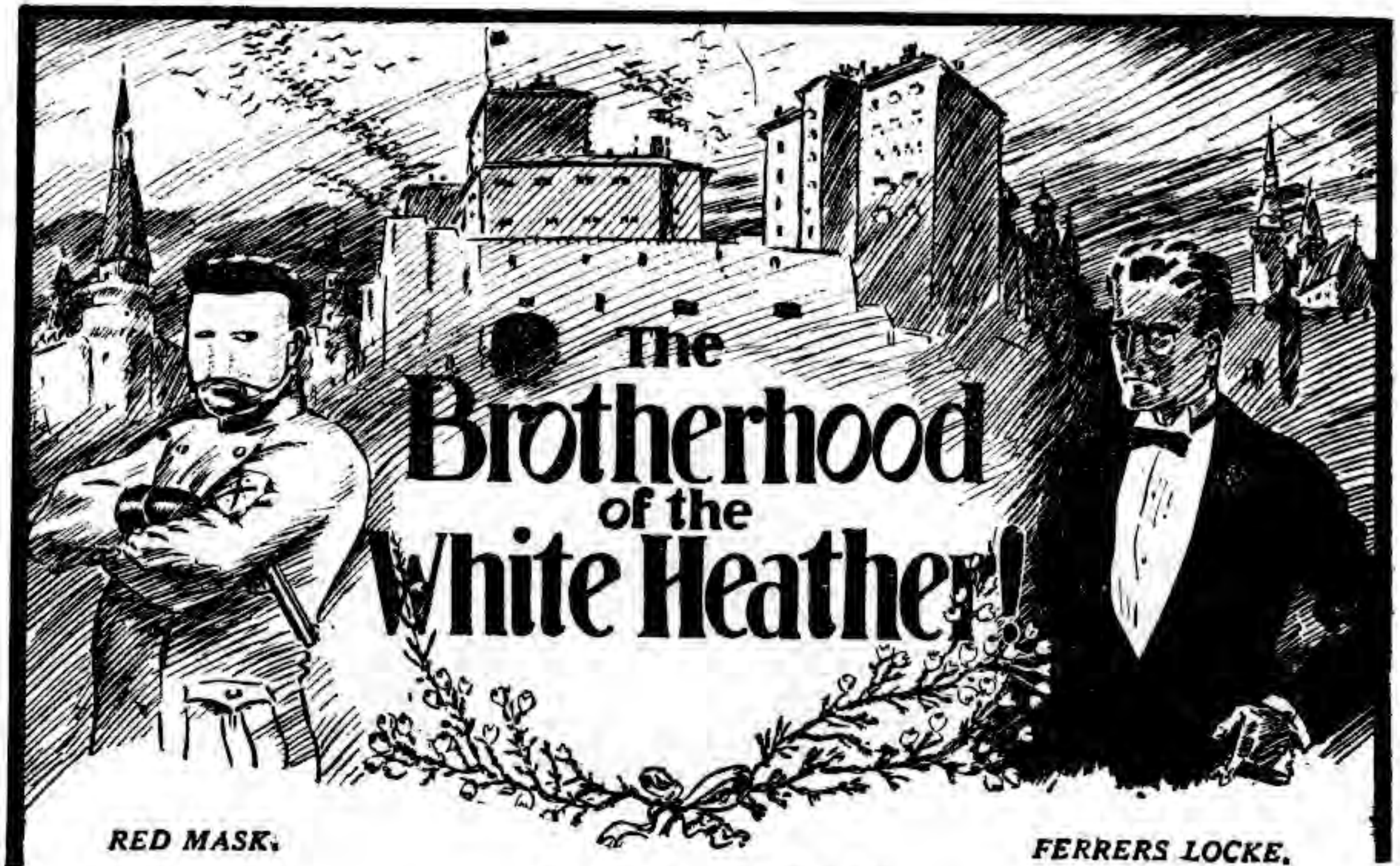
They obeyed without a word. The pistols convinced them. A goodly stream of guineas and silver crowns were poured out in a glittering pile, and the crestfallen rascals slunk away till the last one had gone. Only Dick, the crofter, the dead man, and the gold remained beneath Charles' Oak.

"Fill your pouches, good man," said Dick to the crofter. "Take the spoils for your own. Render back such as you can find owners for, and keep the rest. Rebecca will never trouble the poor again. And if ever a maiden of his gang dares demand gold, or threaten to wrong any man, tell him Galloping Dick shall return and hang him on the highest oak in Dalton!"

THE END.

(There is another thrilling story dealing with this popular character in next Monday's MAGNET, entitled "The Honour of Langley's!" Don't miss it!)

Look out for the next sensational highwayman yarn!



RED MASK.

FERRERS LOCKE.

Related by "X."

The Mute Messenger!

JACK slid off on his quest, keeping touch with the tall, red-robed figure as he stalked through the crowded salon, to turn into a wide corridor, and finally step out on to a marble balcony, where he took a seat near the low parapet. Jack took shelter behind a heavy curtain, and waited.

The man in the red robe was lounging back, smoking a cigarette, and he seemed to find it difficult to keep it alight, for twice, in as many minutes, he struck matches, holding the flame for a long time.

"Want to let someone know you're there, eh?" thought Jack.

In another few minutes the boy heard a curious sound—a dull, smothered thud. Something fell from the darkness beside the chair. The smoker stooped swiftly and lifted it. It was one of those long, rubber-ended darts used in a certain type of air-gun.

Jack saw the man unroll a sheet of flimsy paper from the shaft of the dart, and rise to his feet. He turned to come across the balcony, and, as he did so, two figures emerged from a window lower down, and Jack, crouching behind the curtains, heard the man in the red robe give a quick, startled gasp.

"Ah, Nicolas!" one of the newcomers drawled. "We wondered where you had got to!"

Jack saw that the second man had sidled away from his companion in order to cut off the figure in the red robe from the open window.

"I was just enjoying a smoke, my friends!" said Nicolas.

With a gesture, he tossed away the long cigarette, and it fell close to the curtain where Jack was hiding.

"Just a quiet smoke—ah!"

His quiet tones died away, for, as though by a given signal, the two men

leaped at him with sudden, grim ferocity. One of them caught the red-robed man's throat, and the other tried to pinion him by the arms!

They swayed together across the balcony, thudding against the parapet. Jack saw the flash of a knife. Then, next moment, the three figures went headlong over the balcony down to the

THE CURTAIN RINGS UP ON

RED MASK, a powerful and sinister individual, whose identity is at present unknown, holding sway over the fortunes of distressed Moscow. Englishmen, in particular, have been made to feel the weight of his tyrannical power.

FERRERS LOCKE, England's premier detective, who forms a society known as the Brotherhood of the White Heather. Its object is to rescue the innocent victims of Red Mask.

JACK DRAKE, the detective's clever young assistant.

PRINCE IVAN, BORIS SAROV, FATHER PETRO, and **MR. MALBY**, members of the society.

COUNT HEINRICH, a German. Noted for his extravagances and his apparent limitless wealth, the count appears to hold some mysterious power over the officials of the city.

INA CARTWRIGHT, the latest victim of Red Mask's tyranny. Found guilty on a charge of treason of which she is entirely innocent, the young English girl is about to be sent to the fortress of Butirka, when Ferrers Locke rescues her and smuggles her out of the country.

Following closely upon this initial success in Ferrers Locke's great campaign, Jack Drake manages to secure an important map from a trusted emissary of Red Mask's.

Some time later Ferrers Locke and his assistant are invited to the carnival at the Governor's palace. Suddenly the detective receives the secret sign of the White Heather from a member of the Brotherhood.

"Quick, young 'un!" whispers Locke to Jack Drake. "Follow that man in the red robe! You'll get a message from him! Bring it back to me!"

(Now read on.)

flower-beds below. A quick lunge saw Jack sweep away the curtain, and, stooping, he lifted the long cigarette. Wrapped around it tightly was a flimsy piece of paper. Jack caught his breath.

"My hat! I thought he did that!" he told himself. "A jolly plucky fellow, too, for they've got him—got him now!"

Next moment Jack had darted through the tall windows, and, hurrying up the passage, turned into the salon again. Ferrers Locke and Mr. Maltby were still standing beside the pillar, and Jack, sidling up to his master, slipped the paper into his hand.

"They've got the chap who was waiting for the message, guv'nor!" Jack whispered. "I'm afraid that it's all up with him!"

Mr. Maltby leaned forward.

"You mean they've got Nicolas?"

"There were two of them," Jack told him. "They got him, right enough. There's one of the fellows that tackled him. I recognise him!"

A man had come hurrying into the salon, and halted for a moment to peer across the lighted space. He was dressed in an embroidered suit, and, as he came past Locke and Maltby, they saw that one sleeve had a long slash in it, and there were dark stains on the grey material.

Maltby drew a quick breath.

"Yes; it looks as though—as though Nicolas has gone!" he murmured.

The figure in grey went on and halted at another pillar, where three men were talking together. The tallest of the trio, dressed in a magnificent silken courtier's garb, swung round, and took a pace aside, while the man in grey whispered to him.

"Our friend, Count Heinrich, seems very interested," said Ferrers Locke. "Wait here, Jack! I've got a little duty to perform."

He slid away through the pillars, and

A man in a thousand—Ferrers Locke!

presently Count Heinrich also vanished. Count Heinrich, leaving the salon, crossed a smaller chamber, and turned down a narrow corridor, finally entering a dark chamber on the left. The window of the chamber gave out on to the gardens, and there was a table in the centre of the room on which lay the inert figure of the man Nicolas.

Heinrich, crossing to the table, stood looking down at the lifeless body. Then, stepping to the window, he pressed the iron shutters down, and, returning to the table, made a quick search of the man's clothing.

"You were here to receive a message. I know it! These fools bungled my orders!"

A click from behind him made him start up and look round. A figure in black velvet had stepped quietly into the room, and had closed the door behind him. Through a silk mask two steady eyes were fixed on the gorgeously attired count, and a quiet, metallic voice sounded.

"Your ruffians were too late," it said. "Nicolas was too cute for them. He delivered the message, Count Heinrich!"

The massive figure backed itself, and then leaped, but the black-garbed arm was raised, and Heinrich found himself looking into the muzzle of an automatic.

"It will not be good for you to move until I give you permission, my friend," the same level voice said. "Meanwhile, here is the message that Nicolas received."

The crumpled sheet was tossed on to the edge of the table, and Count Heinrich took it with a shaking hand. It was a telegram, worded in English:

"I am across the frontier, and with friends.
INA CARTWRIGHT."

Again the quiet voice sounded.

"Merely a message of farewell, Count Heinrich—hardly justifying a murder!"

An angry, half-inarticulate oath broke from the count, and he leaned forward, glaring at the figure in the black velvet.

"You shall pay for this!" he grated. "I shall find out who and what you are, you dog!"

Under the mask the iron jaw of Ferrers Locke hardened as he backed towards the door.

"Yes, you will find out all about—when I am ready to let you know. I happen to have a slight advantage over you now, count! I know you!"

His voice was cool and level.

"I know you—Red Mask!"

The huge figure leaning against the table made a sudden lunge, throwing itself headlong at the man in the door.

"You spy! You—you—"

The butt of the automatic smashed home on the count's head, and he reeled back a pace. Next moment the door slammed behind the black, velvet-clad figure, and Count Heinrich, lumbering against the barrier, began to beat on it with his clenched hands.

"They have arrested Prince Ivan and Mr. Maltby," Boris Sarov announced, as he came to a halt beside the breakfast-table the following morning. "I only just heard the news a few minutes ago. I believe they are in the Kremlin now, and will be brought in front of the committee this afternoon."

He sank into his chair beside the table, and looked across at the clean-shaven, strong-featured detective.

"I suppose it's through what

happened at the carnival last night," Boris went on.

The news had been spread that Nicolas was murdered by someone out of revenge. His body was found under the railway-arch.

Ferrers Locke leaned back in his chair. He and Jack Drake had made a dramatic exit from the great assembly the previous night. After leaving the infuriated Red Mask a prisoner in the guest-chamber, Locke had gone quietly back into the main salon, and had found Jack Drake waiting for him. They had set off in search of Maltby, but had failed to locate him, and a sudden disturbance in the main entrance of the salon had given Ferrers Locke a cue, for he had caught sight of the ruffled figure of Count Heinrich, surrounded by a group of officials. It was obvious that the count was going to search the assembly for the man who had held him up so dramatically.

Ferrers Locke realised that it was time for him to make a quiet exit. He slipped down a side passage, and, followed by Jack, emerged into the back of the garden, and, crossing a narrow path, reached a small gateway that gave him exit into a narrow lane.

He had only just cleared the lane when a company of armed police from the Kremlin came up at the double, and the governor's palace was swiftly surrounded. Locke and Jack were in the interested crowd that watched that grim proceeding. The news spread like wild-fire that men were being arrested, that some plot against the Government had been discovered, and before Locke and Jack left the crowd they had seen one or two of the arrested individuals marched off with their armed escort—and every individual among the prisoners was dressed in black velvet.

"No one seems to know how Nicolas met his death," Boris went on.

Ferrers Locke leaned forward.

"Nicolas was killed by the order of Red Mask," he said.

"You know? You are sure?"

"I saw his dead body in a room in the governor's palace," Ferrers Locke returned. "And my assistant here—Jack—witnessed his last struggle. It was Nicolas who received the message concerning Ina Cartwright, and he managed to deliver it before they killed him. He was a brave man!"

Boris drew a deep breath.

"Nicolas was my cousin," he said in a low, intent voice. "Some day I shall avenge him!"

He rose to his feet, and his keen, dark eyes blazed.

"I went round to Maltby's house, and had a word with one of his servants. Apparently Maltby was arrested because he attended the carnival last night in a black velvet suit. At least, that is the only crime he is charged with so far."

Ferrers Locke smiled grimly.

"I think you'll find quite a lot of other prisoners were charged with the same crime, Boris," he said. "But they are all innocent. The man who is really wanted is myself."

His steely eyes snapped.

"It is Red Mask who is behind these arrests," he went on. "He is out for revenge."

Boris shrugged his shoulders.

"In that case it is all up with Maltby and the other prisoners," he returned. "The committee will not dare to do anything else but convict them. They are all in the hands of that fiend in human form, Red Mask!"

He looked across at Locke.

"How do you know it's Red Mask? Have you succeeded in identifying him?" he asked, studying the expressionless face of Locke, who was sipping his cup of coffee.

"I'm afraid I cannot answer your question yet, Boris," he returned. "In my own mind, I am satisfied that I know who Red Mask is, but I shall keep that knowledge to myself till the time comes when it may be really useful. Meanwhile, there is work for us all to do. The brotherhood must be summoned. Pass the word round that I have a message to give them. We shall meet in the crypt of Father Petro's old church—the usual place—at noon to-day."

He came round to where Boris was seated, and put a hand on the tall man's shoulder.

"We are on the eve of great happenings, Boris," he said, "and if we play our cards correctly, the power of Red Mask will be broken. The wholesale arrest that took place last night will stir up fresh enmity against him, and we must take full advantage of that. Can I rely upon you to let the brotherhood know about this meeting?"

Boris smiled grimly.

"The word shall go round within an hour, Locke," he returned. "Already I have been approached by numbers in the city. They are seething with excitement over last night's happening. They seem to fear a renewal of the dark days of terror that Moscow went through five years ago."

He shook hands with Ferrers Locke and Jack, and hurried out of the chamber. When he had gone the detective spent a few moments pacing up and down the room, and Jack watched his chief in silence. He knew that that keen, fertile brain was grappling with a new problem, and presently Ferrers Locke halted beside the table, and smiled at the youngster's eager face.

"Yes, Boris was quite right. There are going to be some more ructions, and this time you and I are going to be in them," he said. "I happen to know that Red Mask has been watching his chance to get at Maltby, and Maltby also knew it. He told me last night that someone in the garage had discovered that the van had been out the previous night. Red Mask's spies are everywhere, and I am afraid that already Red Mask has linked Maltby with what has happened."

"But surely they won't dare to do anything to Mr. Maltby, governor? He's well known here and in England."

Locke shrugged his shoulders.

"There is no protection for any foreigner in Russia at this moment, young 'un," he said. "Even our temporary Consul here warns us all that we remain at our own risk. Our Government is powerless, for the time being, and we cannot expect them to help us."

He drew a chair forward, and seated himself again. Then, slipping his hand into his pocket, he produced the blue tracing-paper—the map which Drake had stolen from Dimitri.

"Yesterday afternoon I spent an hour or so with Prince Ivan," Ferrers Locke went on, "and we studied this map together."

He gave Jack a quiet nod.

"You did us an excellent turn, Jack, when you managed to collar this," he said. "Although I may be mistaken, I'm inclined to think that it supplies us

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with a key for which we have been seeking. Look!"

Ferrers Locke began to indicate the red ink line that ran through the map. It started at Moscow, and ran on through Nijni-novgorod. From the latter place the line curved on to Perm, and then went on across the Urals to a small town called Tiuman, and finally following the river to another town called Tomsk.

Jack, studying that long, slender line that ran half across Russia, pursed his lips and whistled.

"By James! Dimitri called it the 'long, long journey,' governor, and I think he was about right."

really think that—that they are sending prisoners to Siberia from here? I thought that was all done away with."

Ferrers Locke lit his pipe and leaned back in his chair for a moment, puffing quietly.

"I have been making very careful inquiries during this past three months, Jack," he said, "and I find that within the last four months no fewer than fifteen souls, men and women, most of them foreigners, and at least a half Britishers, have vanished from Moscow. Several of them have been tried by the committee, and have been sentenced to various punishments; but quite a few have simply disappeared from their

unfortunate prisoners are alive—are being held to ransom by the man known as Red Mask!"

"But, hang it, governor! Surely the Russian Government won't allow—"

"Make no mistake about it, Jack. The Russian Government knows nothing of this," Ferrers Locke returned. "We're a long way from St. Petersburg, and they have troubles of their own up there. Red Mask is master of Moscow, and from governor to police official they all dance to his bidding here. You saw how quickly and ruthlessly his orders were obeyed, for it was at his command that Nicolas was murdered last night. Unfortunately,



THE RAID!

"The police! Quick, brothers, the police!" The hooded shapes leaped to their feet at the hoarse cry and scattered to right and left. Ferrers Locke drew Boris by the arm. "The electric light! Quick! Put it out!" A snatch at the wire brought it down, and a slash of the knife cut the slender cord, plunging the room into darkness. (See page 27.)

There were various signs—obviously some sort of code—dotted here and there on the map, at the names of the towns.

"I haven't been able to decipher these," Ferrers Locke admitted. "But Prince Ivan gave me a clue as to what they probably meant."

He tapped the map for a moment.

"That thin red line, Jack, represents the old exiles' route—the prisoners' way to Siberia. They used to start from here—Moscow—and go by train to Nijni-novgorod, and then embark in prison barges, to be towed to Perm. Prince Ivan recognised the route at once. He was an officer in the garrison at Perm in his earlier days, and handled several of the big batches of prisoners."

Very carefully Ferrers Locke folded the map again, and slipped it into his pocket.

"What we have to find out now, Jack, is why this man Dimitri is preparing for this long, long journey again, and who and what are the 'cattle' that he takes with him."

Jack looked up swiftly.

"Great Scott, governor! You don't

families and homes without leaving the slightest trace behind them."

A long wreath of smoke climbed ceilingwards, and the grave, inscrutable eyes followed it.

"From that fact, Jack, we can gather one important point—there is someone here in Moscow who hates the British, and this someone wields an extraordinary power, for he is able to satisfy his hatred. Ina Cartwright was his last victim, and she is the only one who has ever been able to escape."

"But what has happened to the rest? Do you think they have been murdered?"

"I doubt it. Many of them were influential business men, and the greater part were fairly comfortably off. In many cases their homes have been raided and their valuables removed, but from my researches I discovered that there were at least three or four men among them who were worth anything from £100,000 upwards. The greater part of this money is invested in other countries—in bonds and securities. A dead man cannot hand over valuables, Jack, and that is why I think that most of those

Nicolas was known to be an enemy of Red Mask, and he was always closely watched. It would have been better if we had chosen someone else to receive the telegram from Ina Cartwright."

"But, governor, what a ghastly city to live in!" Jack Drake broke out. "People seem to go about here with their lives hanging by a thread!"

"That is because they are under the thumb of an unscrupulous, merciless fiend," said the detective. "All that will be changed, Jack. This Brotherhood of the White Heather has grown tremendously, and already I have given them a proof that Red Mask can be beaten. Ina Cartwright was a special victim marked down by him, and her escape is a blow to his prestige as well as his pride. And it won't be the only blow he will receive. I'm going to beat him—to beat him at his own game!"

From the lips of any other man that quiet promise would have sounded absurd and bombastic. That a solitary Britisher—alone in a great foreign city without even the casual protection of his own Consul to aid him—should drive from his established place the mysterious Red Mask, seemed absurd. But Jack Drake thrilled at his master's quiet words.

That inscrutable face, with its remarkable steel-blue eyes—eyes that seemed to see into a man's brain, and read his very thoughts; that strong, powerful jaw, and well-shaped student's head were visible signs of a personality above the ordinary run of mankind. Cool, deliberate, assured, Ferrers Locke was no boaster. He was a very glutton for work, with an amazing mastery of detail, and an energy that never flagged. He worked and planned and schemed,

A feast of fun and mirth—our supplements!

building his fabric carefully, as an architect masses some huge structure.

"I have located Dimitri," said Locke. "He is living at present with a brother of his who is commandant of the Peresilni. It is situated in the suburbs about two miles outside Moscow, on the banks of the river. The man who informed me about Dimitri said he was in bed—bandaged from head to foot, and a mass of bruises."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"That pony must have given him the drubbing he deserved," he added.

He looked at his watch, and rose to his feet.

"I want you to go to the Peresilni, Jack," he went on. "Once upon a time it was the place where they used to keep the prisoners for exile, but just now I believe it is merely a huge stores, with a small company of soldiers under Dimitri's cousin. I've got a disguise for you. You will be a peasant boy selling food. I want you to keep a watch for Dimitri, and if he should leave the prison you must follow him. Find out where he goes, and return to report to me."

Jack Drake looked glum for a moment. He did not like being parted from his master, for he realised that there were grim events developing. Boris had mentioned about the meeting of the brotherhood, and Jack Drake was dying to witness that scene.

"I suppose I'll have to go, governor," he said. "But I'd rather stick with you."

Ferrers Locke put a hand on the youngster's shoulder.

"I don't want you to get mixed up with us just yet, Jack," he said. "We are never safe at those meetings. The trouble is that, although most of our members are loyal enough, there is always a fear that someone may have been bought. Nearly every Russian, just now, is penniless, and a great many are starving. It is hard to be true to your promise when a rich bribe and safety are offered you."

He laughed quietly.

"So, young 'un, you've got to go and keep your eye on Dimitri, and you may find that quite exciting enough."

Half an hour later Jack Drake slipped out of the quiet side entrance of the huge mansion, and, hurrying through the narrow streets, turned into a broad doorway of a small shop which had a very poor display of fruit.

Locke had told Jack to call at that shop, and as soon as he entered the proprietor came out from the dingy back room. Jack lifted the collar of his coat, revealing the sprig of white heather pinned to the under-side of the lapel.

The man nodded, and, turning on his heel, shuffled back into the other room. Jack Drake followed. Crossing to a cupboard, the old fellow fished out a ragged suit of clothes—a loose coat, a pair of voluminous trousers, a shabby pair of shoes, and a soft, conical hat.

When Jack had changed his garments the man produced a basket, and commenced to fill it with a collection of fruit.

"Good trade, friend," he said, as he let Jack out by the back door. "We are all brothers together; but remember that I'm a poor man, and I would like my basket back."

Jack grinned as he hurried off down the narrow courtyard, and turned into a wider thoroughfare. After a long trudge, he reached the suburb, and located the huge, barrack-like building that had once been a forwarding prison.

The iron gateway was open, and Jack shuffled into it, approaching a group of soldiers that were lounging under the arched passage on the right. Behind them was their guard-house, and it led to a small, two-roomed house, with a wide porch.

Out of the corner of his eye Jack saw a figure lounging back in a comfortable, canvas deck-chair. There were a couple of bandages round the man's head, and he had one arm in a sling.

The soldiers began to chaff Jack, turning over the contents of his basket; and presently the man in the chair barked out an order:

"Here, come here, you!"

It was the voice of Dimitri, and Jack, for a moment, felt his knees quake under him as he turned to obey the summons. Halting by the chair, he thrust his basket forward, and Dimitri reached out with his uninjured hand and selected a box of sugary dates and a few oranges, tossing a coin into the basket in payment.

"They say there were great doings in the city last night," Dimitri said. "Many of those cursed foreigners arrested. Have you heard what has happened to them?"

Jack, thanks to the painstaking efforts of Boris, could understand the guttural language fairly well, but he was far from sure of his pronunciation, so he adopted his usual ruse. Raising a finger to his lips, he shook his head.

"A mute—eh? But you hear me?"

Jack nodded, and Dimitri's bandaged face slid into a smile.

"So you hear but cannot speak—eh? Well, who knows but what that may be a virtue rather than a handicap? At least you know how to hold your tongue."

He laughed at his own joke, and then his eyes fixed themselves on Jack again for a long moment.

"Do you know the Butirka fortress?"

Again Jack nodded.

"Would you like to own a few roubles?"

The conical hat danced on Jack's head, and Dimitri, smiling grimly, slipped to his feet and vanished into the house. A few minutes later he reappeared, holding a sealed envelope in his hand.

"You will take this to the fortress, and wait for an answer; and, no matter how long you wait, you must not leave until you get it. Come back here with the reply."

He reached out, and took the basket from under Jack's arm.

"So that I can make sure you do return, I will keep this for you," he said, chuckling at his own cleverness.

He knew that a poor peasant boy would not dare to return to his home minus his basket and its contents, and he watched Jack hurry off through the iron gates, with a smile on his bruised face.

Not until he was clear of the gloomy, one-time prison did Jack venture to glance at the envelope. There was a solitary line on it in Russian, and it took Jack some time to decipher it. "To his Excellency, the Chief."

Jack trotted on, crossing one of the bridges, following a road little more than a rough track, which he knew would lead him to the fortress. When he came to a wind-swept space of desolate country he left the road, and descended into a hollow among the gnarled shrubs.

There was a little pool in the centre of the hollow, and Jack, kneeling beside it, set to work on that envelope. The

seal was carefully detached, and the gummed flap, after it had been moistened, was raised. Jack withdrew the solitary sheet of notepaper and unfolded it. To his surprise, the message was written in English.

"I am at the Peresilni, awaiting orders. Special carriage and engine ready. If your Excellency has any more passengers, there is room for them to-night. Awaiting your Excellency's orders.—D."

Jack carefully memorised the message. Then, replacing the note, he manipulated the envelope again. When he was satisfied with its appearance, he slipped it into his pocket, and resumed his quiet progress towards the fortress.

"I hope the governor won't jump on me for doing this," he told himself. "I couldn't very well help it. It isn't exactly keeping in touch with Dimitri, but it's doing the next best thing."

It was late in the afternoon before Jack reached the gloomy, grey-walled pile, and he halted at the same side gate in front of which he had stopped the car. One of the armed sentries spoke to him, but Jack's pantomime was repeated. Then he drew out the letter and showed it to the man. The way in which the fellow's eyes bulged indicated how important Dimitri was.

"The Chief is not here now, but you'd better come and wait," he said. "Follow me!"

Jack was led up the stone-flagged passage, and into the house that stood by itself at the end. He was taken into a small room on the ground floor.

"The Chief will be here presently, and you must wait until he comes," the sentry said, and turned the key in the lock after him.

A glance round the room told Jack that it was little more or less than a cell. It contained one or two hard chairs, a table, and was lighted by a long, narrow window set with iron bars.

"Let's hope the Chief won't be too long," Jack muttered to himself, as he tried to make himself comfortable. "I don't like the look of this guest-room—not by a long chalk!"

He leaned back in his chair and drew a deep sigh.

"I wonder what happened at the meeting of the brotherhood?" he muttered. "I feel in my bones that it was something exciting."

And Jack was right!

The Raid!

TO the dingy, grass-grown square came a strange gathering of silent, quick-moving men. They came singly, and looked neither to right nor to left, as they hurried out of the dingy archway, crossed the court, and vanished into the shadowy porch of the half-ruined church.

As each man came out of the sunshine into the gloom a figure appeared from the niche on the left and raised a hand. The newcomer repeated the gesture, and then, in various ways, revealed the sign of the white heather.

Some had it pinned in the lapel of their coats, and others had it concealed in the lining of their hats; while others, again, revealed the design in the form of a little silver emblem.

To each, as the sign was made, the challenger handed a long, voluminous robe, and each newcomer donned the shapeless garment before he passed on

(Continued on page 27.)

Red Mask v. Ferrers Locke! Who will win?



Supplement No. 144.

HARRY WHARTON
EDITOR

Week ending September 29th, 1923.



By

HARRY WHARTON.

I SAT at the study-table, staring thoughtfully at a sheet of paper.

There were ten names on the paper—the names of the Famous Five, followed by Vernon-Smith, Mark Linley, Peter Todd, Tom Brown, and Bulstrode.

And now came one of the knottiest problems I had ever been called upon to settle.

Whom should I put in as eleventh man?

After debating and deliberating until my brain was in a whirl, I appealed to my chums.

"For goodness' sake suggest an eleventh man, somebody!" I groaned.

"Tom Redwing!" said Bob Cherry promptly.

"Squiff!" said Nugent, with equal promptness.

"Penfold!" said Johnny Bull.

"The worthy and most esteemed Desmond!" said Hurree Singh.

I gave a snort.

"Well, that's jolly helpful!" I growled. "I can't fit four fellows into one place. You'd better try again!"

"Russell!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ogilvy!" said Nugent.

"Morgan!" said Johnny Bull.

"The estimable and ludicrous Rake!" said Hurree Singh.

I could have wept! The problem was growing more and more perplexing. Personally, I had been thinking of putting Monty Newland in; and I had rather hoped that my chums would endorse my selection. Instead of which, they had given me eight more names to think about!

My head began buzzing as if there was a beehive inside it. I ran over the names of the candidates several times, and found myself mumbling the following doggerel:

"Redwing, Penfold, Desmond, Squiff—
Jove, this problem's pretty stiff!

Russell, Ogilvy, Morgan, Rake—
I'm dashed if I know which to take!"

Suddenly there was a tramping of elephantine hoofs in the passage. The

study door was thrown open without ceremony, and in came Bolsover major, eyes glaring, chin thrust forward aggressively.

"I say, Wharton!" he said, in his booming tones. "Am I taking part in the first match of the season?"

"The answer," I said wearily, "is in the negative."

"What!" roared Bolsover. "You haven't found room for a first-rate player like me? You'd better make up your mind that you'll play me, and sharp, or I'll smash everything within sight!"

I laughed scornfully.

"You can bully and bluster till you're black in the face," I said, "but I'm not going to play you!"

With a bull-like bellow, Bolsover

IF I WERE SKIPPER!

By Billy Bunter.

Our footer team would be a dream,
And every smart and nimble nipper
Would shoot for goal with heart and soul,
If I were skipper!

Both Bull and Brown I'd soon "turn down,"
And put in chaps like Harold Skinner;
While Herbert Trevor, smart and clever,
Would prove a winner.

Alonzo Todd, so quaint and odd,
Would find a place in my eleven;
And all these guys would have to rise
At ten to seven!

We'd start to play at break of day,
I'd rouse the slackers with a slipper;
They'd have to work, and never shirk,
If I were skipper!

With me in goal, upon my soul,
Our foes would have no chance of netting;
I'd stop each shot that came red-hot—
Now, what's the betting?

I'd hold the fort, enjoy the sport,
And be a really thrilling stunter;
And ringing cheers would greet my ears:
"Oh, well saved, Bunter!"

From London Town they'd all come down,
I'd have a smile for every tripper;
They'd simply swarm to see my form,
If I were skipper!

snatched up a cricket-stump, and prepared to do great execution with it. I believe he would have smashed up the happy home—if we had let him! But we sprang at him like tigers, and wrested the stump from his grasp, and sent him whirling into the passage. He landed on the linoleum with a bump and a roar, and we slammed the door upon him.

But, just as there is no rest for the wicked, so there is no peace for a footer captain.

Within a moment of Bolsover's exit, Alonzo Todd trickled into the study.

"My dear Wharton," he said mildly, "much as I deplore and detest the debasing and degrading pastime of football, I have decided to take it up this year, with a view to strengthening my legs. They have become somewhat weak through lack of exercise. I shall therefore be pleased to keep wicket for the Remove football eleven, or to become a three-quarter full-back stand-off half!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo looked surprised.

"I fail to see what I have said to excite your risibility—" he began. And then we propelled him, gently but firmly, into the passage.

Exit Alonzo; enter Fisher T. Fish. Fishy "guessed" and "calculated" that the Remove eleven would be in Queer Street without him. He insisted on going through the season as a playing member. He went through the doorway instead!

There were other interruptions, at the rate of one per minute. And at last I got so "fed up" that I locked the door. But even this precaution failed to shake off the intruders. Glancing towards the window, I beheld the fat face of Billy Bunter peering in. The fat junior was mounted on a pair of steps, and he blinked and beckoned through the glass.

"I say, Wharton, old fellow," he shouted. "I hear you're making up the team for the first match of the season! Am I down?"

"No; but you'll be down in a minute!" I said grimly. And I picked up a cricket-stump and rushed to the window.

The expression on my face must have terrified Billy Bunter, for he took a short cut to earth, and lay roaring on the flagstones of the Close. He complained loudly that his spine was fractured in fifteen places; but as it was only a short drop from the window to the ground, we didn't trouble to telephone for the ambulance!

I went to bed that evening with the eleven still uncompleted; and the problem haunted me to such an extent that I spent a sleepless night. But I have since had an opportunity of seeing the fellows at practice, and on present form I must make Dick Penfold my selection as eleventh man. The others will get a chance later.

Town or country—which do the Greyfriars heroes prefer?



My Most Thrilling Match!

The Remove Footballers have taken part in some breathlessly exciting tussles, and some of their experiences are recorded below.

BOB CHERRY:

The most thrilling match I ever played in was against St. Jim's. It was a ding-dong tussle from start to finish. The first half was fought out at such a fierce pace that the crowd went into ecstasies. We were two goals down at half-time, but we didn't despair. After the interval Wharton got a grand goal; but, try as we would, we couldn't put the ball in again. However, five minutes from the end, Vernon-Smith sent across a high centre, and the wind carried the ball clean into the net, bringing the scores level. In the very last minute of the game I took pot luck with a long shot, from near the halfway line. It was our only hope of winning the match.

Fatty Wynn, the St. Jim's goalie, ran out to gather the ball, but it bounced over his head into the net, and we won a sensational game on the very stroke of time. I was almost torn limb from limb by my exuberant comrades; and there was great revelry and rejoicing in the Remove camp that evening.

BILLY BUNTER:

I've played in a good many thrilling matches; but the most egg-sitting football drama I have ever figured in was when my "Weekly" played against the "Greyfriars Herald." We were seven goals down at half-time, but were we downhearted? Neigh! Was there a man dismayed? Neigh! I popped round to the

tuckshopp at the interval, and had a jolly good feed. I then returned to the field of battle like a giant refreshed. We were all over our opponents in the second half, and I scored eight goals off my own bat—or, rather, boot. The winning goal was obtained on the stroke of time, and the members of my eleven fell down and worshipped me. I shall remember that thrilling match as long as there is breath in my boddy! (Personally, I've no recollection of it at all! But I can remember an occasion when the "Greyfriars Herald" beat "Billy Bunter's Weekly" by 25 to nil.—Ed.)

DICK PENFOLD:

The greatest match that I remember was one I played in last December. We had to get three goals to win, and half an hour to do it in. Old Wharton went and bagged the first; the fellows cheered until they burst! Then Squiff raced through and scored the second—the finest ever seen, they reckoned! And when Bob Cherry bagged the third, great thunders of applause were heard. It was indeed a thrilling game; may this year's matches be the same!

HAROLD SKINNER:

My most thrilling match was one which I struck in the wood-shed. It sort of exploded, and fell into some straw, and set the whole show alight. But the Remove Fire Brigade came on the scene, and smothered the giddy conflagration. The matches that you light cigarettes with are the only sort I have any use for.

EDITORIAL!

BY HARRY WHARTON.

KING CRICKET has been banished from his throne, and the grand old game of football, which has been played in this country—with variations—for hundreds of years, comes into its own again.

There is much excitement and commotion in the Greyfriars Remove. There have been debates and arguments and free fights to settle who shall play for the Form eleven this season. The trouble is that there are forty-two fellows in the Remove, and only eleven vacancies to fill. And the selection of the team—a duty that devolves upon me, as skipper—is a task that calls for the judgment of Solomon.

We have played no matches as yet, but our General Meeting has been held, and the various officers appointed.

Billy Bunter badly wanted to be treasurer. But nobody seemed to relish the idea of Bunter having charge of the football funds. Whenever he felt a bit peckish—and he feels like this at all hours of the day—he would help himself from the funds, intending to replace the money when his postal-order arrived. And that postal-order, like the much-talked-of Millennium, would never arrive at all!

Bunter also wanted to be a playing member of the club. "Give me a place in the eleven, Wharton," he said, "and you'll never lose a match!" As a matter of fact, I don't think we should. Our opponents would be so convulsed with laughter through watching Bunter's antics that they would be unable to

play, and we should have them beaten every time! But we prefer to win our matches on our merits—not by having a prize comedian in the team. Bunter's application to play has therefore been thrown out of court. He is going to appeal to a higher tribunal—Wingate of the Sixth, I believe.

There is "a certain liveliness" in this issue which will appeal to readers in general, and football followers in particular. As soon as the season gets fairly into its stride we shall publish another Football Number. In the meantime, we will tell you of all our preparations for a happy and successful season.

HARRY WHARTON.

THE REMOVE FOOTBALL MEETING!

By H. VERNON-SMITH.

THE annual meeting of the Remove Football Club was held in "The Rag" on Saturday evening last. There was only one absentee.

Alonzo Todd sent a written apology for his absence. "I fear that scenes of violence may arise," wrote Alonzo, "and I shall be much safer if I stay in my study. At the last football meeting I attended there was a free fight, and I was mistaken for somebody else and punched with great violence on the nose. So I am taking no risks on this occasion!"

The chairman (Harry Wharton) said that the business of the evening was to elect a treasurer, a secretary, and a team captain, to do duty during the present season.

Billy Bunter immediately jumped up and proposed himself as treasurer.

"I'm used to handling money, you fellows," said Bunter, "and if you elect me, you'll find I shall make a perfect peach of a treasurer. Every farthing that's paid into the club will be accounted for. I'll start collecting the footer subscriptions right away, and I sha'n't mix the money up with my own, and accidentally spend it at the tuckshop!"

In spite of these assurances, nobody seconded Bunter's proposal, and he was accordingly "turned down."

Bob Cherry proposed that his honourable friend, Frank Nugent, be elected treasurer. This was seconded, and carried unanimously.

Harry Wharton was re-elected secretary, and also team captain. The only rival for the captaincy was Peter Todd, who put up a very strong fight. Peter made a brief speech, as follows:

"Gentlemen,—I have nothing to say against Wharton—in fact, he is one of my firmest friends; but I feel that he's had too long an innings as skipper of the eleven, and that new blood ought to be introduced. That is why I am putting up for the captaincy. If you will do me the honour of electing me, I'll promise to work like a nigger for the success of the side."

Harry Wharton, replying, said that a skipper's job was a pretty thankless one, but he wasn't afraid to shoulder the responsibility for another season. Remove football had flourished under his captaincy, and he failed to see that the team would fare better under a new skipper.

A fierce battle of words followed between the Wharton-ites and the Todd-ites. Finally, the issue was put to the vote. Wharton polled 24 votes, and Todd 17; and Wharton was thus re-elected to the captaincy, amid scenes of the wildest excitement. Victor and vanquished having shaken hands, the meeting dispersed.



(Continued from page 24.)

into the dimly-lighted church. Here another robed figure appeared, and, acting as guide, led the newcomer across the echoing space, and round behind the altar with its smashed ikon. A panel on the left was thrust aside, revealing a narrow staircase running downwards.

At the bottom of the stairs the newcomer found himself pacing into a great arched vault, lighted by a number of small electric bulbs, swinging from the roof. A long table ran the full length of the vault, and arranged round it were low benches.

Slowly the vault filled, man after man appearing, to take his place in silence in the rows of seats. At twelve noon, when Ferrers Locke and Boris entered the vault they found it thronged. There were three chairs at the head of the table, one of them already occupied by a thin, bent shape.

Father Petro was the only individual there who had not troubled to disguise himself in the muffling robe. For him there was no need for disguise or artifice. He had got beyond the years of fear, and his bearded, benevolent face was full of calm dignity, as he stood up and bowed to Locke and Boris. They were both wearing black garments, but on Ferrers Locke's chest was the device of the white heather, in gold.

Locke took the central seat, and every man in the crowded space arose, and a

murmur of greetings sounded. Ferrers Locke raised his hand.

"Be seated, friends," he said.

The lines of figures arranged themselves again, and Ferrers Locke began to speak in his crisp, quick way. It was fluent Russian that came from his lips, and every man leaned forward to listen intently. He gave them a quiet account of what had happened the previous night, telling them of the death of Nicolas.

"Nicolas is the first of the brotherhood who has suffered death in the cause," said Ferrers Locke. "He will have to be avenged. There were two men responsible. Their names are Alexis Snazine, and Felix Madaski."

From one side of the table a huge man arose, holding up his hand.

"There is only one now, brothers," he declared in a low, vibrating voice. "Madaski is dead. Last night he boasted of what he had done—and a brother overheard him, and avenged Nicolas."

He dropped into his seat, and a murmur ran round the vault. Then another figure arose.

"Alexis Snazine has fled the city," he said. "He heard of what happened to Felix Madaski. I was but a half-hour late. He has gone to the fortress."

He sat down, and again the murmur passed from lip to lip, to be checked as Ferrers Locke raised his hand again.

"This afternoon some who are brothers of ours are to be tried before the committee, and we know already what the result of that trial will be. They will vanish, my brothers, just as our other friends vanished. Are we to let them go quietly?"

He looked round the rows of figures. A stir ran through them and an uneasy shuffling movement. Then, from the end of the table, someone spoke.

"It is Red Mask," he said. "Red Mask has set his seal on them. Red Mask is powerful."

Ferrers Locke had expected some such remark, and now his quiet voice sounded again.

"There are two of us here who have nothing to fear from the enmity of Red Mask," he said. "Therefore we offer our services to the brotherhood. We shall leave Moscow, and others must take our places in our absence. When we return—if we return—there will be no Red Mask for Moscow to fear."

He turned and put a hand on Boris' shoulder, who arose to his feet.

"Is it the brotherhood's desire that we should go?" Ferrers Locke asked.

Hand after hand was raised in silent assent. Father Petro leaned forward.

"You go on a dangerous mission, my sons," the old priest said. "And you will meet many enemies; I do not think it is wise."

Ferrers Locke turned and put his hand on the old priest's shoulder.

"At least the brotherhood will have a wise head to guide it when I am gone," he said. "You, Father Petro, will be leader."

Locke removed the insignia from his cloak, and placed it on the old priest's robe, raising him to his feet.

"Does the brotherhood approve?" Ferrers Locke cried.

A murmuring "yes" resounded through the vault. As the murmur died away a sudden interruption came. From overhead there sounded three quick thuds on the tessellated floor of the church above, followed, a moment later, by a dull crash and a quick patter of running feet. Then an anguished voice called out from the darkness behind the stairs:

"They're coming, brothers! Quick! The police!"

The benches scraped as the broad shapes leaped to their feet, and, with a quick movement, Ferrers Locke gripped Boris, and drew him clear.

"The electric light! Quick! Put it out!"

(What is the outcome of the police raid? See next Monday's fine instalment for the answer, chums.)

An Island Mystery!

(Continued from page 16.)

There was no arguing with a levelled revolver, and the ruffians did not attempt to resist. Their faces were dark with rage as the juniors jumped to obey the detective. In a few moments the two scoundrels were lying on the floor, trussed like chickens.

Mr. Hart limped over to Slater.

"And now, what about the sparklers, Slater?" he asked gently. "I know you don't trust even your pals, so they won't be far away. The game's up, you know."

The injured man's face was fiendish.

"Find them, hang you!" he hissed, his voice trembling with mingled rage and weakness.

"I'll soon do that!" said Hart.

And he did. As the baffled Slater fell back exhausted the detective rummaged amongst the dry seaweed of the bed, and at last drew out from its hiding-place a small handbag. It was unlocked, and as he opened it Harry Wharton lifted up the lantern.

There was a simultaneous gasp from the juniors as the rays from the lamp glittered and sparkled on the contents.

"Jewellery, by gum!" breathed Bob Cherry. "So—so—"

"Yes, jewellery," agreed the detective, smiling grimly. "Not so very romantic, after all—eh? These rascals are simply common or garden jewel thieves, who operate chiefly on the railways. They stole this stuff while in transit on the railway, and got away by plane. We lost them completely until the local constable here reported your story of an aeroplane having dropped on the cliffs. They sent me down, and—well, here we are!"

"But—but how did they know about this place?" gasped Wharton. He was amazed, though he had half-expected something of the sort.

"You'd better ask our friend Porter that," said Mr. Hart. "I believe he's a native of these parts—isn't that so, Porter?"

Porter scowled, and the detective turned to the juniors again with a smile.

"I'm not going to scold you for disobeying me," he said. "After all, it's turned out well. But I'd be obliged if you lads would clear out now and get on the phone to the Courtfield police. I'll see you later about all this."

"But you—" began Harry.

"I'll be all right—with this," said Mr. Hart, nodding at the revolver in his hand. "My foot's none too comfortable, though, and the sooner you bring the inspector and his men here the better."

The Greyfriars fellows did not like leaving the detective alone with the three rascals, helpless as they all were. But he was insistent, and within ten minutes

they had boarded their two boats and were out in the sunlight once again.

"Well, that's that," said Harry Wharton, as he shook out the sail. "After all, it's been a ripping adventure, and we've come out on top, you chaps."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Three cheers for little us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That same evening Inspector Grimes visited Greyfriars to report that Slater and his two rascally accomplices were safe under lock and key, and to explain matters to Dr. Locke. But Harry Wharton & Co. had already done that.

The scandalised Head had scolded them severely for having taken such risks. But he did not punish them, and as he ended by congratulating them on their pluck and resource and for having recovered the stolen school boat, they scarcely minded that.

But his congratulations were nothing to the congratulations of the rank and file of Greyfriars when they heard the story. The Famous Five found themselves covered with glory—a glory Coker & Co. also shared for their part in the recovery of the stolen jewels, the stolen boat, and the solving of an island mystery.

THE END.

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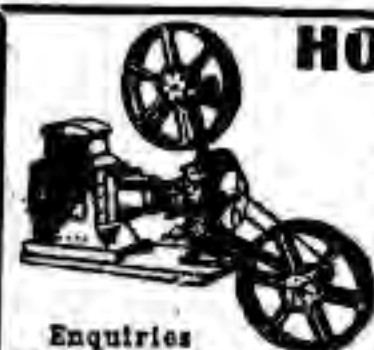
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