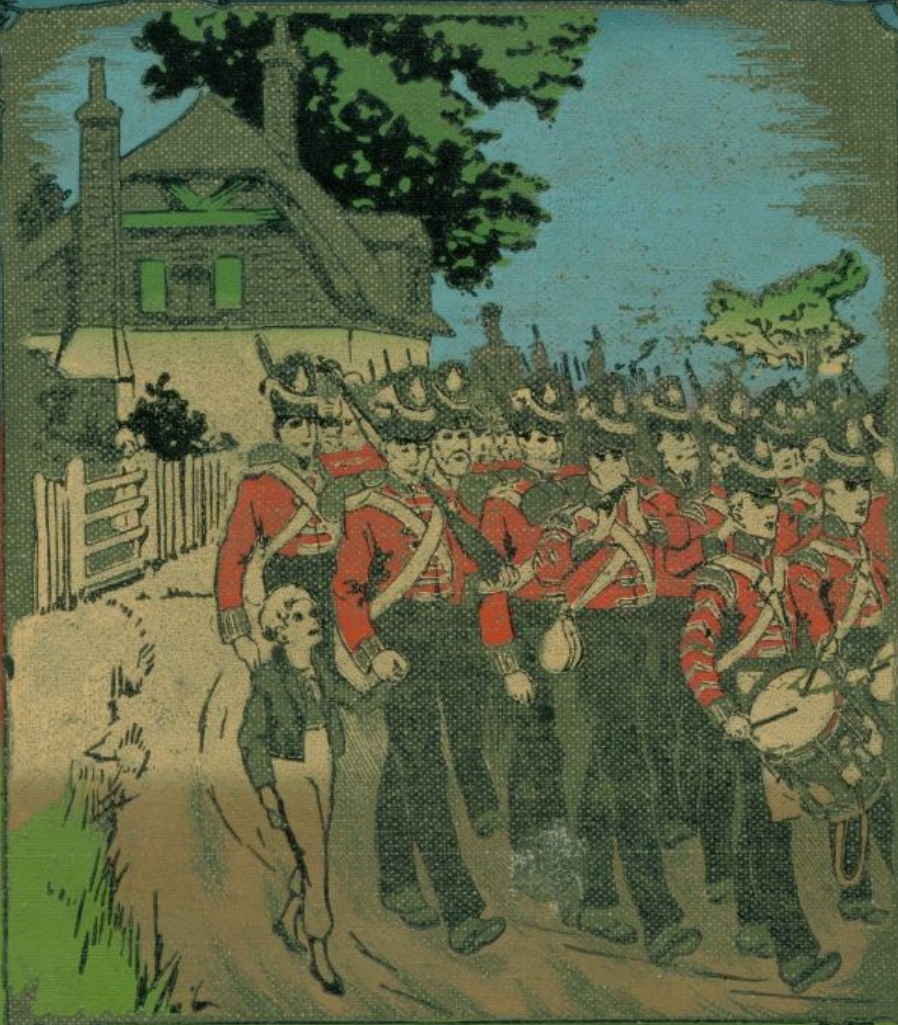
LIGHTS OUT



ROBERT OVERTON

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THE BOY FOLLOWED THE SOLDIERS.

“LIGHTS OUT!”

BY

ROBERT OVERTON

Author of “After School,” “The Son of a Hundred Fathers,” “Friend or Fortune,” “The King’s Pardon,” “Far from Home,” “The Orphan of Tor College,” “Water-Works,” “The Record Reciter,” “Katie’s Uncle,” etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY REINHOLD THIELE

TORONTO
BELL & COCKBURN

CONTENTS.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

“LIGHTS OUT!”

HOW CAPTAIN STAUNCHEON DID HIS DUTY.

 IRST, for a few words by way of introduction to these stories. I know well the large private boarding-school—Dr. Audlem’s Salwey House College—in the big dormitory of which they were all originally told. In this big dormitory are twenty-six beds, and the twenty-six boys occupying them are marched upstairs at half-past eight every evening. A few minutes before nine a master enters the room to see that every boy is safely in bed. The striking of nine is the signal for “Lights Out!” and out they go. Until ten o’clock subdued talking is not forbidden, and the custom in the big dormitory for years has been to use this hour between nine and ten for the purpose of “spinning yarns.” These stories are usually told by anybody who likes to volunteer, except in the case of new boys. New boys have to “pay their footing” by telling a tale whether they want to or not. But a few terms ago the bedroom monitor—a rather big boy named Martin Abbott—insisted that the story-telling should be done more systematically. He said that every boy in the room must take his turn regularly in spinning a yarn or be bolstered. There were thirteen beds on each side; the boy in No. 1, on the right-hand side nearest the door, must start the running, the boy next him take it up the following night, and so on till every boy on the right-hand side had done his duty. After that the boys on the left would have to take their turn, running the stories “all down the line” till the last bed on the left of the door was reached. Then it might be time to have a rest from story-telling.

What we have to deal with is the stories ("touched up") told under these circumstances "in the dark" by the boys of the big dormitory at Salwey House.

Nine o'clock. "Lights Out!"

"Hamilton!" said Martin Abbott.

"*Ad sum*," replied Jack Hamilton from Bed No. 1.

"Keep your Latin for roll-call," enjoined the monitor, "and get on with your yarn."

"Right you are," was the ready answer, and Jack proceeded to tell How Captain Stauncheon Did His Duty.

Bob Stauncheon was the son of the captain of the revenue cutter *Scorpion*, in the days when smugglers still carried on business at certain places on the coast. Bob was always a wild and reckless, though never a bad-hearted, sort of fellow. The fact was that his father being almost always away, the boy's early training had missed the restraint of his strong hand. Bob's mother was a good woman, but she lacked strength of will to curb her son's rash impulses. From his earliest days he was always getting into mischief, and his happy knack of getting out of it again only encouraged him to fall into fresh mischief. At sixteen he was a strong, fearless, dare-all lad, who seemed unable to settle down steadily to anything.

Captain Stauncheon's home was close to a fishing (and smuggling) town, on a very wild part of the coast. Soon after Bob's sixteenth birthday, the captain made a stay at home of a good many weeks, and during this time he learnt just what sort of a boy his son had grown into. He saw that his impulsive, generous, thoughtless disposition was already leading him into various temptations. He objected strongly to a number of acquaintances Bob had made in the village. He did his best to knock some ideas of discipline into the boy's head. He talked to him, and warned him. Bob appeared to take it all in good part, and promised to amend his ways in several directions. For a time he kept his word, but before his father had been long away again, he "broke out worse than ever." His love for loose company increased, and in various ways he caused such grief to his gentle mother's heart that at last she wrote to Captain Stauncheon, and told him of her growing fears for their only boy. The truth was that at this time Bob was in more danger of "going

wrong" than he himself had any idea of. But his awakening was soon to come.

Late one afternoon he was riding along the low-lying cliffs that stretched for several miles on either side of Pentawen, the fishing town I have referred to. He was riding a horse which he had borrowed because it was known to be a vicious brute which had done no end of damage. He had been almost thrown several times during the afternoon, but now, in the early dusk of the November gloaming, he was trotting quietly and steadily home. Too quietly and too steadily for his head-strong nature, so he gave the horse a sudden and sharp cut with his riding whip. That did it. The animal had borne a good deal, and was in no mood to stand any more. In a moment it was ungovernable. It plunged and reared and bucked. Bob stuck to his seat sturdily, but that was all he could do. To bring the horse again under restraint was beyond his power. At last the bridle-reins got twisted, and in a frantic attempt to wrest the animal's head away from the edge of the cliff Bob pulled it nearer. He felt the earth slipping and crumbling beneath the infuriated creature's feet, and knew that they were struggling on the very verge. Then over they went in the darkness—horse and rider. Bob had the presence of mind to kick his feet free of the stirrups, and he struck the water below some feet from the spot where the horse fell. The latter was soon carried away out of sight and hearing, but the boy managed to keep afloat near where he had made a hole in the water. The height from which he had fallen was not great, and before long he found his voice and shouted lustily for help.

Rough voices hailed him in the darkness, and he heard the welcome sound of a boat approaching him, though where it could have come from he was at first at a loss to conjecture. That, however, mattered nothing. A boat was coming, sure enough, for now he could hear the rumble of the oars in the rowlocks. Just as he realised that he couldn't keep himself above water for many seconds longer, the boat reached him. He clutched the gunwale, and strong hands pulled him in. The man who was steering bade him lie down at the bottom of the craft, and "bale some o' the water out of him." The boat's head was immediately turned round, and the oarsmen commenced to pull her back in the direction whence she had come. After a short distance, however, had been traversed, the order was given to easy up, and she again stopped.

"Pull him up, and let's have a look at him," said the man at the tiller; and Bob found himself hauled, not very gently, into a sitting position on one of the thwarts.

Finding his voice for the first time since his rescue, he began to splutter his thanks, but was told to be silent "till they'd had a look at him." Then one of the men lit a lantern, and, whilst they looked at him, Bob looked at his rescuers. There were three of them. The steersman, Will Watch, Bob knew by both name and sight; the other two he knew by sight only. But evidently they all knew him, for when Will Watch exclaimed—

"Why, it's young Stauncheon," the other two ejaculated—

"So it is."

Bob gave a rapid account of how he came to tumble into the water, and again expressed his gratitude to his preservers.

A thoughtful look had settled on Watch's dark face. He was a man of notoriously evil character, being, in fact, the leader and chief of the most desperate gang of smugglers and wreckers along the whole coast. For a long time he had had his eye on Bob Stauncheon, whose wild pranks and thoughtless escapades were almost all well known to him. If he, the son of the captain of the dreaded *Scorpion*, could only be induced or entrapped into joining the gang, what a valuable recruit he would be. His daring, fearless nature was the very thing to fit him for their lawless and adventurous work, irrespective of the value of the information he would always be able to spy out as to the intended movements of the revenue men. And now here he was in the smugglers' own boat, owing his life to the three members of the band who were also in it.

"The chance has come," muttered Watch; and then, louder, he said—

"Give way for the cave. It's all right," he added, reassuringly, as though in answer to a questioning look on the faces of the other two; "he's game."

In darkness and in silence, save for the sound of the dip of the oars and the swish of the boat, they sped over the water.

"Where are we going?" asked Bob.

"To a safe place," was the answer.

After a very short time the smugglers headed in for the shore, at a place where the cliff took a sudden rise. They evidently knew their way, even in the darkness, for just as Bob expected the boat to grate upon the beach she shot *under* the cliffs instead, through a winding and narrow channel, right into the smugglers' cave. She was made fast, and the three men sprang nimbly from her to a slippery ledge. Bob was ordered to follow them, and all four walked forward. The next minute he found himself in the midst of a

large group of men, most of them armed in some way or another. A number of lanterns lit up the cavern.

Bob was stood a little apart, while Will Watch talked earnestly for a minute or two with his men. Then the leader of the smugglers turned to him, and said heartily—

"Well, lad, you know who we are?"

"Yes," said Bob.

"That's right. Now, look here. I know you're a plucky sort, and made of the right stuff, and I'm not afraid of trusting you, especially after just saving your life. Join us, and take your turn with us now and again, and your pockets will never be empty. You've got your first chance to-night. Our cutter's standing in now from France, with the best cargo we've run for years, and we're going out to meet her to arrange about running her barrels in here before morning. You shall come with us, share in the work, and have your part of the plunder."

"Never," cried Bob. "Let me go. You have saved my life, and because of that I will never betray you. But I'll die before I join a gang of such cut-throats as you are."

Angry shouts and threatening gestures on the part of almost all the smugglers followed this reckless speech, but Will Watch only laughed and said,

"Leave the youngster to me. Come and dry your clothes, boy."

He led him away and made up a fire, where Bob dried his clothes and rubbed himself down. All his demands to leave the cave were laughed at, and at last he flung himself down before the flames and fell fast asleep.

He awoke two or three hours later. Will Watch was standing over him.

"The boat has gone to meet the cutter," said the latter, "and we shall start running in her cargo in about an hour's time." He renewed his attempts to entrap Bob into joining the gang, but only with the former result. Then he altered his tone.

"You know too much now," he said, in a low, determined voice. "*If you refuse still, I shall drown you in the very water from which I hauled you a few hours ago*."

All day long His Majesty's revenue cutter *Scorpion* had been beating and tacking towards Pentawen. Arrived within some half-a-dozen miles lower down the coast, she hove to till dark. Then, lighting no lamps, she continued on her way; and the wind having veered to fair, made such good progress that before the smugglers had despatched their boat to meet their own vessel their dreaded enemy had anchored off the coast-line about a mile from their cave.

Captain Stauncheon—a stern, resolute-faced man between fifty and sixty years of age—sat in his little cabin. Cap in hand, his first officer stood before him.

"Mr. Wood," said Stauncheon, "I am ordered to perform a special duty to-night, and I'm going to do it. We are *all* on special duty, and we're *all* going to do it."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded the officer cheerfully.

"Information on which we can rely," continued the captain, "was sent me a few days ago as to the movements to-night of the worst gang of smugglers on this or any other coast. They are expecting a contraband cargo to be run across to-night. We are to trap them in their own hiding-place, of which I have the exact bearings. The entrance to the cavern is dry at low water—about an hour's time. With the exception of the necessary guard who will remain in charge on board, the entire strength of the cutter will go ashore here. We shall be met by half-a-dozen coastguard men, and immediately proceed to do our duty. I shall lead the attack myself. These rascals," continued the captain, "are wreckers as well as smugglers, so in case of any refusal to yield, the word is 'No quarter.' You will make the necessary arrangements at once."

Mr. Wood's eyes glistened as he proceeded to carry out his orders. All was done quickly, quietly, joyously, and in due time almost the entire crew of the *Scorpion*, fully armed, joined the waiting coastguardsmen on the beach. An immediate move forward was made for the smugglers' cave.

"Row him out into deep water," ordered Will Watch, "and don't come back till you've seen him drown. Our lives are in the young dog's hands."

Roughly some of the furious men seized Bob and commenced to drag him out, but even quicker than they had seized him did they loose their hold as a loud voice rang sternly and clearly out:

"Surrender! In the King's name." And into the dimly-lighted cave rushed the servants of the law.

In a moment the trapped smugglers grasped the situation.

"Fight!" yelled Watch. "For your lives, fight!"

There was no parley on either side. A desperate struggle began without another word. The revenue men were better armed, but were largely outnumbered. Swords and cutlasses clashed, and the smoke of firearms filled the air.

"Drive them back," shouted Captain Stauncheon. "Drive them back, corner them!"

Bob found himself in the midst of the fighting smugglers, who were gradually being forced rearwards. He struggled to push his way through them in order to join and fight on the other side, but this he found to be impossible, for he was hustled back and hemmed in by the men around him.

"Strike hard, lads," roared the skipper of the *Scorpion* again. "Force them back; they're giving way."

So they were, but suddenly the attacking party were themselves unexpectedly attacked in the rear. The boat which had rowed to the incoming cutter had returned, and from her had landed seven or eight of "the enemy." These rushed pell-mell into the cave and into the fray.

The din and confusion were now indescribable. It seemed almost certain that the smugglers would win. They fought with the ruthless determination of men who knew that their all was at stake. Bob seized a cutlass which had fallen from the hand of one of the smugglers, and laid about him amongst them right and left. Will Watch saw him, and with a bitter oath fired a pistol point-blank at his head. Bob dodged the shot just in time, and, putting all his strength into the blow, cut his would-be murderer to the ground. Seeing that their leader had fallen, a moment's hesitation seemed to seize on his gang. It probably lost them the fight, for the other side were quick to take advantage of it. With a rushing charge they drove all before them. In a few minutes the smugglers had been driven far back and cornered, Bob perforce amongst them. "In the King's name, yield—or I'll shoot down every man as he stands."

Sullenly they obeyed Captain Stauncheon's shouted command.

"Mr. Wood, disarm the prisoners and secure them."

This was soon done, and Captain Stauncheon, who for the first time felt that he was slightly wounded, walked to the entrance of the cave. Mr. Wood followed him.

"You will march the prisoners to Pentawen jail at once, Mr. Wood."

There was a strange look on Mr. Wood's face, and his voice trembled.

"Captain Stauncheon," he said in low tones, "your son Robert" (he knew Bob well) "is one of them."

Captain Stauncheon started as though a sudden blow had been dealt him. A spasm of agony seemed to quiver through his body, and his bronzed face blanched. He thought of the letter he had received from his wife—had her forebodings been so horribly realised? He thought of his son's recklessness and waywardness and wilfulness—the bad companionships he had formed. And so all had ended in—this! He turned aside, and shook from head to foot.

Then he faced round to his waiting officer.

"You will march *all* the prisoners to Pentawen jail at once."

Mr. Wood's face was almost ashen pale.

"Sir," he said, "blood has been spilt. This is a matter of—death. I took your son with arms in his hand."

Only God heard the stifled cry that broke from Captain Stauncheon's white lips as again he turned aside. For the third time he spoke.

"My duty was to give you your orders. I have done it. Your duty is to obey them. Do it."

Mr. Wood touched his gold-laced cap and retired. Captain Stauncheon stood back as the prisoners were marched out, and saw his only son amongst them. Then he fainted—for the first time in his life.

Bob was discharged from custody as soon as he had told his story. Two of the other prisoners—a shade less villainous than the rest—corroborated it, and told how he had sided against the smugglers in the fight.

The adventure brought him to his senses—taught him the lesson he needed.

"Father," he said, as they grasped hands, "I know how you did your duty. Please God, all my life long now, I'll try to do mine."

THE BOY WHO FORGOT HIS PRAYERS.

THE next night Terrie Warner had to take up the running. Considering that Terence Warner was a minister's son, and meant going in for the ministry himself, it was rather expected that his narrative would be of a religious turn. So it was, for he told the tale of THE BOY WHO FORGOT HIS PRAYERS.

"Saying his prayers" was not only a more difficult but a more important and serious matter with Tony Chucks than the same thing is with many boys. But then praying had to Tony, so to speak, the charm of novelty, because he had only recently learnt anything about it—had only recently learnt that a prayer from the faltering lips of a London Arab in a garret or under an archway has no farther to travel up to Heaven than have the sweetly-sung petitions of cathedral choirs. A London Arab—that was what he was: a waif of the city streets. He lived on the few coppers he managed to earn by doing—anything. He had been higher up in the world once, for there had been a time when he was the recognised sweeper of a street crossing. But there came a spell of fine weather, and his receipts fell away to nothing. Unfortunately it was a long spell, and in the meantime, waiting for the fine weather—which was to him foul weather—to give place to weather which misguided people in general would consider foul weather, but which would to his better regulated mind be fine weather—in this "meantime" he was starving. And the pangs of hunger compelled him to sell his broom and his entire interest in the crossing to a luckier boy, who, having several shillings to fall back upon, was able to command all the special privileges of a capitalist.

"It's very 'ard on a cove wot's 'ad 'is own crossing to come down to 'oldin' 'orses," poor Tony used sometimes to complain to himself. However, he was glad enough to hold horses, call cabs, or do anything else to earn a copper. When he was "in luck" he shared at night a garret with a swell acquaintance of his in the potting flowers profession; at other times a seat in

the park, or the stones beneath a railway arch, afforded him sleeping accommodation. But he wasn't so miserable as you might suppose. He had never known any other life, of course with the exception of his crossing-sweeping days, with which to contrast his present existence. Home, parents, friends, loving kisses, and kind words—how could he miss them when he had never had them?

At the time our concern in him begins, he was—or appeared, for there were no means of telling exactly—about fourteen years old; an under-sized, pale-faced, but precociously shrewd little urchin, with quick, sharp eyes, and with quick, sharp movements.

Now about Tony's prayers. First, living the life he had to live, how did he learn them?

It was in this way. One Saturday night he slept under an archway in Whitechapel. He woke early, and having neither breakfast preparations nor toilet to detain him, he shook himself and sallied out. He was in good spirits that fine Sunday morning in early summer, for safely stowed away in that pocket of his ragged clothes which had the smallest holes in it, he was comfortably conscious there was the sum of three-ha'pence. This meant that he could afford to treat himself to a really good breakfast.

Arrived at the corner of the street over which ran the archway, he hesitated as to which way he should turn. Towards the west he knew of a coffee-stall where the beverage was brewed more to his liking than the coffee at the stall down the high road to the east, because at the former stall it always had more grits in it, and seemed consequently more filling at the price. But, on the other hand, the man at the other stall invariably cut his bread and butter thicker.

Which stall should he patronise? It was an anxious moment. Finally, the thick bread and butter turned the wavering scale, and he set off resolutely further east. Having finished his repast at the favoured stall, he kept eastward still, ambling on and on without any definite idea where he was going, for by-and-by he found he had wandered beyond the limit of his geographical knowledge of the district. But the sun was shining, the sky was bright, and the air was warm, and almost all the people who now began to make their appearance were going in the same direction—eastward still further.

At last Tony remembered that he had heard a great deal lately about Epping Forest, and he knew that if he kept on he would be bound to reach it. It struck him that he could not do better than treat himself to a "day in the

country" on his own account, and once having resolved that the forest should be his destination, he held on his way quite gaily.

Before twelve o'clock he found himself in a place that seemed to him like fairy-land. Soft grass was under his feet, leafy branches waved above his head. Like the aisles of a mightier cathedral than the hand of man has ever built, three long avenues of great trees stretched before him, where the sunbeams played with the shadows.

Poor Tony had never known that the world contained such a place as this. It took his breath away. Could he possibly have any right to be in such a beautiful spot? Wouldn't somebody come along directly and turn him off with a cuff or a kick?

So thinking, he looked warily round for the expected apparition of a policeman to "chivvy" him on. There wasn't one to be seen! But who was that man in velveteen and gaiters, carrying a big stick in his hand, and with a big dog following at his heels—a big man with big shoulders and a kind face?

"Please, sir," said Tony, as the forest-keeper approached him, "I ain't done nothink. May I sit down, sir, same as some o' the other people are a-doin' of?"

"Sit down!" laughed the big man with the kind face, as he passed on, "why, yes. We don't charge for seats here."

So down on the cool grass rolled the tired little London Arab, and presently he fell fast asleep.

He woke with a start, and sprang to his feet. From where the trees were thickest came sounds of sweet music, the voices of men and women and children blending with the rich notes of a softly-played harmonium. Tony crept nearer.

Filling the open space between bushes on one hand and trees on the other stood quite a crowd of people, surrounding the little stand on which was the harmonium. Behind the player stood two or three earnest-faced men and as many earnest-faced young women. On a long bench in front of the instrument were a lot of children, and the men and the women and the children were singing a hymn, many of the bystanders joining in.

One of the earnest-faced men behind the harmonium held a banner, and on this banner (though Tony could not read the inscription) were the words "Gospel Temperance Mission."

The ragged boy listened entranced.

"Ain't I a-'avin' a day of it!" he said to himself.

The hymn finished, an address was given, and a prayer followed. Then the man with the banner announced that he and his companions would be there again in the afternoon, and—a third time—in the evening.

Tony waited till they returned. Again he listened to the singing and reading and preaching and playing, liking it very much, though he wondered what it was all about.

As the afternoon gathering was dispersing, the leader of the little band—whom Tony had heard addressed as Mr. Holly—spoke to him. Tony shrank back frightened at first, but—unused as he was to the tones of a kind voice—there was no mistaking the friendly intentions of the mission preacher. Tony and he had quite a conversation together, and in the end Mr. Holly *took him home with him to tea*. After this invitation had been given him, Tony's capacities for being amazed were exhausted. But "Oh, crikey!" he muttered, as he followed along a little behind his new friend, "wot's a-goin' to 'appen nex'?"

A good deal happened, for his newly-found friend, Mr. Holly, kept him in view, and kept him in hand. All that poor Tony ever knew of God and goodness and the Bible, the leader of the Gospel Temperance Mission taught him. He taught him to pray. He taught him the "Our Father." Just "Our Father," and a few stammering words of his own, which he had thought out with infinite pains and infinite difficulty—these were Tony's only prayers. But he said them regularly, every night and every morning.

That was what his teacher impressed upon him.

"Never forget your prayers, my boy. You'll never go far wrong if you keep on praying—really praying. However bad you may feel, however much you may feel your own ignorance—never mind—don't forget your prayers."

The "theology" of Mr. Holly and his Gospel Temperance Missioners might have been summed up in one phrase—they just loved God and hated Drink. There were a great many things, well known to better educated people, that they were ignorant of; but they knew that they loved God, for His peace was in their hearts—and there was no doubt about their hating the Drink. Most of them knew it from personal experience as the rock from which they must steer wide in order to avoid shipwreck.

Poor themselves, they could do little for Tony in the way of material help, but what they could do they did willingly, and before long provided

him with the outfit and equipments of a shoe-black. Thus provided, he established himself in a fine position near Stratford Station, and soon found himself doing well. Every Sunday till the winter came he went with the Missioners to Bushwood, where he had first heard them. When the open-air gatherings ceased, meetings were held in a hall, and here Tony was just as regular an attendant.

One dark, cold, bleak November night, Tony Chucks returned unusually late and unusually tired to the attic which, with another boy who followed the shoe-blacking profession at another "pitch," he now occupied. The room contained two mattresses, and Tony threw himself on his own particular resting-place as soon as he had climbed up the steep stairs, and entered the apartment.

"I'll rouse up directly," he muttered to himself, "say my prayers, and undress, and get into bed properly."

But he neither "roused up," said his prayers, undressed, nor "got into bed properly." He was so tired that he just fell sound asleep. Not even the entrance of his fellow-lodger, Timber Joe (so called because he had lost his right leg from the knee downwards, and had to have a wooden half-limb substituted for the amputated flesh and bone), disturbed the fast slumber into which he fell, although Joe's wooden stump made an awful noise on the bare boards.

Timber Joe had had a rather hard day of it too, and snores from his mattress soon joined those proceeding from Tony's.

Joe was the first to awake. He sprang from his rude bed with smarting eyes and choking breath, for the attic was full of hot smoke.

"Tony, Tony!" he cried, "get up—the house is on fire!"

Together the two boys rushed to the door, and flung it open. From the stairs and stories below, clouds of fiery smoke were rolling up, lit here and there by red flashes of quivering flame.

Very soon after daybreak a policeman knocked at Mr. Holly's door.

"A boy is lying—and dying, sir—in West Ham Hospital. He has been asking for you ever since he recovered consciousness. Will you come?"

Few people were yet in the streets, and Mr. Holly and his companion walked quickly along together to where poor little Tony Chucks was lying, and, as the policeman had said—dying. As they walked, the policeman

answered the other's inquiries, and briefly told the story of what had happened.

"The place was in flames pretty well from top to bottom," he concluded, "before any real help arrived, for all the engines had been called away to a bigger fire a mile or two away. It appears that the two boys in the top attic—the cripple and the boy we're going to—rushed out of their room together, and began to fight their way downstairs through the flames. But only one of them got clear out of the burning building—only one of them. He stood, dazed-like, on the pavement.

" 'Where's Timber Joe?' he cried.

"The answer was easy enough. The cripple had been unable to struggle out. He was somewhere inside still.

"I never saw such a thing in my life. The little chap didn't wait an instant. He dashed aside the hands that were stretched out to stop him, and rushed into the house again. Back to death to save his chum. And he saved him. We guess he had to scramble pretty well to the top of the house again. He found the cripple on a landing, fainting and choking, but not much burned. He put his own coat round him to shield him from the flames, and then fought his way out a second time, dragging the other with him—somehow. They both fell down the instant they got outside on the pavement, but the boy who was saved we soon brought round. He's all right. He'll recover. But the boy who saved him got much more hurt, by some means or other. And I hope you'll be in time."

Mr. Holly bent over the little white bed where lay poor Tony. His hands held very gently those of the little hero, who smiled every time he opened his eyes and saw his friend still by his bedside.

Suddenly a disturbing thought seemed to strike him, and he moved his right hand from the tender clasp in which it was held, as he whispered quickly—

"Mr. Holly—I forgot my prayers last night!"

"No, no, my boy; no, no!" cried Mr. Holly earnestly. "Every wound that your poor little body bore last night was a prayer. Your self-sacrifice, the love that filled your heart for a helpless fellow-creature—it was all a prayer. You didn't forget your prayers. You said them in a deed instead of in words—that's all."

Tony smiled as though he understood, but such a strange look was settling on his face.

"And all that you wanted to pray for. . . ." Mr. Holly was going to say, "God will grant you," but he stopped as one long sigh passed Tony's blistered lips. So peaceful looked the dead face as he said instead, "God has granted you."

GOING TO SEA!

OR

MY VOYAGE TO THE ANTIPODES.

"I'LL RELATE to you," announced Peter Vincent, "the particulars of my voyage to Australia and New Zealand."

"Why, you've never been there!" exclaimed a number of voices.

"I will not be put down by popular clamour," said Peter firmly.

"'Popular clamour' be blowed!" cried Hamilton.

"Abbott," appealed Peter Vincent to the monitor, "it's my turn to spin a yarn, and I claim your protection from these unseemly interruptions. I've been reading some Parliamentary reports lately, and I claim to be in possession of the floor of the House."

"Everybody shut up except Vincent," commanded Martin Abbott. "As for you, Peter," he continued, "just stow that Parliamentary sort of jaw. We don't want it here. Keep it till you get into Parliament yourself."

Somewhat taken aback by a general laugh at this sally, the occupant of bed No. 3 proceeded at once with his yarn, which he insisted on calling "GOING TO SEA! or MY VOYAGE TO THE ANTIPODES."

I am now sixteen years old, and have been at this school, as you all know, for about six months. My father is a large farmer in Essex, and a little more than twelve months ago I was at home with him during my holidays from my last school. I had formed a very special and particular wish, which might have been divided into two parts. First, I didn't want to go back to school at all. In the second place, I WANTED TO GO TO SEA. Every boy does at some time or another. This wish is like the measles—you're bound to have it. Only, like the measles again, some boys have it worse than others. In my case, the attack was a very bad one indeed. I could think of nothing but

splicing sails, and taking in reefs, and shivering timbers, and saying, "Aye, aye, sir," and bounding over the rolling seas. I pictured myself in lovely dark-blue uniform, with gold buttons, and with gold lace round my hat. I practised hitching up my trousers, and tried to walk with a nautical roll of the body, as though I were so accustomed to the roll of the ocean that I couldn't walk straight. I once went so far as to chew a piece of tobacco. Never again, sea or no sea! No more 'baccy for me. I thought I should never have any control over my own stomach again.

Of course the first thing was to speak to father. When I told him I didn't want to go back to school, but wished to begin life at once on my own account, he looked both amazed and amused. When I insisted that I wanted to go to sea, and begged him to send me on board a ship, he looked very serious. He made the usual remarks about a sailor's life, and argued with me, and tried to talk me out of the idea I had formed; but he failed. Then he put mother and my sisters on to me, and they did their best. They came nearer being successful than he did, but in the end they too failed.

At last father went to Chelmsford to consult an old retired sea-captain who lived there, and was an old friend of father's. When told about my determination to go to sea Captain Quarters said, "Tell him that if I had a dog, and the dog came to me and said he was going to sea, I'd drown him to save him from a life of such misery."

There was no getting over the fact that this was discouraging. When father triumphantly pointed out that old Quarters knew what he was talking about, I wavered. But in the result, I stuck to my point, though I wavered once more when father tried on the bribing dodge.

"If you'll give up this idea, Peter, and go quietly to school for a few more terms, or even if you'll start learning some other business—if you'll just give up this wild notion of going to sea—I'll give you the white cob colt for your very own, and buy you a new saddle and bridle into the bargain."

The bribe was a tempting one, and I required all my strength of mind to resist it, for the white cob was a beauty. But I called to mind the glorious times that everybody had on board ship, according to all the books I had been reading on the subject, and, with an effort, I escaped the snare, refused the bribe, and said that I felt the sea was made for me, and I for the sea.

Father realised then that nothing remained for it but to find me a ship. He drove over to Chelmsford, and had another consultation with Captain Quarters, who gave him some introductions, including one to another old captain, named Stagger, who commanded a ship called the *Queen of the Age*.

This ship was expected in the Thames from abroad any day, and, when she arrived, father was to go on board, interview the skipper, and try to arrange with him to take me with him when the ship sailed away again.

I was, of course, all agog with excitement. Every morning I got hold of the London newspaper as soon as ever I could, and turned instantly to the shipping news, to see whether the *Queen of the Age* had arrived. When I read the intelligence that she *had* arrived, and was in the East India Docks, I could scarcely contain myself. I rushed to father with the paper, and showed him the news.

"Very well, my boy," he said slowly, "I'll go and see Captain Stagger to-morrow."

"Oh, Peter," sobbed my mother, "why are you so anxious to go away from us?"

I was further upset by my sisters beginning to snivel a bit too; but I pulled myself together.

"How proud they will be of me," I thought, "when I return from my first voyage, all in uniform, and bronzed and tanned—a regular young Jack-tar officer"—and this thought comforted me a lot.

Father kept his word. He and his friend Quarters went up to town and saw Captain Stagger together, instead of father going by himself with the letter of introduction. And between them they settled everything. I was to sail aboard the *Queen of the Age* for Australia and New Zealand in about three weeks' time.

The days passed very quickly. Father bought a good many things for me, and mother and the girls were busy getting my clothes ready, and so on. My schoolmaster was written to and my non-return arranged for.

As the three weeks dwindled away, and came nearer and nearer being three days, I began to feel very queer. Everybody in the place seemed to get glummer and glummer. I tried all sorts of dodges to keep up my spirits, but only one had any success. That was getting out my uniform and looking at it, and trying it on. But I couldn't be always doing that, and at all other times —particularly when mother kissed me good-night with such red eyes—that funny feeling I have alluded to got hold of me more and more. The only explanation I could think of was that that chew of tobacco had thoroughly upset my constitution. You will understand what I mean when I say that—it was a similar sort of feeling.

I want to pass as quickly as possible over the last night at home, before I started on my long, long voyage to the Antipodes—over the last morning—and particularly over the final parting. Have you ever had a peculiar disease called Lumps in the Throat? Well, we all had it rather badly, father included. He came up to London with me to see me safely on board. I thought that when we reached the city everybody would be turning round to look at my uniform, but as a matter of fact nobody seemed to take the slightest notice of me. I was just jostled about in the crowds like anybody else.

We got to the docks and went straight to the ship, walked up the gangway, and stepped on board. There were a lot of sailors about, but not one of them touched his hat to me, and saluted me as "your honour." I was very much surprised. It seemed to me that they couldn't have read the right books, for they actually grinned and laughed, and made some jeering remarks to each other about me.

Father went below, and had a last chat with the captain, returned on deck (where he had left me), shook me warmly by the hand, and hurried off the ship.

I was trying to persuade myself that I hadn't got lumps in the throat worse than ever when Captain Stagger appeared from his cabin. I touched my cap to him and said, "Come aboard, sir," all correct, but he didn't take the least heed of me for several minutes. He stamped about the deck roaring out some orders.

He wasn't a bit like what I expected, but just the most awful old man I had ever seen in my life. He was short, stumpy, stout, and prodigiously thick-set. His hair was white, and his face was red—redder than any other face in the world, I should think, except a real red Indian's, perhaps. The fire of his face seemed to have got into his head, and to glow out of his savage old eyes—and to have got into his heart, for such a temper as he was always in—well, well—cayenne pepper is no word for it. When at last he condescended to notice me, "go for'rud," he said—no, shouted—"take off those kickshaws and get to work."

I found my way to the forecastle, and was horrified to find that I should have to mess and berth there with the men, for it was a low, dark, evil-smelling place. So different from my quarters at school—such an awful contrast with my dear old farm-home in Essex.

I got out of my beautiful uniform and into my working clothes, and found myself put to work precious quickly. But such work! They just

seemed to find the dirtiest jobs for me that could possibly be found on board the ship. My arms soon ached, and so did my heart.

Almost at the last moment something happened to prevent us from sailing for a couple of days, and I shall never forget those two days as long as I live. Everything on board seemed in the wildest confusion, and what with the rattling of machinery, and the bumping of great bales of goods as they were swung on board and flung into the hold, the shouting and halloaing, the wits were driven clean out of my head. As for the food—well—I'd often complained of the grub at boarding school, but I only wished I could have got a chance at some of it then!

At last we started, getting out of dock on the evening tide. Of course we had a pilot on board to take us as far as Gravesend, which we reached before the morning.

But before we got there an awful adventure happened to me. An order was given which necessitated the hauling in of a lot of slimy, slippery cable on the forecastle deck. With a lot of the men, I was hauling away with all my might when my foot slipped, I let go the cable, and rolled backwards so violently that I rolled right off the ship—rolled overboard into the black, cold waves of the river. I remember the shock as I struck the water. I rose to the surface almost instantly, and then sunk again. For the second time I rose, and for the third I sunk. As I rose for the last time and put out my hands to try to swim, I felt a rope which had been thrown after me. I needn't say that I hung on to it like grim death, but it seemed hours before they dragged me aboard. They bumped me dreadfully against the sides of the vessel as they hauled me up, and pulled me over the bulwarks amidships.

Drowned, and bumped, and bruised—more dead than alive—there I stood, and there before me, with a lantern in his hand, and Mr. Pettigrew, the chief officer, by his side, stood Captain Stagger, looking redder and fiercer and angrier than ever. He seized me by the collar and shook me till my teeth rattled.

"How dare you fall out of my ship, sir?" he roared. "Isn't the vessel good enough for you? How dare you fall overboard? How dare you fall out of my ship? How dare you, sir?"

I was literally dumb with amazement, and could only stare at the captain's savage form in speechless affright. He shook me violently again, and then turned to the mate.

"Mr. Pettigrew," he said, "you will have this boy dried, and bring him to me in my cabin as soon as the ship has anchored."

"Very good, sir," answered Mr. Pettigrew.

I gave way. All things considered, I had borne up pretty well until this point, but now, in the darkness of my miserable berth, I gave way. The lumps in my throat seemed about the same size as whales. Instead of being swallowed by a whale, like Jonah, I felt as though a whale had been swallowed by me. As I was always fond of animals, it was a comfort to think that I had first swallowed sufficient water for the whale to swim in.

I heard the anchors rattling down, and soon afterwards Mr. Pettigrew sent for me to take me into the dreaded captain's cabin. The chief mate looked very solemn as he removed his cap and entered, with his hand on my shoulder, as though I were a prisoner.

It seemed like an execution.

Old Stagger opened fire at me instantly.

"How dare you leave the ship without permission, sir?" he demanded again.

"Leave the ship without permission, sir!" I cried.

"Yes. Who gave you leave to fall overboard? How dare you leave my ship in such a hasty manner without permission?"

He turned to the first mate, and continued, not more angrily, for that was impossible, but certainly more solemnly:

"Mr. Pettigrew, this is a more serious matter than I thought. This boy evidently meant to desert the ship. As a matter of fact, he did desert her, for he admits that he fell overboard, and that he never even asked permission so to leave the vessel. Desertion is equivalent to mutiny. He shipped under the articles, and the articles provide proper punishment for the crimes of desertion and mutiny. You will keep him in irons for the rest of the passage."

"Keep me in irons, sir!" I gasped.

"In irons, and on punishment diet," said the old villain firmly.

"May I suggest another course, sir?" asked Mr. Pettigrew respectfully. "Of course the prisoner's conduct can't be overlooked, but at the same time is it worth while to keep such a character on the vessel? If he's begun like this, how is he likely to end? Why not send him ashore with the pilot, sir?"

"He wouldn't go," said Captain Stagger, shaking his head.

"Oh, yes, I will, sir!" said I eagerly.

"Had enough of it, then?"

"Too much," I replied.

"Then pack up your traps, and be ready to leave the ship in a quarter of an hour."

Late that night—I was glad it was dark—I walked very quietly through the farmyard at home, and entered the house. Mother screamed, and my sisters sort of squawked a little. Father had a guilty kind of look on his face. I sat down and ate for about an hour and a quarter without stopping. Then I went very quietly upstairs to bed. And I've never wanted to go to sea again.

"That's what you call the story of your voyage to the Antipodes, is it?" said Martin Abbott.

"Yes," replied Peter Vincent "I went as far as Gravesend."

"How long was it," went on the monitor, "before you tumbled to the fact that the whole thing—the way you were treated from beginning to end on board the *Queen of the Age*—was a put-up job between your father, his friend Quarters, and old Stagger—their object being to sicken you of the sea as soon as possible?"

"Not long," confessed Peter.

Profound silence reigned in the big Dormitory for several minutes. It was broken by the voice of Jack Hamilton.

"Peter Vincent, you said you had been reading Parliamentary reports lately. So you will understand what I mean when I say that I shall propose that a vote of censure and want of confidence be passed upon you for one of the worst faults a boy can possess—funkiness."

"I shan't allow the vote to be put," decided Martin Abbott. "In the same circumstances we might all have behaved just as Peter did. And though any sort of funkiness is a sign of loss of grit, an honest account like his is a sign of plenty of grit left."

THE COLONEL'S HEART.

"THE boy who hesitates is bolstered," was Monitor Martin Abbott's warning, evoked by the hesitation of Reggie Warwick to begin his story. The implied threat was efficacious, for, without more ado, the tenant of bed No. 4 began his tale: THE COLONEL'S HEART.

The great war with Napoleon was over, and the soldiers were coming back. Covered with the glory of their great victory at Waterloo, already many regiments had landed home. The country was alive with the movements of the military, for, from the seaports at which they had arrived from the Continent, squadrons and troops of cavalry, batteries of artillery, and regiments and battalions of infantry were everywhere on the march to their temporary or permanent barracks.

The 47th Regiment of the Line had been landed at Portsmouth, and along the dusty roads and through the leafy lanes of Hampshire were marching on Reading. The inhabitants of every town, village, and hamlet through which they passed, "turned out" to do them honour, and from most places they were followed by a crowd of cheering admirers, who accompanied them for a mile or so on their way. We must suppose ourselves to belong to one of these crowds, only instead of turning back with the others, we must continue to follow the regiment, for it is with the gallant 47th that this story is connected.

Some miles had been covered without a halt, and almost as many more lay between the tired soldiers and the town they were bound for. Just where the hard road before them broadened, stretched some open meadow land, where tall trees cast cool, delicious shadows on the soft green grass. Beyond the meadow land was a great forest, the deeper shadows of which were more tempting still in the burning heat of the early afternoon. And the sun—Oh! it was tantalizing—glistened on the clear water of a bubbling brook. Longing eyes "turned left" from the dry, bare road, and happy ears welcomed the "Halt!" roared from the head of the column.

The ranks were broken, arms piled, and then—"Dismiss." On to the sweet grass of the meadow, into the shade of the fringe of the forest, rushed the hot, dust-covered soldiers, throwing themselves down singly and in groups, after refreshing their parched throats at the brook.

Round the war-grizzled sergeant of a certain company lay some dozen of his comrades—very much "at their ease." They were discussing the character of their colonel—a fertile and frequent subject of conversation. Colonel Towers had the unenviable reputation of being the strictest martinet in the British Army.

"However did the Colonel come to call this halt?" wondered Corporal Thomas Tompkins. "I didn't think he'd got the heart to do it."

"'Eart!" said Sergeant Beck, who was very weak on his aspirates; "he ain't got no 'eart. It's been froze into a ice-block. I tell you, you don't know him yet."

"It's time I did," replied Tompkins; "it's more than six months since I was drafted into the 47th from my old regiment."

"Six months!" sneered the other; "why, I've served under him six years, and been in the regiment all my life. I remember the day he succeeded to the command, and from that to this he's never give a sign of a 'eart. Nobody ever saw him smile, excep' when a-going into haction. 'E's a 'ard 'un, and no mistake."

A general expression of agreement followed this summing up of the colonel's character, and a number of anecdotes were related and reminiscences recalled as examples of his severity and want of sympathy.

The current of conversation was diverted by a sudden exclamation from the old sergeant—

"'Ulloa! Where did you spring from?"

The observation was addressed to a little brown-skinned, blue-eyed, yellow-haired boy, who had crept close up to the group, and now stood admiring, with unconcealed interest, the red coats and gold buttons, and the stalwart forms which wore them.

The little fellow—who did not appear to be much more than twelve years old—smiled brightly and fearlessly as he replied, pointing towards the forest behind as he did so, "From the gipsies."

"You ain't a gipsy, with that 'air and them heyes," said Sergeant Beck unceremoniously.

"I belong to them," replied the boy. "I don't know where they got me from. Are you home from the war? What great, strong men you are!"

The soldiers laughed good-naturedly, and the gipsy boy was soon chatting with them quite freely.

But before long the bugle sounded and the troops fell in.

"All ready, sir!" was reported to the stern and silent colonel who bestrode the big black charger that was champing its bit so impatiently.

The word of command was given, the band struck up, and away marched the regiment again.

This time there was no crowd to follow. But the popular sentiment had a representative—one, and a very small one—in the person of the gipsy boy. Instead of returning to the forest, he followed the soldiers. Sometimes he kept close to them, sometimes he lagged behind. At others he took a short cut across the fields and waited for them higher up the road.

On and on went the regiment; on and on went the boy, often turning and looking searchingly rearwards, as though fearful that he was being followed.

Reading was reached as the shadows of evening were falling, and then the laddie was lost in the shouting throngs that blocked the street leading to the barracks.

An hour or so before the drums beat the tattoo, Corporal Tompkins was inquiring rather anxiously for Sergeant Beck, whom he found in the barrack square.

"I say, Beck," he exclaimed, "here's a rum go! That gipsy boy has followed us up all the way and got into the barracks. And now he won't go out. The little beggar says he wants to see you."

"Wants to see me? Where is he?"

"I left him in the canteen, standing on a chair and singing like an angel."

"A hangel in a canteen? Never 'eard of a hangel in a drinking place before," growled Beck.

The two men walked into the canteen. There, sure enough, was the little fellow, and, apparently, as "happy as a king." The room was crowded with soldiers, with whom he seemed on the best of terms and perfectly at home. They had stood him on a chair in their midst, and he had sung them song after song, to the rapturous delight of his rough audience. Was there ever a soldier who did not love a song? He had a clear, sweet voice, the tones of

which were very pleasant to the ear. When he had finished the song he was singing as Beck and Tompkins entered, a big, swaggering fellow lifted him in his arms and placed him on the floor as gently as any woman could have done.

"Well sung, my youngster. You've got a bird in your throat," he said. Then, as he noticed Beck's burly form, he added, "There's the sergeant you've been asking for."

Beck and the corporal took the boy outside.

"Don't send me away," begged the little fellow, slipping his fingers into the old sergeant's huge hand; "don't make me go back again to the gipsies. They would beat me, as they often have done before. I am certain I was not born a gipsy, I am sure that they stole me. I can just remember—I see still sometimes in dreams—such different faces from theirs, such a different home from any of their tents!"

"But what can we do with you, my boy?" asked Beck.

"Take me into the band," was the eager reply. "Let me beat a drum with the other boys. Some of them are not much bigger than I am."

The two soldiers asked him a number of questions, and at last Beck said to Tompkins:

"Find the boy a place in the married men's quarters for to-night. I've got an idea. To-morrow we'll find out the tribe he's bolted from, and either get at the truth as to the youngster's notion that he was stole or knock their 'eads orf. What do you say?"

"Certainly," answered Tompkins at once. The thought of knocking some heads off evidently pleased him very much.

Beck's idea was carried out. The would-be recruit for the band was made comfortable for the night, and the next day his two new friends set out to beard the gipsies in their encampment. They were more successful than either of them had anticipated. By a judicious mixture of threats of what they would do if confession were not made, and of promises of concealment from the police if confession were made, and by starting with the bold assumption that the runaway *had* been stolen, they extorted the admission that the boy had been "found" some seven or eight years ago by a since-dead leader of the tribe. Pressed further, they named the neighbourhood. Pressed further still, and on further threats and promises, they at last produced and handed over a scarf and some of the other articles of clothing worn by the child when he was "found." More valuable still, they gave up a little toy-

book they had "found" on the boy—on the fly-leaf were written a few words in a lady's hand.

The instant the two soldiers were out of sight the encampment broke up, and before the next day the tribe were far away.

"I don't know why we should take all this trouble," said Sergeant Beck as he and his companion were returning to the barracks at Reading; "but the lad's fairly wormed 'imself into my 'eart."

"Mine too," agreed Tompkins. "I can hear him singing yet."

Of course the matter was promptly reported to their immediate superiors, with the boy's still urgent application to be taken into the band. Then the whole subject was ordered to be "reported to the colonel."

Colonel Towers sat in his private quarters—calm, cold, grey, and grim: the man whom many respected, all feared, none loved. He had not always been so strict and stern and taciturn and forbidding—there were those who remembered him when there was a warmth in his manner and a light in his face that had been wanting now for years in the man who "only smiled when he went into action."

On the wall behind him hung a single picture—the portrait of his dead wife. As he rose to enter the room where he was to receive the officers of the day, he looked upon the fair face of this portrait, with hunger in his eyes; and for a moment his firm lips softened, but of this softening no sign remained as he closed the door and strode out.

The usual reports were made, the ordinary routine business transacted. Then came up the matter of the runaway from the gipsy camp. He listened silently to the brief and business-like statement of the officer whose duty it was to present it. The statement concluded with a reference to the result of the investigation voluntarily undertaken by Sergeant Beck and Corporal Tompkins.

"Bring the men before me," was all the colonel said.

A few minutes later Beck and Tompkins stood in the dreaded presence. Beck repeated the story from beginning to end, taking care to use as few words as possible.

"Show me the articles you brought back from the encampment."

"Yes, sir;" and the old sergeant laid them upon the table.

The colonel passed through his fingers the scarf and the other articles of clothing, and laid them aside. Then he opened the little book and read the words written upon the fly-leaf.

He turned to the waiting officers:

"You will proceed to your duties."

As they left the room he raised his eyes coldly to Beck.

"Fetch this boy."

"Yes, sir."

Tompkins, having received no orders, remained rigid and intensely uncomfortable.

"Go too."

"Yes, sir."

The colonel was alone. He sat with his eyes fixed upon the door.

When again it opened he saw the eyes, the lips, the hair, of the beautiful face of the portrait—saw them in the face of the child who stood between the tall forms of the sergeant and the corporal.

Without the quiver of a muscle he had listened to the story told him of the runaway gipsy lad; without the quiver of a muscle he had examined the articles that lay upon the table before him; without the quiver of a muscle he had recognised the writing of the wife who died from the grief of the loss that had changed the current of his own life. But now his eyes were wet; now his broad breast heaved; now his strong hands shook; now his voice trembled as with open arms he cried aloud—

"My son—my boy—my boy!"

Without waiting for either order or permission, the two soldiers hurried from the room. Soon the tale—of which it was easy to supply the few missing links—had spread all over the barracks.

"Jim Beck," said Tompkins thoughtfully, "did you notice the colonel's face at the last?"

"I did," said Beck shortly.

"You said the other day the colonel hadn't got a heart."

"I did."

“Jim Beck, you lied!”

“I did,” said Beck.

“Likewise you said that the colonel’s heart was froze,” persisted Tompkins.

“So it was,” answered Beck; “but it’s melted now.”

The colonel’s son didn’t join the band, but in due time he joined the regiment, in which he rose to fill his father’s place. From the day he recovered his lost boy Colonel Towers was a different man—kindlier, more sympathetic. He saw and regretted the selfishness into which his hidden grief had betrayed him, and endeavoured so successfully to atone for it that he became one of the best loved officers in the whole service. As for Beck and Tompkins, no one had an envious word to say against the rapid promotion that rewarded them.

“What became of the gipsies?” inquired somebody.

“I don’t know,” answered Reggie Warwick.

“If anybody’s hard up for a moral lesson,” observed Martin Abbott, “I can give him one from Reggie’s concluding remarks about Colonel Towers. It’s this: it’s only a hidden form of beastly selfishness when we let our own sorrows harden our hearts—they ought to soften ’em.”

And the monitor fell asleep with a snore of superior virtue.

THE HIDDEN GOLD.

"I'VE BEEN studying up a tale," observed Harry Huddle, "so as to get it all perfect, till I thought my brain would turn. Even as it is, I haven't been able to master properly the whole of it, but I hit on a dodge out of the difficulty. I turned over the second half to Alf. Bell, who, you know, sleeps here next to me in No. 6. I know the first half pat, and he's splendidly coached up in the second. So I'll tell my whack to-night, and he'll take up the running to-morrow, and finish the story."

"These irregular dodges won't do," said Abbott sternly. "I suppose I must allow the yarn to be split up between you two this time, but in future the rule of 'one boy one complete yarn' must strictly be kept to. Begin at once, Huddle, please."

Thus adjured, Harry Huddle began the story of THE HIDDEN GOLD.

Round a rough deal table, in their hut at Gubbin's Creek, far up in the Australian gold fields, sat three miners in a disconsolate attitude. We shall best acquaint ourselves with the position of their affairs by acquainting ourselves with the nature of their conversation.

"Well, boys," said Rube Nash, the oldest looking man of the three, "I guess things are so bad that they can't get much worse."

"Which cert'nly ain't no sort o' comfort to *me*," remarked Sam Taylor sententiously. "The question is, what's to be done?"

"Early and late we work, harder than any nigger slave ever worked," resumed the first speaker. "And what do we get for it all?—nothing. No gold, no gold."

"Then I asks again," repeated Sam, "what's to be done?"

Both turned to the third digger, a fine stalwart man of about thirty-five, whose looks and manner, as well as his speech, showed him to be possessed of a refinement and education which were wanting in his two companions, honest and sound-hearted though they had proved themselves to be.

"What's to be done, Chamberlain? We've got to the end of our tether."

"And we can't live on air," said Ned Chamberlain slowly, adding rather bitterly, "at all events, it isn't very satisfying, though remarkably cheap. As for me, it isn't that I care so much for myself, boys. What bears me down is the thought of that dear little wife of mine"—here he pointed quickly to a little inner compartment of the hut—"whom I married and brought here seven years ago, and the thought also of the dear little child we both love so well—our tiny Flossie. When I think of them I can't help feeling down-hearted sometimes. I can starve and die myself, I hope, like a man; but I can't see my wife and little one want—it breaks my heart, boys."

"Cheer up, Ned," said Rube Nash. "Maybe we'll have brighter days after all."

When Chamberlain spoke again it was with a firm, steady, and determined voice.

"You have just asked me," he said, "what is to be done."

"That's *the* question," agreed Sam.

"Very well, then, I have a plan; but it can only be carried out with the full consent of both of you, for we're fair and equal partners in everything. Here is the state of matters—we are in desperate straits. Now, first, what is the cause? I'll tell you my idea of it. I say that the cause of all our trouble is to be traced to Michael Beam and Shooting Dick, the two loafers whom we were foolish enough, on their own false pretences, to take into partnership last year. Those two have brought us into trouble all round. They won't work, they won't take their spell of hardship. They have broken diggers' law with us over and over again. We want working men—not lazy, drunken rascals—in this claim."

Rube and Sam rose excitedly to their feet, exclaiming:

"You're right, Ned."

"Moreover," continued Ned, "I believe they're a couple of thieves into the bargain."

"There's them in the camp as says so."

"Here have we been a month near starvation, yet these two can go off to Harper's Gully every night and come back as drunk as they can be. Where do they get the dust to buy the liquor if they don't steal from us? Didn't we take them into partnership without payment?"

"Yes."

"Have they had their fair share of everything?"

"Yes."

"I repeat that they've never done their share of work, they've broken miners' law with us over and over again, and they're always drunk and kicking up rows with the neighbours."

"And perpetually a-shootin' somebody quite unnecessary," added Rube; "pertickler Dick."

"I say they're the cause, of all our troubles. Let's remove the cause and see if things won't mend. We did get something out of the claim, at all events, until they came. Let's turn the skulkers out, neck and crop. Do you agree?"

"We do," shouted Rube and Sam, and the three men shook hands to clinch the agreement.

"A jolly good riddance it'll be too," said Sam joyfully.

"Lucy, Lucy!" cried Ned, and from the inner room his wife came running to him.

"Yes, Ned?" she said cheerfully, though she looked tired and weak and careworn.

"I've good news for you. We've agreed to turn out Michael Beam and Shooting Dick at last—and out they're going."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Ned," said Lucy earnestly; "they've been the terror of my life."

"Heaven knows you have had enough to bear, my lass, since I brought you here," Ned said sorrowfully, looking round him: "a nice place to bring a girl like you to."

"Have I ever complained, Ned?"

"Never, lass. God bless you!"

"Well, don't you trouble about me till I do complain. And when we get back home again in the old country, 'sweet home' will be all the sweeter for our trials and troubles away from it. Oh, I think of it so often, Ned—'Home, sweet home!'"

"And we'll get there yet, wife," said Ned tenderly.

"Perhaps sooner than we think," replied his wife, moving towards the compartment from which she had entered. "Dinner will soon be ready, Ned," she said, as she disappeared. "But—there's very little."

The door of the hut was suddenly flung roughly open, and two rascally-looking fellows, each smoking a dirty pipe, lurched in. They were Beam and Shooting Dick.

"Now then, dinner ready?" demanded Michael Beam.

"Dinner ready?" repeated Shooting Dick.

"Look here, Michael Beam and Mr. Shooting Dick," said Ned Chamberlain calmly and coolly, "we've just been talking about you, and we've made up our minds, all of us, that you two have no more dinners here. Is that right or is it wrong, boys?" he asked, turning to Rube and Sam.

"Right," said they both instantly.

"What d'yer mean?" shouted Beam.

"Think you're a-goin' to turn us out—is that your little game?" sneered the other ruffian.

"Precisely," said Ned. "We've borne with you a long time, but now you've got to go."

"Wait a bit," put in Michael Beam. "If Shooting Dick likes to go out of this claim he's free to do it; but there's no clearing out for Michael Beam."

"Nor for Shooting Dick either," said that worthy valiantly.

"We don't mean to waste any words about the job," was Ned's reply, "for dinner must be almost ready, such as it may be. You brought nothing with you when we took you into partnership in this claim, and you'll take nothing out with you—excepting what you may have stolen."

At this last remark both men started violently, and exchanged quick glances. Ned was watching them narrowly lest they should draw revolvers. This they didn't do; perhaps because they knew his keen eyes were on them. But in a corner of the tent stood some rifles, and with a rapid dash each seized one. Ned looked at Rube and Sam with a slight gesture, and in an instant each of the three had brought out a revolver and levelled it towards Dick and Beam.

"Now clear out," cried Ned, "neck and crop. And put down those rifles."

The two rascals looked at the men confronting them. The six eyes were very steady, the three pistols were held very firmly. Slowly they replaced the rifles, and slowly backed out to the door.

"Listen to me, you three," said Michael Beam. "We're turned out now, but this shall be the worst day's work you've ever done."

"And mark you," said Dick, "you shall pay for it dearly."

"Go," was the only reply, and Ned, Rube, and Sam, with the pistols still in their hands, walked forward and watched the retreat of their late partners till they were out of sight.

"My revolver wasn't loaded," said Ned, as he replaced it in his pocket; "was yours, Sam?"

"No," replied Sam.

"Nor mine either," said Rube Nash.

With a hearty laugh they returned to the middle of the room, where a brief consultation was held between them. Having got rid of their late obnoxious companions, they decided to give the claim another chance, going on working it for the present in the hope of better luck. Their talk was cut short by the entrance of a beautiful little golden-haired child, who sprang gaily into their midst from the inner room.

"Father! father dear!" she cried: and Ned Chamberlain, sitting in one of the few chairs that formed the chief furniture of the place, took her on his lap.

"Well, Flossie," he said, "I suppose dinner's ready. Is that it?"

"It's almost ready," prattled pretty Flossie, "only there's such a little. Mother and I heard you sending away those rough, nasty men just now, and we're so glad. You'll never let them come back, father, will you?"

"No, darling; they shall never come back any more."

"And when you take me far, far away from here, back to your home in England, when you've got very, very rich, there won't be any cruel, rough men there, father, will there? I shan't have to hear any rough, naughty words there, shall I?"

"No, little Flossie, no. Only wait till I've got plenty of bright gold, and then I'll take you right away across all the blue water, to a dear little village in England. I've told you all about it, Flossie, haven't I, many a time?"

"Yes, papa; and all you tell me about it I dream all over again."

"Please Heaven, Flossie, it shall be something more than a dream to you some day."

At that moment a stentorian voice was heard somewhere outside, singing, very loudly, but still melodiously, one of the wild, semi-religious ditties in vogue amongst the many negroes in the mining camp. The voice came nearer and nearer; it was evident that the singer was approaching the tent.

"It's one of those niggers," said Ned. "There are too many of them prowling around the camp—they're a nuisance."

"You mustn't say that, papa," said little Flossie quite earnestly. "There's one great black man here I'm very, very fond of."

The singing suddenly ceased, and the next moment first a great big black face peered through the half-open door of the tent, and then a huge negro entered. He looked about sixty years old, though his hair was as black as his skin. He was more than six feet high, and looked a regular giant.

"Chuck something at him, Rube," said Sam; and Rube Nash at once picked up a chair to throw at the intruder. But Flossie jumped from her father's knee with a scream, and ran to the negro. Then she faced the astonished Rube, holding out her little arm before the darkie protectingly.

"You shan't throw things at him," she cried.

"Beg pardon," stammered Nash, lowering the chair. "Didn't know he was a pal of yours, missie."

"Well, he *is* a pal of mine," retorted Flossie, "and I'll protect him!"

"Why, it's that old nigger who plays with the child all day whenever he gets a chance," said her father. "What do you want, darkie?"

"How you do, boss, eh?" was the negro's grinning response; "how you do? My name Hickory Joe."

He glanced wistfully at Flossie.

"Massa, me want to kiss de little piccaninny. Me bring her pretty flowers—look:" and he held out a bunch of blooms which he must have wandered far enough away from the camp to gather, poor fellow.

"What do you want to kiss her for?" asked Chamberlain; but Flossie exclaimed—

"Oh, yes; let me kiss old Hickory Joe. He often plays with me, and tells me such funny stories. I was beginning to tell you about him just now. I like to kiss the pretty black man."

Hickory Joe lifted the child in his great arms and kissed her greedily, just as Mrs. Chamberlain appeared again. She watched him with her little one, and spoke very softly and kindly.

"Ned," she asked, "what does the negro want?"

Hickory Joe answered for himself, addressing the three diggers.

"You take me on to work wid you. Me work in dis claim before—long time before."

"Some of these niggers know more of the secrets of these gold diggings than all us white 'uns put together," muttered Sam Taylor.

Ned Chamberlain looked hard at the applicant for work.

"You say you worked here before, a long time ago; did you get any gold?"

All waited anxiously for the negro's reply.

"Yes, massa—plenty gold. We all got gold."

"Then what did you do with it?"

"Drank him."

"Drank gold?"

"Yes, gem'men," replied Hickory Joe. "All got gold. Hickory Joe got gold. But in d'ose times Joe liked de whiskey and de rum, same as de udders, so when we started to Melbourne to take de ship, we all drunk. Me drunk—big drunk—very long drunk—so long dat when I wake up all my drinking comrades gone, and dey take my gold wid dem—all gone. Poor Hickory Joe ill—starve. Den I listen to de little voice here in my heart dat make me remember de good words I heard long time before—not to drink. So poor Joe starve and starve, but he never drink, never drink any mo'. Den I get strong again, and work. But I come back again to look at de old spot, and I see you all work, and I see de pretty piccaninny."

"Upon my word, boys," said Ned, "we might do worse than take him on. We shall have work for another hand now. But come along inside, and we'll talk it over. Sit down, darkie, and we'll let you know."

The three men entered the inner apartment, and Hickory Joe, with Flossie clinging tightly to his hand, walked up to Lucy.

"Dis your piccaninny, missis?" he said; "dis your little piccaninny?"

"Yes, Joe, she's mine," replied Lucy kindly.

"Me love de piccaninny, missis; me love de little piccaninny. You know why I love de piccaninny?"

"No, Joe. Unless it be that all good men love little children."

"Missis, I was a slave once, before I ran away to be free. I loved my wife, I loved my child. I see my wife beat and die; I see my child beat and sold, and all my heart change to stone. De day came when I was free, but I had no wife, no little child to love. So when I see de piccaninny, de old love seemed to come back again, and I love your child for de sake of mine dat I shall never see again."

"Oh, poor Hickory Joe!" cried Flossie. "You *shall* love me, and I will always love *you*."

"Come, Lucy," her husband was heard calling, "and bring Flossie."

The child turned round as her mother led her away, and waved her hand to Hickory Joe, with a promise that she would soon come back.

"Wonder if dey take dis nigger on," soliloquised the blackamoor when left to himself. "Dey take him quick enough if dey knew what dis nigger knows. Ho, ho! if dey knew what dis nigger saw one night! Saw Massa Beam and Shooting Dick take de gold—de great big lumps of gold, de great nuggets, out of dis very digging. Ha, ha! how dey creep along! But dis nigger, he see, he know—he know where dey hide de gold!"

"Wait till you hear my finish to-morrow night," said Alf. Bell from the next bed.

THE HIDDEN GOLD.

(CONTINUED BY ALF. BELL.)

His eyes fell on a well-scraped meat bone on the table. This he took in one hand, and with the other produced a pocket-knife from his coat.

"Me carve little horse for de piccaninny," he muttered, sitting down and commencing to cut away at the bone. "Dat please de piccaninny. P'raps she smile when I done give her de little horse."

His quick fingers were not long in producing the semblance of a horse from the unlikely material he held in his left palm; but after some minutes his labours were interrupted by the "piccaninny" herself, who persisted in climbing to his knee, and resuming her conversation with him.

"What funny hair you have," was her first remark, as her little white fingers pulled at his black wool. "It's all such funny little black curls. And you can't think how black your face is. Does any of it ever come off?"

"No, Missie Flossie. Dis nigger so frightened when he born dat he done go right away black in de face and all over him."

"Never mind, Hickory Joe. If you're very, very good, Joe, I daresay when you die you'll be changed into a beautiful *white* angel."

"You t'ink so, eh? How long de little piccaninny been here?"

"Oh, all my whole life—seven years. But" (here Flossie crept a little closer, and twined her arm half round his neck) "I'll tell you a very, very, very great secret. By-and-by, father is going to take me far, far away from this rough, wicked place—far away across the great big blue waves to the little, tiny village in England where *he* was born. Oh, it's such a beautiful village, Joe, you can't think. All about it are the green fields—the dear green fields I see in my dreams. And in the summer-time they are covered with daisies and yellow buttercups. And father says that in the beautiful trees the birds sing, Oh, so sweetly, all round the little white cottages. It isn't like this rough, stony, hot place, Joe."

"No, no," said Joe earnestly; "not like dis place, not like dis place."

"Ah, and there's something else there, Joe," continued the child. "There's a little church there, with green ivy climbing all up the old grey walls. And on Sunday all the people go there, Joe, and the minister reads from the Bible; and they sing hymns together, and they all kneel down and fold their hands, and pray together. Father cried, Hickory Joe, when he told me how he used to go to the little village church when he was quite little himself, like me. He cried—do you know what made him cry, Hickory Joe?"

"Yes, Flossie, I t'ink I know de t'oughts dat make Massa Chamberlain cry."

"The best of all will be, Joe, I shan't hear any more bad words like the diggers use here, and I shan't have to see all the rough sights that I can't help seeing here. It will be all different when father takes me home—takes me to the dear English home which the angels bring me dreams of every night."

"When he take you?" asked Hickory Joe. "When Massa Chamberlain take de piccaninny home?"

"When he's found plenty of gold, Joe. He's poor, very poor, now; and first he must find some gold."

The negro put the child hastily to the ground, and sprang excitedly to his feet.

"Gold!" he shouted. "Massa Chamberlain want gold to take de little piccaninny home! I tell him—I know—I tell him where find de gold. Missie Flossie, if Hickory Joe tell where to find de gold, and make your fa'der rich man, happy man, will you t'ink of Joe—pray for poor Hickory Joe, in dat little church?"

"Yes, yes; oh, yes, Joe."

"Den I tell where to find de gold. Piccaninny go home now—Hickory Joe send her home—Hickory Joe show Massa Chamberlain de gold, de gold, de hidden gold!" he shouted.

Out rushed Ned, Rube, Sam, and Lucy.

"What on earth is the matter with you, darkie?" cried Ned to the gesticulating black.

"De gold, massa! De piccaninny tell me you want de gold to take de piccaninny home. Listen, you all. Dis was once de bed of a big river, and de gold was washed down from de big mountain long ago, before de world was made. De gold here is at de top, not down where you dig and dig. Dere is

little dust, but here and dere big lumps. Dat what we find years back—and some of dese lumps, Dick and de udder t'ief, dey find 'em. I come to see de piccaninny, and I see Beam and Shooting Dick, and I watch dem. In de night time dey lift de great lumps of gold—so heavy dat sometimes dey fall. Hickory Joe watch, watch and follow, and he see where dey hide de gold. Hickory Joe show you. Here, quite close."

"What? Gold!" cried the three miners.

"Quite close," repeated Joe.

"Boys, I believe the nigger speaks truth," said Ned, seizing a spade, Sam and Rube following his example. "Lead on, Joe;" and, headed by the negro, out ran the madly excited men.

Lucy never knew how long they were absent. Clasping her child to her breast, she waited, with a heart so full of hope and longing, fear and doubt, that it welled over in the tears that ran down her pale cheeks. At last a tremendous "Hurray!" burst upon her ears. She sprang to the door and looked out. Then she too, but so much more feebly, cried "Hurrah," for with them they were bringing back—the gold!

For the next few minutes the hut was the scene of the wildest hubbub. Lucy was crying louder than ever, though her tears were all tears of happiness now. Ned and his partners kept on shaking hands with each other and Hickory Joe. With everybody so happy around her, and understanding sufficiently what had taken place, Flossie was clapping her hands with glee.

At last the little group regained a measure of composure, and hastily settled the following plans. It was decided that it would not be safe to take the precious earth containing the gold to Melbourne without the protection of the armed escort provided by Government. That escort was to start to-morrow from Cedar Creek, three miles off. Ned, Sam, and Rube, together—for travelling in the neighbourhood of Gubbin's Creek was notoriously unsafe—must proceed to Cedar Creek at once, and arrange to meet the escort, with their newly-found treasure, the next day. Till then the nuggets had better be buried again for security's sake. Their claim was in an isolated spot, but they were subject to visits from the owners of other claims.

So they all set to with a will, and dug a hole under the table in the centre of the larger room of the hut, in which hole they put their treasure-trove and then filled it in again. This done, off started the three partners to give notice to the escort at Cedar Creek, leaving Hickory Joe in charge. In consequence of the number of suspicious characters known to be lurking in the

neighbourhood of the camp, each loaded his revolver, chiefly lest anything should delay their return till dusk.

They had not been gone half-an-hour when the negro exclaimed to Lucy, looking towards the cluster of tents and huts in the near distance, "What dat commotion about? See—right away down d'ere. I believe it am de escort come here widout being fetched. Sometimes dey do."

"I'll go and see, Joe," replied Lucy. "If it is the escort, my husband must have missed them, I'm afraid, or he would be back by this time. If so, I'll hurry on after him, and bring him and the others home."

So saying, she hastily left the cabin. She found that things had happened as she surmised, and made the best speed she could to overtake Ned and the others.

Hickory Joe, Flossie, and the gold were left alone in the solitary hut. The darkie and his little "pal" chattered away to their hearts' content.

"You soon go home now, piccaninny," said Hickory Joe. "You not have to stop at Gubbin's Creek much longer. You soon see de English village, and say de prayer in de pretty church you tell me about."

"Yes, Joe. What a wonderful thing gold is, isn't it? Just fancy, Hickory Joe, gold can take us all the way from here to England."

Outside the cabin, which they had seen Ned and the others leave, stood two evil-faced men, listening to every word. They were Beam and Dick.

"D'yer hear?" whispered the first, "they're talking about the gold."

"Hickory Joe," prattled away little Flossie, "you don't know how I love you for telling father where those wicked men had hidden the gold they stole."

With an oath Shooting Dick muttered, "The nigger spied on us, and has told the secret."

"We'll have the gold again yet," responded Beam fiercely, "and his black blood into the bargain. There's not a moment to lose. Quick, Dick—seize him."

With a bound the two desperadoes sprang into the log hut. Striking Hickory Joe with all their force together on the temples, they felled him to the ground. He rose again instantly, and a furious struggle commenced. But Shooting Dick spied a spade on the ground, and with one fearful blow struck the poor African again to the earth—this time stunned.

"Bind him, Mike," he cried; "bind him quick."

Picking up a heavy coil of rope, they dragged the fallen man to his feet, and fastened him securely to an upright post supporting the roof. He recovered consciousness only to find himself helpless to move hand or foot.

"Oh, don't hurt poor Hickory Joe," sobbed Flossie; "don't."

"Hold your tongue, young 'un," said Beam, "and let the nigger hear what we have to say. Now then, you black thief, time is short, so listen. It's true, is it? We found just now the gold was gone, and when we saw you here we guessed you'd laid your thieving hands on it. We saw you talking to those precious rascals, Nash and Taylor and Ned Chamberlain."

"My father is not a rascal," little Flossie burst out; "how dare you call him one?"

"Here, Mike," said Shooting Dick, "we'd better tie the kid somewhere, or she'll be running to the camp to give an alarm."

"Sling her up in there," replied Michael Beam, pointing to the other room; "and tie a handkerchief round her mouth."

Dick promptly followed these instructions, and returned to his companion. Then they both turned their sole attention to poor Joe.

"Where's the gold? You've either got it, or know where the others have put it. It's too heavy to carry far. Where's the gold?"

No answer came from the negro's bleeding lips.

Taking each a long length of rope, they showered blow after blow upon his head and body till their own arms ached. Only a few low groans escaped from their helpless victim.

"Now will you tell us?"

Shooting Dick clenched his fist, and struck the silent hero full in the mouth.

"Now will you tell us?"

Faintingly came one word in reply—

"No."

"You won't tell us?"

"No."

"Then you shall die."

He retreated a few paces, drew a revolver, and faced Hickory Joe.

"Will you tell? Once!"

"No."

"Will you tell? Twice!"

"No."

"For the last time, will you tell?"

"No."

"Then die."

And Shooting Dick fired. Joe was wounded, for fresh blood spurted from his great broad chest.

"You fool," said Beam; "if you kill the nigger how can we get the gold?"

With a scream Flossie ran between them. She had freed herself, though the handkerchief with which she had been gagged hung still round her neck.

"Oh, you wicked men, you have killed poor Joe! Oh poor Joe—poor, poor Joe!"

Beam walked to the wounded man.

"Guess you're off your aim, Dick. You've only wounded him." Then to Hickory Joe he said, "Will you tell us now where the gold is?"

More faintly than ever, but still defiantly, came the reply—

"No."

Then, as he saw them lay rough hands once more on Flossie, Joe cried:

"Massa, for de love of Heaven, don't hurt de child."

"What do you care about the kid for?" asked Dick.

"Because me love her," said poor Joe simply. "For de sake of Heaven, massas, kill me, but spare de child."

"Dick," said Beam, "I see something in this." He took hold of Flossie, and stood with her facing Joe. "We'll soon see how much you love her, you canting black hound. Here's the piccaninny you say you love. If you don't tell us where the gold is, *I'll cut her throat*!"

He brought a bowie knife from his pocket and held it to the child's white neck.

"Will you tell us now?"

"Yes. To save the piccaninny me tell you. Dere!"

Hickory Joe bowed his bleeding head towards the table, which Beam and Dick kicked away. They turned up again the newly-dug soil, and saw that the truth had been told them. They gave a shout of triumphant joy, and then Shooting Dick, speaking very quickly, said—

"This time we'll take it farther away. But as to the nigger and the child, it's our lives or theirs. If we spare them they'll put the diggers on our track. We must kill them both and throw the bodies in the river where they'll tell no tales."

"The gold and our revenge—the two things we wanted," returned Beam hoarsely.

"You finish the nigger, I'll kill the child."

Piteously Hickory Joe cried:

"You have de gold. Spare de little piccaninny!"

But already Shooting Dick's pistol was levelled at his head, while Beam held again in his hand the knife he had laid on the table.

No one saw that face at the entrance to the hut, the face of Ned Chamberlain. Not a cry escaped his white lips. Two reports rang out from his revolver, and Michael Beam and Shooting Dick rolled to the earth, both dead.

Ned and Lucy, and Rube Nash and Sam Taylor, were all inside a moment afterwards. Lucy caught the fainting form of little Flossie to her heart, while the men unlashed Hickory Joe. Ned tenderly supported his head as he half carried him into the adjoining room, and laid him upon Lucy's bed.

Lucy, with her child in her arms, and the other two men, grouped around him.

"What is all this?" cried Chamberlain. "How came those murderers here?"

Very slowly, very softly, and with many pauses, Hickory Joe said:

"Massas, dey find out about de gold. Dey say to me to tell where is de gold. But I say 'no.' Dey beat me, and hit me. But I say 'no.' Dey shoot me, but I say 'no.' Dey bring de piccaninny to me, and hold de knife to her neck.

It was de gold or de piccaninny. Hickory Joe dying now. He wouldn't give de gold to save him life, only give it up for de little piccaninny."

They knew too well the look that was settling on the shivering black face, and Ned and Rube and Sam bared their heads. Lucy knelt. Hickory Joe's shaking fingers touched the curls on Flossie's golden head.

Still more softly, still more slowly, with still more pauses, were spoken Hickory Joe's last words.

"Now de piccaninny will go to de English village after all. I can see her playing in de green fields. De piccaninny is playing in de green fields far, far away, gadering daisies in her little hands, and hearing de birds sing in de green branches. And she not have to hear any rough, wicked words now, or see any rough, wicked sights now, and de summer sun is shining on de piccaninny's pretty hair. See her in de little church now—see her so plain in de little church wid de green ivy climbing all up de old grey walls—and de piccaninny is kneeling on de floor praying to de Great Massa,—'bless—poor old—black Joe.'"

"I'm saying it now, Joe," wept Flossie. "Listen."

"How brave and true a heart has ceased to beat," said Lucy, as Ned Chamberlain closed the patient eyes for ever.

"Aye," said Ned; "a Heart with Hidden Gold."

BIG BEN; OR, THE BOYS WHO BOUGHT A LIFE-BOAT.

"THE yarn I am going to spin to you," remarked the tenant of the seventh bed, "is a splendid one."

Five boys were seized with one uncontrollable impulse; five pillows were hurled with one aim from five directions. The next moment indignant howls from Ralph Weedon proclaimed that the aim had been reached.

"Serve you jolly well right," said Martin Abbott, as he ordered Ralph to throw back his bolster. "Bragging won't do here; confine yourself to telling your story, and leave us to decide upon its merits."

In a much more subdued voice, Ralph Weedon proceeded as follows:—

My last school was situated in a very wild and romantic place called Eastborough, far up on the stormy East coast of England, exposed to all the wild breezes of the German Ocean.

Eastborough itself was only just a little cluster of a few fishermen's cottages, the nearest coast-town being Westborough, about half-a-dozen miles away.

A HUGE WAVE LIFTED HER FOR A MOMENT.

Eastborough College was a big school, with generally about eighty boarders in it, most of us coming from one or two large manufacturing towns a short distance inland. The head-master was Dr. Prestage, not at all a bad sort of old chap, unless you rubbed him up the wrong way, which some of us were constantly doing.

The principal boy at the school in my time, and my particular chum, was Briggs major. This Dick Briggs was a fellow who would be a credit and an honour to any school. He was the biggest and the oldest boy in the place, and took the lead in everything. He could thrash anybody, and was our champion in football, cricket, and everything. Whatever was on, Briggs major took the lead in it. We got to believe in any movement being bound to be successful so long as he had a hand in it. But he started one scheme so big, so bold, so daring, that it took our breath away—we *couldn't* believe that it could be carried through. For days before he broke it to us we had noticed that he looked uncommonly thoughtful. So much so, that Jenkins remarked to me:—

"Something's up with Briggs major."

"I'm afraid so," said I. "I noticed yesterday that he didn't touch his second helping of pudding. I shall try to sit next him to-day, for he *might* leave his pudding again."

"Something seems weighing on his mind."

"There *must* be," I agreed, with a growing hope of his pudding weighing on my chest.

That same night Briggs broached his dazzling idea to us other fellows—Jenkins, Jawkins, Mole, Butterwick, and myself—who shared his bedroom. We all knew Dick to be capable of great things, but, as I said before the idea of such an undertaking as he had thought of now took our breath away—simply staggered us.

He began by saying what a dangerous place for all passing ships was the craggy, rocky coast-line of Eastborough. That first point there could be no disputing. Every winter there were wrecks. Ships got driven in, and once they touched the far-stretching, low-lying rocks that bristled seawards from the beach, there was no hope for them. When the tide was out, we used to scramble and play on these rocks, sometimes almost a mile from the shore, so we knew all about them.

Briggs' second point was that Eastborough possessed no life-boat. The nearest was at a station miles away the other side of Westborough. His second point was as correct as his first. So there could be no doubt was his third point, which was that Eastborough *ought* to have a life-boat.

"I've made every inquiry," went on Briggs major rapidly, "and have had a letter from the Royal National Life-boat Institution itself. A life-boat—just the boat—costs five hundred pounds. Then there are the fittings, and the house to keep it in, and other things. These cost another five hundred pounds. But if anybody gives the first five hundred for the boat, the Institution provides everything else, and the boat is the gift of the chap planking down the five hundred. It's *his* boat, and he gives it to the Institution, christening it by any name he likes. Or, of course, any number of fellows may club together, and the thing works in the same way. My grown-up brother is in the Honourable Artillery Company, and they gave a life-boat, which is stationed at Walton-on-the-Naze a jolly little place a long way down the coast. *We'll do what those soldiers did. We'll start a fund in this school, subscribe five hundred pounds, present a life-boat to the nation to be stationed here, and call her the 'Schoolboys*.'"

It was a bitterly cold night in the middle of November, but I remember as well as possible that as I grasped this stupendous idea I sat up in bed in a state of bewildering amazement.

Five hundred pounds? *We* raise five hundred pounds? If *this* was what had been weighing on the mind of Briggs major, no wonder he neglected

even his pudding! If only this idea held sway over him for a few weeks longer, that second helping was mine to the end of the term.

A brief but profound silence was broken by the voice of Butterwick, who said firmly, "Briggs major has gone mad!"

"Hear, hear," exclaimed Jenkins, Jawkins, and Mole.

"Just shut up about being mad," roared Dick indignantly, before I had time to speak myself. "I'm not cracked, but only in earnest—just simple downright earnest. Let's reason it out," he went on more quietly, "and you'll see that the thing isn't so impossible as it looks. In the first place, a committee has to be formed, with a chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer. Then the subscription list is opened, and appeals made all round for the coin. I've learnt all the ropes. Now, in our case, let's see how much we in this room, as the prime movers in the scheme, can make up. I've got one shilling and sevenpence. Butterwick, how much money have you got?"

"Ninepence ha'p'ny," replied Butterwick.

"Jawkins?"

"Eightpence," said Jawkins, after stretching out for his trousers and rattling some coppers as he counted them.

"Jenkins, how's your banking account?"

"One bob," said Jenkins proudly, after going through *his* pockets.

"I've got fivepence," announced Mole, after a similar process of calculation.

"And I'm worth tenpence ha'p'ny," said I.

"Total," summed up Briggs, "five shillings and fourpence. Well, I'll subscribe my one-and-seven and be chairman of the committee. Jenkins, you'll have to part with your bob and be secretary. Weedon, with his tenpence ha'p'ny, will be treasurer. Butterwick, Jawkins, and Mole will be the committee-men."

At last this enthusiasm carried us all away, and before we went to sleep the Eastborough Life-boat Local Committee had been formed, and five and fourpence subscribed. A proposal to postpone the movement till after Christmas was instantly crushed by the chairman.

"Not at all," he said. "The sooner this school covers itself with glory the better. Besides, with the fund already started, and the names of old Prestage, the vicar, and a few others added to the committee and their subscriptions

booked, the holidays will be the very time to make our parents and grown-up friends shell out to swell the amount. It'll take us no end of a time to make up five hundred pounds; but we'll collect everywhere, and do it somehow."

The next day we called a general meeting in the hamper shed, and put the life-boat scheme before the other fellows. Public feeling ran high in favour of it, and subscriptions poured in to the amount of six and tenpence. Thirteen pocket-knives, two hundred and ninety-seven marbles—many of 'em glass 'uns—and "a number of other articles too numerous to mention"—my father is an auctioneer, and I've cribbed this phrase from one of his catalogues—were also handed over to me as treasurer, after being duly booked by the secretary.

As soon as it was "Lights Out" that evening, we held a committee meeting in our bedroom.

It was just the night to consider a life-boat scheme; black as ink, except when the forked lightning flashed from the sky, to be followed by the rumbling roar of the thunder. Great hailstones rattled against our window-panes, and we could hear the wind that dashed them there shrieking and howling outside.

The storm grew worse and worse. To go to sleep was impossible. We all lay awake, talking in whispers of ships and sailors at sea. Every now and then Briggs major walked to the window and peered out into the darkness. Once he opened the window—how he shivered as the cold wind rushed in!—and exclaimed excitedly—"I can hear the waves beating on the rocks!"

At last we heard twelve o'clock strike. Briggs couldn't rest in bed. He got up and dressed himself. Butterwick and I followed his example. The storm was wilder and fiercer than ever.

At last, above the raging gale, we heard a sound we hadn't heard before—a sound that was repeated once, twice, three times—a sound that came from the sea—the booming of a gun.

"There's a ship on the rocks," cried Briggs. "They're firing the minute gun."

Out from their beds sprang the other three, and bundled on their clothes. We all stood crowded round the window. Again and again we heard the firing of that gun. How close the wreck must be! I don't know what time it was, I don't know how long—it wasn't long—we talked about it before we

did it—I scarcely know how we did it; but we did do it, and Briggs major began it.

"I can't stand it any more," he cried. "I'm going down to the beach!"

We all went, as hard as we could pelt. We first made a sheet rope, and dropped safely to the ground. Once clear of the premises, and who could stop us?

But should we get clear? There was one danger—one thing that might bring about detection. We should have to pass the kennel of "Big Ben," Dr. Prestage's huge Newfoundland dog. If he raised an alarm, we were done for. But he knew us all well; we used to take him to swim in the sea and play with us on the rocks.

"Speak to him all the time till we're well outside," ordered Briggs. "Good dog, good dog—Ben, Ben, Big Ben!"

The dodge succeeded; we spoke to him, patted him on the head, and ordered him to lie down again. He licked our hands, and wagged his bushy tail, and obeyed us.

What a sight when we reached the beach! The few men of the place, and all the women, and even some of the children, were clustered together. The men looked very grim, and the women very white. All their eyes were strained seaward, fixed on the awful sight—it wasn't so dark now—of a ship on the rocks. A lot of her rigging had gone by the board; the crew were clinging to what remained.

"She's breaking up," said a fisherman.

"She can't last long now," added another, as a huge wave lifted her for a moment, to dash her keel on the crags again the next.

"Where are her boats?" we cried.

"Washed away," somebody replied, "and one swamped trying to make for the shore. Nothing but a life-boat could live in a sea like this."

"A life-boat, yes," said Briggs major bitterly. Just then his eyes fell on a large coil of life-line lying close to the group.

"Can no one swim off to the wreck with this?" he cried. "I've heard of such things being done."

"So have we, governor," said the fisherman, with a laugh that had no mirth in it. "Three of us have tried it already, and almost lost our lives by being dashed against the rocks before our mates could haul us in again."

With a strange, sudden light on his face, Briggs turned eagerly round to me, and seized my arm with a grip.

"Ralph," he said, excitedly and very quickly, "I've an idea. You're the fastest runner in the school?"

"Yes," I said. "I won the challenge cup."

"Then run as you never ran before. Go back and fetch Big Ben down here. Human lives instead of a silver cup may be your reward."

Like a flash, his meaning struck me. Without a word, I turned and was off. When I got back with the dog, I was panting for breath. I couldn't stand. I couldn't speak. I tumbled down.

Quick hands helped Briggs to secure one end of the line round Big Ben's neck. Then he and Butterwick, Mole, Jenkins, Jawkins, and several of the men waded and scrambled along the slippery rocks—sometimes almost washed off—till they reached the nearest standing-point to the wreck, Big Ben running with them. Dawn was breaking now, and the figures of the poor sailors could be plainly seen, as they clung to the wreck, shouting for help.

I picked myself up and joined the group around the dog. Thank God he understood our words and gestures, he seemed to understand even those despairing shouts and signs from the men on the ship, towards which, with a terrific bound as he rushed into the water, he swam on and on. Sometimes we saw him, and sometimes we couldn't. Sometimes we still hoped he'd do it, and sometimes we gave up the hope.

But at last a tremendous shout went up. Every one of us helped to swell it into a perfect roar of joy. Brave Big Ben had reached the wreck—a great wave had almost washed him aboard—strong hands had seized him, and pulled him on deck.

Our end of that line was made fast to the jetty. What the men called a "cradle" was swung on the stretched line, and every man on that wrecked vessel—which turned out to be a Norwegian barque called the *Robert H. Dahl*, bound for the Thames with timber, came ashore—saved. The last man to land was the captain; the first man to land brought Big Ben with him.

After those bolsters that were chucked at me when I started this yarn, I don't exactly care to describe the scene. Briggs major was hoisted shoulder high, and so was I. As a matter of fact, we boys and Big Ben were the centre of a cheering crowd. As the crowd moved up from the beach, Briggs and I almost toppled down, for whom should we see coming towards us but Dr.

Prestage! As he caught sight of his six pupils—in such strange company, and all "out of bounds" without permission—he stopped dead.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

About a score of voices told him. I believe that if any suspicion had been entertained that he would punish us, he would have been lynched on the spot. But every one of the six out-of-bounders felt that he had no idea of the sort. On the contrary, I was certain that I saw lumps in his throat as he bent down to fondle Big Ben's dripping head. As a matter of fact, he rewarded, instead of punishing us—rewarded us by working with us heart and soul on our Life-boat Committee. We were all sent to bed to have a sleep after our exertions over-night, and as soon as we woke we held another committee meeting, at which a resolution was passed unanimously that the doctor be taken into our confidence at once. So we sent in our names for an interview with him, and Briggs major put the whole thing before him:

"So you have actually formed your committee and started the fund?" said the doctor.

"Yes, sir."

"What is the total amount of the subscriptions already received?"

"Twelve shillings and twopence, sir," I answered proudly.

Dr. Prestage tried hard not to smile, but he only partially succeeded.

"You may call it fifty pounds twelve shillings and twopence, Mr. Treasurer," he said, "for I will give the pounds. If you will add my name and that of the vicar to the committee, no doubt we shall soon succeed in raising the five hundred."

As soon as we got outside his study we gave him three cheers.

He and the vicar took the matter up, and published an account of how Big Ben saved eleven lives. They wrote letters to the papers, and private letters to various big people. The money rolled in, in large sums and in small. The captain and crew of the *Robert H. Dahl* were amongst the subscribers. Every boy in the school put his name down for something, and got more out of his friends at home. During almost the whole time that the excitement lasted, I came in for Briggs major's second helping of pudding.

Soon after we returned to school from the Christmas holidays, we had more than the five hundred pounds—sufficient over that sum to buy Big Ben a silver collar (with a suitable inscription) such as no dog ever wore before. We sent the money to the Royal National Life-boat Institution, and in due

time down came our boat. The ceremony of launching her was the grandest sight the world has ever seen! Briggs major, Butterwick, Jenkins, Jawkins, Mole, and I all walked in the procession.

That's the tale of the "Boys who bought a Life-boat." I could have told the story better if I hadn't been interrupted at the start by bolsters.

"You've spun the yarn very well," said Martin Abbott, "although you needn't have mixed up so much pudding with it. Did you christen the life-boat the 'Schoolboys'?"

"No fear," replied Ralph Weedon; "we called her the 'BIG BEN.'"

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

"Now that my turn has come" (said Arthur Barlow from the eighth bed on the right-hand side of the big dormitory), "I'm going to tell you of an awfully stirring adventure that happened to me when I went home from this school last Christmas holidays. I've often been tempted to tell about it before, privately, but I'm glad that I managed to bottle the yarn up for to-night. Now that the time has arrived, I pull out the cork, and pop goes the story."

"You talk like a ginger-beer bottle," criticised the monitor.

"Let's hope his tale will be a *fizzing* one," said Higgins, who was fond of a pun, however bad.

"I wish you fellows would hear my yarn first, and make your remarks afterwards," grumbled Barlow, who proceeded, without further interruption, with his narrative, which he entitled, "A Dark Night's Work."

I always think that breaking up for Christmas is the most exciting break-up of the year. Besides many of the usual joys of all holidays, visions of roast beef, plum pudding, tarts and mincepies, fill the soul.

(*"Hear, hear," cried Ralph Weedon, with much emotion.*)

As I followed my box out of Salwey House on the 18th of last December, the usual pleasing anticipations occupied all my thoughts. Between the dry bread of past miseries and miseries to come was to be sandwiched a delicious slice of ham in the form of six weeks' vacation. Excuse the poetry of this idea.

(*"Splendid simile" murmured Weedon.*)

I had first to get to Liverpool Street Station, and then book again from there to Norwich. Between the short journey and the long one I had about an hour to wait. I decided to spend it in eating something, so made my way into the Refreshment Room.

(*"Ah!" exclaimed Weedon again, with a longing sigh.*)

When the Norwich train was almost ready to start a porter came and warned me. I hastily finished another pork-pie, put a few trifles in my pocket for fear I might suffer hunger on the journey in case the line was blocked anywhere, and followed the porter, who had saved me a nice corner seat in a second-class carriage. Just before the train started, I had the presence of mind to remember that I had better lay in a three-shilling luncheon basket. So I called the porter again and gave him the money to buy me one, with a couple more bottles of ginger-beer.

We were soon tearing away across the country in the twilight, which rapidly darkened into night. I filled in the time between London and Chelmsford by proving that the food basket was all right and the ginger-pop in good condition. At Chelmsford all the other passengers in the carriage got out, so when the train started again I stretched out my legs and made myself comfortable, the rumble of the wheels gradually settling down into our celebrated school song:

"Holloa, boys, holloa, hip hurray,
For it is our going-home day!"

which those wheels seemed to sing louder and louder.

I had three things to help me bear the tediousness of my lonely journey —a large sausage roll, one remaining bottle of ginger-beer, and an awfully exciting book called "Gory-handed Jack, or the Blood-covered Highwayman," which I'd smuggled into school and brought away with me. It was a story of murder and crime and daring deeds of evil of all sorts, mixed up with impossible adventures and incredible escapes from justice. I read, ate, and drank, all at the same time—a sentence, bite, and sip—sip, bite, and sentence. At last all three were finished: book, roll, and bottle. But I was surprised to find we were pulling up at Ipswich—I had been so absorbed in "Gory-handed Jack" that I hadn't noticed how the time had flown. Nobody got in my carriage, so I knew that I should have it to myself for the rest of the journey, because we weren't going to stop again till we reached Norwich. I had nothing to occupy myself with now, as we rushed on again, except my thoughts and the sing-sing-sing of the wheels, which seemed to have changed their tune, and to be shrieking some of the wild choruses of the murdering highwaymen of my book, and repeating the cries of their victims. My box was in the guard's van, but in the rack above my head the porter had placed the portmanteau which contained the overflow of my baggage. I brought it down and fixed it in the corner of the carriage seat, so as to serve as a pillow. Then I laid myself out at full length upon my back

along the seat, and closed my peepers. But I seemed, the next moment, to receive an electric shock, which made me spring up with a start. I felt my heart beating wildly. My eyes were glaring. My blood seemed to cease flowing. My "fascinated gaze was rooted with horror" (that's a quotation from "Gory-handed Jack") upon—a human foot! Now there's nothing very terrible about a human foot in the ordinary way—unless, of course, it's kicking you—but to be alone at night in an express train and suddenly to see a foot protruded from underneath the seat opposite to you is enough to try anybody's nerves. And that's what I had to see—a heavily-booted man's foot thrust out into sight from the darkness of the space beneath the seat opposite to mine. After the foot came the leg to which it was attached. Then another foot and another leg appeared—and a man rolled himself from under the seat. I couldn't speak, I couldn't cry out. I could only look at that man. I don't want to tell you what he was like—he was just the most awful-looking villain I'd ever seen outside the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's. Let that be sufficient—spare me from giving the details of his murderous-looking face. He coolly sat in the opposite corner, and glared at me. I don't know how long it was before he spoke. When he did speak, it was in a very thick, husky voice.

"Don't you ask me no questions," he said, "or I'll chuck you out o' winder."

I opened my lips, but couldn't force out any words—even if I'd known what to say.

"What I want you to know," went on the stowaway, "I'll tell you without no questions. What you want to know is what you've got to do. Just this. In the nearest first-class carriage to this carriage there's a old gent as looks well worth robbing—and of course murdering if necessary. I'm going to crawl along the foot-board to that first-class carriage, and before I leave it that old gent's wallybles will be mine. He'll have to be knocked on the head in any case—to kill or stun as may be—because, after this first job's over, I've spotted a invalid young man and two old women as'll have to be done in turn. They're in two other carriages. Now two chaps is always better than one in jobs of this kind, 'specially when one has been on the drink as I have. You're a hefty young fellow and'll just suit. So get up, open that door, and foller me."

"Follow you!" I screamed, finding my voice at last.

"Foller me. That's your ticket. You've got to come along o' me and take part in the work. You're strong enough to strangle both the old women, and

may come in very handy with the other pair. You can throttle while I robs."

"You shan't stir from this carriage," I cried, and made a dash for the bell that would stop the train.

"Ring that bell, and I'll wring your neck."

That was all he said with his tongue—but it was nothing compared with what he said with his eyes, the look in which seemed to freeze my very blood. I sunk back into my seat with a groan. I think he began talking again, but I could only see—only see his lips moving—I couldn't hear. The next thing I remember is making a desperate effort to pull myself together. For the second time I sprung on my feet and rushed for the bell.

He knocked me down, and held the glittering blade of a long, dagger-like knife to my throat. I think I fainted, and don't know how long it was before I found myself listening again to his harsh, horrid, grating voice. There seem to be lapses in my memory, and confusion, so I must tell you what happened as it appeared to me to happen.

He had flung the carriage door open, and now stood over me with one hand grasping the scruff of my neck; in the other was the knife with which he had threatened my life.

"I can't trust you," he hissed in my ear. "Get out first—walk along the splash-board towards the engine. I shall be close behind you. Stop when I tell you, and do what I tell you, or I'll run the knife through your body. Don't tremble like that, or I'll do it now."

My next recollection is of crawling along the foot-board of that express train, rushing along in the blackness of the night. Just as I clutched hold of the handle of the first first-class carriage I came to—to steady myself—the ruffian robber behind me whispered,

"Halt!"

I stopped dead.

"Let's look in at the winder," he said hoarsely, steadying himself by catching hold of my shoulder. We cautiously raised our heads to the level of the window and peered inside the carriage. There was the old gentleman, fast asleep. His newspaper had fluttered to the floor, his hands were crossed peacefully in front of him, and over his head he had flung a silk handkerchief. In the flickering light of the lamp, a heavy gold chain gleamed and glittered across his waistcoat.

"Prime!" muttered my brutal companion, at the same time thrusting his open knife into my hand. "Turn the handle quietly, sneak in to him like a mouse. Stick the blade in his heart before he can wake, and leave the rest to me. We may as well make the job a safe one first as last."

Before—it seemed to me—I knew what I had done, I had turned the handle and, entering, stood with the knife between my fingers, over the sleeping victim.

"Strike!"

I need not say whose voice uttered the command. I could never, never, have meant to obey it, whatever the consequences of my refusal, but my hand seemed to raise itself into the position for striking without any exercise of my own will.

"Now!"

At that moment, without awaking him, the handkerchief fell from the sleeper's head, and my terrified, horrified eyes fell full upon the face of—my own father! Surely that shriek of mine must have been heard along the whole length of the train. Yes—for the express was pulling up. It stopped short with a jerk. But before it stopped the robber had dragged me out backwards from the carriage.

We were standing again upon the narrow footway. The train had stopped where the metals of a branch line crossed those of the main line upon which our express was travelling. Off to the left was a signal box, which was shewing a vivid red light, to stop any train coming along on the branch line and crossing the junction of the metals till we had passed on. Just ahead of us was a similar signal. It was evident that it was this similar signal that had stopped us, and not my shriek, for there we just stood waiting for the red sign of "danger" to be changed to the white light of "safety." No hurrying guard came rushing to my help.

I tried to scream again, but couldn't.

"Baulked," muttered the wretch by my side; "but not for long."

He gazed earnestly through the darkness towards where the red light shone from the signal station, round which the branch line took a sharp curve. For what seemed to me a long time he kept on muttering to himself. At last he clutched me again by the shoulder.

"We'll do it," he cried. "Listen: a train is due along that loop line. She'll pull up when the driver sees the red signal. But I'll jump down before she

comes up, run to the box, climb into it, kill the signalman, and shew the white light instead of the red one. If our train doesn't move on in the meantime, the train on the branch will come tearing round the bend and go crash into her. Both trains will be wrecked. We'll stand clear till the smash has happened, and then run back and, in the confusion, rob the dead and wounded left and right. Foller me."

He seized the knife which I had been still holding—seized it from me with a jerk—leaped from the foot-board, and rushed off for the signal box. The moments seemed like hours. He was carrying out his fiendish scheme. He must already have murdered the signalman—for see! the red light has gone, a white one is shining in its place. Hark! the train is coming on the branch line whose metals cross the spot where our express remains motionless. It's coming—nearer and nearer and nearer—and there glows the signal that the *line is clear*. Nearer still—look at the gleaming lights of her engine, listen to the panting of her piston rods!

Imagine the horrible rest—the fatal moment, the crash, the overturned engines and carriages, the flames, the shrieks and groans and screams.

I was alive; that was all I knew—but alive in a different sort of world. That man, that hundred-fold murderer, was shaking me savagely, and shouting in my ear . . . . . .

Arthur Barlow paused. Twenty-five boys raised twenty-five heads from twenty-five sets of bed-clothes, beneath which they had hidden them.

"What did he say?" asked Higgins junior, with chattering teeth.

"Who?" said Barlow.

" 'That man, that hundred-fold murderer,' " quoted Eaglebeak.

"It wasn't that chap at all," was Arthur Barlow's cool reply. "It was a porter, and he was saying, 'Now then, sir, Norwich. Wake up!' "

" 'Where am I?' I cried."

" 'A-lyin' on your back on the floor of the carriage,' said the porter, 'with your portmanteau a-tumbled down on to your chest. And you're a-hollering and a-shouting like a loonattic. Wake up!' "

The stern voice of Martin Abbott broke the silence.

"The first remark I have to make," said he, "is a general one, and it's just this: the next boy who tries to palm off a mouldy nightmare as a genuine yarn will be bolstered for six nights running. My next remark is addressed to Arthur Barlow—and you'd better make a note of the first part of it too, young Weedon—and it's this: don't give way to your appetite for too many pork pies and sausage rolls, which disorder the stomach; and don't read unwholesome books, which disorder the mind. Good-night."

WILHELM.

THE ninth bed in the big dormitory was occupied by a new boy—a German named Hans Hoffmann. He was a strange character. "He's an awful beggar to Think," said Ralph Weedon, who had taken him in hand. "He's always Thinking. He Thinks enough for half-a-dozen fellows. I caught him the other day half-dazed, with his head leaning on his hand; and when I asked him what he was up to, he only said 'Thinking.' It's my opinion that he's doomed to turn out a poet—in fact, that he is one already, only not quite hatched yet."

He was understood to be turned sixteen. He wore long yellow hair, and had big, blue, dreamy-looking eyes.

"Now then, you new boy in No. 9, you'll have to pay your footing to-night," said Martin Abbott rather sharply.

The only word that Hans seemed to grasp in this sentence was "pay."

"Sur," he began, but the monitor hastily interrupted him.

"Why do you call me 'sir'?" he demanded.

"It ees po-lite," replied the new boy.

"Polite be blowed," said Martin. "Pay your footing."

"Sur," returned the German, "I will pay dat vhich I have. It ees t'ree ha'-pence. Ralph Weedon, he has eat de rest. He say he shall be my shum."

When it was explained to him that to pay his footing meant to tell a tale, he told the strangest story ever heard in the room. How much of it came out of his own dreamy German head, and how much out of dreamy German fairy-tale books, nobody attempted to guess. He told the story very slowly and very softly, and, when he had got over his first nervousness, in much better English than might have been expected.

All day long fell the snow. It fell so low, from so high. It fell from the great grey clouds that roll before the Gates of Heaven, where Angels are,

down into the streets and alleys of the cities and the towns, where sinners are. All day long, all day long, till the great city where Wilhelm, the orphan crossing-sweeper, lived, was covered all in white, from the gold cross on the summit of the cathedral spire down to the slippery flags of the pavement. All day long, all day long—and ever the winds grew colder and the heavens darker and the streets drearier. All day long, till the Spirits of the Night began to spread their black wings above the white world. With the falling of the evening shadows, all the houses and all the churches and the big cathedral burst gradually into a blaze of light, and soon the bells crashed merrily out, their glad notes playing in gleeful frolic with the flakes of the whirling snowstorm. For it was Christmas Eve, and all the bells were ringing "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*." And out from their bright warm homes came the people in scores, and in hundreds and in thousands, all wrapped in warm, rich garments, and they made for the great cathedral. For there, on every Christmas Eve, unseen by human eyes but heard by human ears, an angel descended to sing the "*Gloria*" with the choir. Generation after generation had this good thing been believed, for always above the other voices rose one of thrilling sweetness. And none dared claim that voice for his—so the people knew an Angel sang.

Wilhelm—ah, the poor one!—stood shivering with cold and hunger close to the cathedral gates. Fatherless, motherless, friendless, homeless, with never a hand to help, a heart to pity him; all day, and all the day before, and all the day before that, he had been out in the wild winter weather, with nothing to eat, no fire to warm him, no clothes save a few ragged tatters to cover his cold and starved and shivering body—out in the snow and the bleak, nipping air, and the slushy, freezing streets. Even at night, only an oozing archway near the black-rolling, half-frozen river had sheltered his poor little aching head and his poor little weary body. And now—this Christmas Eve—when the great cathedral had filled to overflowing, and the voices of priests and choir had commenced to follow the throbbing music of the organ as it pealed forth the notes of the solemn offices of Christmas Eve, Wilhelm dragged his bare feet slowly towards that dismal archway to rest there for the night. It was close at hand, but it took Wilhelm a long time to reach it, his feet were so numb, and his heart was so tired, and there was so strange a whirling going on in his bare head. It seemed to whirl around with the snowflakes. When at last he reached the archway, the storm-driven snow had drifted under it in great white heaps. And on one of these he fell down, and soon he forgot his hunger and his wretchedness—forgot how tired he was, how cold he was—forgot the snowstorm and the hard streets and the sworded policemen who had kept moving him on, moving him on, moving

him on, moving him on, till he could move no more. He forgot all these things, for he fainted. But before he fainted, he thought of all the bright, warm, happy homes in the great city all around the dark archway. He thought of all the happy children who had fathers and mothers to kiss them and take care of them and love them. And as he thought of these things he clasped his dirty hands together with a great sob, and raised them to his dirty face to wipe away the streaming tears that were rolling down it.

The time was near at hand for the singing of the "*Gloria*" in the great cathedral. And down from out the Gates of Heaven flew the Angel who sang it with the choir—down through the snow-clouds to the city. No man saw his bright and beautiful form, glowing with the celestial light that no mortal eye may see—no man heard the rustling of his wings. But all the priests around the high Altar, and all the white-robed singers in the chancel-aisles, and all the thousands of kneeling worshippers, waited for the coming of the Angel's presence—waited with longing hearts and open ears for the sound of his voice in the "*Gloria*." But the sweet music of the Angel's singing was not heard that night. For as he drew close to the cathedral with its waiting and expectant multitude, he saw the dark archway where lay poor little Wilhelm on the snow. And the Angel folded his wings and entered the archway, and knelt by the frozen body of the waif of the big city, whom nobody loved, nobody cared for. As he saw this poor little lost lamb of his Master's flock, the Angel's heart grew sad within him. One great tear lay on the child's cheek, close to the weary eye from which it had rolled. And the Angel bent his head, and from the fainting face of Wilhelm he kissed away the tear. Then he took Wilhelm to him, and, spreading wide his glorious wings, bore him from the archway; bore him up above the cruel city, higher far than the steep gold cross that crowned the cathedral's loftiest spire—bore him away from all the sinful world—carried him right into "The Children's Land."

Then suddenly he remembered that he had not sung the "*Gloria*" with the cathedral choir, and he began to be afraid, for had he not disobeyed the wish of the Lord of the Angels? But as he thought thus, he became conscious that in the crown upon his head was a new jewel—brighter than all the other jewels there. And, wondering greatly, he asked what the new jewel was that was so rich and lustrous?

Then it was told the Angel that the jewel was the tear-drop he had kissed from the dirty face of little Wilhelm.

WALTER QUICKLEIGH'S FIRST DAY AT BUSINESS.

WILLIE HAYHOE'S STORY.

WALTER QUICKLEIGH may have been a sharp boy; but, anyway, the events I am going to recount prove that he wasn't so smart as he thought he was. That's just the case with a lot of people, boys included.

Walter was a scholar in a fair-sized school in the suburbs of London—not a boarder, but only a day boy. Although he wasn't fifteen yet, he'd got it into his head that he was too old and too smart—especially the latter—to be kept at school any longer. He was for ever bothering his father to let him go to business.

"Do find me a place, father, and let me leave school and go to the City."

This was his constant cry. The ambition to go to the City every morning in a high hat and a tail coat had not only rooted itself in his mind but kept on growing. School was not large enough as an exercise ground for the talents of a boy of his smartness; only the great City of London would give him a fair chance.

It was the wish of his father, who was a doctor, that Walter should continue at school for a year or two longer; but at last he gave in, and yielded to his son's importunity. With great reluctance, he spoke to a patient who was engaged in one of the big London banks, and asked him if he could find Walter a "berth" in the office of some good mercantile firm.

Walter was overjoyed when he heard that this first step had been taken, and waited impatiently for the result. Within a few days came a letter from the doctor's friendly patient, who wrote that everything was so quiet in the commercial world that he feared it would be a long time before a good opening could be found in a merchant's office; the merchants seemed to have more clerks than they had work for. If, however, a solicitor's office

would do, his friends Messrs. Parch, Tapement, and Co., of Philpot Lane, were willing to take Walter on trial for three months.

"That'll do," exclaimed Walter, when he was made acquainted with the offer. "It's something in the City, at all events; and it strikes me there's as much chance for smartness in a lawyer's as anywhere else. Now, father, won't you see at once about a high hat and a tail coat? I can't go to town dressed like a common schoolboy."

All arrangements were concluded without loss of time, and on the following Monday morning Walter Quickleigh, clad in the tail coat, and wearing the high hat he had so long coveted, sallied forth from his home to catch the early 'bus that was to take him from Hackney to the City, there to spend his "first day at business." Before he reached the 'bus he attracted—or rather his hat and coat did—a good deal of attention from a number of ribald boys; but on reaching town he found that he didn't attract any attention at all; his hat and coat passed unnoticed in the crowds of other much higher hats and much longer tail coats.

He made his way to Philpot Lane. For a moment or two he stood gazing at the brass plate which proclaimed that "Parch, Tapement, and Co., Solicitors," were on the first floor. He began to feel just a little bit qualmish, but he shook this feeling off, and boldly walked upstairs and entered the office.

"Oh, you're the new junior, I suppose?" said a tall, slim, good-natured-looking young man.

"Yes," replied Walter.

"All right; come inside. Hang up your hat there. Have you brought an office coat?"

"No."

"Better bring one to-morrow. Good gracious, what's that?" he exclaimed, as the new junior's new hat fell from its peg with a bang.

Its owner rather ruefully picked it up again, and climbed on the stool next to that of the clerk, whose name he soon ascertained to be Jobson. The other clerks arrived in rapid succession, and by the time Mr. Tapement hurried in and passed through to his private room work had fairly begun.

"Parch, the head governor, isn't expected to-day," remarked Mr. Jobson to Walter; "we've a big case on, and he's gone direct to the Courts."

By-and-by the bell rang from Mr. Tapement's room, and Walter was told to go in.

"Good morning, sir," he said, bowing as he entered.

"Oh, you're the new boy?" remarked the lawyer, with a keen but very brief glance. "Mr. Jobson will put you up to your work; you'll have to assist him chiefly. Take these letters out, and ask Mr. Jobson to show you how to endorse them."

In the middle of his initiation into the simple mysteries of the process of the "endorsement" of letters as practised in lawyers' offices, Mr. Tapement walked into the outer office.

"Jobson," he said, "that writ of ejectment must be served on that fellow Dodgson to-day; Colonel Scrunchem has written about it again in the most peremptory terms. You took out the order?"

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk; "but Dodgson seems such a slippery customer, it may be difficult to serve it. Why not send this new lad here, sir, down to Brentwood to do the job? A fresh face may put Dodgson off the scent. We're told he's a smart youngster, sir," he added in a lower voice; "and I really don't see how anybody else can be spared to-day."

"All right," agreed the other; "explain the thing to him, and send him down."

"Look here, Quickleigh," said Mr. Jobson, "you're going to be trusted with an important piece of business. Colonel Scrunchem, one of our best clients—an old Indian officer—lives at Brentwood. One of his tenants there, a butcher named Dodgson, is not only in arrears with his rent, but won't give up possession of the shop, house, and meadow that he owes rent for. Besides this, he's been impertinent to the colonel, who's an awful fellow when he's rubbed the wrong way. In fact, there's a regular and rather mixed-up row between them, but there's no need for you to know more about it than I've told you. Get down to Brentwood at once, find out Dodgson, and just serve him with this ejectment order. If he won't take it, throw it on him."

Mightily proud of his errand, Walter started for Liverpool Street Station. Here he caught a fast train, and within a quarter of an hour from leaving the office was steaming away for Brentwood and Dodgson. The only other occupant of the carriage in which he rode was a big, burly, red-faced old fellow, of whom at first Walter took little notice. Drawing from his bag the document he was to serve upon the unfortunate butcher at the other end of his journey, he spread it open with a pompous air, and started to read its

contents from beginning to end. The stranger watched him narrowly from the corners of a pair of very keen, shrewd-looking eyes, and—quite unknown by the youthful process-server—caught a glimpse or two of the ejectment order.

As Walter finished his reading, and replaced the paper in his bag, the stranger spoke. After a few commonplace remarks—

"You're in the law, maybe?" he hazarded.

"Yes," replied Walter, surprised and gratified. "I'm in Parch, Tapement, and Co.'s."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the other. "Why, they're *my* lawyers. I'm Colonel Scrunchem, of Brentwood."

"Colonel Scrunchem! Then you know Dodgson the butcher, sir? I'm going to Brentwood on your business—going to serve your tenant with this order to quit," said Walter excitedly, bringing out again the document with which he had been entrusted.

"Let's have a look at it."

"Certainly, colonel."

The colonel read the paper through with great interest, and then handed it back.

"That's all right," he said; "and I'm glad they've given the job to such a smart young fellow. You're bound to get on in the law, you are. A cool head, and a hard heart—they're the two things wanted in the law. When a poor chap's come down in the world to have writs served upon him—serve 'em. You can't afford to think about his feelings or his family, or any nonsense of that sort—serve 'em. Now as to this Dodgson, of course I know him well, and I'll point him out to you. I'll help you with this job right through. I've taken a regular fancy to you. Next time I see your governors I'll speak up for you."

Walter thanked him, and thought what a jolly old chap he was.

As the train pulled up at Brentwood, the colonel thrust his head out of the window, and looked along the platform.

"Well, this *is* a slice of luck," he said quickly. "Jump out, sharp."

Young Quickleigh sprang from the carriage. The other, grasping him by the arm, pointed to a gentleman standing with several companions near the engine.

"You see that old fellow in a tight frock-coat, and with a white moustache—he's talking to the vicar and those other gentlemen?"

"Yes—I see."

"That's Dodgson the butcher. Go and serve him at once. Then bolt the other side, and you'll catch the express back. She's due now. Be smart!"

Walter did his duty with a rush. He walked rapidly up the platform, and thrust himself into the midst of the astonished little group that had been pointed out to him. He forced his ejectment order into the hands of the wearer of the tight frock-coat and the fierce white moustache. In his excitement he lost his head, and said loudly—

"*Take that. In the Queen's name!* Resistance is useless. In the law, we can't think of families and feelings. You must get out of your happy home at once. Take that!"

Then he "bolted the other side," and jumped into the express as she steamed in. He beckoned a porter. It would look fine to show that he was so well acquainted with the colonel.

"Has Colonel Scrunchem gone?" he asked. "Do you see him anywhere?"

"There he is," replied the porter; "that gentleman on the other side in a frock-coat and with a blue paper in his hand—the old gentleman that's flourishing his stick so, and looking about for somebody."

"But I didn't come down with *him*," gasped Walter.

"No," said the porter, "you came in the last down train *with Dodgson the butcher*. Right, forward!"

There was an awful row in the office that afternoon. The real Colonel Scrunchem followed Walter by the next train, and (metaphorically) set things on fire. He brought the warmth of India with him. He banged open the door of the clerk's office, and stalked straight through into the private office of Mr. Tapement, whom he addressed in a voice so furiously loud that his angry words were heard outside.

"Told to quit my own premises, sir," he roared, "and served with this order in the hearing and sight of the vicar, General Stock Banger, of Warley Barracks, and several other intimate friends! Give me that boy, sir—let me get hold of the boy who did it. I will boil him alive, sir! I'll throw him out of his own skin, sir!"

Walter felt very sick—and looked as he felt. He hastily told his friend Mr. Jobson the particulars of his fearful mistake.

"Put your hat on," said Jobson, "and get out of it at once. Go anywhere, and stop there an hour or two."

From three o'clock to almost six the crest-fallen junior wandered aimlessly about the City. When he returned, Mr. Tapement and all the clerks, with the exception of Mr. Jobson, had left for the day.

"This is a sad mess you've made of it, Quickleigh," said the kind-hearted clerk, "and of course you'll hear enough of it to-morrow. I'm going to work late to-night, and I think you'd better stop and help me. I'll take care that the governor shall know of it."

Walter thanked him heartily, and of course willingly consented to stop and help him with his work, to which they stuck steadily till about half-past seven, when Jobson proposed that they should lock up the office for half an hour, and go and have some tea—then return to resume their labours till about half-past nine. At the restaurant to which they repaired Jobson met a friend, with whom he started "just one" game of chess, soon becoming so absorbed in it that, handing Walter the keys of the office, he told him to return and push on with the work as well as he could by himself for a little while, promising to rejoin him as soon as "mate" was declared.

As he reached the landing on the first-floor and inserted in the lock the big key that opened the door of the outer office, young Quickleigh was "taken back" to find that *the door was already unlocked*! Who could have opened it without the key?

Cautiously and noiselessly he pushed the door more and more widely open, and stole inside the office.

A man was there—a man had got in! He was at the big safe—evidently rifling its contents. His back was to the door, his head was actually inside the safe, bent over a bundle of papers that he had already taken from their drawer. "A burglar," gasped Walter to himself—"a burglar!"

Then a brilliant idea struck him. The burglar was a little man, the safe was a very big one. It would hold him. What a chance to wipe off the disgrace of his Brentwood misfortune—what a chance of proving his smartness after all, and on his very first day at business!

In a moment his plan was formed—his mind made up: in the next the deed was done. He bounded forward. *He seized the burglar's neck with both hands*, and put his knee in the small of his back. The keys with which the

robber must have effected his entrance and opened the iron safe dropped from his guilty hands and fell on the floor. Ducking the thief's head and kicking his feet forward from under him, Walter closed upon him the massive door of the safe with a bang.

With his own hands he had imprisoned the burglar. He had saved his masters' property—he had protected their deeds, documents, money. Oh, what glory for a boy of his age!

He rushed round to the restaurant to fetch Mr. Jobson—together they rushed back.

"Seize the poker," cried Jobson, "and hit him on the head at the first sign of resistance. We haven't time to bring a policeman, for the man must be suffocating. I'll open the door of the safe—stand by!"

Open he flung the prison door. Out fell the prisoner, back first, on the carpet. Jobson gave one look at his face, already turning black from the want of air.

"Goodness gracious!" he yelled. "Oh, goodness gracious!—it's Mr. Parch, the head governor!"

That night before he left the office to which he had unexpectedly returned, the senior partner wrote the following brief memorandum to Dr. Quickleigh:—

"On no account can we allow your son to enter our office again. In our opinion he had better go back to school."

He did go back to school. A few weeks after his short but startling career in "the law," his mother remarked to the doctor, "What shall we do with Walter's high hat and tail coat?"

"Burn them, mother!" said Walter Quickly quickleigh—no, no, I mean Walter Quickleigh quickly.

PLUCK.

Like Arthur Barlow (began Morris Turle), I have been keeping back a personal experience to serve as my yarn on this eventful night, when my turn has come at last. Just before we broke up for the last Christmas holidays, I received, as some of you know, an important letter from my father. As well as I can, I will quote it from memory.

"My dear son," he wrote, "I am sorry to tell you, and you will be as sorry to hear, that you must not come home to spend your Christmas vacation. Your mother, Minnie, and Bertie, are all seriously ill—your little sister and brother with diphtheria. Under these circumstances, my first intention was that you should remain at Salwey House in charge of Dr. Audlem until the commencement of next term, but in the nick of time your godfather Widdrington has come to the rescue and invited you to pass your holidays at his beautiful place on the Yorkshire wolds, or moors. He has never seen you since you were a baby, and I have almost lost sight of him myself until recently, owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding between us which has only just been cleared up. Now Mr. Byrne Widdrington is the oldest friend I have living, and for many reasons I am anxious that you should create a favourable impression upon him. He is rough-mannered but soft-hearted, and you must try to fall in with his ways, and make him like you. He is very wealthy and has great influence, and if you create a favourable impression upon him he may help you greatly when the time comes for you to start in life."

Then followed full travelling instructions and a lot of good advice. A liberal tip was enclosed besides the money for my journey. I wrote a letter to Byrne Widdrington, Esquire, J.P., Wold Abbey, near North Allerton, thanked him for his kind invitation, and mentioned the day I was coming and the train by which I should arrive. I received a brief note in reply. My godfather said very little except that as Wold Abbey was several miles from the station he would send a conveyance to meet me.

By the first post in the morning of the day on which I started I had a second letter from home, telling me that the three patients were out of danger and going on well. This, of course, put me in good spirits, which

were added to by the excitement of the long journey before me. On my way to King's Cross I took out father's first letter and read it carefully through once more. I seemed to perceive more clearly than ever the importance he attached to my making a good impression upon godfather Widdrington. I flattered myself that I was just the boy for the job—anyway, I would do my utmost.

Well, we got off all right from King's Cross and speeded away north. Out in the country there had been a lot of snow, and in some places it had drifted on the line and almost blocked it. After an hour or two I found, by consulting my watch and the time-table, that the train was getting behindhand, and as the snowdrifts got worse we couldn't pick up the lost time. When at last we reached Thirsk it was quite dark. A bitterly cold winter's night had set in, with a lot of snow whirling about on the piercing wind. I was sick and tired of the journey and longed to be safe indoors. I wanted to be seated in front of a good fire and a square meal. When, therefore, a porter came to the carriage door and explained that in consequence of an accident on the line between Thirsk and North Allerton we couldn't get along any further for several hours, till the road was clear again, I was, to put it mildly, savage. I made some remarks, and the porter said, very civilly—

"Where is it that you exactly want to get to, sir?"

"Wold Abbey," I replied.

"Mr. Byrne Widdrington's?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you what I should do, sir. Of course Wold Abbey is nearer North Allerton than Thirsk, but it isn't more than about seven miles from this station. You let me go and get you a horse and trap, with a steady driver, and you can be safe inside the Abbey before this train can stir an inch."

I thought I'd better agree to this plan, so the porter ran off to engage a trap. In about a half hour it drove up. I treated the driver—a nice-looking young man of about twenty—and myself to a cup of steaming hot coffee before we proceeded on our lonely way across the wild Yorkshire moors. We were soon out of the town and into the snow-covered open. I could make out no road through the bleak expanse, but Jack Miles—as the driver had told me was his name—kept steadily on, evidently knowing where he was and where he was going. He was a fine chap, and we chatted away together very pleasantly. The night was so dark and the snow so deep that we drove slowly.

"Do you know Mr. Widdrington, Jack?" I asked. "He's my godfather."

"Everybody know he," replied Jack. "He be good-hearted but wonderful hot-tempered. He ha' sentenced mony a chap to six months, and then kept his wife and family all t' time."

He proceeded to illustrate my godfather's character by a number of anecdotes, but broke off suddenly as the horse gave a quick shy and then stopped dead. At the same moment a low, deep groan startled our ears. It seemed to arise from the ground in front of the frightened horse's fore-feet. Down I sprang, and rushed forward. I fell over something—something lying in the snow. Struggling to my knees, I groped about with my hands, for the lights of the trap didn't reach quite so far. Just as another groan reached my ears, my fingers touched the "something" from which it proceeded.

"Drive on a yard or two, Jack," I shouted—but he had already taken one of the lamps from its socket, and was hurrying to me with the light in his hand.

"It's an old woman," he cried, as he held it above the fallen figure over which I had stumbled. "There's been foul play here," he went on excitedly; "she ha' been cracked over t' yed."

The sound of our voices seemed to arouse the old lady. She opened her eyes, looked at us with a startled gaze, and tried to rise. I put my arm round her, and helped her to her feet.

"Who are you?" she asked in a quavery voice.

"Friends," said I. "What has happened?"

We soon knew that nothing less than a highway robbery had happened. The old lady had started to walk from a distant farm-house into Thirsk. Upon reaching the spot where we found her, she had been suddenly attacked, robbed, and struck. The thief had run away, leaving her where she stumbled and fell.

"What did he take from you?" we asked.

"My purse."

"How long ago was it?"

"It seems only a minute ago, but I think I've been unconscious."

"Which way did he run?"

"Straight up the road across the moor," replied the old lady, who seemed rapidly to have recovered herself. So much so, that although we offered to drive her safely home she refused, and insisted on walking on into Thirsk, to give information to the police, so that they might be early on the track of the thief and the stolen money.

A brilliant idea struck me. I took Jack Miles a step aside, and said earnestly—

"Jack, I'm awfully anxious to make a good impression on my godfather, and here's a chance. Whilst the old lady—as she's all right again now—goes on to the town, you and I will push along up the road as fast as we can drive. We'll overtake the robber, collar the purse back from him, lash him to the back of the trap, and take him a prisoner to Wold Abbey. It'll be a plucky thing to do, and certain to please the old gentleman immensely."

"All right, sir," said Jack, "I'm game. But we'd better take t' lady's name and address before we part company with her."

This we did; then sprang into the trap and drove on. The snow had ceased to fall, and the moon was now showing her light. We kept our eyes well on the alert, ahead, and all around. At last we came to a spot where four roads met.

"What are we to do now?" asked Jack. "He may have gone straight on, he may have turned left, or he may have turned right."

"Wait a minute," said I, jumping from the trap again, and trying to find a trail in the snow, as though I'd been an Indian. I struck one—I found marks of recent footsteps leading straight on up the road.

"Go it, Jack," I cried, springing to his side again; "he's not far off now. We've got him."

Sure enough, after driving about another thousand yards, we saw the hurrying figure of a man ahead of us. The fellow answered closely enough to the description of the highwayman given us by his victim; as we saw when we arrived closer to him. He was carrying the very stick with which he must have struck the poor old woman.

"Now, Jack," I whispered quickly, "we mustn't give him a chance. Drive right up alongside of him on the off side, then give a sudden turn with the left rein, and knock him over with the shaft. Then we'll both jump out on him."

Miles obeyed my directions splendidly—there's no doubt he was a brick. He gave the horse a sharp cut. The next moment we were up with the robber—a twist of the rein, and the near side shaft had bowled him neatly over, and I was on him before he had time to get up, Jack jumping out after me.

"No nonsense," I cried; "give up that purse."

"My purse—give up my purse!" cried the highwayman, who was quite a respectably-dressed man, with a long overcoat and a muffler. However, I didn't pay much attention to his appearance.

"*Your* purse, indeed!" I said scornfully. "No nonsense—we're two to one; give up the purse, or we'll knock *you* on the head this time. Now, Jack!"

But Jack had already unbuttoned the fellow's coat. I shoved my hand into his pocket, and closed my fingers round the purse, which, of course, was there all right. In transferring it to my own pocket, I had to loosen my hold on the robber's throat. He took instant advantage of the opportunity; he flung me off with one hand, and Jack with the other. Seizing his stick, which had fallen from his grasp as we knocked him over, he sprang to his feet and made for us. I saw that my original programme couldn't be fully carried out; he was not the sort of chap to lash behind the trap and carry off in triumph to the Abbey. However, we'd done well as it was.

"Bolt, Jack!" I holloaed—"into the trap, and bolt."

Again we sprang into our seats, and dashed off. The thief first made a mad attempt to seize the horse's head, and then to cling on behind. I pushed him off, and we rattled away. For a time he ran after us, and even after we lost sight of him we heard him shouting.

"Push on—faster still!" I said breathlessly. In fact, we were both almost breathless.

"Didn't we do it to rights?" exclaimed Jack, as his wind came back.

"Splendid—splendid! Oh, what an impression this will make on my godfather!"

"It will so. He's a good-plucked 'un himself, and, depend upon it, there's nothing like pluck to please him."

"How far are we from the Abbey now?"

"Only about a mile. Yon are t' lights."

We rapidly covered the distance, and drove into the grounds of Wold Abbey. I found godfather Widdrington a bluff-spoken, burly, jolly old chap of more than sixty. He looked just the fellow to knock you down with one hand, and give you all he had with the other. He made me very welcome, and when he heard that I had driven from Thirsk, told a servant to take Jack Miles downstairs and give him a good supper. In order that Jack might have his share of the glory before he left, I hastened to tell the squire of our exciting adventure with the highwayman.

I had not been mistaken in my idea of the favourable impression that my conduct would make upon him. He was delighted—so much so, that he sent down for my accomplice and gave him a sovereign. My mouth watered as I caught a glimpse of that golden "tip," and, on going through a rapid bit of mental arithmetic, I calculated that as Jack Miles got a sovereign, I might make sure of a "fiver." Godfather opened the purse and counted out four pounds thirteen shillings.

"You're a plucky lad," said the old chap, slapping me on the back. "Nothing like pluck, my boy. You shall drive over with me in the morning to Mrs. Joskins's, and restore her purse to her."

I finished the particular mouthful of cold turkey I was engaged on at the moment, and then said—

"I hope I've made a favourable impression on you, sir?"

"Eh?"

"Hope I've made a favourable impression on you, Mr. Widdrington?"

He looked a bit puzzled, and then laughed heartily, as he almost choked me by another thump on the back.

In the morning off we went in the squire's splendid dog-cart, to take back her purse to the old lady. When we arrived at the farm-house we were ushered into the best room. I felt that I was the hero of the occasion, and when Mrs. Joskins came in and identified me as the "brave young gentleman" of the previous evening, my chest didn't seem the right size for my waistcoat. I felt swollen as I put the purse in her hand.

"Four pounds thirteen shillings in it," I remarked.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed godfather, as the old lady gave a loud squeak.

"This isn't my purse, squire!" she screamed.

"Not your purse?"

"No. This is silk, mine was leather, and had only seven shillings in it."

I particularly wish to end this tale now as quickly as possible. My waistcoat seemed to fit me again suddenly. From a hero I seemed to shrink into an ordinary individual—suddenly. My godfather made a number of remarks as we drove back, but I do not think it is worth while to repeat them.

Just as we approached the spot where Jack Miles and I had made our gallant attack upon the highwayman the night before, he suddenly pulled up his horse with the exclamation—

"Here's the vicar!"

The vicar hurried to the side of the dog-cart, and—almost before I recognised him—poured out an excited story into my godfather's ear.

"It happened at this very spot last night," he said "Two highway robbers drove up in a trap—ran into me—knocked me over—sprang out and seized me—threatened to knock me on the head—robbed me of my purse, containing four pounds thirteen shillings."

Squire Widdrington produced the purse that Mrs. Joskins had disowned.

"Was this your purse, vicar?"

"Yes—how on earth . . . ?"

My godfather was very rude. Instead of waiting for the vicar to finish his question he turned to me.

"What in the name of . . . Hulloa! what's up now?"

"I should like to get out and walk, godfather," I explained, with my foot on the step of the dog-cart.

"So that was how you created a favourable impression on your godfather, was it?" said Martin Abbott—"by committing highway robbery, with violence, on the person of his friend the vicar!"

"Yes," answered Morris Turle.

"Did the affair blow over all right?"

"I don't think people can laugh and be angry at the same time," said Morris; "and my godfather and the vicar laughed so long that there wasn't

time left to get angry."

"Do you want to hear the moral of your experience?" asked the monitor.

"Not particularly."

"Well, you've got to hear it, anyway," said Martin firmly. "It's this: Pluck is a splendid thing, but it's none the worse for being mixed with a little discretion."

"THAT'S YOUR COURSE."

CONRAD LLOYD'S STORY.

THE schooner *Lady Brooke* was sailing with the wind free. Her passage home from the Azores was almost over. Her "desired haven" of discharge was not many miles distant. Down to leeward on the port beam was seen the expected pilot boat.

Captain Montague Raymond was aft, and Phil Marston, his nephew—a bright, fine young sailor of twenty—was at the wheel. On shore, and sometimes in the cabin on board when Phil was off duty, these two were uncle and nephew. But at other times, the one was just skipper and the other just what he was rated on the ship's books, and neither of them forgot his position.

"Ease off those sheets," cried Captain Raymond. Then to Phil Marston, "the man at the wheel," he said—

"Starb'd your helm, lad, and let her go off a bit to clear that rummer buoy."

"Helm's a-starb'd, sir," reported Phil promptly.

"Steady so," said the skipper; "starb'd a little yet—so. Steady! How's her head now?"

"Sou'-sou'-west, sir."

"Steady so. That's your course."

Forward bounded the *Lady Brooke* on her course towards the buoy.

By-and-by, the captain, who had been narrowly watching the pilot boat, muttered to himself, "What's the fellow up to?" Suddenly he shouted, "Haul in those sheets—main-sheet flat in now—port your helm lad, and let her come to, sharp. Now steady. Look out, don't let her shake—you'll have her in the wind."

Again he looked towards the pilot boat. "What's the lubber doing?" he said again; "he'll drive us over on the sands. We can't fetch him on this

tack." Then loudly, "Stand by for about. Hard down your helm. Let go those head-sheets—haul in your main-sheet. Ease your helm. Haul in those head-sheets smart, or we shall make a stern board."

The ready sailors were carrying out his orders almost as fast as he uttered them.

"Steady your helm. Well the main-sheet. Steady so. How's her head now?"

"Nor'-west, sir," replied Phil.

"That's your course," said Captain Raymond.

The movements of the pilot cutter continued erratic. Again the schooner was manœuvred.

"Stand by. Hard down your helm, and let her come round. Mind those head-sheets. Steady your helm again, my lad, and steer up for that cutter. Look out, or we shall over-run her. Haul that stay-s'l sheet right to wind'ard. Haul in that fore-boom—keep the helm steady."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Now we shall run past him," said Captain Raymond to himself. "Drop that jib down, and scandalise the main-s'l. That'll do. Look out with a rope to leeward. Has he got that rope?"

"Aye, aye, sir," cried a sailor, and quickly afterwards the pilot clambered on board, and joined the skipper aft.

"'Afternoon, captain," he said, speaking rather unsteadily. "Smart schooner this. Been out all last night, sir. P'raps you've got a glass of grog handy—hot?"

The captain of the *Lady Brooke* eyed the speaker keenly, as he replied, "I don't drink myself, pilot, and I never give drink to pilots on duty. From the way your cutter was handled I fancy you must have drunk quite enough already."

So saying, for a moment he turned aside.

"Put your helm up, and let her away," he shouted. "Haul down that main tack—ease off those head-sheets. Pull up your jib. How's her head now?" he added to Marston.

"Sou'-sou'-west, sir."

"That's your course."

Then he turned to his companion.

“Now, pilot, you can take charge.”

Pilot Darley’s appearance was not calculated to belie or allay the captain’s suspicions. He was a short, thick-set, hardy-looking man enough, and the redness of his face might be attributable to constant exposure to the weather. But that would not account for a certain bleariness about his eyes, and for a certain shakiness about his hands, to say nothing of a peculiar huskiness about his voice. He was about forty years old. It wasn’t exposure to the weather that made him appear so much older.

HE RAISED IT OPENLY TO HIS LIPS BEFORE THE CAPTAIN.

He had not been on board five minutes before he furtively produced a flask from his pocket, and furtively took a long drink. As the cold and wintry afternoon wore on into evening he treated himself to further drinks—he seemed to carry spirits in every pocket. His face became redder, his voice huskier, his hands more shaky.

With the deepening shadows the chill November breeze freshened. On rushed the *Lady Brooke* through the foaming waters. Her port should be

reached now before midnight, though many a tack would have to be made first. And the dreaded Red Rock would have to be passed. This was the most dangerous reef on the whole coast. Many a ship had struck there, to be broken up by the waves—for no vessel that struck the Red Rock ever got off again. Helpless wreck, hopeless death—that is what the Red Rock meant to the mariner—and means it still. The face of Captain Raymond grew graver as the time went on, every tack bringing the ship nearer to the fateful spot. Several times he had suggested to the pilot that sail should be shortened, but these suggestions had been met with a grunt of disapproval. It had now struck four bells (ten o'clock); the wind was blowing harder than ever, the waves, all ridden by the "white horses," were rising higher and higher. The sky was darker and stormier.

He spoke again, for the schooner still carried almost all sail, under which she staggered through the blackness of the night.

"Pilot, you must be going rather near the Red Rock—nearer than I like at all events—and I tell you again you'd better get in some of those small sails."

"Never you mind the sails," said Darley roughly; "I want to find the Red Rock Bell-buoy—the tide'll carry her clear of the stones."

"If you *won't* take in sail now, I *must* and I *will*," said Raymond sternly.

"Not while I'm here," rejoined Darley. "I am pilot of this vessel."

"And I am master—and can hear the bell."

"I'll wait till *I* hear it," said the pilot.

Once more he brought out his flask, and this time he raised it openly to his lips before the captain. With an impulse of uncontrollable anger—righteous anger, to feel which is "to sin not"—the latter dashed the flask from the other's hand. It fell on the deck with a crash that was not heard in the gathering storm. The pilot sprang furiously at the captain and laid his hands upon him.

"You drunken lubber," cried Raymond, "are you mad? Do you think I don't know how you've been drinking?"

He *was* mad—mad with drink—for he continued to struggle furiously, though by this time the schooner was dipping her side-lights at every plunge. But suddenly he let go his hold, staggered to the rail and clutched it tightly with both hands. A blinding flash of lightning had lit up the angry

sea, a terrific peal of thunder following almost instantly. In the sudden shock the ship shivered from stem to stern.

A silence that was awful in its intensity appeared to follow the last roll of the thunderclap. But a sound more awful than had seemed the silence, a sound more fearsome far than the roar of the artillery of heaven, struck the listening ears of Captain Raymond—the clanging of the bell on the Red Rock Buoy *close at hand*—a clanging which showed that the *Lady Brooke*, under heavy sail, was now to leeward of the buoy—that the Red Rock was right ahead! The sound that should have been a warning seemed now like the voice of doom.

The pilot heard it too. He looked up with wild red eyes. But even yet he failed to grasp the imminence of the danger.

"How's her head?" he shouted.

"Sou'-sou'-west," shouted young Phil Marston.

"Steady so," cried the drunken man, with a loud but thick voice.

But already Captain Raymond was roaring out his orders. His voice rang through the trumpet at his lips loud and clear above the wailing and shrieking of the wild night-storm.

"Down with those gaff top-s'ls. Let that jib run down. Hard up your helm. Sharp, lads, or we shall be on the stones."

The pilot seemed seized with a very fury of passion. His spirit-maddened blood had frenzied him at last. He was possessed by as foul a demon as ever entered the bodies of the wretched slaves of Satan in olden times.

"Hold on everything," he yelled; "steady that helm. I'm pilot of this vessel."

"Hard up, I tell you," rang out again the first voice. "Down with those sails. Now!"

"Keep her on her course. I'm pilot."

"Hard up!"

For one moment the helmsman and the sailors hesitated, confused by the contradictory voices. Then over Phil put his helm and the men sprang to obey the captain's orders with a quick "aye, aye, sir."

Another flash of lightning almost as his last "hard up" was uttered.

Captain Raymond seized the pilot with one hand and pointed ahead with the other to where the broken water flowed over the very fringe of the reef.

The wretched Darley saw—and understood. The consciousness of what he had done flashed upon his soddened brain, and he shook from head to foot. For those few moments he was sober again. Before the answering thunderclap followed the flash a cry broke from Captain Raymond's set lips.

"God help us—we're on the stones!"

The pilot heard too—he, too, knew. With a shriek that echoed for years afterwards in the ears of all who heard it, he threw up his arms, and just as the lightning played once more upon the plunging vessel, he flung himself overboard, to be dashed to death against the Red Rock. He was found next day—a mangled corpse, a human wreck.

Thank God Phil had obeyed already the order to put his helm hard up, for the schooner's head was swinging round. The only chance now was to back her off and make a stern board.

Bravely and coolly the effort was made. Quick, loud, but with no trace in it of the almost hopeless fear that was in his heart, Captain Raymond's voice was heard all over the ship.

"Keep your helm up, lad. Haul that fore-sheet to wind'ard—flatten in all your sheets."

A moment or two of speechless suspense—then he cried exultantly—

"Now she moves." Then again aloud, "Ease your helm. Ease off your main-sheet again. Right your helm. Let that fore-stays'l draw. Steady!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Now how's her head?"

"Nor'-nor'-east, sir," cried Phil.

"Thank God," said the skipper to himself. The tight little schooner had answered the call made upon her—the white waves that lashed in impotent fury the cruel stones of the Red Rock were already astern of them. In sight of the Rock, in sight of wreck, in sight of death, the *Lady Brooke* and the lives she carried were saved.

"Steady so," said Captain Montague Raymond "That's your course."

The next evening, safe in harbour, Phil Marston and his uncle were seated comfortably in the latter's snug little cabin.

"Phil, we had a terribly narrow escape of going to pieces on the Red Rock last night."

"Yes, uncle."

"You know how it was we were carried into such danger?"

"Yes," and young Marston shivered a little as he thought of the drunken pilot, and his fearful end.

Captain Raymond paused, and hesitated. He had something to say, but did not quite know how to say it. At last he spoke again:

"My lad, there's a Red Rock ahead of *you*—ahead of every young man—the rock on which that pilot foundered—the Red Rock of drink. Don't try how close you can steer to it—try how far you can steer from it. If ever you see that Red Rock across your bows, if ever you see it——"

Quite seriously, though with a smile of quick humour upon his face, Phil Marston quoted rapidly those orders of his uncle the night before, which had brought the *Lady Brooke* completely round in the nick of time—

"Hard up with the helm. Haul the fore-sheet to wind'ard; flatten in all the sheets. . . Ease off the main-sheet. . . Let the fore-stays'l draw. . . Steady."

"THAT'S YOUR COURSE!" said Captain Raymond.

"That's a prime story, Conrad," said Abbott; "and worthy of almost the biggest boy in the room."

"I *am* almost the biggest boy," said Conrad Lloyd.

"Quite so," replied Martin. "That's what I say."

"It's got a tremendous moral too, after all," muttered Bob Newbegin.

"What do you mean by 'after all'?" demanded the narrator of the tale.

"Well, we had an idea you'd spin us a blood-and-thundery sort of yarn without much of a moral hanging to it."

"Then that's just where you were wrong. I've come to the conclusion at last that a rattling good story can be told without 'piling on the agony' of clap-trap, and also that a sound moral chucked in with an exciting adventure is not a drawback."

GOD'S WIND ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

By Martin Abbott's "special dispensation" George Macdonald, of bed No. 13, was allowed to *read* the following story, by the aid of a candle surreptitiously lighted.

December 24th, 188—.

Past four o'clock, and the early shadows of Christmas Eve are falling on land and sea. The lights of the harbour of Sheerness fall on the rushing waters of the turning tide; the street lamps shed their flickering glow on the snow and slush of road and pavement. A cold, keen wind blows gustily from the sea, wreathing with white foam the tops of the angry waves, shaking the windows of the houses in the town, and whirling the light snow that covers the open country behind.

By-and-by, though it will be a rough night for the journey, we shall have to go to sea, for our story takes us there. But first let us turn into the neat and comfortable little cottage where Annie Morrison is preparing for the return of her husband and her only boy.

How busy she is! How happy she looks! She has plied the fire with fuel till it fairly roars with contentment: she has lit the lamp, and placed it on the table before the window, where it can be seen from the very end of the street. The materials for a tremendous meal are all on the dresser, waiting to be popped into the oven; the kettle is ready on the hob, prepared to sing at a minute's notice. Some dry clothes are hanging over the back of a chair, a huge pair of slippers warming on the fender; they are for her husband, skipper and part-owner of the little fishing-smack *Daisy*. With Sam Collins, who lives next door, Ben Morrison went fishing yesterday, to return this evening to spend Christmas Eve at home. There's his portrait over the mantelpiece—a great, big, burly fellow in the prime of life, large-handed and broad-chested, with honest eyes and open countenance. Those who know Ben best say that he's "as brave as a lion and gentle as a lamb." What better character can any man have than that?

By-and-by Annie moves to a chest in the corner of the room, and opens the top-drawer, from which she takes a new brass-bound Bible and a little leather case. She puts them on the table, to which she brings a chair and sits. Opening the case, she lifts carefully out a brightly glittering silver watch and small gold chain, admiring them as they flash in the warm light of the cosy room. She puts them tenderly down, and opens the Bible, in the fly-leaf of which she prepares to write something, handling a pen with evidently unaccustomed fingers. It takes her several minutes to write the few words she has in her mind, but at last there they are—

"*To my dear son Chris on his birthday,*
December the twenty-fifth."

Then the book and the watch and chain are for him, her boy. There's his portrait on the wall near his father's—the portrait of a bright-faced sailor-lad of fifteen. But that was taken three years ago; he's rated as a man now on board the man-o'-war *Viking*. It's eighteen years ago, "come to-morrow," since the day of his birth. "God's present," Ben and Annie called him in their simple piety, and named him "Christmas," though now all shorten the name to "Chris."

The *Viking* is homeward bound. She is almost home; to-night she is only a few miles off, if all has gone well, for she is to be in Sheerness harbour, and her crew paid off, by Christmas Day. She may even now be entering port—and surely they will let her Chris come home to-night. Whose step will she hear first? Whose face will she see first? To whose lips will hers first be pressed? Who will be first home this Christmas Eve—father or son?

Now we know why Annie Morrison has been so busy and why she looks so happy. But it is getting late slowly as the time has passed. The night, as it grows older, grows darker and more cheerless, and the snow has begun to fall again. From her seat to the window, from the window to the door, over and over again walks the anxious wife and mother, peering into the darkness, straining to pierce with her eyes the white veil that hides the end of the street from her view. No sight of form, no sound of voice or footfall, though now the long minutes have numbered hours.

"They are late—both late," she murmurs.

She takes the Bible from the table, draws her chair closer to the fire, and begins to read. But soon the book slips from her fingers, her eyes close, her tired hands droop upon her lap. In her sleep—if sleep it be—she sees—or dreams she sees—her sailor-boy, not as he was when he sailed away three

years ago, but bigger and stouter. What a fine, manly fellow he has grown; how brave and strong he looks! She hears his voice; how full and round and cheery it sounds!

But—the water's round him now—he's struggling in it, battling in it and with it for dear life! His face—the tanned, brown face that has changed so white—is raised above the cruel waves that leap around him and beat upon him—beat upon him and press him down, down, down!

His eyes—wild and despairing eyes, eyes with death in them—are looking into hers. His voice is calling to her—calling her "Mother!" Only his hands are above the water now—they are stretched towards her in dumb appeal. But still she can see those eyes, still hear that voice.

With a scream and start she wakes. The clock is striking twelve. Again to the window, once more to the door; then again to her seat by the now dying fire in the lonely room—lonely still. The light has all faded from her face—a sickly fear possesses her heart. She falls upon her knees, and clasps her hands in prayer.

"O God, Who sent Thy Son into the world to-day, send me my boy—send to me safely from the sea my husband and my son!"

The latch of the door is lifted. How sweet the click sounds in poor Annie Morrison's ears.

She springs to her feet.

"A merry Christmas to you, Annie," says the voice of Mrs. Collins, her neighbour, who enters the room. "Our sweethearts haven't come back, so the *Daisy* is out all night. But I suppose you know the *Viking* is in?"

"The *Viking* in?"

"Hours and hours ago. One of the dockyard men told me so."

Annie hastily throws a shawl over her head and shoulders, and hurries to the dockyard gates. A friendly watchman may give her news.

Sunset at sea—the last sunset of the voyage for the gallant officers and crew of her Majesty's ship *Viking*. As the red sun dips, down is hauled the Union Jack, but the "homeward-bound" pennant still stretches its long length in the breeze.

The Foreland is rounded. Ahead, on the port bow, shine the lights of Herne Bay, gleaming brightly through the darkness of the snowy air. The

throbbing engines speed the good vessel swiftly towards her "desired haven," against the impetuous tide beneath her keel. Landmark after landmark has been passed—almost to a minute eager hearts on board are calculating the hour at which Sheerness will be fetched. Nearly home at last!

Down comes the darkness—on drives the gallant vessel.

The officer of the watch casts his keen eye aloft, where the rigging is silhouetted against the wintry sky. The breeze has fallen, and the pennant has fouled a backstay.

"Lay aloft a hand," he orders, "to clear the pennant from the main-royal backstay."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Up springs a smart young topman. The height is soon gained, and the pennant disentangled. Is it that he is reckless with the joy of being so near home? or is it because spars and rigging alike are slippery with sleet and snow, that his feet lose their hold and his hands their grasp?

"Man overboard!" is cried, almost before his body strikes the water.

The mighty engines are stopped—a boat is lowered.

Seaward and shoreward pull the strong arms that ply her oars. Far beyond the man-o'-war's white wake search the shipmates of the lost topman. But no hail answers theirs—no struggling swimmer can they find, long and far as they row and seek. They reach again the vessel's side, and with saddened faces climb on board.

Again the mighty engines throb, the screws revolve. Again the *Viking* is borne over the surging tide. Sheerness is in sight.

"Poor Chris," murmurs a messmate—"*drownded on Christmas Eve*."

The wind is N.N.E., and the sails of the *Daisy* are full as she heads pluckily in the gloom for the mouth of the river.

"Tide's running against us very strong to-night, Ben," says Sam Collins.

"Never knowed it stronger," agrees Ben. "If it worn't for this fair wind a-blowin' more than ekally strong *for* us, we should never make home to-night."

"That we shouldn't."

"And of all nights," continued Ben, "I shouldn't like to lay out here this Christmas Eve. You know we promised our old women faithful to be home, whatever our catch o' fish was—and in my case there's an extra special reason for to be thankful that the wind's fair and strong to take us up against tide. For by the time I fetch home, all being well, I shall find my boy Chris there. The *Viking* was due to-day. I ain't set eyes on that boy for 'most three years. As for his mother, she's been crazy for a month past, ever since she knowed he was on the way—fair crazy with hope and joy."

"Quite nateral with a woman, Ben," says Sam Collins philosophically; "'specially a mother."

"I ain't been much better myself," Ben Morrison confesses; "only, of course, I ain't showed it so much. We're reg'lar bound up in that boy. Born on Christmas Day, he was—eighteen years ago to-morrow. And as fine a lad, and as smart a lad, and as good a lad, as ever trod a deck—though I says it myself."

"Three hours will run us up, now," says Sam after a pause—"if the wind holds."

"If the wind holds!" cries his companion almost angrily. "Of course it'll hold. Why, I'd rather chuck every fish overboard than lose this wind. Ain't my wife waiting for me—ain't the fire blazing, and the lamp a-glowing in the window—don't I tell you my Boy will be home? Of course the wind'll hold. Just haul in that fore-s'l a bit."

Neither man speaks again for a long time. Only the sound of the bounding waters and bowling breeze is heard, as the *Daisy* keeps steadily on her course.

With a loud and bitter exclamation, Ben springs suddenly to his feet. The white foam no longer drips from the smack's bows, the water no longer pours from her scuppers—her sails flap uselessly against the mast.

The wind has dropped!

The waves subside. The boat is still. Not still now—for already the ebb tide is bearing her astern.

THE WIND HAS GONE!

Poor Ben thinks despairingly of the bright, warm, happy home he will never reach that night. The *Daisy* must anchor till the flood tide of Christmas morning.

"A plague on the wind!" he cries as the cable rattles over the little smack's bows.

Fair and clear and crisp breaks the Christmas dawn. As the sun rises higher the waves sparkle out at sea; and on land the roofs of houses and of churches, and all the trees, and all the broad fields around, glitter and shine as though diamonds and crystals had fallen from the sky, instead of snowflakes.

The early bells are crashing out the glad message that Christ is born. The early risers already abroad give each other greeting.

With the earliest turn of the tide the *Daisy* comes in at last.

As Ben Morrison and her husband step ashore, Mrs. Collins meets them. She and Ben converse earnestly, and as the latter turns and sets out with eager steps for his cottage-home, Mrs. Collins calls to him—

"Break it to her gently, Ben—tell her slowly."

As he reaches his little house, Ben Morrison sees that the lamp is still burning in the window—burning though the sun is shining so brightly.

Noiselessly he lifts the latch, noiselessly enters the room.

With her hands spread out before her and her face lowered upon them, Annie is seated at the table, upon which are still the Bible and the watch and chain.

Ben enters so quietly, closes the door behind him so quietly, that not until he speaks is his wife aware of his presence.

"My lass—my dear lass!"

She lifts her tear-dimmed eyes—rises with a great cry—flings her arms around her husband's neck, and clings despairingly to him.

"Do you know, Ben? Do you know?"

"Yes," says Ben; "I know—all."

"Oh, Ben! Our boy—our son!"

"My lass—my dear lass."

Tenderly his great, coarse, rough hands release her clinging fingers from his neck. Gently and so lovingly he seats her in the chair again, bending over her, with his big arms around her.

"My heart is broken, Ben," she wails; "broken, broken, broken."

"My dear lass."

"He was so young to die—our boy was so young to die. I can see it all—I saw it last night. I can see him battling in the cold sea—he's holding his hands out towards me—he's calling me 'Mother!' I see it all, just as they told me it happened."

"Annie. . . ."

"Here's the Bible we bought for him—and the watch—and the gold chain: our present for Christmas—and his birthday. I can't look at them now, Ben. They hurt me. Take them away."

Ben's hand touches them to obey her. But she stops him as he lifts the brass-bound Bible.

"No, Ben," she says; "leave that. There's God's comfort for wounded hearts in His Book."

"Yes, my lass—my dear lass. And I 'umbly thank Him that He's let *me* bring comfort. Listen, my girl. Last night as we were running up with the wind against the tide, the wind fell. Only the wind could bring us home. 'Twas only because it fell that we had to anchor. Annie, my lass, as we lay at anchor I heard a faint, far-away sort o' cry—heard it again, nearer—heard it a third time, nearer still. 'Twas the cry of a drowning lad, Annie. He'd been carried so far by the current and the tide, that he couldn't be found by the boat sent after him from the ship he fell from. His strength was all gone. He couldn't swim any longer, he couldn't keep afloat any longer."

"Go on—go on!"

"He was washed almost against the *Daisy's* bows. He was just able to clutch our cable. We dragged him aboard—in time. We saved his life."

With a strange look in her eyes, Annie Morrison raises them to her husband's face. She doesn't hear that soft click of the latch again—she doesn't see that someone outside has partly opened the door.

"Ben, Ben," she cries, "what do you mean? What is it you are telling me?"

"My lass—my dear lass—we brought him ashore with us. Won't you give *him* these things, Annie? Won't you throw your loving arms round *him*! Won't you take *him* to your heart?"

"Won't you—MOTHER?"

Chris—big and brown and bonny Chris—Chris, saved from the sea—Chris, alive and hearty—Chris, with love in his eyes, and joy in his smile—stands at the now wide open door. Only for a moment—the next he is locked in his mother's arms.

"Annie," says Ben very slowly, later on, "if the wind hadn't dropped last night—and I almost cursed it when it did—we shouldn't have anchored. If we hadn't anchored where we did, how could our boy have been saved?"

"We should never have looked upon him again, Ben—till the sea gives up its dead."

"And now he's with us, safe and sound—making this Christmas time the happiest in all our lives—just because the wind fell."

"Yes, Ben," says Annie thoughtfully. "It was GOD'S WIND, and HE let it fall."

ALL ALONG THE LINE!

A BALLAD OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.

"FRED WATE, it's your turn. And Fred mustn't *wait*," added Martin Abbott.

When the groan that greeted the pun had subsided, Freddie Wate remarked steadily—

"I can't tell a story, and I'm not going to tell a story—that is, an ordinary story in the ordinary way—but all the same you needn't get your bolsters ready, because I'm going to substitute for an ordinary yarn something that not even Abbott can object to."

"What is it?" asked the monitor suspiciously.

"A recitation," answered the other.

"Recitations are allowable," decided Abbott promptly.

Without further parley, Fred Wate recited in fine style:—ALL ALONG THE LINE! A BALLAD OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.

The Sabbath bells were chiming in our dear homes far away,
As o'er the list'ning field rang out the summons for the fray:
Oh, brightly in the morning sun our spangled banners gleam'd,
And fearless every warrior's eye with dauntless courage beam'd;
For tho' the foe in strong array had mustered for the fight,
We knew we fought in Freedom's cause—for Freedom and the Right—
And Glory follows close where'er the Flag of Freedom goes—
As moved our Van of Battle on loud cheer on cheer arose
All along the Line.

Hard by a rugged ridge we men of Vermont had to stay,
The ground to hold till orders came—ours only to obey—
But as the battle's tide swept on, and regiments hurried past,
As thro' the drifting smoke we saw our comrades falling fast,
And heard their piercing death-shrieks rise above the conflict's din,
Hard work our leader had to hold the Boys of Vermont in.
In strong, extended ranks we stood that rising ridge to keep,
But burned our hearts so fiercely that rose murmurs loud and deep
All along the Line.

At last, O God! we see our men are falling, falling back,
The Southern hosts are stealing on, our guns are firing slack!
But now across the reeking field a mounted soldier rides,
His panting charger wild with fear, a red stream down his sides.
With eager, throbbing, burning hearts, our eager eyes we strain,
As on, still on, the rider comes across the bloody plain.
" 'Tis Colonel Gray!" is shouted, "from the Staff our orders brings—
Our orders come at last—Hurrah!" and joyous shouting rings
All along the Line

We know him well, and love him well, this brave young Colonel Gray,
Our ranks triumphant he has led on many a well-fought day.
On, on he comes until we see his face is ghastly white—
His steed is close upon us now: why checks he not his flight?
The charger halts, and at our feet, fast streaming life's red tide,
The Colonel falls, a lifeless corse, with one white hand stretched wide.
A paper, see! that dead hand clasps, with these words, written large—
"The General bids you ride and tell the Boys of Vermont charge
All along the Line!"

THE COLONEL FALLS LIFELESS.

The words were read; one look upon the dead man's face we gave—
Then "Charge!" our leader shouted, and a glittering long white wave
Ran down the rising ridge which we throughout the day had kept,
As forward, forward, on, on, on, our line impetuous swept;
To roll the tide of battle back, to win the half-lost field—
To win it yet, or every man resolved dear life to yield.
It seem'd as though that dead white face our fearful onslaught led,
And soon our bright steel's rolling wave bore crest of bloody red
All along the Line.

And as we charged our troops re-formed, and joined on every hand—
Our charge was like the whirlwind that sweeps Death across the land;
And ere upon the western heights the sunset glow was seen,
The Stars and Stripes waved proudly where the rebel camp had been!
When we death's roll have answer'd, and our children's sons are old,
The gallant deeds of North and South that day will still be told,
For long 'twill be before the fame of such brave deeds shall fade—
But, chief of all, they'll tell the charge we men of Vermont made
All along the Line.

Next eve, when peaceful starbeams gleam'd the field of battle o'er,
The corse of gallant Colonel Gray with tender hands we bore:
A soldier's hasty sepulchre some sad-faced warriors made—
Where friend and foe together lie our valiant dead we laid.
No costly monument we rear'd to mark his place of rest,
But just these words we wrote upon the slab above his breast:
"He, being dead, yet speaketh"—and our meaning well they know
Who hear how by a dead man's word we charged against the foe
All along the Line.

My brothers who are fighting for the Right against the Wrong,
My brothers in the battle for the Weak against the Strong,
My brothers who are fighting for the Rights God meant for all,
When those who give our orders in the raging struggle fall,
No dimmer in our stricken hearts must glow Faith's sacred flame—
The Foe is still before us, and the Cause remains the same:
In death our leaders speak to us as plainly as in life—
"Charge, comrades, Charge! close up your ranks, and carry on the strife

All along the Line!”

“I think we shall understand the meaning of that last verse more fully when we are grown-up,” said Martin Abbott thoughtfully.

HOW I GOT MY FATHER INTO PARLIAMENT.

In a voice that carried with it a conviction of his own gravity and earnestness, Bertie Perkins commenced his yarn by giving utterance, in a somewhat sententious manner, to the following original reflections:

"We hear a great deal about the gratitude that boys ought to feel as regards their fathers. There is no doubt that boys owe their fathers a good deal, but it sometimes strikes me that there is something to be said in favour of putting the boot on the other foot. Whatever our fathers do for us, surely we do a great deal for them. In this way: there is no doubt but that as a rule we are, in one way and another, a constant source of anxiety to the authors of our being. Quite so—but that anxiety prevents them worrying themselves too much about other troubles, and sort of draws them out of themselves. Having us to think of and to provide for, they can't bother so much about themselves as they would do otherwise. We save 'em from it. Again: we are an expense to them. But I have been reading lately of the mischief that arises from too much wealth accumulating in single hands. By being such an expense to them, don't we save our fathers from the danger of getting too much money, and very likely getting too fond of it? And as the vicar said the other Sunday, the moral dangers arising from a love of filthy lucre are . . ."

"Perkins?" interrupted Martin Abbott sharply.

"What?" asked Bertie.

"We don't want a sermon, or a lecture, or anything of the kind, but a good solid yarn, and the sooner you begin one the less danger *you*'re in."

"By referring to our general services to our fathers," explained Perkins, "I was only leading up to an account of my special service to my special father in getting him into Parliament."

"I don't believe you did anything of the kind," remarked the monitor emphatically.

"Hear, hear," exclaimed a number of voices.

"Open your ears and shut your mouths," retorted the story-teller of the evening, "and I'll soon show you that I did."

"Silence, then, everybody," commanded Abbott

And Bertie Perkins plunged boldly into his yarn.

My father is a Member of Parliament, and I got him his seat. The whole circumstances of the case were peculiar, from beginning to end. Owing to the resignation of the former member for Nethercliffe—where I come from—there had to be what is called a "bye"-election. I was at home at the time, and, from the moment when a deputation of voters waited upon father to persuade him to stand, took the greatest and most active interest in all the proceedings. I am bound to tell you that even before he was returned to the House of Commons, my father was almost the most important man in Nethercliffe.

(I fail to understand what all that sniffing is about.)

After his election, of course he became *the* most important man in the place. He is a shipbuilder at Nethercliffe, which is a rising seaport on the south-west coast. The only other shipbuilder there is Mr. Keale. Father and Mr. Keale are now on the very best of terms—so much so that I have heard some talk of uniting the two businesses under the style of "Perkins and Keale." But at the time when the election began, they were what they had been for years—jealous rivals and bitter enemies. There's no use in disguising the fact, little credit as it reflects on either of them. Our elders are very smart in telling us boys to be all sugar-sticky sweetness towards each other, but they often forget to keep a sugar-stick in their own tempers towards each other.

("Leave our fathers alone," said Abbott sternly; "and get on with your story. Any moral remarks that are called for I'll make myself afterwards.")

This rivalry and jealousy entered into everything they did. If Keale built a big boat, father built a bigger. When father started a one-horse carriage, Keale bought a two-horse one. When Keale enlarged his business premises, father added about another acre to his. To go longer back, when my father was filled with natural pride and joy at the arrival into the world of myself, his son and heir, what do you think Mr. Keale did? Why, he had twins within a month.

One of these twins—Daisy Keale—is mixed up with my yarn. At the age of eleven, I fell in love with her, and my affection was returned. To such an

extent, that at the present time we are secretly engaged. You will hear plenty more about Daisy before I've finished.

The day after father agreed to stand for election, the printers and bill-posters set to work. "Vote for Perkins!" was stuck up everywhere. The very next day the place was flooded with placards exhorting everybody, in flaming characters, to "Vote for Keale!"

True to the old and mutual animosity, Josiah Keale had decided to enter the lists against the candidate already in the field.

Public feeling soon began to run very high—all the higher because the feeling was more personal than political, for the two rival candidates, instead of differing in politics, were on the same side. So as there was no "party" question to be considered, *all* father's friends rallied round him, and of course *all* Mr. Keale's friends rallied round Mr. Keale.

What with rival pamphlets, rival meetings, rival addresses—and a few rival free fights—the general excitement was kept at fever heat. Everybody seemed to go mad—and, in my father's cause, of course I was proud to follow the general example, and go mad too—for the time being.

("Never got over it," muttered a voice in the darkness of the big dormitory.)

I squeezed into all the meetings I could, and shouted "Vote for Perkins!" till I was hoarse. I looked out for Keale's boy—the other twin—to give him a hiding, but he was away at boarding school.

Daisy was at home. One day I met her in the street, just after I had heard father deliver a stirring speech to a crowd of working men in their dinner hour.

"Vote for Perkins!" I cried.

"Never," said Daisy.

"Then all is over between us," I said in my excitement.

"Certainly it is," Daisy replied.

"Then give me back all the presents I promised you," I demanded indignantly. You must remember that my brain was upset by several weeks' Parliamentary excitement.

Daisy walked on without a word. I felt that I was a martyr and a Trojan—a Trojan and a martyr rolled into a single boy. I had done more for my father than my father had ever done for me—for his sake I had given up my

future wife. Several times during the next few days Daisy and I met and passed each other—like perfect strangers.

At last the day of the election was only a week off. The excitement was madder than ever. It was said at home that I holloaed, "Vote for Perkins!" in my sleep. No wonder if I did—for next week would decide who should be "M.P." for Nethercliffe. The end was drawing near. The daughter of my father's rival would soon know now whether she had or had not lost for ever the son of a live member of Parliament.

The result of the election hung in the balance. Whatever our side said in public, in our hearts we knew that Keale was strong, very strong. So strong, that every hour of the remaining time must be used to the greatest possible advantage. We must strain every nerve. We must leave no stone unturned.

For that last Saturday night before the eventful day, we had managed a splendid public meeting. A celebrated speaker from London had promised to deliver an address. We had advertised the meeting well, and felt certain of a successful and exciting night. Father had been practising a blood-curdling speech for days before-hand.

In the afternoon I thought I would prepare myself for the turmoil of the coming meeting by taking a stroll by the sea. A quiet walk might help me to get my voice in good order for shouting "Vote for Perkins!" in case the other side invaded our meeting—or for practice if they didn't.

From the cliff I descended to the beach, and by-and-by found myself on the pier. Amongst the little crowd of promenaders upon it were old Keale, Mrs. Keale, and Daisy. As I passed them I moved aside to hiss in the opposition candidate's ear—(of course he knew me well)—or rather as close to it as I could reach—"Vote for Perkins!"

The wind was blowing hard from the shore, and the tide running out fast. The waves eddied and swirled at the harbour mouth, and the sea was thick with "white horses."

I stood at the pier-head. On the landing below were the Keale party, fishing. Every now and then I heard Daisy's merry laugh. But a sudden piercing scream—one piercing scream—rang through the air. The next moment—the same moment—I saw the body of Daisy Keale strike the water. By some mishap or another she had fallen from the slippery stage. There she was, in the sea, her white hands held up despairingly—every moment, every fraction of a moment, she was drifting farther and farther away. When I rushed on to the landing below I just had time to see that Mrs. Keale was clinging to her husband, holding him back, and shrieking—

"No, no—the boat! the boat!"

I hadn't time to notice any more, because I fell into the water too, and was striking out for Daisy.

("Very good indeed," said Martin Abbott approvingly. "Very modestly put. Bravo, Bertie!")

I *can* swim—I can, indeed—and I soon reached her. I think she'd only sunk twice. I got a good hold on her, and headed round. But you see there were four things against us—wind, tide, undercurrents, and rocks. I got knocked about a bit, which wouldn't have mattered so much if I could only have got *nearer*. But I couldn't. I tried hard and I kept on—which is about all that any fellow can do in any sort of difficulty.

I couldn't do it. The pier, and the beach, and the town, and the bye-election—everything—seemed to be fading away farther and farther—fading out of sight—fading out of mind as I became unconscious. I didn't see the boat that was being frantically pulled towards us—Mr. Keale at one scull and a fisherman at the other. I don't remember anything of the boat reaching us, or of being pulled into her. Daisy does—and she says we were more than a mile out at sea.

But I remember that as my senses returned to me Mr. Keale was bending over me in the boat, supporting my head and crying aloud—

"He saved my child. What can I do for him—what can I do?"

My senses couldn't have returned properly yet—my wandering mind had got back to the election—for I instantly replied—

"*Vote for Perkins!*"

"I WILL!" cried Josiah Keale.

I thought that if they knew at home that I had been drowned in the course of the afternoon, I shouldn't be allowed to attend the meeting in the evening. So I gladly allowed myself to be driven first to Mr. Keale's house, where I had a good rub-down, and changed my clothes for a suit of his son's. I got inside our own house without being observed, and changed my clothes again. By these dodges I escaped detection, and cut off for the meeting in good time to get a seat at the back of the platform before the front doors were thrown open.

I shall never forget that meeting. As soon as the doors were opened, in rushed the people, filling every seat, every nook in the great hall. It was soon

evident that it was a mixed crowd, some cheering for Perkins and others for Keale.

The popular politician from London made a terrific speech, and wound up by proposing a resolution in favour and support of the candidature of Mr. Albert Perkins. The resolution was seconded in "high-falutin!" language by a local orator, who owed father some money, and spoke of him as a man who would be, in Parliament, a living proof of the discretion and sound judgment of the constituency that elected him, and an ornament to the Senate-house itself. He sat down mopping his brow, and no doubt feeling that father wouldn't ask him for the money just yet.

Then arose a commotion. A man was seen pushing his way to the platform. Some of the people shoved him back, and others thrust him forward again. Anyway, he was getting nearer, and at last he leaped on to the stage. He was Josiah Keale, the rival candidate!

In the midst of the uproar he appealed to the chairman, who gave him permission to speak, and asked everybody to hear him quietly.

"I stand here," shouted Mr. Keale, "*to support the resolution*!"

A burst of exclamations was followed by a profound silence. Mr. Keale stepped to the back of the platform and pulled me with him to the front.

("I say, Martin," broke off Bertie Perkins, "that chap Keale called me a lot of names before he finished, and I don't like to repeat them for fear of being bolstered."

"You mean such as 'brave,' 'gallant' . . ."

"Yes," said Bertie hastily.

"Just substitute for such words the word 'blank,'" decided the monitor after a pause.

"Right you are," agreed the story-teller.)

"I repeat," said Daisy's father, "that I stand here in support of the resolution pledging this meeting to do all that is possible to secure the return to Parliament of Mr. Albert Perkins. This afternoon this blank boy, his son, saved the life of my daughter in a blank and most blank blank manner. Listen, and I will tell you the story of his blank blankism."

The rest was *all* blanks, till he reached the end.

"I have been thinking that I ought not to have come forward at all in opposition to Mr. Perkins—I have been thinking that it was an ungracious

and unneighbourly thing to do. Anyway, I now retire from the contest in favour of the father of this blank blank little blank. Vote for Perkins!"

"And he did retire," said Abbott, as the yarn ceased, "and in consequence your father had a walk over?"

"Just so. Now then, didn't I get him into Parliament?"

"It seems very likely that you did," was the ready response; "at all events you made his election certain."

EXPELLED.

"I SAY, BENYON," observed Abbott to the occupant of the sixteenth bed, "I've heard a very serious thing about you."

"What is it?" asked Archie Benyon.

"Why, that you were expelled from your last school."

"Quite true—so I was, and another boy with me. But we were both innocent."

"What were you dismissed for?" demanded the monitor. "I consider we have a right to know."

"Certainly," cried a number of boys.

"You're quite welcome to know, all of you," returned Benyon. "In fact, as it's my turn to spin a yarn, I thought of telling the story to-night. Poor old Bunnie Laws and I—'Bunnie' was the other chap's nick-name, though I never knew how he came by it—Bunnie and I both got chucked out of boarding school for playing a game—playing at Heroes."

"Playing at Heroes! What do you mean?" asked Martin.

"Just what I say, we were dismissed for playing at being Heroes. But I'll just tell you the whole yarn straight away, and to begin with, will christen it 'EXPELLED.'"

WE CLENCHED THE BARGAIN ON THE SPOT.

The boarding school was Milton House, situated near the Thames side between Gravesend and Greenhithe. The head-master was a nice old chap, named Professor Smoale. For a schoolmaster, his character was very satisfactory. He was about sixty, and chock full of learning and experience. He was very tender-hearted and emotional. Any story of suffering, and particularly any tale of devotion and unselfishness and heroism, would touch him up like anything. Things like Horatius keeping the bridge, soldiers dying in face of fearful odds for the sake of duty, sailors standing by their ships in storm and stress—tales of that sort used to get into his eyes, so to speak. He had a terrifically big head, but I really believe that his heart was bigger still, though he did unjustly dismiss Bunnie and me. What used particularly to delight him was to get hold of cases of heroism in modern life, instances of somebody giving up all to save another. You know the kind of thing I mean. Why, I remember when a case was published about a fireman rushing into a burning house, and bringing out a little child wrapped in his own coat—the child living, and the fireman dying—old Smoale read out the account to the entire school. I told Bunnie he would cry before he finished, and so he did.

It was all on account of his own character that I got hold of the brilliant idea that ended in expulsion. The idea was all right, it was the way it worked out that was all wrong. My fellow victim of a sad failure on our master's part to understand my scheme properly, was the only chap in the school I took into my confidence.

"Bunnie," I said, "old Smoale is a brick."

"He is," agreed Bunnie. He always agreed with anything I said or proposed.

"You see how he dotes on heroism."

"He does, indeed," replied Bunnie.

"I'd do a good deal to please him," I went on after a pause.

"So would I," was Bunnie's reply.

"How that rescue of a child from the fire stirred his heart. Why, they ought to send him to the next fire and remind him about that fireman, and get him to shed his tears on the flames to put 'em out," I cried eloquently. "Bunnie, what would his feelings be if he found that he'd got two real live heroes right here, in his own school? What would he say, do, think, if he had a case of real life-saving heroism in Milton House?"

"Two heroes here!"

"Yes. Bunnie, I've got a dazzling idea. Help me to carry it out, and you shall share the glory. You and I will be those two heroes!"

"But we ain't heroes," said Bunnie.

"Not yet," said I; "but we soon will be. We'll save old Smoale from a fearful danger."

"What danger's he in?" asked Laws, with wide-open eyes.

"None. That's just where the first part of my plan comes in. You and I want to save him from a fearful danger, and to be heroes. Now, as he isn't in any danger, what follows? Why, clearly, that he must be put in danger. It stands to reason that with all our heroism we can't rescue him *from* danger without putting him *in* danger first. For instance, if we gallantly plunge into the Thames and save him from a watery grave, he must first be chucked into the Thames. It is impossible for us to pull him out, Bunnie, if he isn't in."

Bunnie Laws saw the force of this reasoning clearly. I continued my argument.

"Again. If Milton House is in flames, in the middle of the night, and you and I rush into our beloved master's bedroom, tear off our own night-shirts, wrap them round him, carry him out in our arms, and place him tenderly on the ground in face of the cheering multitude, the laws of logic require that we first set fire to Milton House."

Bunnie was losing heart. He looked thoroughly frightened.

"The risks are too dreadful," he declared.

"All heroes must face risks," I said, "or how can they overcome them?"

"True," said he, evidently coming round to my way of thinking again.

I went on talking, and succeeded in getting him more and more into sympathy with my splendid plan, until I had completely won him over. At last he became regularly enthusiastic.

"Let's decoy him down to the water-side," he cried, "when the tide's up. Then you rush forward and pitch him in, Archie. I'll be in hiding. As he strikes the water I'll rush forward with a shout, knock you down, and plunge in with a life-belt and save his life."

"No," said I, "that won't do. It would make you far too prominent in the matter, Bunnie, and you know that heroes are always modest and retiring. It will look far better for you to keep more in the background. Now if we could only arrange for you, say, to set our kind schoolmaster on fire, and for me to be standing handy with a bucket of water. . . ."

"Ridiculous," pronounced Bunnie; "you would have all the glory to yourself."

At last we decided that whatever was done must be done together throughout. We must mutually contrive the danger and mutually effect the gallant rescue. After several confabulations we finally settled as follows:—

The fact that we were both good swimmers naturally led us to give the preference to a water rescue, and in this direction we were also led by the fact that the professor was in the habit of crossing the river to visit a friend who lived on the other side. To save himself the walk of quite a mile to the nearest steam-ferry, he used to go over the water in a row-boat belonging to a man named Bill Chalks. Bill Chalks used to bring his boat up the little creek that ran close to the school, embark Mr. Smoale, row him to the Essex shore of the Thames, and return there for him when he wanted to come back. Wednesday or Saturday was generally selected for these visits, the afternoons of those days being half-holidays. We decided to get Bill Chalks to upset his fare from the boat the very next time he was taking him across. The accident was to take place two or three hundred yards from the bank on our side. We would be strolling along, witness the sad affair, and plunge in to the rescue.

Off we started to interview Bill Chalks at once. We were delighted to find that Smoale had engaged the boat for the usual trip, the very next afternoon. But we were taken aback by Bill's reluctance to undertake his share of the work. We explained the whole idea to him, as fully as I have explained it to you, but he couldn't or wouldn't see it in the right light.

"To upset a aged bloke in the water," he urged, "is to danger my char*ack*ter."

"Well," I suggested candidly, "suppose we consider your char*ack*ter worth five shillings?"

"Cash down," added Bunnie.

The boatman hesitated, and then expressed a doubt whether we possessed five shillings. Convinced on this point (for we showed him the money), he still hesitated a lot more.

"I'm a-thinkin' about it," he said at last, "only I thinks slow."

Whilst he went on thinking, we went on talking and chinking the money. The result of the three operations was that he declared—

"This here murdering deed can be dood at the price. Money down."

We clenched the bargain on the spot, and settled every detail for the grand event.

"Just think, Bunnie," I said as we walked back to Milton House, "how splendid our position will be as the heroes of the school! What privileges we shall be able to collar—for how can a man punish two gallant boys who have saved him from a watery tomb?"

We were both in a fever of excitement till the following afternoon arrived. After dinner we dressed in our oldest suits, and made off for the river-side. We saw Bill Chalks row up the creek—and then we waited and watched.

By-and-by—but quite half-an-hour later than we expected—we heard the splash of the sculls again. It was all right—there was the boat—there was Bill—there was the doomed professor seated calmly in the stern. Little did he dream of the rescue in store for him!

They reached the mouth of the creek, and stood across the river.

"Off with our boots, Bunnie!" I cried in an agitated whisper. "The moment is at hand."

Just the distance from the bank agreed on had been reached—every instant we expected to see good old Professor Smoale floundering in the water. But with a vigorous pull of his bowside scull, Chalks suddenly shot the boat out of our sight behind a barge. From Chalks' own boastful account afterwards, we know exactly all about the dark deed of treachery and deceit that went on behind that barge.

Bill Chalks ceased sculling, and glared at his fare full in the face.

"Perfessor," he said, "this here's the wery identical spot where two of your young gennelmen has paid me five bob to chuck you overboard."

"Chuck me—throw me—overboard!" cried our head-master.

"To do that wery deed," insisted Chalks. "Listen to me, Perfessor, and I'll tell you hall."

He told him "hall." But no doubt he failed to make clear the purity of our motives.

Professor Smoale gasped for breath. Then he said—

"I refuse to believe you—I refuse to believe you. Row me back to the shore instantly, and we shall find no two young gentlemen waiting to carry out this fiendish plot. Their absence will prove the falsity of your story."

"I seed 'em lurking 'andy as we come out o' the creek—seed 'em with my own heyes," said Chalks.

"Row me back instantly," repeated Mr. Smoale.

"No, Perfessor. We'll play a better dodge than that. *I'm* a-goin' to jump overboard out o' sight, behind this here barge. *I* makes a tremenjious splash, and *you* 'ollers ' 'Elp!' in your own natural voice, only louder. Then you see if them two murdering young gennelmen ain't waiting on that there bank to jump in for to *pretend* to save you. I don't mind a ducking no more than a porpoise. Five shillings will dry *me*—which you can give me the same, Perfessor, when I've proved as my words is true."

Up sprang Bill Chalks from his seat. The next moment—before another word of objection could be uttered—he dived into the Thames with a truly "tremenjious" splash.

"Help! help! help!" cried the terrified voice of old Mr. Smoale.

Bunnie and I heard the splash, heard the shout for help.

"Now for it," we said—and plunged boldly into the tide, like the heroes we were, striking out towards the barge with might and main.

"Hold up, sir," I yelled: "I will save you!"

"So will I, sir!" screamed Bunnie.

"I'm Benyon, sir!"

"So am I, sir!" roared Bunnie—"I mean I'm Laws."

I swam round the bows of the barge, my fellow hero swam round the stern. We caught sight of the struggling figure in the water at the same moment. At the same moment we reached him, and made a grab at him. He dived out of our clutch and out of our sight—but not before we had each looked at his face—the grinning face of Bill Chalks, the boatman. We each saw also another face—the awful face of Professor Smoale, who was seated, of course, safely in the boat.

I felt my heroism go out of me. So did Bunnie, I'm certain. We both ceased to swim. The tide swept us down the river—the half-hour's delay I have alluded to made all the difference in the strength of the current.

Then *we* cried "Help!"

I can finish in a few words. Chalks clambered into his boat again, pulled after us, and picked up Bunnie Laws a few hundred yards away. I was carried farther and was saved by a shrimp-boat. Off the Nore!

They said it was about half a mile from where Bunnie was saved, but in my opinion it was off the Nore.

The next day we were both expelled.

"Served you both jolly well right," was the quick and uncomplimentary comment of Monitor Martin Abbott. "There's quite enough shamming in the world without boys trying it on. Let's all try to be *real*. An ounce of true and well-won honour is worth anything—a cartload of the false article is worth nothing. And don't you forget it, Benyon."

A TALE OF FOUR SHIPS.

TOLD BY CLAUDE FARMAN.

His Britannic Majesty's sloop-of-war *Ripple* was cruising in West Indian waters. Her general object was the suppression of piracy—the particular object of her cruise, known to everyone on board, was to find, fight, and capture the *Black Angel*, a pirate vessel that had long been the dread, scourge, and terror of the West Indies. The *Ripple* had been knocking about the station so long that she was in anything but first-class condition, besides being rather seriously undermanned. In fact the pirate was known to be not only faster, but more strongly manned and more formidably armed than the man-o'-war in pursuit of her; being, indeed, a giant of a pirate in every respect. But British seamen were not then, and are not now, in the habit of counting the odds in a case of duty. They have never been taught that sort of arithmetic.

"Sail on the larboard bow," roared the look-out man one morning.

"Sail on the larboard bow," repeated the officer of the watch, who almost immediately went below to report the sail to the captain. Quickly as the latter made his appearance on deck, the news that a strange sail was in sight spread amongst the entire crew of the *Ripple* like wildfire. The hope beat high in every breast that at last the pirate had been sighted, and would be brought to bay.

"If that's the *Black Angel*," remarked Stanley Vane, the senior "middy"—a lad of about seventeen or eighteen—"I only hope he won't show us his heels."

"That's the danger, Mr. Vane," grumbled Jack Quarters, the acting bo'sun's mate. "The *Black Angel*—she did ought to be called the *Black Devil* by rights—has got *wings* against our flappers, and if she chooses to use 'em the *Ripple* couldn't catch her in a year o' Sundays."

This lurking fear that the pirate craft would prefer flight to fight had rankled in the breasts of the sailors for a long time. However, everything had been done to make the man-o'-war look as much like a peaceful

merchantman as possible. If the pirate fell into the trap, she would be certain to come to close quarters in the expectation of finding an easy prey. Long and intently gazed Captain Jardine through his glasses at the distant sail.

"What do you make of her, Mr. Steel?"

"Man-o'-war, sir," replied the lieutenant promptly.

"You are right," agreed the captain after a pause. "She has the wind, and if it freshens will outsail us rapidly. You will see that preparations are quietly made, Mr. Steel, in case she should hoist the enemy's colours."

"Very good, sir."

The wind was already freshening, and the strange frigate soon proved the correctness of Captain Jardine's estimate of her sailing superiority.

"She ain't the *Black Angel*," muttered Jack Quarters, "but she sails like her." His intense disappointment that the stranger, whoever she was, was not the longed-for pirate was shared by all on board.

As the morning wore on, the distance between the two vessels lessened, till the stranger's advantage in both size and armament was plainly apparent. The frigate had been so steered as to make it evident that it was her intention to intercept the course of the sloop. Captain Jardine had remained on deck ever since the strange sail had been reported to him, his anxiety gradually increasing the whole time. Stanley Vane was on duty as signal midshipman, and could overhear the remarks that passed between the captain and Lieutenant Steel.

"The sooner we find out what she is the better," said the former at last. "Hoist the English colours."

In a few moments they were fluttering proudly in the breeze. With eager interest the officers and crew of the *Ripple* waited the answering ensign of the stranger, which was run up quickly enough.

The French tricolour!

"Mr. Steel," said Captain Jardine, quickly but coolly, "I should have no right to pit his Majesty's sloop against that fellow by choice. But the action is inevitable. We'll keep afloat as long as we can, and if we can't beat him off we'll go down with the colours flying. Order all hands aft."

"Aye, aye, sir," was the lieutenant's cheerful reply. The next moment the bo'sun's shrill pipe communicated the order to the ship's company.

"My lads," said the captain, "yonder vessel is a first-class French frigate, but this sloop is not going to strike to her, for we're English. The greater the risk the greater the honour. The longer the odds the more the glory. Beat to quarters!" A tremendous cheer followed this brief but stirring address.

Quietly, but very quickly, arms were served out, every man took up his post. The ports were opened and the guns run out. The *Ripple's* course was altered, so that when the two vessels should come abeam of each other the first broadside exchanged would be with the starboard guns of each.

The Frenchman's guns were the first to fire, belching forth a terrific cannonade. The broadside was instantly returned. The action had commenced.

For more than two hours the little British sloop engaged the *Ville de Rouen*. Her hull battered, her rigging shattered, the majority of her officers and almost half her crew dead or wounded, the *Ripple* kept her colours flying still. But the odds were too unequal. Into the gallant hearts that still beat aboard of her, the sullen conviction was becoming irrepressible that she could not continue the fight much longer. Some of the frigate's shots had passed through her bulwarks and topsides, and one or two had penetrated below the water-line. The pumps were kept working, but another raking or two and she must sink. It was a comfort to think how much the frigate must have suffered also! The sloop lying so much lower in the water, the enemy must have been badly hulled.

It was becoming more and more difficult to manœuvre the *Ripple* in her disabled condition, but the order was given to put her about once more, and she passed under the frigate's stern, letting fly a staggering fire as she did so, receiving herself a rain of bullets from her opponent's rigging. Almost at young Vane's feet fell both the captain and the first lieutenant—dead. As the smoke cleared off, the Englishmen saw a sight they were little prepared for. The *Ville de Rouen* had put her helm up and was running away before the wind! Incredible as this appeared, the next few minutes proved it. If the sloop had had enough the frigate had had too much—she was off and away. Although pursuit was impossible, the fight was over; and though the *Ripple* hadn't made a capture she could claim the victory. A deafening "Hurrah!" was raised by her survivors as soon as their astonishment allowed them to use their throats.

For a little while the utmost confusion prevailed. Some of the dead and wounded were carried to the already crowded cockpit, men sprang aloft with axes to clear the entangled rigging, efforts were made to wash and clear the

decks, but everybody seemed to be acting without orders. Instead of the stern silence which discipline would have imposed upon them, the men were shouting loudly to each other. Contradictory commands were bawled in different voices.

With dizzy brain, and with a sickened heart as he looked at the scene of carnage all around him, Stanley Vane—unhurt, unwounded—leaned against the taffrail. That the captain and Mr. Steel, and other officers, were killed, he knew; but the command of the sloop must have devolved upon somebody. Then why was he not at his post to control the growing disorder?

Emerging quickly from the cockpit, where he had just carried the second lieutenant, Jack Quarters hurried up to the young midshipman, touching his cap respectfully as he said—

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Vane, will you give your orders? I'm afraid the ship can't float long unless something is done."

"Give my orders!" exclaimed the lad. "What do you mean?"

"The second lieutenant has just died, sir. All the other officers have been killed too. You are in command of the sloop, sir, and I am now chief petty officer. The casualties have been heavier than I ever heard of before."

For awhile, Stanley was unable to realise the responsibility that had fallen upon him. As at last he grasped the fact that he was actually in charge of the vessel, and realised all that the fact meant, he pulled himself together with a tremendous effort.

"That's right, sir," said Jack, with whom he immediately held a hurried consultation. Then in a loud, clear, ringing voice, he gave his orders. At first the sailors looked amazed, but as they too realised the position, they obeyed with cheerful alacrity, and everything on board rapidly assumed a more ship-shape appearance, though the day was almost over before the first tasks were accomplished. Then the youthful commander called the company aft.

"My men," he said, "the sloop is badly injured. The shots below her water-line are serious. The pumps must be kept going all night, while carpenters' repairs are proceeded with. By the morning she should be watertight again."

He ended with a few words of appreciation and encouragement, which put fresh heart into the brave fellows upon whose exertions the fate of the ship depended. But in the night one of the sudden, brief, furious storms common to the region sprang up. The sloop lived through the storm itself, which ended almost as suddenly as it had begun, but when morning dawned

and revealed fully the further damage she had suffered, all hope of keeping her afloat had to be abandoned.

Gallantly and resolutely young Vane faced his duty. His first thought was to bury the dead before leaving the sinking ship. "But no," he reflected: "the living first."

The sloop's two cutters were the least injured of her boats, and these he ordered to be prepared for launching. Provisions were placed in them, and everything got ready, and he gave the order to lower away. The wounded were all put safely in them first, and then he told off the crews, which numbered together about forty powerful fellows. Into the first cutter, after a little consideration, he had the arm-chest lowered. Before he himself sprang into her, he saw that the bodies of the dead to be left on board the doomed vessel were all decently and reverently laid out.

In sad silence the two cutters pushed off, rowing the minute stroke, in honour of the gallant officers and men who had found their coffin in their ship. At a distance of about eight cables the boats were rounded to head the poor old *Ripple*, and the men lay on their oars, while Stanley produced and opened a prayer-book. All eyes were directed to the sinking sloop, and all heads were uncovered, as he commenced to read the solemn service for the burial of the dead at sea. As he reached the words "we therefore commit their bodies to the deep," the *Ripple* was seen to give a sudden lurch, and immediately afterwards she slowly sank below the waves, every oar of the two cutters being up-raised in a last salute as she disappeared from view for ever.

Stanley Vane's plan was to steer straight for Cape Haytien, distant about three hundred miles, and this intention he had communicated to his men. But in the middle watch of their first night in the cutters, they found themselves almost under the bows of a large brig.

"Ship ahoy!"

"Boats ahoy! What boats are those?"

"Cutters of his Britannic Majesty's sloop *Ripple*," roared Stanley. "What ship is that?"

"The *Mary Mildred*, merchant brig, for Jamaica."

"Heave to!"

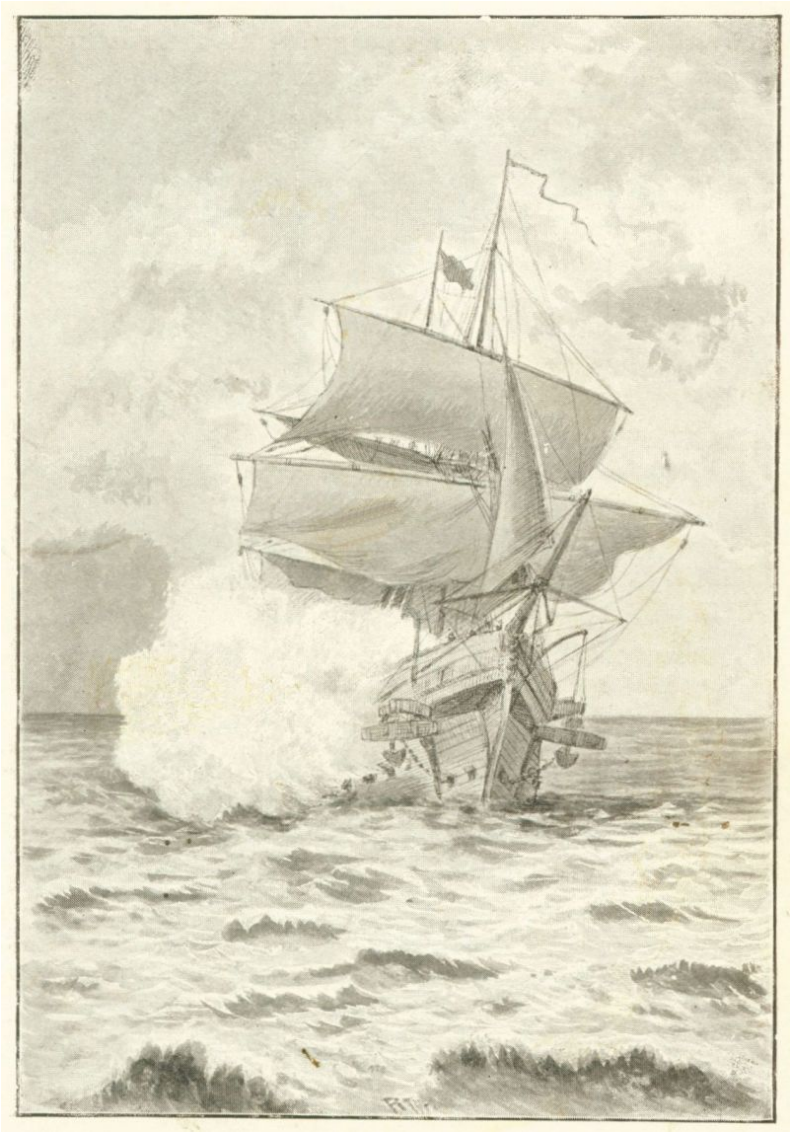
In the course of a few minutes the survivors of the *Ripple* found themselves safe on board the English merchantman, whose commander,

Captain Neal Fyne, listened with eager interest to Stanley Vane's strange story. He accommodated the middy and the surgeon of the *Ripple* in his own cabin. Every attention was paid to the wounded, and the cutters' crews were quartered as comfortably as possible with the crew of the *Mary Mildred*, Vane having instantly decided to proceed with the brig to Jamaica, there to report himself. As she was carrying several passengers and a draft of twenty soldiers for one of the regiments stationed at Jamaica, the *Mary Mildred's* resources were taxed to the uttermost by the unexpected addition to her company.

At daybreak of the second day a sail was sighted about three miles off.

"Mr. Vane," exclaimed Captain Fyne excitedly, "I know that ship. *She's the* BLACK ANGEL!"

He was not alone in identifying the long, low-lying schooner, with clean-cut bows and tapering masts. There were men in his crew who had met her before. She *was* the *Black Angel*, and was heading for the brig, with a light wind all in her favour. Any lingering doubt was dispelled as she came up, and fired a shot as a warning to the merchantman to heave to.



THE FRENCHMAN'S GUNS WERE BELCHING FORTH A TERRIFIC CANNONADE.

Jack Quarters fairly danced with glee.

"What a glorious trap she's fallen into!" he cried. "The brig herself is well armed and fully manned, and she's got forty man-o'-war's-men aboard her, with the *Ripple's* arm-chest—to say nothing of the sojers. Before the day's out she's ours, and every mother's son of her murdering crew will swing at the yard-arm."

"She'll be called to account at last, Mr. Vane," said Captain Fyne quite as joyfully though less demonstratively. "We won't try to run away this time."

"And we'll take care that *she* doesn't run away if we can help it," said Stanley. "Our plan will be to hide our strength until she runs alongside us, or we run alongside her. We're strong enough not only to resist her boarders, but to board her ourselves."

"The wind's too light to force a fight just yet," rejoined the skipper; "and what there is is falling."

Nevertheless the brig was promptly prepared for action. But the breeze died away so quickly, that soon scarcely a breath rippled the surface of the water. The vessels slowly drifted, separated by a distance of about a couple of miles.

"This will mean a night attack," said Fyne earnestly. "In the darkness they'll send their boats to board us. They'll find a little surprise prepared for them."

"Captain Fyne," exclaimed Vane, "I have a plan to propose, by which we can make sure of a capture. There can be little doubt but that they will try the night attack you speak of. Although we can repulse that attack easily, some of their boats will get away, and if a breeze springs up, the pirate herself will up sail and give us the slip, having discovered what a Tartar she has fallen in with."

"True—but what's your plan?"

"Simply this. You have your crew, soldiers, and male passengers. I'll leave you besides half my men. When darkness falls I'll put off in my cutter with the other half. I shall lay-to off the pirate. The attack of her boats on you will be my signal to run the cutter alongside her—board her, overpower the watch, and take possession of her."

In his excitement, Captain Fyne grasped the midshipman's hand.

"She's as good as ours," he cried.

While daylight lasted, everybody was busy. The men's stations were arranged, the brig's guns carefully overhauled, the small arms cleaned, swords and cutlasses sharpened; precautions being taken to hide all these preparations from the pirate.

At last down fell the darkness. The cutter was silently lowered, and pulled off with muffled oars. Every man was armed to the teeth, Stanley—in

addition to a brace of fine pistols—wearing a sword instead of his accustomed dirk. He had carefully noted the exact position of the *Black Angel*, and laid a course that took the cutter about a mile astern of her. Then followed a long spell of waiting, seeming all the longer because of the feverish excitement that filled every heart.

"Oh! ain't it glorious, sir?" whispered Quarters; "ain't it glorious, Mr. Vane? The poor old *Ripple's* done for, but here we are a-waiting to seize after all the very pirate she was looking for. Oh! ain't it glorious?"

"Silence," said Stanley sternly. "I see a moving light on her deck—it's overside now—they're getting the boats ready. Now the light's hidden again."

It was impossible for the cutter's waiting crew to know at what moment the *Black Angel's* boats left her side, and stole rapidly away for the merchantman, but there was no mistake as to when they arrived close alongside their expected prey. Flashes of light from the *Mary Mildred's* cannon, and from the muskets of the men-o'-war's-men, soldiers, and crew aboard of her were followed by a roar that awoke all the slumbering echoes of the ocean.

"Not a shout, not a word, lads," Stanley Vane said hoarsely. "Don't fire a shot without my order. We must get aboard in silence, and give the watch cold steel. Now, my lads, give way."

"Oh! ain't it glorious?" muttered Jack, as the cutter leaped through the water.

They ran alongside the pirate's starboard bows undetected, for the watch were eagerly listening to the sounds of the conflict raging to larboard.

"Follow me," whispered Vane, as he seized the chains and clambered to the deck, the others swarming rapidly after him.

The watch were overpowered almost without a struggle, and the gallant little party of the *Ripple's* survivors were in complete possession. The midshipman's next care was to open his prize's cunningly concealed ports, and run out her guns in preparation for the proper reception of any of the boats that might escape from the brig. That a furious fight was proceeding was plain enough, but after about half-an-hour the firing ceased.

"Ready, my men," said Vane, "for if any of the boats are returning, they're coming now. Be handy there with the lanterns and torches."

By-and-by the splash of hurrying boats was plainly heard. Judging his distance, Stanley suddenly ordered the lanterns to be flashed across the water, and all the huge torches he had prepared to be lit. Two of the pirate-boats were plainly visible, rowed close to each other as hard as they could be pulled.

"Now, lads—fire and sink 'em!"

Bob Simmons was directing the fire of one of the guns. The shot struck home, sinking the leading boat. Screams and oaths and curses arose from her wounded and drowning men. A wild hail arose from the other boat.

"No quarter for pirates!" shouted Stanley. "Fire!"

A flash, a roar—and down went the second craft. It was all over. A few of the drowning rascals struck out for the schooner, and were helped aboard—and saved for hanging.

The next morning a fresh breeze enabled the *Black Angel* and the *Mary Mildred* to continue their passage in company for Jamaica, with the crew of the former reinforced. But one more adventure was to befall them. A large frigate was seen flying signals of distress, and as the schooner and brig bore down upon her, what was the general wonder and delight to find that she was the *Ville de Rouen*! After her fight with the *Ripple*, the storm that sealed the fate of the sloop had played havoc with the frigate also, and in obedience to the summons of Stanley Vane from the deck of his prize, she instantly struck her colours. The youngster was rowed aboard the Frenchman to receive the captain's sword.

"Am I to surrender my sword to a boy?" he asked indignantly.

"I am the sole surviving representative of the officers of the ship that fought you," said Stanley, proudly but sadly.

"Then, sir," the Frenchman replied, with the inimitable grace of his countrymen, "accept with my sword an enemy's compliment to their memory."

The *Ville de Rouen* was taken safely, with the other two vessels, into Kingston. Here the inquiry was held which the rules of the service rendered imperative.

It need not be said that Stanley Vane, and all concerned, came out of it with flying colours. Within a week he received his commission, and the subsequent distribution of prize money was eminently satisfactory all round.

"Ain't it glorious?" remarked Jack Quarters, as he pocketed his share.

SEEN AT LAST! OR, THE IDIOT LAD.

RECITED BY FELIX WESTON.

One night the boys in the big dormitory of Salwey House went to bed very, very quietly. Everyone remained on his knees a little longer than usual that night. Those who spoke, spoke very softly. There was no romping, no laughter. For earlier that evening Death had entered the school. At the far end of the building lay a schoolfellow whose tasks were all ended now. He would never work with them, never play with them, any more.

He had been ill for several weeks. He was better now. He was well now. For he had gone where pain and sickness are unknown.

"I didn't intend to call on anybody to take a turn to-night," said Abbott in a low voice. "But I've seen a poem that Felix Weston has been learning. It will be better than anything else could be—to-night. Say the verses slowly, Felix."

The big dormitory was hushed from end to end as Felix recited SEEN AT LAST! or, THE IDIOT LAD.

The vesper hymn had died away,
And the benison had been said,
But one remained in church to pray,
With a bowed and reverent head.
He could not frame in words the prayer
Which reached the Throne of Grace,
But the Love and Pity present there
Saw the pleading of his face.

In many curls hung his hair of gold
Round a brow of pearly white;
His face was cast in a graceful mould,
And his eyes were strangely bright
Gentle his white hand's touch—his smile
Was tender and sweet and sad:
Nought knew the heart of fraud and guile
Of poor Dick, the idiot lad.

"My boy," I said, "the tired sun
Sinks low on the west sea's breast;
The shades which fall when the day is done
Woo the weary earth to rest.
In the vesper zephyr's gentle stir
The sleepy tree-tops nod—
Why wait you here?" And he said, "Oh, sir,
I would see the Face of God!

"If the sun is so fair in his noon-day pride,
And the moon in the silver night;
If the stars which by Angels at eventide
Are lighted can shine so bright;
If wood and dell, each flow'r and tree,
And each grass of the graveyard sod,
Are of beauty so full, Oh, what must it be
To look on the Face of God!

"I have sought for the vision wide and near,
And once, sir, I travell'd far,
To a mighty city long leagues from here,
Where men of the great world are.
But the faces I saw were false and mean,

And cruel, and hard, and bad;
And none like the Face the saints have seen
Saw poor Dick, the idiot lad.

"In the night, sir, I wander away from home;
Down the lanes and the fields I go—
Through the silent and lonely woods I roam,
Patient, and praying, and slow.
In the early morn on the hills I stand,
Ere yet the mists have past;
And I eagerly look o'er sea and land
For the wonderful Vision at last.

"When the lightnings flash and the thunders roar,
And the ships fly in from the gale;
When the waves beat high on the shrinking shore,
And the fishing boats dare not sail;
I seek It still, in the storm and snow,
Lest it may happen to be,
That then it will please the great God to show
His beautiful Face to me.

"I seek It still when God's gleaming pledge
In the bright'ning sky appears,
And from tree and flower and sparkling hedge
Earth is weeping her happy tears;
For I sometimes think that I may behold,
After yearning years of pain,
The Face of my God in the quivering gold
Of the sunshine that follows rain.

"When the fishers return on the homeward tide,
I ask them nothing but this:
'Have you seen It out there on the ocean wide,
Where the sky and the waters kiss?'
But they smile, and 'Poor Dick' I hear them say,
And they answer me always 'No'—
So I think It must be still farther away
Than even the fishing boats go."

* * * * * *

That night while the simple fisher-folk slept,
From the dreams of the mighty free,
Down to the beach the Idiot crept,
And launched on the summer sea.
And the boat sped on, and on, and on,
From the ever-receding shore,
And brighter and brighter the moonbeams shone,
Which for him were to shine no more.

Far out at sea his boat was found,
And the tide which bore to land
The village fleet from the fishing ground
Laid softly upon the sand
The white, wet face of the idiot boy—
Not yearning and wistful now,
For perfect peace, and rest, and joy
Were written upon his brow.

In the poor lad's eyes seemed still the glow
Of a new and wondrous light;
And down on the beach the women knelt low,
While they gaz'd on the holy sight.
As the fishermen walk'd to the smiling dead,
Softly their rough feet trod;
And bared was each head, as one slowly said,
"He has look'd on the Face of God!"

A DROP AND FOUR DOGS.

A "TEETOTAL" TALE BY OSWALD DONE.

I AM a pledged abstainer—a Teetotaler of the deepest dye. And after my experience—after what I am going to tell you about—it is no wonder that I take strong views on the subject of strong drink.

The awful adventure I am thinking of took place on the fourteenth day of April this year. You will remember that we broke up for the Easter vacation on the tenth of the month, on the evening of which day I arrived safely home at my father's house in Bow, not far from the famous West India Docks, where my father, who is a Custom House Officer, goes to business. Next day—lest they should forget it—I took care to remind people that my birthday was on the thirteenth. Till the dawn of that eventful anniversary, time seemed to pass very slowly. I was chiefly concerned as to what father was going to give me. I had dropped some delicate hints about the improvement that a bicycle is calculated to effect in a boy's health and spirits, on which his progress at school so largely depends. I mentioned specially that I had learnt how to ride one well. But I couldn't tell whether these hints had struck home. Some fathers can stand a deal of hinting.

The eleventh and twelfth passed duly away. I got up early on the thirteenth, and hurried downstairs. I found that I had been very liberally treated in the way of birthday gifts. There seemed to be something for me from everybody—except father. I didn't say anything, but I felt bad until I caught sight of a quizzing sort of look on his face. Then I guessed that it was all right, and went on with my breakfast with a better appetite. When we had finished, father said, "Come outside, Oswald." I followed him gleefully into the garden. My wildest hopes were realised, for there stood father's present in the form of one of the finest bicycles I had ever seen. Everything about it was tip-top. A prince might have been proud of such a machine. With glistening eyes I expressed my gratitude and delight.

Now parents, when they make a fellow a present, have, too often, a bad habit of bothering him with a lot of good advice at the same time, mingled with reproof. I call it taking a mean sort of advantage. My father was guilty

of this fault upon the occasion I am speaking of. He began by saying that he hoped my next school report would be a better one, and proceeded to give me a regular lecture. Now I ask any candid mind what was the use of talking like that to a boy whose legs were itching as mine were to mount that bicycle?

I listened with all the patience I could command—namely, none. Then, the instant he had started off for business, I got the machine to the front of the house and went off for a spin till dinner-time. She was a ripper, and no mistake—as good to ride on as to look at. I returned in a perfect ecstacy about her. That evening father took me to hear our new minister—who is also a celebrated lecturer—hold forth on Total Abstinence. I didn't feel much like going, but could scarcely raise any objections.

This lecture forms, so to speak, the second stage of my story. It took a great effect upon my mind. The speaker described so graphically the horrors attending intoxication, the fearful and terrible effects of drink upon mind and body, and told such frightful anecdotes by way of illustration, that I went to roost quite scared, and feeling almost inclined to look under the bed to see if there were any stray snakes there. He made everything so real that I had no taste for supper. Several times I woke up in the night, dreaming that I had the delirium he said so much about. At last, however, I fell into a sound sleep, from which I woke up quite late in the morning. I was sorry for this, because I had resolved on having a long day on my new bicycle.

Lying by my plate on the breakfast table was a letter from my particular chum Jimmy Bates, who wrote from Chingford, in Epping Forest. Now Jimmy Bates's family had been neighbours of ours at Bow for years, but Mr. Bates, having retired from business, had at last gone away from the neighbourhood to live in the country, of course taking all his family with him. As they had only moved into their Chingford house at Lady-day, Jimmy had never been there before the holidays we were then enjoying. He wrote about his new home, and Chingford itself, and particularly about the Forest all round it, in the most enthusiastic terms. He said that, compared with London, Epping Forest was a perfect paradise.

"And you step from the house right into it," went on his letter; "and once in it you never want to come out again. It stretches for miles on every hand. Within sight of our house is a big beautiful lake, with rowing boats waiting to be hired."

After a page or two of description, Jimmy asked if I would go to Chingford and spend the day with him? "The Great Eastern Railway will run

you here from Liverpool Street in no time," he urged, "and I am sure you will say that the Forest is the jolliest place you ever spent a day in in your life. Come to-morrow. I shall expect you. We'll shin up no end of trees, and go for a row on the lake. However hard up you may be," he concluded pointedly, "the fares are so low that you can easily raise the capital for a ticket."

I instantly made up my mind to accept the invitation, and to start almost at once. But as for the railway—bah! What did I want with a railway when I had my bike? Jimmy Bates little knew the surprise I would treat him to. He little knew that the great ambition of my life had been gratified, and that I was the proud possessor of a brand-new bicycle. Wouldn't he open his eyes when I dashed up to his house on it! What had fares, whether high or low, to do with a boy who owned such a machine as mine? I should, of course, make the journey to Chingford in the saddle.

It was past ten o'clock before I made a start, but, once on the way, I soon made up for lost time. It was a bright, warm spring morning, and I felt remarkably jolly as I bowled along down the broad Bow Road, the route I had selected being by way of Stratford and Woodford.

I rode very fast, and every minute the sun seemed to grow warmer. I passed 'buses, tram-cars, cabs and carts, tearing on like a regular John Gilpin.

When I reached Stratford I found myself remarkably thirsty. With every turn of the wheels I seemed to get thirstier and thirstier. Just ahead of me, its heavy old wooden porchway stretching out on to the pavement, was a quaint, cosy-looking inn. In gold-coloured lettering the parlour window bore the inscription "Sparkling Ales." My thirst became uncontrollable, and also, so to speak, took a definite direction. That "direction" was towards a glass of sparkling ale. It seemed to me that nothing but a "drop of beer"—just a drop—would satisfy my thirst. Ginger-beer and lemonade had no attractions for me. Those words "Sparkling Ales" had fascinated me. Suddenly I thought of the warnings of that lecturer the night before. But "Oh, bother!" I said to myself, "he exaggerated frightfully. Besides, I'll only have a drop. That can't hurt me. I've ridden a mile or two, and I've got a good many miles ahead of me. I'll have just a drop, to see what it's like"—for I'd never tasted ale in my life.

To cut this part of my yarn short, I pulled up, dismounted, and went inside that inn. Marching boldly up to the bar, I demanded a glass of

"sparkling ale." Bright and foaming and tempting, it was put before me. I tasted it, smacked my lips, and finished the glass.

As I re-mounted my bike, I felt a delicious glow beginning to suffuse me, and almost made up my mind to have another drop later on.

In five minutes' time I reached the long High Road that leads through Leytonstone to Snaresbrook and Woodford. I headed gaily on. I'd only gone a few hundred yards when I saw on the pavement to my left a *White French Poodle Dog*.

You will say that there was nothing very remarkable in seeing a white French poodle dog, and I quite admit that there wasn't. Only please remember that I did see, and happened particularly to note, that particular white French poodle dog. There are four dogs in my story. That was the first.

I wheeled on about a quarter of a mile, and then the second dog made his appearance. He ran across the road in front of me, from one side to the other. As my eyes fell upon him, I felt a sudden spasm from head to feet, and my hair seemed to be rising on end. In three respects the animal was like my description of the first—he was a dog, he was French, and he was poodle. But he was more. He was something that no other dog ever seen by mortal eyes had ever been—he was something weird, wild, unearthly, unnatural. He was *Green*! A GREEN FRENCH POODLE DOG!

Oh, that glass of ale! But who could have supposed that it would have such a fearful effect upon me, and so soon? The thought of the awful illustrations scattered through that Teetotal lecture flashed into my mind as I made a convulsive effort to recover myself. My brain was in a whirl as I rode on—away from the spot where that green dog was wagging his green tail. I don't know how long it was before the third dog appeared upon the scene. He was waiting for me higher up the road, seated on the kerbstone of the right-hand pavement. I shrieked when I saw him. That "drop of drink" had indeed done its fell work. My lingering hope that the green poodle was alone in the world as a supernatural animal vanished, for the creature on the kerbstone was A BLUE FRENCH POODLE DOG—a bright blue, a vivid blue! *All* was blue!

My feet slipped off the pedals, my fingers relaxed their clutch of the handles. My bicycle swayed and swerved, and I was almost run down by a cab. Turning my horrified eyes from the blue spectre on the pavement, I gazed shudderingly ahead. The next moment I felt my hair turning white. Oh, the curse of drink! Ambling down the road—in the centre of it—approaching me—was a PINK FRENCH POODLE DOG WITH A YELLOW TAIL!

Only one thought possessed me—just the wild delirious longing to get away before the street became a menagerie of coloured canines. On—on—on! In the Forest there would be some ponds. I would alight at the first deep one I came to, and hold my head in the water for a few hours.

Riding like the madman I now knew myself to be—all through that glass of ale—I neared Leytonstone church.

I turned my head, and gave one furtive, frightened glance behind me. They had all met each other, and were running up the road together—running after me!—the White French Poodle Dog, the Green French Poodle Dog, the Blue French Poodle Dog, the Pink French Poodle Dog.

It was too much. My bike and I fell to the ground with a great crash, just outside a chemist's shop. Into that shop I rushed. I grasped the counter with both hands convulsively, and held the chemist with my glittering eye—no, glaring.

"Give me something at once," I cried.

"What's the matter with you?" said he.

"'Matter'! What's the matter with me?" I yelled indignantly. "How dare you mock me by asking that, when the street is alive with coloured animals? I've seen 'em—a green dog, a blue dog, a pink-and-yellow dog—running about before my intoxicated eyes—wagging their brilliant tails. I've seen 'em. What but one thing can be the matter with a boy who sees green and blue and pink French poodle dogs. I've seen 'em, I tell you—I've seen 'em."

"So have I," said the chemist—"often. They belong to Mr. Dipps, the dyer. He has four of 'em. He colours three of 'em up like that in the dye tubs, and turns them out in the streets as an advertisement."

I didn't reach Chingford that day. My beautiful new bicycle had been injured in its fall, and I left it to be repaired. I came home by train.

All was explained. The mystery was solved. But I had had a fright. I had learnt a lesson. I would regard those dogs as a warning. I resolved that it should be for ever impossible for me to have a second dose of my feelings that day.

"Where are you going, Oswald?" asked my father as he saw me preparing to leave the house as soon as tea was finished.

“Round to the new minister’s, father—who gave that lecture on Teetotalism on the night of my birthday.”

“What for?” asked father.

“To take the pledge, sir,” I answered.

LOCKED IN!

A VERGER'S STORY, REPEATED BY MONITOR MARTIN ABBOTT.

It was Monitor Martin Abbott's turn. Naturally enough, something striking was expected from him. It was afterwards agreed that he did remarkably well. He must have studied pretty hard to have committed so much to memory, and, as for his delivery, it was pronounced perfect.

"When I was home for the Christmas holidays"—he commenced his preamble—"I got put down to take part in an entertainment in aid of a fund for raising money for Free Breakfasts for the starving poor in our part of London. I entered into a conspiracy with my two particular chums, Willie and Sam Garwood, who agreed to appear with me. We arranged the stage to look as much as possible like the scene of the recitation I had selected. I dressed up in a long black gown as the Verger, and carried a wand. They dressed up as visitors to the Minster, and I was showing them round. They sat down soon after I began to talk, and at the proper place I handed Willie a paper, and retired a little into the background while he delivered the ballad, which he gave in fine style. To give proper effect to the last verse of all, we exchanged the paper again. You'll understand what I mean when I've finished. Of course I'm going to give the piece now straight off, all by myself. But before I begin I'm going to say that personally I don't quite like the poem part being written so much in sympathy with the Royalists. I've a fancy myself for the Cromwellian side in the great Civil War. But that's neither here nor there. There's no doubt but that there were some grand chaps on both sides, and the hero of the poem was one of 'em. Attention, please. Here I go."

Now, gennelmen, we come to one of the most interestin' stattoos in the minster. You pucceive in this here niche the heffigy of a hancient cavalier of the days of Charles the Fust, the ill-fated monarch what lost his head in a-quarrellin' with Parliament, and then went to war with Holiver Crommle.

The unfort'nit king lost his head a second time at Whitehall when the war was done, Crommle esclaiming as the sufferin's neck was laid on the block, "Take away that borble!" That, gennelmen, is a matter of 'istory which I have throwed in—this here heffigy hadn't nothink to do with it. But one of the battles in the war was fought near here, and this here gennelman in marble bore a hactive part in the conflick. He kinder led 'em on, like the Dook of Cambridge with his umbrella at a review. You pucceive he is mounted on a beautiful white charger; he is in full armour of the period, as would fetch a good price even second-'and. In his right 'and he carries a flag, from which 'eavy drops of water is a-drippin' free.

As you can read at the foot of the peddlestall on which the charger and the gennelman is a-standin', the stattoo is erected in memory of Reginald, Lord de L'Arge, as—though a Englishman—is a French name with a soft "*g*."

A story associated with the stattoo? Certingly there is, and there's another story as is associated with the story as is associated with the stattoo, and in tellin' one I tells the others.

You must know, then, that in the season we have a very large number of wisitors to the minster. They comes from London, for the sake of the hozone in the sea hair, and for the bathin' and promenadin' and flirtin' and sich, and of course they pays a wisit to the minster, and I'm the only werger allowed to show 'em over. There's a art in showin' wisitors over a place like this as ain't easy acquired. My own opinion is as a respectable werger is born sich, and not made sich. A minster, as a minster, is nothink without a werger to show it over. One old lady went so fur as to give me five shillin's—five shillin's, gennelmen—and to call me the "minsterin' angel" of the place. Five shillin's *she* give me. The people I shows over in the course of the season is warious. They comes in parties, and they comes by theirselves, and they comes in pairs—mostly young pairs and unmarried. No less than seving young men have I knowed in one season to be so overcome by their feelin's and the stattoos as to pop the question by a-squeezin' 'ands in the porch goin' out. Then the young ladies tells their lady friends, and they bring *their* young gennelmen here to see if it's true as the place has a influence of that sort Some wisitors is 'igh, some low—as 'igh as five shillin's—and a few—a *few*, sir—as low down as a shillin'. Some is solemn and some is too light; some hurries through as though dinner was waitin', and the pertaties gettin' cold: and some takes their time. But however warious, they all stops at this here stattoo, and gen'rally asks me whether there ain't a story about it.

Three years ago, just before the reg'ler season set in and rents was ris as usual in consequence, there come a-knockin' me up in my cottage one day two wisitors—a young gennelman and a young lady. The young gennelman's apperiance were wild. He was a tall, thin, lamplighter's ladder style of young gennelman, with long straight hair hangin' down his neck, and a very pale face, with eyes as didn't so much look *at* you as through you and beyond you into—into Space, and no end of other places. He looked like a poet without no reg'ler salary. The young lady were pretty and sweet-lookin', and with a more mortial apperiance. I thought at first the poet was a proposin' gennelman, but from somethink as was said between 'em I found they was brother and sister.

"I want," he says, a-fixin' his gaze through me on to a planet seving million miles the other side of the sun, and a-graspin' somebody there by the button-hole, "I want the man who conducts strangers over the minster."

"What you wants," I says, "is the werger. Hi ham the werger!"

Without givin' him time to recover the shock, I prodooces the keys. The rattle seemed to bring the poetical gennelman down from that planet. He gives his arm to his sister with a pleasant smile, and says to me, "Very well, friend, lead on;" and he follers me into the minster just like a ordinary wisitor. But soon as ever we got inside, and he looked up at the great carved roof, and saw the light streamin' in from the painted windows, showin' the shadowy aisles stretchin' to the chancel, and fallin' here and there on the still, white, marble stattoos, up he jumped into the planet again. I could tell it by the change in his face. And when we stopped here by this heffigy of Lord de L'Arge, and I read him from the Guide Book the story as is associated with it—well, gennelmen, he just stepped out of that planet into a neighbourin' one fourteen million miles further away. There he met a old acquaintance, and stopped to have a cup of tea with him—at all events, he never come out of that planet during that first wisit to the minster. He was actually a-walkin' off without givin' me nothink, and when I were took with a sewere cough, it were his sister as cured it, not the poet.

After that, even when the reg'ler season had set in, that young gennelman were always a-wisitin' the minster. Sometimes he come with his sister, and sometimes with parties of wisitors, but what he liked best was to wander round the place by himself, and his favourite spot was where this stattoo stands. While other folks was bathin' and boatin' and what not, this here was the place for him. I soon got used to him and to his strange ways, and a very nice generous young gennelman he was when he got out of them planets. But at times I used to hear him a-talkin' to himself in werse, and

then see him writin' in his pocket-book. At other times he'd touch his forehead—so—and mutter, "Not yet—it will come—but not now. I must wait."

One day I said to him, "If it's undisgestion, sir, I've suffered myself, and can enter into your feelin's."

But I saw by the flush that come into his cheeks, and the angry stride with which he walked away from me, that I'd offended him, and as any little unpleasantness which he might have with his disgestion were nothink to me, I never ventured into sich conversation with him again. One night, after a very heavy number of wisitors had been showed over during the day—but mostly in parties, which is a dead loss as compared with the same number of indiwiddles *as* indiwiddles—I sought my wirtuous couch unusual early. I'd slept maybe about a couple of hours, and had just fell into a lovely dream. I dreamt that I'd showed a party over—a party of one, that is—as was most unusual mean when the time come—in fack, he come it so low that I don't like to mention *how* low, to gennelmen like you. I espostulated with the party without no effeck, when all the stattoos put their 'ands in their trousers pockets in wirtuous indignation at being showed over to sich a mean party, and held out to me—each indiwiddle stattoo—a shillin' piece. Just as I were calculatin' how much it would come to, stattoo number one drops his shillin' on the floor with a bang, then number two and number three, and so on. One after the other, they was all droppin' their shillin'ses on the floor, and the noise woke me up.

"*Was* it a dream?" I says at first, for sure enough I heard the noise that really woke me. It was somebody at the door of my cottage—tap, tap, tap,—knock, knock, knock.

Who could it be? Surely not a party as wanted to be showed over at that time of night—impossible, for just then I heard the church clocks chime twelve.

The sound of the chimin' woke me right up. A wisitor at midnight! I got out of bed and opened the window, and there by the door, with a shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, I see the sister of the poetical young gent, along with a servint girl. "Miss," I says at once, "down direckly. But what's wrong?"

"My brother," she says—"he has never been home since this morning."

"Down direckly, miss," says I again; and in a minute or two down I was.

"FOLLOW THE FLAG!"

Then she told me how her brother had gone out by himself soon after breakfast. She expected him back to lunch, but lunch-time come and dinner-time come, but no brother. When the evening wore on, she began to get a little anxious, but nothink serious, a-thinkin' as he'd got out into the country, or gone p'r'aps on the sea, and would be back before bedtime. But bedtime come and no brother. In fack, he'd never come home at all.

"Have you been along the beach, miss?" I says.

"Yes," she answers; "and questioned all the sailors we could find. Nobody has seen anything of him since this morning, and then he was seen coming towards the minster. Have you seen him?"

"I saw him this morning *in* the minster," I says. Then a sudden idea flashed into my head; "and that's where he is now," I says.

"In the minster now!"

"Yes. I never knowed a man so unnateral fond of a stattoo in my life as that young man is of the heffigy of the cavalier with the drippin' banner. He's always at it."

"Yes, yes," says the young lady, eager; "he was trying to write a poem on the story of it."

"I see him come into the minster, miss, but never see him come out; and if so be as he were writin' a pome about that stattoo, it's my opinion as he got himself locked up a-purpose, so as to get what poets call a afflutus. I thought it were undisgestion," I says; "but it were evidentially a afflutus."

With that I gets my keys, and we all three walks up to the minster. Quickly I opens the door, and very quietly we walks up the aisle, all flooded in the summer moonlight.

Here—here, where we are standing—just inside this pew at the foot of the marble, was the lost brother. The light was fallin' very bright and soft on his pale face and closed, sleepin' eyes. So calm and white and peaceful he looked that he might have been mistook for another stattoo. Between his fingers was a pencil, and at his feet—the open pages covered with writin'—was his pocket-book. His sister stoops, picks it up, and reads.

"You were right," she says; "he has finished his poem at last."

Then she leans down over him very gently, and kisses her brother on the brow, and wakes him.

I never see anythink took more quietly than that young man took the fack of being found locked up in a minster, fast asleep, at midnight.

"It's all right," he says, to his sister. "I was determined to finish it, and I took the best way to do so. Don't look so scared," he says to me, half laughin'; "it's all right."

"Is it all right, sir," I says solemn, "for poets to be found intruding into minsterses at midnight without bein' showed over by the werger?"

"Yes," says he, "when they give him a sovereign afterwards."

And a sovereign he gave me, sure enough, then and there. Finishin' the pome seemed to have fetched him right away from them planets.

"Come on," he says, and out we all went.

What become of the pome? Why, there were a rage for it. The lokill paper printed it, and since that pome visitors to the minster has been more numerous and more warious than ever. Of course I've got a copy of it I've told my story now, and the pome's got to tell the other story. Here it is; you see I'm put in the very fust werse:—

THE KING'S COLOURS!

I walk'd in the shadow'd minster,
With the verger by my side,
And I gaz'd on a sculptur'd statue,
Standing in lonely pride.
"What is the story, tell me,
Of this mounted Cavalier?
What deed of gallant daring
Is kept in memory here?
Why holds he a dripping banner?"
To the waiting guide I said.
Then from a book he brought me
This tale of the Knight I read.

* * * * * *

Royal in the glitter of armour,
Royal in soldier mien;
Royal in the shimmer of sunlight
On sword and on halberdine;
Royal in the flashing of pennons,
Bright as the wild bird's wing;
Royal in the banner they carry—
The Colours of Charles the King—
With never an eye that flinches,
With never a heart that fears,
On to the leaguer'd city
Ride the Royal Cavaliers.

Around her walls the Roundheads
A year have sat them down;
With blood her stout defenders
Pay tribute to the Crown.
Starving and worn and dying,
Oh! eager eyes have scanned
From the rise of sun till the day was done,
O'er all the wasted land,
For sight of the goodly troopers
Who are only coming now;
The troopers who ride with steady stride

Over the far hill brow.

Over the hill, across the plain,
With never a rank that breaks;
Never a man who dreads the fight,
Never a hand that shakes;
With white plumes nodding proudly
O'er heads held proudly high,
On to the town the troops march down,
To rescue or to die.
And the stateliest form among them,
In manhood's young bright spring,
Is Reginald, Lord de L'Arge, who bears
The Colours of Charles the King.

On past the flooded river,
Which rolls its swoll'n tide
Fast to the sea between the cliffs
Which frown on either side—
On they come, and the citizens now
Behold the brave array;
And the men begin to man the walls,
While the women begin to pray.
And the ready rebels see them,
And form on left and right;
In silence stern their ranks they turn,
And move to offer fight

Then Lord de L'Arge his Colours
Clutches with tightening hold,
As rear'd aloft in the summer breeze,
Shakes every gleaming fold.
He turns to the list'ning soldiers
Who wait for the word to charge;
In ringing tone these words alone
Speaks Reginald, Lord de L'Arge—
"If ever a heart be flinching,
If horse or rider lag,
Think of the King and your honour—
Cavaliers, follow the flag!"

Then in the shock of battle
Meet rebels and the leal;
For every man a man goes down
By musket, gun, or steel.
None asks for mercy—no one
Evades his death by flight;
"We'll save the town ere the sun goes down,
For the King and for the Right!"
So cry King Charles's soldiers—
Scornful the one reply:
"Ye shall surely yield, and this bloody field
Shall tell the reason why!"

Brighter and brighter above them
God's blessèd sunlight gleams;
The trampled heath their feet beneath
Is red with life-blood streams.
Wherever the fight is fiercest,
Wherever the maddest charge—
Where Death reaps the thickest harvest—
Rides Reginald, Lord de L'Arge:
And tho', torn and shot, his banner
Is now but a fluttering rag,
Still rises high his battle cry,
"*Cavaliers, follow the flag!*"

But, alas! who are left to follow?
For still the foe close round,
And quicker and thicker fall man and horse
On the redly-oozing ground.
Till, with a shout for Cromwell,
Is made the last attack,
And the day is lost, for the Cavaliers
Can move not, front or back.
Now to De L'Arge the rebels
In boastful triumph cry,
"The Lord has given thee up to us—
Yield us thy flag or die."

One piteous gaze around him,
One piteous stifled moan—

'Midst comrades dead and living foes
Stands young De L'Arge alone.
Then flames his eye with passion,
His cheek with hot blood burns;
With gasp of wild defiance,
His charger's head he turns:
He kisses once the Colours,
Then flaunts them high in air;
Gives rein with the shouted challenge,
"*Follow the flag who dare!*"

Oh! never man rode so madly,
Ne'er follow'd pursuit so fast;
On and on, up hill, down dale,
Till the Cavalier at last,
Panting, reaches the river bank,
Where the black waves hiss and surge;
The thud of the rebels' hurrying hoofs
Seems beating his funeral dirge.
Nearer and nearer and nearer yet,
From his gallant hand to drag
The Colours of Charles the King—but hark!—
"*Rebels, follow the flag!*"

And as rings out the haughty challenge,
He drives his spurs well home;
And down plunge charger and gallant
Into the river's foam.
Is there a rebel to follow?
No! no!—see the Colours wave
On the crest of the black deep billows
Which bear to his ocean grave
The first in a host of heroes,
The last of a noble race—
With the Colours press'd against his breast,
And a smile upon his face.

Last year that young gennelman came down again. When he found I were so proud of bein' put into the very fust werse, he gave a laugh, wrote somethink in his book, tore out the leaf and gave it to me, sayin', "Well, then, there's a special werse written for you alone." Wisitors roars when they reads it; but I don't see nothink to laugh at. Here it is—

My heart beat high within me
    As I laid the book aside:
And I rais'd a hand that trembled
    My swimming tears to hide.
And tho' old to him the story,
    Yet methought the verger's heart—
Tho' it beat in a rugged bosom—
    Bore with my own a part,
In the pray'r I breathed for the spirit
    Of the brave young Lord de L'Arge—
For he bow'd his head as he softly said,
    "*There ain't no reg'ler charge*."

SMITH'S SISTER.

BEFORE I tell you the story about Smith's sister in particular (said Stanislaus Yarrow), I wish to make a few remarks about sisters in general.

Sisters are of two kinds—your own and other fellows. There are boys—especially older ones—who consider their own sisters worse than other fellows' sisters.

("Hear, hear," cried Martin Abbott, who was strongly suspected of having fallen in love with Dr. Audlem's maiden aunt, who was not much more than forty.)

But the general opinion amongst boys is that all sisters—all girls, in fact—are muffs and nuisances.

("So they are," agreed a number of voices cordially.)

I thought so myself once. But Smith's sister taught me to take a higher view of girls. I admit that they have defects—they can't help 'em. There are times when I doubt if even boys are perfect. I freely admit that there is a certain amount of idiocy in the ways and manners of girls in general. Far be it from me to deny that they squeak and squeal when there is no occasion for squeaking and squealing. There is no use in denying that they are afraid of mice. Even Smith's sister visibly shuddered when I offered to give her my biggest piebald rat, to be her very own for ever. But we ought to be charitable and try to overlook these things, for, as I said just now, they can't help 'em.

What I insist upon is that there's real grit in girls all the same. This is how I work it out: Smith's sister was a brick—Smith's sister is a girl—therefore, as one girl can be a brick, so can other girls, other sisters, be bricks.

Now for my true yarn. To separate the circumstances of the story from the story itself, I will first give you the circumstances.

Smith and I lived next door to each other, and were close chums, especially at intervals. He was a very generous chap—he'd give a friend

anything he'd got. When he was laid low with illness last summer, I slipped in to his bedroom by way of the verandah, to have a look at him, and he gave me the scarlet fever. He was such a very generous chap that he never wanted to keep anything all to himself. The fever stayed with both of us as long as it could, and left us a good deal weaker than it found us. Finding us both in need of a long and thorough change, Smith's father and mine put their heads together, and finally decided to send us to North Wales for the rest of the summer and the autumn. The idea was promptly carried out.

They didn't, strictly speaking, "send" us, for they came with us. In fact, it was quite a carriage-full of us that steamed away north-west from Paddington—namely, Smith, myself, Smith's father and mother, my father and mother, a number of boxes, portmanteaux, and parcels, and Smith's sister. I put her last because at the time she was last in my estimation.

We had a lovely journey, to a lovely little out-of-the-way and out-of-the-world station, which was spelt with all consonants, and pronounced with three sneezes, a cough, and two gasps. From the station we had a long drive to the remote farm-house in which our fathers had taken apartments.

In this delicious old farm-house we soon made ourselves—Smith and I—quite at home. It was in a beautiful valley. Tremendous hills rose all round it. On the very tops of some of the mountains there was snow almost all the year round. Glens, and brooks, and streams, and waterfalls simply abounded.

After a fortnight our two fathers had to return to London, leaving behind them our mothers, us, and Smith's sister.

Oh, what a time we had then! Smith shot me by accident in the leg with the farmer's gun—Smith himself got almost drowned in two different streams, and was once carried over a waterfall, and dashed against the stones. On all three occasions he was getting black in the face when pulled out. I fell down a precipice in the mountains, and was rescued with the greatest difficulty. On another occasion a neighbouring farmer caught us trespassing, and thrashed us with a stick till he was too tired to hold it any longer. Smith got bitten by a dog supposed to be mad, and a horse kicked me in the stomach.

All was gaiety and excitement. Ah! when shall we have such times again? We made enquiries as to whether we were likely to catch scarlet fever a second time.

Now Smith's sister screamed at our accidents; she was afraid to join us in any of our adventures. She was as old as myself, and only a year younger

than Smith, but as timid as a chicken—or so we thought her, for so she seemed. We tried at first to encourage her, to bring her out a little; but it was no good—we just had to leave her to herself.

"She hasn't pluck enough to come with us," Smith used to say as we set off on our rambles—"let her stop at home and play with the fowls."

You must understand that we didn't dislike her—we simply despised her. I think contempt is worse than dislike—at all events, it is harder to bear. Week after week passed away, till at length the end of September approached. In a few days we were to go home again.

Now high as all the hills were, there was one that towered above the others. From the very first, Smith and I had been warned not to attempt to scale this monarch of the mountains, whose crown was sometimes visible, sometimes hidden in the clouds. Being warned not to do it, we naturally wanted to do it. We had made, in fact, several tries, but had always been frustrated. Once or twice Mr. Griffiths—the farmer at whose house we were staying—caught us starting, and turned us back.

"Up towards the top of that mountain," he said, on the last occasion, "is a place so difficult of access, except by one way, that it is called the 'Eagles' Home.' Lives have been lost there. The hill is dangerous—the clefts are steep and deep. Leave it alone. There are plenty of other hills to climb that are not so dangerous."

That reference to the Eagles' Home was more than we could stand. We could make out the very spot he meant. Fancy being up there with the eagles near the sky—fancy birds'-nesting in the clouds!

"Yarrow," said Smith firmly, "we must do it."

"Or perish in the attempt," I agreed recklessly, quoting from a book I'd read.

What we meant was, of course, that before our visit ended we must climb that hill, at all events as high as the Eagles' Home.

Our approaching return to London left us with no time to lose. We had only four clear days before us.

"We'll make the ascent immediately after dinner to-morrow," said Smith.

"Right you are," replied I.

The next day arrived. Dinner was always over soon after one at the farm-house, and by two o'clock, having slipped quietly and secretly off, we were beginning our climb up the hillside. For more than an hour we made slow but easy progress, taking a rest every now and then for a minute or two. We must have got up a considerable distance, but neither the mountain-top nor the Eagles' Home seemed much nearer. On and up we trudged, walking faster and determined to take no more rests. We noticed how much colder it was, and cast uneasy glances at the dipping sun.

We met a shepherd going down, and stopped him to ask some questions. He told us that there was an easy way and a hard way to reach the Eagles' Home. The easy way was to follow the path worn up the hill to the left. That would take us *above* the spot. Still following the path as it curved round to the right, we should find a comparatively easy way *down* to the "home of the eagles," unless we lost the road, and tumbled down one of the many steep declivities.

"Which was the hard way?" we asked.

With a smile, he pointed straight up the mountainside. It wasn't far that way, he said—only that way would take us farther than we wanted to go. We looked up the frowning pathless mountain—and knew what he meant. We must take the safer and longer way.

"Not that we're *afraid* of the other," said Smith.

"Of course not," I replied.

In vain the shepherd tried to dissuade us from going any further in the failing light: in vain he told us of the dangers we should run. We thanked him, put him off with some excuse about going "a little" further, and turned resolutely on up the "path" he had pointed us to. It was by no means the sort of path we were accustomed to.

On and on and on—I don't know how far we went. But the farther we went the more silent we became. Each knew the other knew that he was getting more and more uneasy at every step. Each knew the other wasn't going to be the first to admit that he was funky.

It grew so awfully cold. It became so awfully dark.

"The moon will be up by-and-by," Smith said.

"Yes," said I; "we shall be all right then. What's this?"

It was too dark to see it, but we felt it in our faces. We put our hands on our sleeves and felt it there.

Snow!

We both gave in then, and funked it without disguise. We turned to go down, to get home. We tried at first to disbelieve it, but it wasn't long before we both gave up the pretence.

"We're lost!" we cried together.

That was just our position. In the cold, dark night, in the midst of a rapidly-rising storm and fast-falling snow, we were lost on the wild Welsh mountains.

We stumbled about. For a long time—I don't know how long, but it was a long time—we stumbled about. That is the only expression I can use, for soon we didn't know whether we were moving up or down, left or right. We were so numbed, so bewildered. It was so cold up there, though October had not yet set in, that we had a vague idea that if we didn't keep on moving, we should be frozen still, meeting the fate of many other mountaineers.

You must bear in mind that we had nothing to eat, nothing to drink, and only our summer clothes on. Neither of us had a watch, so we could only judge what the time was. Smith's hope that the moon would soon rise hadn't been realised, for everything above was as dark and black as everything was beneath.

At last a frightful thing happened. Our feet slipped at the same moment, and the next moment we were both falling through space. My previous slip down a precipice was nothing compared with that awful fall in the darkness. Only one thing saved us. Before we struck the ground, we managed to break the full force of our fall by grasping the roots and branches of some low-growing shrubs and bushes which we felt without seeing. We slipped then less rapidly from hold to hold, until, with a thud, we struck the earth. It seemed more like the earth striking us.

Smith gave a loud scream of pain—then all was silent.

Smith fainted. I cried. Smith recovered and cried. I left off crying, and took his turn at fainting. There's nothing like telling the truth. We both prayed. I won't tell you about that, because praying is a thing to *do*, not to talk about.

We didn't move about any more. That fall proved that moving about was too dangerous. Poor old Smith *couldn't* move. He couldn't even stand up. He tried to once, and sank down again with a yell. He had sprained his ankle.

Please imagine for a moment that this adventure is being played on the stage, and let the curtain fall. Now imagine the curtain raised again.

In the meantime, the storm has died down. The winds are not howling now, the snow is not falling. The heavens above us are not so black—we can see parts of the mountain that drops from our feet into the deep invisible valley below. We can see enough to make out where we are. We are in the Eagles' Home. Our ambition has been realised—but in what a way! We reached the spot neither by the pathway nor up the rugged steep—we rolled from the top; we came through the air with the snowflakes.

Pretty snowflakes! Smith is hopelessly crippled, and I—the other snowflake—am simply a living collection of bumps and bruises. We must spend the rest of the bleak night strung up on this dizzy height. We must wait till the morning—if we can live through the night.

What's that, down there—far away down there?

A light! a number of lights. They're moving—moving up. They've reached the spot where we met the shepherd who told us of the two ways.

They've stopped. Hark! What's that?

A shout—a hail—loud and long continued, as though a lot of people are calling together.

Hurrah! We're saved. The farmer has turned out a rescue party to find and save us. Hurrah!

Gathering all my strength—all I have left—I answer the hail. Smith joins me as well as he can. Once, twice, thrice we shout. We catch the distant cry that tells us we have been heard.

For a minute the lights are stationary. Then—their bearers sending up another great hail as though to tell us they know where we are and are coming—we see the lanterns flashing forward up the track which leads above our heads, and then round to the Eagles' Home. Mr. Griffiths, who knows the hills as well as he knows his own farm lands, has told them where we are from the direction of our frantic voices.

So cheer up, Smith—they're coming.

But they'll be such a long time coming—and we're so cold and numbed. Smith is fainting again. So am I, I'm afraid—you must remember I am knocked about. It will be such a long time before the coming help reaches us.

Will it? Then what's that solitary light stealing up the jagged steep below us? Who is it coming to us by the "hard" way, straight up the precipitous mountainside? It must be Griffiths—he's crawling up the rough boulders—he's clinging hold of roots and branches, swinging himself over the clefts. The shepherd said it couldn't be done—but Griffiths is doing it. How torn his hands must be.

I can't be quite fainting, because I can see that Griffiths' lantern is coming nearer and nearer.

Listen! I can hear his voice—only it sounds such a weak voice. That is because I am getting so weak now myself, though I manage to call back, that Griffiths may know just where we are. . . .

Griffiths has reached us. Griffiths is attending to poor old Smith. Now he's got his arm round me. Griffiths is pouring a cordial down my throat that brings life back into me. I can feel my heart beating again. I'm better now. I'll shake Griffiths by the hand. I dare say I shall by-and-by. But this is the hand of SMITH'S SISTER!

The strain of this theatrical style, and of the present tense, is more than I can stand any longer, so I hope it is quite clear to you what had happened. Just a few words to sum up.

When the rescue party formed by Mr. Griffiths—as soon as it was obvious that Smith and I had lost ourselves—set out, Smith's sister set out with them. Griffiths ordered her back. She went back, collared a lantern and a flask all to herself (in view of the party separating—what a thoughtful girl!), followed and rejoined them. When they stopped and halloaed to find whereabouts we were, he ordered her back again, but not until she had heard the hasty consultation which resulted in the party sticking to the safer way to us. She heard about the "two ways," and she dared the one that everybody else was afraid of. The ascent up the mountain's face was suggested, but only Smith's sister had the pluck to make it. This was the girl we had scorned and laughed at. This was the girl whom we had told to stop at home and play with the chickens!

About an hour after she reached us with the "first help" that may have saved our lives, we saw the lights of Griffiths' party on the crest above us. We exchanged shouts, and they let down a rope at once, and hauled us up. Long before this, Smith's sister had bound up his injured ankle neatly and lightly with her own handkerchief and our handkerchiefs.

You should have seen the farmer's face—and, indeed, the faces of all the others too—when they realised how she had reached us.

It is all very well for her to say that she didn't know what she was doing—that she couldn't have done in the light what she did in the dark. All I am concerned with is the fact that she did do what I have told you she did.

Referring to the proposition I laid down soon after I started—about there being real grit in girls after all—you will understand what I mean when I wind up my yarn with the familiar quotation, Q.E.D.

A MOMENT'S PASSION.

"CORSICA is an island in the Mediterranean," fluently began Frank Foster. "It is situated between the island of Sardinia and the Genoese coast. It is of irregular form, its greatest length being 116 miles, its greatest breadth about 51 miles, and its area 3,380 square miles. It lies between 41° 20′ and 43° 0′ N. latitude, and 8° 32′ and 9° 33′ E. longitude. Seneca, who was exiled to Corsica, epigrammatically wrote of it thus:—

"*Corsica, terribilis quum primum incanduit æstas,*
Sævior ostendit quum ferus ora canis!

The mineral productions . . . ."

A cloud of bolsters whitened the darkness of the big dormitory. Twenty-five boys flung twenty-five bolsters with unerring accuracy of aim. The voice of the speaker was smothered.

"How dare any boy in this room," demanded Martin Abbott fiercely, "trot out his mouldy old guide-book quotations by way of beginning a yarn? Are we living in the nineteenth century, or have we gone back to the middle ages, that a human boy in this school should chuck Latin lines in our faces at this time of night?"

Foster cleared himself from the avalanche of bolsters beneath which he was buried, and proceeded to vindicate himself in vigorous language.

"Some preliminary particulars, especially historical ones, are necessary," he declared; "or my story will not run smoothly when I get into it. Why should I be attacked like this when I am simply clearing the ground for a fair start?"

"There can't be any occasion to go back to old Seneca," said Abbott in a somewhat mollified voice.

"I'll leave him alone, then, and pledge myself not to give you the interesting general particulars about Corsica I've been studying up. I'll

confine myself to only necessary information before I come to my story itself."

On the distinct understanding that this engagement would be adhered to, the bolsters were collected, order was restored, and Foster allowed to proceed.

In 1768 Genoa ceded the Island of Corsica to France, and a large French army occupied the place. The natives, led by a patriot named Paoli, made a desperate resistance, but were overpowered, Paoli making his escape on board an English vessel. When the French Revolution broke out, he proceeded to Paris, and eventually returned to his island home as its military governor. When, however, the French legislature proposed to cede Corsica to the Duke of Placentia, he again rebelled, and put himself at the head of a formidable faction. These malcontents asked the aid of Lord Hood, the Admiral commanding the English fleet in the Mediterranean. This aid was given them, and in 1794 General Dundas landed with five regiments. Some of the French troops evacuated and others surrendered, and by negotiation between the British Government and the Corsicans the island became part of our empire till 1796, when we abandoned it, partly in consequence of the bitter feelings which had sprung up amongst the natives against us.

So much at present for the facts of history: I will now proceed with some facts mingled, perhaps, with fiction, in the shape of the story I am going to tell you about A Moment's Passion.

The natural elation of Colin Joscelynne upon being gazetted as ensign in the —th Foot was only damped by the circumstance that that gallant regiment was doing duty in Corsica. He would have preferred to have commenced his military career where, in the stirring times of '96, there were the chances of quicker promotion in the certainty of immediate fighting. However, it was with pride and high hope that he hastened to join his regiment. He received a hearty welcome from his brother officers, and was soon a favourite both with them and the rank-and-file. He was a dashing, high-spirited young fellow, tall and well-made, though still wanting a year or two of the number of years that legally qualify the hitherto "infant" to claim to be a "man."

At the time of his arrival on the island the relations between the Corsicans and the representatives of England were "strained," the former

strongly resenting the action of the British Government in its dealings with Paoli. The commandant of the occupying troops had strictly enjoined his officers and the soldiery to be as conciliatory as possible in their demeanour towards the natives, and to avoid as far as possible either giving or taking offence.

"Mr. Joscelynne," he remarked to the young ensign one morning, after the latter had informed him that he had accepted an invitation to a ball which was to be given by a prominent citizen of Porto Vecchio that night—"Mr. Joscelynne, do I do you an injustice when I fear that you have a very hot temper, under very imperfect control?"

"I'm afraid you don't, sir," was Colin's candid answer.

"Then let me ask you to be very careful. It is our policy just now to keep on smooth terms with everybody here. The Corsicans are quick to take offence, and bitterly revengeful. Don't forget that any want of discretion on your part may compromise all of us."

"I am sorry you appear to be afraid to trust me, Colonel Halhead," said Colin, rather warmly, and flushing a little as he spoke.

"No man is to be entirely trusted, Mr. Joscelynne," rejoined the colonel kindly but firmly, "who cannot trust his own temper. You'll be a better man, as well as a more valuable soldier, when you get the whip-hand of yours."

The ball was a very brilliant affair, most of the dancers being in fancy dress. Heated and a little excited, Colin strolled from the ball-room. In the vestibule his progress towards the verandah was impeded by a man in what Colin took to be the attire of a native peasant. Wondering at the intrusion of the peasant into the house at such a time, the youthful officer somewhat haughtily ordered him out of his way. The man resented his manner, as well as his words, and retorted in a way that brought the quick blood into the Englishman's face. He put out his hand to thrust the Corsican aside, but the instant he perceived the gesture, the latter drew himself up, and deliberately planted himself directly in Colin's front.

"When the English officer has apologized, he may pass," he said, with a sneer upon his swarthy face.

In a moment the temper, the passion, that his parents, his teachers, his friends—even the colonel that morning—had warned Colin Joscelynne to master, mastered *him*. His eyes blazed, his very lips trembled. Forgetting everything, forgetting himself—even forgetting the uniform he wore—he struck the Corsican full in the face.

Almost instantly he realised what he had done; and realised, too, that the man he had struck in that moment of mad passion was a Corsican of rank, dressed in masquerade.

A number of Corsicans who had witnessed the blow immediately stepped up. Colin was informed of the name and position of the man he had assaulted, and corresponding information on his part was demanded. Immediately after morning parade the next day he was waited upon by two strangers.

"You will not be surprised, sir," said the spokesman of the couple, "to hear that we present ourselves on behalf of Monsieur Buonaveno, whom you affronted last night. I may say at once that our principal declines to listen to any explanation, or to accept any apology. If you will honour us by presenting us to the gentlemen who will act on your behalf, the meeting can be arranged for to-day, before sunset."

"I was prepared for your visit," replied Colin, "which will be returned by my friends Captain Masters and Mr. Mostyn in the course of the morning. I leave myself in their hands."

Buonaveno's seconds bowed haughtily, and withdrew. To the two brother-officers (both attached to his own company) whom he had mentioned to them, the hot-headed ensign had already spoken of the affair, and in the course of the morning the preliminaries of the duel were settled. Colin had the choice of weapons, and decided without hesitation upon pistols. The place selected was a secluded spot just outside the town, and the time a little before the hour of sunset.

During the afternoon young Joscelynne wrote several letters in view of his falling in the approaching meeting, and then waited, as calmly as he could, for the summons of his seconds. That he was in the wrong—that, even had he been correct in his hasty belief as to the social status of Buonaveno, he had no more justification for striking a "peasant" than a "gentleman"—that he was breaking God's law in going out to slay, or to be slain by, this man he had insulted and assaulted—all this he knew. But according to the false code of honour prevailing at that time—particularly in the military caste—he could see no alternative. Even at the risk of bloodguiltiness he must fight this man—he must abide by the consequences of that moment of mad passion last night.

With a firm step and erect carriage, he accompanied Masters and Mostyn to the ground. Almost at the same moment arrived the other party. The

seconds stepped aside and held a brief consultation, at the close of which Captain Masters walked to his waiting principal.

"Joscelynne," he said, "Buonaveno insists on a peculiar condition. Both pistols are to be loaded, but, instead of a simultaneous exchange of shots, lots are to be drawn for the right of first fire. If the man who wins the first fire drops the other man, all right; if he doesn't he has to stand fire in his turn. It's a murderous way of fighting, and I've declined to agree to it without your consent."

"I consent," said Colin shortly. "Let the lots be drawn. Toss a coin if you like," he added recklessly. Again the seconds drew together. He watched them coolly, though his face was growing very white. Lieutenant Mostyn hurried to his side.

"I've won first fire for you," he whispered joyfully. "Take care not to miss him, and it's all over."

Twelve paces were quickly measured, and the two men faced each other.

"You will fire at the word," said Masters.

It wasn't long before that word was given—scarcely half a minute. But brief as was the space of time, it was long enough for Colin to come to a determination in. Now that the moment had actually arrived—now that he was face to face with his adversary, and that adversary practically at his mercy—he could not do it, he would not do it. A hundred memories of old-time teachings of the sacredness of human life seemed to wake within him: his heart softened, his vision cleared—the glamour of man-made principles of "honour" ceased to bewilder him, and he saw everything in a truer light. Though in all probability he would forfeit his own life—though the muzzle of his pistol was already covering the heart of his antagonist and he knew that his aim was sure—he could not do it, he would not do it.

"Fire!"

Sharp on the word, Colin Joscelynne raised his pistol and fired harmlessly and deliberately into the air.

The hasty expressions of his surprised seconds were instantly followed by a loud exclamation from Buonaveno.

"It is my fire," he cried.

With flushed cheeks and flashing eyes he looked exultingly, gloatingly, at the poor doomed young Englishman.

"It is my fire."

"I'm waiting to receive it," said Colin.

But just as the revengeful Corsican was raising his weapon, a party of gendarmerie burst in upon the group. The two principals were instantly surrounded, and Buonaveno's pistol was wrested from him as he was on the very point of firing it.

"You, monsieur," said the leader of the gendarmes to him, "will accompany us. The English Commandant"—turning to the three British officers—"will deal with these gentlemen upon our report."

The duel was over. Colin's party marched off in one direction, the Corsicans in another. To the last day of his life, Colin never forgot the look on the face of Buonaveno at the moment of parting, as, turning his fierce black eyes full upon him, the Corsican uttered the warning—

"Remember—*it is my fire*!"

As they were re-entering barracks, the captain, lieutenant, and ensign were met by their colonel.

"The man-o'-war that entered the harbour this afternoon," he said, "has brought me my long-expected dispatches. The English occupation of the island is at an end. Amongst the companies to leave at once is yours. You will embark at daybreak, and sail with the morning tide."

Almost twenty years passed away—for England, twenty of the most momentous years in all her stormy history, for they assured her position as a Great Power on land, and established her supremacy at sea. Napoleon was at last overthrown, his power humbled to the dust.

Once again English soldiers landed on the island of Corsica—this time simply to hold it on behalf of the restored Bourbons of France, pending the conclusion of the general European settlement that was following the long years of general war.

For the second time in his life, Colonel Colin Joscelynne—now at the head of the regiment he had joined as ensign in '96—entered Porto Vecchio.

Shortly after mess one evening—very soon after his arrival—he retired to his private quarters in order to prepare a dispatch. In this labour he was interrupted by the arrival of a packet of letters, which had been sent ashore from a sloop that had just reached the port.

The first communication he opened informed him of the death of the Earl of Ingatestone, his uncle. Between the earldom and himself was now only one life—that of his cousin Alfred, serving the king in the Royal Navy.

He opened a second letter. It contained the intelligence that two days after the decease of the late Lord Ingatestone, the Honourable Alfred Joscelynne had died on board H.M.'s frigate *Syren*.

For some minutes Colonel Joscelynne was lost in thought. His memory flashed back to the time when, nineteen years ago, he had stood in that very room before Colonel Halhead—an ensign-stripling of less than twenty. The intervening years had brought him rank and fame, love, a fair wife, a bonny boy. And now, while still less than forty, he had inherited the title, wealth, and broad estates of an historic earldom, and he had a son to inherit them after him. Into a future where other laurels were to be won he carried the glory of an honourable past. Who might not have envied him?

Not another letter did he open. Flinging a light cloak over his shoulders, he walked from the room, out of the barracks, into the city, his agitation calming as he walked. Soon he found himself in the outskirts of the place, and—why did the spot seem familiar? When was he here before?

Suddenly he remembered. This quiet spot that he saw now in the moonlight he had seen before in the late sunlight. It was the scene of his duel.

Here, just where he was standing now, he had stood then, and over there, twelve paces off, had stood. . . .

Who was standing there now? Whose was that cloaked figure that had approached so silently? Who was standing now almost exactly where the Corsican had stood in that mad adventure of his hot-headed youth?

The stranger halted, and spoke quickly.

"I know you. I have followed you. I am Buonaveno. IT IS MY FIRE!"

A flash, a loud report, and Lord Ingatestone fell to the ground. Dead.

THE ADVENTURES OF A COLD KEY.

"IT is eighteen months since I was taken to Warley Lunatic Asylum!" Such was the startling commencement coolly made by Gus Hardacre. Up sprang Martin Abbott into a sitting posture.

"I've suspected it all along," he exclaimed—"ever since you came to the school. You're dotty still. What are things coming to? Is Salwey House to be turned into a place of refuge for escaped lunatics? Are insane boys . . . ."

"Hold your row, Abbott," said Gus; "and don't holloa till you're hurt. I'm no more insane than you are, and I never was insane."

"They all say that. If you weren't mad, what were you taken to the Lunatic Asylum for? Why was it?"

"That's just what I'm going to tell you, in my own way. As soon as you shut up," added the yarn-spinner of the evening.

Martin Abbott did "shut up," and no one interposed any more remarks until Gus Hardacre had finished his story of THE ADVENTURES OF A COLD KEY.

Charlie Caldecott was a born doubter. I never knew such a beggar to doubt in all my life. It wasn't that he actually disbelieved—he doubted. Nothing could dissipate his doubts but proof—demonstration. It was his great delight to demonstrate himself the truth or falseness of anything he considered doubtful—and as a matter of fact, he began by regarding almost everything as doubtful. If I may dare to drift into Latin, he always said "dubito" before he would say "credo."

I remember that in the course of a lecture which we both had to attend on Chemistry, the professor said that the joining together of certain easily generated gases would result in an explosion.

"I doubt it," said Charlie.

The next morning he came to me with one arm in a sling, and his face and head wrapped round with linen bandages.

"That chap was quite right about those gases exploding," he remarked in a pleased sort of voice. "I tried the experiment last night—and look at me now!"

I ought to tell you that we were at school together, a mile or two from Brentwood, about eighteen miles from London. Brentwood itself is on the left of the line from town, and is joined by Warley on the right of the line. In Warley are some big Barracks, and the County Lunatic Asylum, which I have already referred to. Brentwood being such a jolly place to live in—being right out of the noise and bustle of London, and yet near enough to it for City men to get to their offices in about half-an-hour—both Charlie's family and mine had removed there, our fathers having to go to town every day. At first we went to a very good school in Brentwood itself as day-boys; but the fact is we got into awful trouble there by playing the truant—or rather by being found out in doing so. I am sure there was every excuse for us, for the country round Brentwood and Warley is so delightful, as to tempt anybody to chuck up school now and then for the sake of a glorious ramble.

But no excuses were made. Poor Charlie and I were punished by being sent away as weekly boarders to another school, where we were kept very strictly in hand.

"This'll be an awful change for us, Charlie," said I, before our first week was up.

"I *don't* doubt it," said Charlie, for once in his life.

However, going home every Saturday until the Monday, made a pleasant break in our new lives, and by-and-by we managed to enjoy ourselves pretty well.

People can always manage to enjoy themselves pretty well if they make the best of things, and look at the bright side of everything.

In an evil hour somebody told Charlie Caldecott that in cases of fainting, a cold key slipped down the back of the fainter by way of the neck, was an excellent thing to restore consciousness, or to prevent the fainter from going "right off."

Now I don't know what led up to this information being given to Charlie, any more than I know why the matter should have lingered in his mind; but it did linger.

"I doubt it," he said—of course—and added, "I'll test the dodge the first chance I get."

That chance came all too soon. For being late at the roll-call one Monday morning (it was entirely the fault of a sudden hard frost, for we merely stopped on the way from home to have some sliding), Charlie and I were sentenced to be kept within bounds for three days. This, of course, meant that for the period named we could not go outside the playground walls. Now we shouldn't have taken our punishment so much to heart if it hadn't been for the circumstance that on Wednesday afternoon a splendid football match was going to be played at Warley. A crack team was coming from London to play the soldiers, and all our fellows—Wednesday being a half-holiday—were going to see the game. Owing to our unjust punishment, we must stop behind.

As soon as dinner was over, off started the others, some of them mockingly remarking to Charlie and me what a jolly match it would be.

Left to our solitude, we tried in vain to soothe our spirits on the giant-stride, and to find an interest in marbles. It was no go!

If it had been possible to scale the walls without detection, we should certainly have done it. But the only safe way out of the premises was through the locked gate at the end of a covered alley, that led from the playground on to the pathway at the side of the house. We could walk up to the gate but not over it. We couldn't climb over, for there wasn't enough space between the top of the gate and the roof of the alley. Nothing but the key of that gate could help us. Naturally enough, the hopelessness of our position increased the charms of that forbidden football match two miles away. Oh, for that key!

But it was kept with all the other keys in the porter's lodge. The porter—as he was called—was an old Irish soldier, named Tom O'Falvey. He was a tender-hearted old chap who pretended to be crusty and strict. On the sly he did us many a good turn with a bad grace.

"Gus," exclaimed Charlie, "let's have a try at Tom, and see if he won't lose that key for us. Pile on the blarney," he cried, as we hurried together to the lodge to put his idea into execution.

"Tom," he asked in a strikingly friendly manner, "wasn't it you who charged the Russian guns at Balaclava?"

"And won the battle of Inkermann?" I put in with flattering anxiety.

"Besides being the first man to enter Sebastopol?" continued Charlie.

"Ah, thin," replied Tom, "maybe it was. But shure that's no reason why I should lind ye the loan of the key that ye're wanting, or the use of it aither. 'Tis I that knows the pair of ye. Clear out now."

With a longing look at the key we wanted—we knew where it hung—we left the lodge.

We were foiled, but not defeated.

The next idea was mine. The key of the hamper-shed was in its lock: it was not unlike the key of the gate. I proposed that we should pocket it, and return to the lodge. Whilst one of us distracted Tom's attention, the other—unperceived—was to slip off from its nail the gate-key, and slip on the hamper-shed key in its place.

It was only half-past two. We could bolt down to the barracks by three, see the match for an hour, and bolt back again. The object was a great one; the risks comparatively slight.

The ruse succeeded. Within a few minutes of its conception, its execution was an accomplished fact.

We noiselessly opened the gate, re-bolted it behind us, and made safely off. In less than a quarter of an hour, we broke into the top of the High Street at a smart trot, and as warm as though it hadn't been one of the coldest days we'd had that winter.

We were brought to a halt by a little mob that had gathered on the side-walk.

"What's the row?" we asked, so as to feel justified in joining in it if there was a scrimmage on.

"This old gent slipped, and knocked his head on the kerb," said a man who was supporting a white and scared-looking old gentleman in his arms.

"He's fainting!" cried somebody.

"Fainting, is he?" said Charlie, just as we were about to trot on, having satisfied ourselves that the fall hadn't been a serious one. "Fainting—here, Gus, where's that key?"

I was carrying it in my hand—so it was cold enough. He snatched it from me, and the next moment slipped it neatly down the old gentleman's back from behind his collar.

Whether it was because of the cold key or not, Charlie's "patient" pulled himself together. He recovered himself wonderfully. He thanked, very

courteously, the man who had been holding him up; and picked up the little black bag he had been carrying. Seeing him about to walk on again, the crowd melted away. Only Charlie and I accompanied him down the street.

"Do you feel better, sir?" enquired Charlie.

"Oh, yes, my boy," answered the old gentleman. "I think I suffered more from fright than anything else. When you get to be my age, you'll find a sudden shock to be a nasty thing. Where are you two young gentlemen hurrying to?" he asked pleasantly.

He seemed a good deal interested when we told him about the football match, and asked us various questions. Looking at his watch, he exclaimed —

"I must hurry up now, for it's past three o'clock, and I have a call to make before I catch my train."

"Well, we'll run on," said we. "Good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye, boys, good-bye."

Off we went at a rattling pace down the hill leading to the station. Over the bridge we sprinted, and into Warley.

Suddenly and excitedly Charlie seized my arm, and came to a full stop. I had never seen him look frightened before.

"Gus," he gasped, "where's that key?"

We glared at each other in dismay. We'd had a lot of warnings, and only one fate awaited us if we were found out this time. If we couldn't get back inside the school premises without the discovery being made that we had broken bounds, we were doomed boys. Our only hope, our one chance, of returning safely, was in that key. Where was that key?

Down the old gentleman's back!

It was our turn to feel like fainting now. But there was no time to lose. Where was the old gentleman? We both remembered that he'd said he had a call to make in the town *before he caught his train*.

"Gus," said Caldecott quickly, "you watch the station. I'll take the town. We must find him between us or we're done for."

The awful situation was too plain to require any more words. Silently we turned and rushed back. When we got to the railway bridge Charlie shot on ahead, and was out of sight almost directly.

I pulled up, hesitating which platform to try first—the up or down. A train might come alongside either at any moment. The old chap with our key might be at the station already.

Horror! A train *was* coming. No—two trains were coming—one on the up line, the other on the down. They were both in sight—both rushing into the station. I felt that I was rapidly losing my head.

A rough-looking man was lounging near me on the bridge, eyeing me curiously. I seized hold of him with one hand, and pointed with the other down the incline to the up platform.

"Run down there," I blurted out as well as I could. "Stop any old gentleman you see with a key in his hand, and a black bag down his back. Hold him. Don't let him go. Knock him down till I come!"

Then I tore frantically across to the other side. The train was in—going to start again. The ticket collectors wouldn't let me go on the platform. They shut the door in my face.

By this time I had lost my wits completely. I kicked and thumped at the door with all my might, and yelled:

"I want the old chap with a key down his back. Stop him! Stop thief!"

Just then, through a window, I caught sight—as I thought—of the old gentleman, seated comfortably in the corner seat of a carriage almost opposite to the very spot where I stood howling "Stop him!" I cracked my fingers on the glass with all my might, and roared to him:

"Gi' me that key. Please get out at once and undress yourself!"

"Right, forward!" called the guard—and off went the train.

"Look 'ere," said a voice behind me, "the old bloke you want ain't t'other side, nor 'e ain't this side. And 'e ain't been t'other side, nor 'e ain't been this side. I know where 'e is. You come along o' me."

"You know where he is?" I cried delightedly. "With our key!"

"Yus. I know. You come along o' me."

Trying to collect my wits again as well as to get back my wind, I accompanied my "friend in need."

We made for Warley. Outside the Asylum my guide halted, and shouted "Gate!"

"What does this mean?" I demanded. "This is the County Lunatic Asylum."

"Thought you'd know it agin," grinned the fellow, grabbing hold of me tight by the collar. "This is the 'Sylum right enough, and you're a-goin' in. A-yellin' at Railway Stations like that," he went on indignantly, "and a-tellin' me to knock down a aged gennelman with keys and black bagses down 'is back. Come on, you mis'rable loonattic—Gate!"

The gates swung open. The next moment I was inside them—inside the gates of Warley Madhouse, rapidly closed again by their liveried keeper.

"Here," cried my captor to him proudly—"a escaped loonattic for yer! You've lost one of 'em, ain't you—a young 'un?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Well, I 'eard so, and I've caught 'im. 'Ere 'e is. Asked a wenerable old bloke to undress 'isself on the platform—in weather like this!"

Of course I wasn't in long—I was out again in a few minutes. There was nothing to do but to meet Charlie and tell him that the key had gone travelling on the down line—for I was certain now that I had not mistaken the identity of the gentleman in the railway carriage.

I met my fellow unfortunate near the station. Of course he had had no luck in the town. I told him how I had "seen the old gentleman off."

"Gone," he groaned: "prigged our key and gone!"

Slowly and mournfully we trudged back to school to give ourselves up. At the gate—that gate—we found old Tom O'Falvey. We made a clean breast of it.

"'Tis mesilf that pities the pair of ye when I tell the masther," said Tom, as he opened the gate with a duplicate key and let us in.

We prepared for the worst that very evening, but it didn't come. Tom evidently hadn't split yet, and the affair hadn't been found out without him. But he was at the foot of the stairs as we went up to bed, and whispered in our ears (just to help give us a good night's rest):

"'Tis in the morning I'll be telling the masther."

But the Thursday morning came, and he didn't tell: the afternoon and evening came, but still he didn't tell. Poor old Tom! what a brick he was—he never told at all.

After morning school on Friday, he beckoned us towards his lodge.

"Come here now," he said, "and look at this."

He spread out that day's "*Essex County Chronicle*," and pointed his finger to an advertisement:

> "*The gentleman who met with a slight accident in the High Street, Brentwood, on Tuesday last, and was in danger of fainting, finds himself in possession of a key that is not his property. It will be restored on application to Mr. Walter Benham, Solicitor, Dovercourt*."

We wrote to Mr. Benham, and the key was returned to us. We handed it to Tom, with every farthing that the two of us could club together. The good old chap took the key, but wouldn't take the money.

"'Tis not I, indade, will take the money of bhoys who are going to the gallows as fast as the pair of ye," he said. Then he added:

"Take heed to what I say now. This last prank ye got up to in laying ye're hands on my key might have got me into throuble as well as yourselves, and lost me my situation intoirely for not taking better care of it. 'Tis mesilf that doesn't mind bhoys getting into a bit of fun and mischief, but be careful now, when ye have ye're fun, to have it without running the risk of getting other people into throuble and danger."

"Charlie," said I to my chum a few days afterwards, "I've been thinking a good deal of the fright we got into over that key."

"So have I," said Charlie.

"The origin of the whole thing was our breaking of the rule about punctuality. We are always getting into trouble, because we are always breaking rules. I'm going to turn over a new leaf. In future I'm going to keep all the rules laid down for us."

"I doubt it!" said Charlie Caldecott

"A very laughable yarn," remarked the monitor. "But I don't know that you gave it a very apt title, Gus. It wasn't exactly about the adventures of that key, but the adventures into which the key led you."

"It was *my* yarn," returned Gus Hardacre, "and I had a right to call it what I liked."

“ ‘I doubt it,’ ” quoted Martin Abbott.

HE SEIZED HIS BUGLE.

THE BOY WHO WON A BATTLE.

DAVE WATSON prefaced his yarn by saying, "At my last school we had as our Drawing and German master a chap named Thiele. He was a very good specimen of the sons of the Fatherland, and we all liked him. On his side, he seemed to like us as heartily as we liked him. The fact is, he shared in our sports as well as our studies, and took as much interest in us in the cricket-field as in the class-room. His character—especially as an all-round cricketer and a clever athlete—was beyond reproach; which, I'm afraid, is more than can be said of most masters, from our point of view. We were all sorry that he was a German; but he couldn't help it.

"One fine August half-holiday we were to play the second eleven of a neighbouring school. The match was to come off in our field, and there we were, waiting for the representatives of the rival club, nick-named the 'Wasps' C.C., on account of sporting black-and-yellow colours. Either we were early or the Wasps were late. Mr. Thiele was in charge of us, and to beguile the time of waiting we got him, as we often did, to spin us a yarn. The particular yarn he spun us, on that afternoon, is the one I'm going to treat you to. Here goes for the German master's story without further introduction."

This beautiful summer day (he began slowly) is the anniversary of one of the great battles of the Franco-German War, twenty years ago. The battle I am thinking of was fought on just such a beautiful day as this. It began in the morning, raged through all the lovely afternoon and sweet evening, and only ended at night. Through the hours of glorious sunshine, in the softer light which came when the white moon rose, and the Angels lighted the silver stars, French and Germans fought on and on.

Of all the tens of thousands of men engaged on both sides, our chief concern is with a German bugler, whom we will call Reinhold.

He was only a lad, this Reinhold, a lad of about eighteen, but strong and big for his age.

When the war broke out—when the French armies marched to invade the sacred soil of the Fatherland—he was at school at Hameln—or college we might call it here.

Hameln is a quaint old historic town, on the banks of the Weser, in Hanover. Browning calls it Hamlin in his celebrated poem of the "Pied Piper," who first piped away all the rats, and then all the children, hundreds of years ago. Reinhold was one of the youngsters who have come there since. It was his birthplace—I wish I had time to give you a description of it; but I haven't, for the Wasps may arrive at any minute. Generally, it is a very sleepy, Rip-van-Winkle sort of place. But the fever of patriotism that—when France declared war against her—heated all Germany, as though a great wave of fire had passed through her every province, roused the sleepy burghers to enthusiasm. All the men of a fighting age marched away to fight. All the old men cheered them as they went; all the women prayed for them when they had gone. Schoolboys called themselves young men, and begged to be sent away with them. Big boys, of Reinhold's age and size, were allowed to go, for the country had need of all her strength. Of the cadet corps at the school, Reinhold, who was very musical, was bugler. He pressed eagerly forward to be taken into one of the regiments that were going to swell the innumerable ranks of the armies in the field. Great was his joy when he knew himself "passed"—proud, indeed, was his heart when he donned his uniform as bugler in the "crack" regiment of his dear native town. Playing at being a soldier was all over for him now—he *was* one!

And soon he knew, in his own experience, the stern realities of a soldier's life in war-time. The huge hosts of the invader and the invaded soon got touch of each other, and the series of victories began that rolled the former back across the frontier, and carried the latter, in triumph, to the gates of Paris.

After the first battle in which his regiment took part, Reinhold formed a strange friendship. Several thousands of the French were taken prisoners. As, rank after rank, they were marched through the German lines to the rear, the young bugler watched them. Some looked defiant still, others sullen, and very, very sad. Some were whole, others wounded; amongst the wounded, though he tried hard to carry his head high, and tread with steady feet, was a trumpeter of cavalry, of not much more than Reinhold's own age. Their eyes met, and somehow the hunted look in the Frenchman's face seemed to haunt the German bugler for hours afterwards.

By what men call "chance," Reinhold was employed, that night, on duty in the prisoners' quarters. There he and the French trumpeter fell into talk.

Each talked to the other of his own country. Besides the similarity in their ages, a certain similarity of tastes was soon discovered, which drew them to each other more and more.

Next day they renewed their talk. We—I mean the Germans—were waiting for reinforcements, and it was several days before an escort was formed, under which the prisoners were finally marched away. During this time Reinhold and his French friend, Alphonse, "improved their acquaintance." One of their mutual tastes was for music, of which they were never tired of talking. Each taught the other, what were to the learner, new and strange airs. From Alphonse, for instance, Reinhold learnt quickly some of the French cavalry calls.

When the moment of parting arrived, the eyes of each were wet. "Enemies" though they were, their hands lingered together in a loving embrace as they said farewell—farewell for ever, for they never met again. As the long column marched away, Alphonse turned and waved a last salute.

The days went on—days of fierce and mad excitement. Their story is written in blood on the pages of the world's history.

At last was fought the battle of which this is the anniversary day. The Germans were flushed with their recent triumphs—the French were stung by their defeats. The desperate valour with which the former attacked could only have been equalled by the death-scorning bravery of the latter in meeting that attack.

From an eminence behind the approximate centre of his forces, the King of Prussia, surrounded by a small staff, watched the conflict. From only such a spot, so extended was the line of battle, could the varying fortunes of the day have been followed. Those taking an actual part in the fighting knew little of how the day was going save in their own neighbourhoods. This was particularly the case with Reinhold's regiment during the greater part of the battle. They were engaged, with other regiments, in clearing a series of wooded heights, held by the enemy in great force. It was warm work, for every inch of their advance was stubbornly contested. Daylight had faded away, and the autumn stars were shining in the skies above the smoke-covered earth, by the time their last assault succeeded. Scarcely half of the regiment were left to take part in it. The others—wounded, dying, dead—strewed the way behind.

The breathless survivors of the force halted at last. Before them stretched a wide plateau, where whole masses of troops were fighting in the starlight.

The pause was brief. Upon this plateau Reinhold's regiment, with the other regiments co-operating with it, were ordered to deploy. On and down they rushed to join the massed battalions on the open plain.

The issue of the battle was still uncertain. It hung in the balance.

Suddenly the French made a last desperate charge of cavalry. The blast of their bugles was followed by a mad rush of their impetuous horsemen. Rained on by rifles, stormed on by our artillery, forward they charged. Heavy cavalry and light—cuirassiers, lancers, hussars, dragoons, chasseurs d'Afrique, and the savage Turcos—their sabres and swords and lances a whirling sheet of light—on they rode.

They carried everything before them. A panic seized the Germans. Their cavalry, their artillerymen, even their solid squares of infantry, went down before the furious whirlwind.

So far as Reinhold was concerned, it seemed to him that it was all over in a moment. One instant he saw them coming, the next instant they had ridden over his square.

A sabre-cut had slashed open his forehead, his right foot had been crushed beneath the hoofs of a charger.

He raised his wounded head, dashed from his eyes with a trembling hand the warm blood that was pouring from his forehead down his face, and gazed after the charging enemy. They were advancing still—the German line was giving way—the tide of victory was setting against his countrymen. All was lost—and he was lying there, bleeding and wounded and helpless! Nay—was he helpless? A sudden wild thought nerved his hand. He seized his bugle and raised it to his lips. From it the next moment rang out the French cavalry "Retreat!"—one of the bugle calls he had learnt from poor Alphonse.

Loud and clear the sharp notes rang out.

Those charging Frenchmen heard them. A few rode on still—some drew rein, and wheeled—all the others wavered. In the very moment of victory their awful charge was broken. The Germans heard that "Retreat!" too, and saw its instant effect—and *their* retreat was stopped. With a ringing cheer, they regained their formation.

Back turned the French—on came the Germans. In a few minutes all was over. The enemy had made their last attempt. The battle was over. The boy-bugler, whose *ruse* had won it, lay fainting on the ground, wet with his own blood.

That night the King slept in a peasant's hut near by. The next morning he rode to the hospital into which they had carried Reinhold, and with his own hands presented him with the Iron Cross. For the story had been told him of what had been done by the Bugler of Hameln.

"Mr. Thiele," said I, "don't you walk lame still—with your right foot?"

"Ye-es," he replied.

"You have a scar on your forehead."

"Have I?"

"Is your Christian name Reinhold?"

"Yes."

"Are *you* the boy who won that battle?" I continued.

"Here come the Wasps!" answered Mr. Thiele.

JOE FLOTSAM.

IT was the turn of Seth Burdekin, nick-named Eaglebeak.

"Last summer," said he, "father and I took the rest of the family to Clacton-on-Sea for a month's holiday."

"That's a cool way of putting it," remarked somebody in the darkness.

"Very well, then," Eaglebeak corrected himself hastily, "father took me and the rest of the family to the jolly little place I've just mentioned."

"That's better."

It's the same thing. Well, along the coast at Clacton are several Martello Towers. I suppose you know that most of the Martello Towers on the English coast were built for purposes of defence during the great Napoleonic scare. Similar Towers are found along the shores of the Mediterranean, where they were built against the pirates. An alarm-bell, or *martello*, used to be rung from them as a warning when an enemy was seen approaching. From this word martello all the Towers are named.

One of these Towers at Clacton was occupied by a coastguardsman—a splendid chap called Joe Larty. We got to be great chums, Joe and I. He used to let me go up to the top of his Tower, and there, with his telescope, I got a magnificent sweep of open sea and pretty country, and drank in enough ozone to last me till we go there again.

"WOULD YOU HAVE GONE WITHOUT ME?"

Like all coastguardsmen, of course Joe had been a man-o'-war's-man. He'd been in all sorts of dangers, and had had some jolly shipwrecks and narrow escapes and fine wounds. My great delight used to be to get him to tell me of some of his adventures. The funniest thing about him was that he appeared to be half ashamed of himself for not having been killed.

"Better men than me," he used to say, "and plenty of 'em, who were never in half my scrapes, lost their lives, while I never got killed in all my life. There never was such a beggar for living as I've been. Cats ain't in it with me."

One morning father came with me to see Joe, and on that occasion he spun us a yarn into which he couldn't work this rummy idea of apologizing for not having got killed, because the story was not about himself at all, but about Joe Flotsam of Audley Cove. My father was so much interested in the tale that he afterwards wrote it out in his own style instead of my chum Larty's, and the version of it I'm going to give you is the former. There's only one thing I'd like to say first.

"You've said a good many things first," observed Martin Abbott.

"I consider that remark uncalled for. What I was about to say was this: we've had one story about a Life-boat, and two stories in which Christmas Eve was referred to. Now my yarn is also about a Life-boat, and a part of it is timed on Christmas Eve. These points of resemblance I can't help. In all

other respects my story will be found quite different from the stories I've referred to."

"Life-boats are good things and so are Christmas Eves," said the monitor, "but they must be kept out of our yarn-spinning after this tale. Now then, Eaglebeak, go it."

Seth Burdekin "went it" without more ado.

A sweet September morning, and plenty of it.

Plenty of it? Why, it just seemed filling the world with its brightness and sweetness and gladness, and to have enough left to give away some to any unfortunate neighbouring worlds that might have run short.

Sunshine? Plenty. Sunbeams in the air, on the land, on the sea; round the tops of the tallest trees on the highest hills; in the lowest valleys, bathing the fields in a glamour of gold richer than the lost glory of their harvest beauty; on all the little gleeful child-waves that rip-rip-rippled on the margin of the yellow beach, and the big billows that tumbled about in ecstacy farther off. Early morning sunbeams that melted the hearts of all the birds into song—that made the fishes in all the flashing brooks and streams so merry that they jumped up to swallow them, as if they felt that a little sunshine inside would do them good.

What a grand thing it would be if we could all get more (or some) sunshine—moral sunshine—inside us! There wouldn't be so many cross looks and snarling words—all the nasty, angry, bitter thoughts would go cowering away, like shadows into corners.

Such a soft, soothing, luscious breeze tempered the sunshine that the flowers couldn't contain themselves—they flirted so with the willing wind that he kissed them by thousands at a time, and bore away such a tell-tale fragrance that all the world could tell what he had been doing. Not that he was ashamed of it—not a bit of it! Why, the rogue was telling the tree-tops all about it till they shook with laughter, and when he told the rivers they thought it was such a good thing that they bounded away quicker than ever to tell old Neptune, and he laughed till all the ships and yachts and fishing boats above him rolled in the commotion he caused.

Not that it was a frisky, flighty morning, mind you—like a morning in early Spring-time, whose mood is no more to be depended on than the mood of a maiden of sensitive seventeen. Not a morning liable to sudden tears and petulant changes of every sort, but a more staid, middle-aged sort of sweet

September morning, certain to keep all its promises till the shadow-time. Even that fluttering wind would be quiet in the quiver of noon.

("Good," said Abbott approvingly, "very good indeed. I mean good of your father—I couldn't have done that description better myself. And good of your memory, Seth.")

But look here (went on Seth quickly). Oh, this is outrageous for a staid September morning. Actually, as he lies in bed, here's a sunbeam jumping about right on Joe Flotsam's nose. His blinds are up and the windows open, and that sunbeam has come right in, and is shining on old Joe's nose, as though it considered his proboscis the proper place for a halo.

Joe was an old "salt" whose years were nearer seventy than sixty. After a long "life on the ocean wave," he had returned to Audley Cove, his birthplace, to end his days. He had saved exactly one thousand pounds, and enough besides to purchase an annuity of a sovereign a week—facts of which he made no secret whatever. In fact, a secret of any sort would have comported ill with his honest, open, ingenuous, rough, red, rugged, weather-beaten face—the face with the tender lips and kindly eyes that everybody in the place knew so well—the face that all the children loved. He lived all by himself in a little white cottage on the brow of the "Brow" just beyond the town.

The sunshine was rousing up other people beside Joe Flotsam—sunbeams were flashing upon all sorts of windows where they couldn't get in, as though they wanted to enter in order to tickle the sleepy occupants into wakefulness and life. They seemed to know, those sunbeams, that everybody ought to be up and about, because that was going to be the biggest day for Audley Cove that Audley Cove had ever known.

A few minutes after the sunbeam that had selected Joe Flotsam's nose for sudden glorification had commenced touching it up, the proprietor of that nose "tumbled out," satisfied himself as to the exact direction of the wind, and dressed himself—with an eye rather to the reception of breakfast than "company." Having prepared and eaten a tremendous meal, he dressed himself again—this time with elaborate and most unusual care.

Then he sallied out.

What a lot of fishermen there were already about the beach, and how smart they all looked! They greeted Joe with excessive heartiness, and to every salutation he returned one as cordial.

A general move was made towards a prominent object on the shore just above the highest tide-mark. It was not what (at all events at that time) could be called a "common object of the sea-shore," I am sorry to say—sorry, for it was a very pleasant object. Such an object had never been seen in Audley Cove before—thank God it can be seen there now to this day. It had not sprung up in a night—it had been gradually growing to completion, and every day it had been watched with eager interest. Women had brought their little children to watch it—and had watched it themselves. The fishermen had fallen into the habit of making the spot which it occupied a sort of general meeting place when they were not at work; and all the old men who would never go sailing and fishing any more had day by day, all day long, burned tobacco incense before it—they had regularly crawled to the spot and solemnly smoked and watched from their seats on the nearest upturned boats they could find.

It was a Life-boat House.

His companions kept a few paces behind as old Joe drew a big key from his pocket and opened the door. There, on a neat, new, unused carriage, stood a Life-boat. No honourable scars, no marks of hurtling storms, bore she yet—in pride of model lines of unimpaired beauty, in glory of bright varnish and fresh paint, she stood as though consciously waiting in seemly dignity the coming great ceremony which was to float her upon the congenial element man's partial triumph over which her comely strength represented.

("Bully for Burdekin's father!" murmured Martin Abbott. "He can put things together.")

How lovingly those rough men eyed her, how fondly their great, red, agile hands felt her smooth hull, and toyed with her exquisite fittings.

Everything was there, either on board, or ranged with true sailor-man neatness round the walls of the house—cork life-belts, anchors and cables, grapnels and lines, life-buoys, lanterns, rockets, and many other articles of which landsmen never even heard the names, together with portable or launching skids.

A commandingly given order by Joe Flotsam was obeyed with a hearty cheer—willing hands drew the carriage and boat out on to the beach, and arranged everything for the launch in workmanlike fashion. Then a signal was run up, and in response to it a number of fishing boats and yachts began to make their way shorewards over the glittering sea.

The morning wore on. As the clocks struck twelve everybody seemed bound for the station. All the streets were hung with flags, and a triumphal arch spanned the entrance to the railway yard. Two gentlemen were coming from London by the train due in at one o'clock, representing respectively the Royal National Life-boat Institution and the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Society.

Hark—the band of the local Volunteers! They were coming, merry fifes sounding, stirring drums rolling and throbbing. Up the High Street, gay with its fluttering banners, round the corner—there they were: and a gallant-looking, well-set-up lot of fellows too.

After a few moments' conversation between Flotsam and the members of the Local Board (who had all now arrived and were expressing their appreciation of the importance of the occasion—and their own—by breathing very hard), everybody went through the trying but inevitable ordeal of waiting.

One o'clock. Train signalled. Excitement intense. Train in. Local Board gasping. The "gentlemen from London" promptly identified.

This was the order of the procession as it marched from the station down to the beach. How the people did cheer—how those flags did wave to be sure.

The Band of the local Volunteers.
The Coastguard Crew.
The Gentlemen from London.
Joseph Flotsam, between them.
The Local Life-boat Committee.
The Local Board (breathing very hard indeed).
Distinguished Individuals, unsorted.
The well-known Messrs. Tag, Rag, and Bobtail.

Very sweet and nice looked all the Sunday and day school children on the beach as they welcomed the processionists with a ringing cheer. There, too, were all the teachers, and the Vicar in his robes. He, "the gentlemen from London," Joe Flotsam, and the committee ascended a platform, while the others took up appointed places. The official crowd was fringed by sightseers of all sorts, shapes, and sizes.

Joe Flotsam made a speech—a more public one than he had ever delivered in his life. For a reason which will be sufficiently obvious directly, it was his function formally to hand over the Life-boat to the representative of the Life-boat Institution.

Addressing that gentleman by name, Joe said:

"Mr. J. Hee Farman. Sir. It is my pleasin' dooty for to hand over to you this here Life-boat. All I can say is, you're hearty welcome to it. As is well beknown, I'd saved a annuity and a thousand pounds. I've got the annuity still, but the thousand pounds is busted on this Boat and the Boat-house." (*Wild cheers*.)

Then his voice suddenly altered its tone.

"There's a lot of us here, sir, standin' by this Boat, as knows what shipwreck *means*—we know what it is that word stands for. And we feels what we're wishin' for when we 'umbly prays that this here Boat may bring Hope, and Life, and *Shore* to many a poor sailor and traveller who thought soon to be going down for the last time—and, please God, it shan't be our 'ands and 'earts as shall be back'ard in 'elping her so for to do. (*Tremendous applause, in which the speaker heartily joined*.)

"I made my money on the sea, sir—I lived on the sea—all them what was nearest and dearest to me is *under* the sea. Now I gives to the sea this here Life-boat, as I'm going to name after the day, and the time, I was born on; and the day—and the time—as I hopes to die on. (*Loud but inappropriate cheers*.)

"Take this here Boat, sir—and God bless her! She's a beauty! (*Steady, lads, or there'll be a run on artificial ear-drums, and a rise in the price*.) She's a Boat as any man might be proud to live near. (*Cheers*.)

"I've said my little whack, sir, and, thank goodness, I ain't a public speaker to say a word more than my feelings. Mr. Farman. Sir. I will now resoome my silence."

Formally accepting the gift with warm-hearted words of thanks, Mr. Farman explained that what "Mr. Joseph Flotsam" had done was to endow Audley Cove with a Life-boat, a boat-house, and every accessory for ever. Whatever might become of that particular boat, Audley Cove would nevermore be without one.

The voices of the school children rang out in a hymn with the plaintive refrain:

"Oh! hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea."

And the waves rippled "Amen."

Then the Vicar folded his white hands and prayed, saying finally:

"For the help of the helpless we launch this boat upon the waters which Thou holdest in the hollow of Thy Hand. To the cause of Humanity we dedicate her—which is Thy cause, O Lord of earth and sea."

For the first time in Audley Cove the command was given to man the Life-boat. In sprang the crew. Joe Flotsam walked to the bows, where hung the immemorial bottle of wine. Broken by his hand, the rich liquid bubbled over the prow. And a mighty shout from all the people on the shore, and all the people in the boats that clustered in the bay, proclaimed a minute afterwards that the ceremony was over which launched

"THE CHRISTMAS EVE."

The bells are chiming from the storm-beaten Tower of Audley Church—chiming, on Christmas Eve, the old sweet Christmas story. But their tempest-driven echoes—the echoes of the chimes that tell the tale of Infinite Pity, the story of Divine Love—clash with the echoes of another sound—the sound of Nature in her Infinite Pitilessness, her direful Wrath—and the sound of the wailing that is bore shoreward from the sea. The Storm King is lashing the waters with his heavy sceptre, and has called his myrmidon winds to their fell work of ruth and wreck and death. They howl exultantly as they hurl the wreck-laden billows on the shrinking shore. They fling into the souls of the horrified crowd upon the beach the cries of the hapless ones on board that doomed vessel on the rocks—those men and women and children.

The Life-boat is ready. So are her men. Already she is moving on the skids when a quick shout is heard, and Joe Flotsam is seen approaching.

He has aged even in the short time since that bright September day which was so different from this wild December night. He comes quickly, but even in the extremity of the occasion he cannot move so quickly as he could only a few months ago. Bleak weather has allied itself to his weight of years, and helped to weaken his limbs and stiffen his joints.

On he comes, straight for the Life-boat and her waiting crew. He joins the silent men, and turns angrily to their captain.

"Would you have gone without me, Bill Burneigh?"

Sorrowfully but firmly—so kindly but so firmly—replies the stalwart young fisherman.

"Joe, mate," he says, "it's a toss whether we can do it as it is. One pair of weaker arms in the boat, and we *couldn't* do it. You can't come, Joe."

"I *will* come," is the fierce reply. "Where's the man who will stop me?"

"Here, Joe. I will."

And Bill Burneigh plants himself before the old man squarely. But he holds out his hand as he speaks—speaks very quickly.

"I must do it, Joe. I must refuse you, for 'tis my duty. One pair of weak arms—only a couple of old hands—and the job can't be done. Good-bye, Joe."

Joe Flotsam dashes away the offered hand, and springs for the boat. But a shouted order rings out from Bill Burneigh's firm lips, and the *Christmas Eve* glides down into the sea. As Bill leaps on board Joe curses him, for the bitterness of his weakness—the weakness of a strong man grown old—fills his heart.

"*My* Boat!" he cries—"the Boat *I* gave them—and they have turned me away."

For a few minutes the boat is seen struggling in the wild turmoil of the waves. Then for a time she disappears in the blackness.

Over and over again that wailing cry:

"*My* Boat, and they have turned me away!"

A flash of lightning! Surely Nature rends the sky with that vivid light in mockery of the horror of the scene, in mockery of the woe in the eyes of those who look upon it. There is the wreck, her wave-washed decks crowded; there is the Life-boat, labouring apparently in vain to gain her side; and there, closer in, first driven forward and then driven back, but setting towards the pier-head, is something else. It is a life-belt, and clinging to it are a man and a child.

Blacker the darkness after the momentary light. A second flash!

The man has gone from the life-belt, but the child clings to it still—tied there. First driven forward, and then driven back, but setting still for the pier-head.

Can it be darker than ever now?

The third flash of lightning! Close in now, though first driven forward and then driven back, and setting always for the pier-head—to be dashed

against it or drifted out of the Bay—the life-belt and the child are floating still. And Joe Flotsam is swimming towards them.

"They're both living, but there's blood on Joe Flotsam," said the man who threw from the pier the ropes by means of which they drew the old man and the young child from the water. "He struck against the piles."

He had just had life enough to grasp, but there was no sign of life in the scarred face now. They bore them both to the cottage near the pier gates—Bill Burneigh's cottage.

The life-saving work of the *Christmas Eve* was over, and the captain of the crew stood beside the white bed wherein lay Joe Flotsam. In a little cot nearer the fire lay the boy-child he had rescued—sleeping peacefully.

But not so peacefully as Joe was soon going to sleep.

"Bill," said the captain's wife, "I've sent for the parson."

"He'll come too late. But Joe saved the life of yon child, and . . ."

The clock on the chimney-piece commenced to strike the midnight hour.

". . . the Child Who was born . . ."

The twelfth stroke sounded, and between the first stroke and the last Joe died.

". . . *to-day*—and the CHILD Who was born to-day to save the world will look after Joe Flotsam."

TWICE SAVED.

WITH great gravity Monitor Martin Abbott addressed the tenant of the last bed.

"Thomas Frederick Sanderson," he said, "you have to tell to-night the concluding yarn. A heavy responsibility is upon you."

"I'm equal to it," returned Tom Sanderson confidently.

"I hope you are, Tom—I hope you are," Abbott remarked dubiously. "But with twenty-five such yarns as we have had spun, in this room, to beat, or equal—for no inferior story will do for the last—all I can say is that you have your work cut out for you. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then 'go!'"

Sanderson began by explaining:

"The scene is the encampment of a body of British troops during the 'Autumn Manœuvres.' The time is late in the evening or early at night—whichever way you like to put it. Inside the tent of Sergeant-Major Rippon, seated in easy attitudes around him, are five or six other 'non-coms.' It is Rippon who is speaking. He is telling his comrades how the Colours of the good old 47th were TWICE SAVED."

Ensign Travers lost them. I brought them back. Sister Grace saved them a second time, and I *did* salute that Sister of Mercy whose appearance you smiled at as she passed by the camp, and if she passed me a thousand times I should salute her a thousand times, in memory of what that other black-dressed Sister did. She saved them a second time. The Colours of the 47th Regiment.

It was at Inkermann. Very cold and gloomy was the dawn of that fifth of November of which so many gallant fellows never saw the sunset, and a thick and cold and gloomy fog hung over the camp. Muffled in the misty veil, the enemy's guns boomed an awful warning of the unexpected fight.

Then the drums throbbed and the trumpets sounded—guns were limbered and chargers mounted, and swords and rifles and bayonets grasped in eager haste, as from tent to tent, from man to man, rang the cry, "*The Russians are on us!*"

Almost before we had time to arm and form, we heard the solid tramp of marching men, and saw, through the yellow mist, closing in around us the grey-coated masses of the foe. Then it was bayonet to bayonet, sword to sword, man to man.

In such a fight as fell to the 47th's share that day, hours pass like minutes, and how long we had been fighting before we lost the Colours I don't know. But I know we had been getting fewer and fewer. We had managed to keep pretty well together, close to the Colours carried by Ensign Travers, but many had been beaten back, and many a poor comrade had lost the number of his mess. At last only eighty or a hundred of us remained together, when a mounted officer dashed up crying—

"Look out, 47th—the enemy's cavalry is on you!"

Even as he shouted we heard the thunderous thud of hoofs upon the turf, and the jingling of spurs and bits. A moment afterwards they were close upon us—a small but solid square kneeling round the Colours. A volley emptied many a saddle, but like a whirlwind they were on us. Our square was broken, and the Russian troopers rode in—rode on us, and over us. Sword in one hand and the Colours in the other, grasped as with the grasp of death, his crisp curly hair fringing his bared and smoke-grimed forehead, a passionate light glaring on his face, stood Travers. A couple of months before he was the pet of ladies' drawing-rooms—a curled and scented darling of the parks and Rotten Row—a budding dandy with a fine taste in gloves and neckties. But there was no fear in his eyes, no trembling of his lips, no shaking of his hands, as he stood there facing death. He had grown since then. He was a man now!

Only for a second he stood, for like a lightning flash fell a sabre, cutting a ghastly wound across his head. He fell, and the man who smote him carried off the Colours!

With a red rain of blood dripping from his brows, he raised his wounded head from the sodden grass, and stretched blindly out his twitching, eager hands.

"Bring me back the Colours!"

All around him lay helpless the faithful fellows who would have died a dozen deaths to place that flag in his hands again—wounded, dying, dead—never to "receive cavalry charge" any more. Who was there to bring back the blazoned silk that bore the record of our regiment's honour? Only one man remained unwounded of the square over which the Russian horsemen had ridden—that man myself.

Again the cry, again with the same agony and despair:

"Bring me back the Colours, or"—reaching out for his broken sword—"kill me!"

But before the words were finished I had leaped upon a riderless steed hard by, and thrust the jagged point of a bayonet into his side.

On, on after the flying troops—a mad, wild chase to win the Colours back or die. A sudden fire from the French (for our allies were now in the field) played upon the Russian horsemen, and the sight of a British cavalry regiment, preparing to charge, dispersed them in every direction, and the man who had taken the Colours—our Colours—was cut off from his comrades. Wild with hope, I tore on—nearer and nearer, stride by stride, foot by foot, to the man I pursued—till at length we were level. A short, sharp struggle, and the Colours were mine, the Russian trooper was dead. Then I rode back, and put them, torn and tattered and bloodstained, into the hands of Ensign Travers.

Some one was kneeling by his side, bathing and dressing the poor boy's wounded head, staunching the blood which was pouring down his fair young face, wiping it—Oh, so tenderly, so gently—from the brave blue eyes and away from the white, pain-shivering lips which said so fervently as his eager fingers took the Colours from me, "God bless you, Sergeant-major!"

Her eyes were full of pity, but they didn't turn from the sight of his gaping wound; her face was full of holy light like an angel's, pure and delicate, but it didn't flinch, though it whitened, at sight of the blood; her hands were frail and very small, but they didn't tremble as she bound up the torn flesh. Under her black and ugly dress beat the bravest heart of all the brave hearts, living and dead, on the field of Inkermann.

She was a Sister of Mercy. She was Sister Grace.

Travers got hold of my hand. Poor boy—he—I don't like to tell you—he kissed it!

Looking at me as he did so, and feeling something falling upon him, he cried out in sudden terror:

"Sergeant-major, you're wounded!"

"I know I am, sir," I said; and fell by his side as helpless as he was.

What! what! what is that? Two Russian cavalry officers are riding for us—they must have seen the flag re-captured, and they're coming to take it from us once more. What do they care for the risk they run?—the Colours of the English 47th Regiment are worth *any* risk!

Look, look! They're spurring—on they come, on over the bodies of friend and foe—on, on—coolly, steadily on. Look at the triumph in their eyes—look at the light in their faces, the smile on their lips.

We're cut off from help—we're both wounded—we can't fight; we can't rise. Curse them! they know it. Their tired chargers are spurred again, and now they're on us!

Travers clutched his splintered sword, and tried to struggle to his knees.

"The Colours are theirs again," he moaned; "but they shall kill me for them!"

"No, they shan't!"

Oh, the light on the pale face of Sister Grace as she said it! Snatching them from the arms of Ensign Travers, she tore the Colours from the broken flagstaff, and bound them round her body—folded them tightly round her heart; and the crucifix she wore around her neck gleamed upon them. Then she took a few steady paces from our bodies, and halted as the Russian officers drew rein.

"They are mine, and you shall not take them!"

I can see it all again, just as my straining eyes saw it then. I can see her face, and her black nun's dress with the Colours wrapped round it, and I can see those two uplifted sabres above her gallant head.

"They are mine, and you shall not take them from me!"

How long it was those two threatening sabres were upheld to strike I don't know;—nor how long it was before that strange look came into the fierce faces of the two Russians;—but I know that all the time she didn't flinch. I know that she fixed steady eyes on the angry men who grasped the shining blades, and that with steady hands she pressed the Colours tighter and closer to her heart. And I know that none the less were those two officers of the enemy's cavalry brave soldiers and gallant gentlemen when

they lowered their sabres and turned and rode away—not from a park of artillery, not from a cavalry charge, not from a bristling line of British bayonets—but from Sister Grace and—*her* Colours!

Yes, chums; I won the Victoria Cross. And Sister Grace? The veneration of every man, the love of every soldier, who hears her story—and the highest place for ever in the history of the 47th Regiment of the Line.

As Sergeant-Major Rippon finished, loud and clear, over the white-tented plain rang the bugler's sharp notes sounding the

"LIGHTS OUT!"

" 'Here endeth the twenty-sixth story,' " said Martin Abbott.

"Which has been the best of the whole lot?" queried Eaglebeak.

"Let's put that to the vote," suggested Bob Newbegin.

"A good idea," agreed the monitor. "So that nobody's opinion shall be prejudiced by the opinions of another, let everyone write on a piece of paper the title of the yarn which he considers to be the best of the twenty-six stories told in this dormitory since I started the idea of having tales told in regular order."

A candle was produced from under somebody's mattress, and lit. A pencil was found and a sheet of paper torn into twenty-six pieces, and distributed. Then the pencil travelled from bed to bed, till every boy had written down the title of the story he considered the best. The twenty-six slips of paper were handed to Martin Abbott, who read what was written on each, and announced the result of the polling.

"The selections number twenty-six," he said slowly.

"The two fellows who told about 'The Hidden Gold' between them have voted each for his own half. Counting their selections as two, every boy has voted for his own story!"

An "eloquent silence" followed. It was broken by the voice of Eaglebeak, who made a proposition that was immediately carried into effect.

"We oughtn't to forget," he suggested, "that we owe the spinning of these splendid yarns to Martin Abbott. *Let's give him three smothered cheers under the bed-clothes!*"

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of "*Lights Out!*" by Robert Overton]