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Title: Gunpowder Treason and Plot, and Other Stories for Boys

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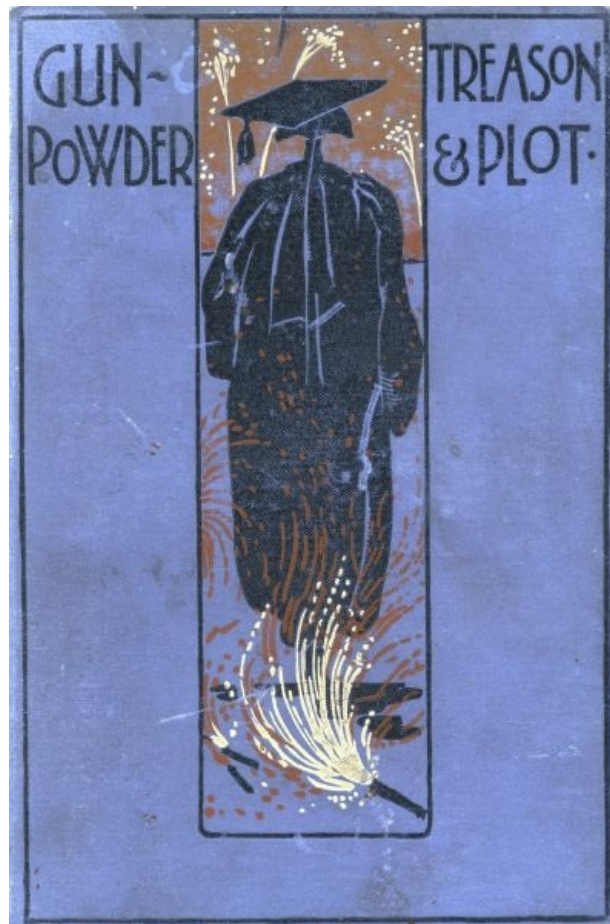
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Release date: June 6, 2011 [EBook #36341]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Chris Curnow, Katherine Becker, Lindy Walsh  
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# **GUNPOWDER TREASON AND PLOT.**

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A MAGNIFICENT RACE.

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# **GUNPOWDER TREASON AND PLOT**

## **And Other Stories for Boys**

BY

**HAROLD AVERY, FRED WHISHAW,**

AND

**R. B. TOWNSHEND**

*WITH FOURTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS*

**THOMAS NELSON AND SONS**

*London, Edinburgh, and New York*

**1901**

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## GUNPOWDER TREASON AND PLOT.

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### WHEN FRIENDS FALL OUT.

Old Dan Mudge, fisherman, of Brixham, Devon, saw a curious sight one afternoon as he walked along the shore between his own village and another of the name of Churston, in order to see whether the gale of the preceding night had disturbed his lobster-pots, laid in a symmetrical line just clear of the rocks that lie to the north of Broad Sands, one of the many lovely coves in Tor Bay.

A curiously-shaped object floated and bobbed in the still lively sea, fifty yards from shore, and from the midst of the object there seemed to rise—yes, he was sure of it—a child's cry.

"I must wade in and see to that matter," thought old Dan. "It isn't deep where she's floating now." [Pg 10]

"She" consisted, as he plainly saw when he had approached a little nearer, of a most elaborately-made floating nest. Two lifebuoys, held apart by thick wire zigzags, floated one above the other; and slung upon the uppermost, hanging between it and the other, was a basket, lined within and without with thickest oilskin. In the basket, lying securely fastened among cushions and blankets, were two splendid little boys, one of whom slept soundly; the other yelled loudly. From their likeness to each other, it was plain that they were brothers.

Old Dan Mudge was astonished beyond words—so astonished that he omitted to save the lifebuoys with their ingenious appendage, but simply took the two children out and carried them ashore, leaving their peculiar raft to itself and to the mercy of the waves.

"Good Lord, deliver us all!" he exclaimed. "What a splendid pair of babies! And what in the name of good gracious am I going to do with them?"

As a preliminary to finding an answer to this question, Dan took the children to Brixham, and showed them to his wife and to a select company of neighbours, who had come in to hear the news, having seen Dan walk through the streets with two babies on his two arms.

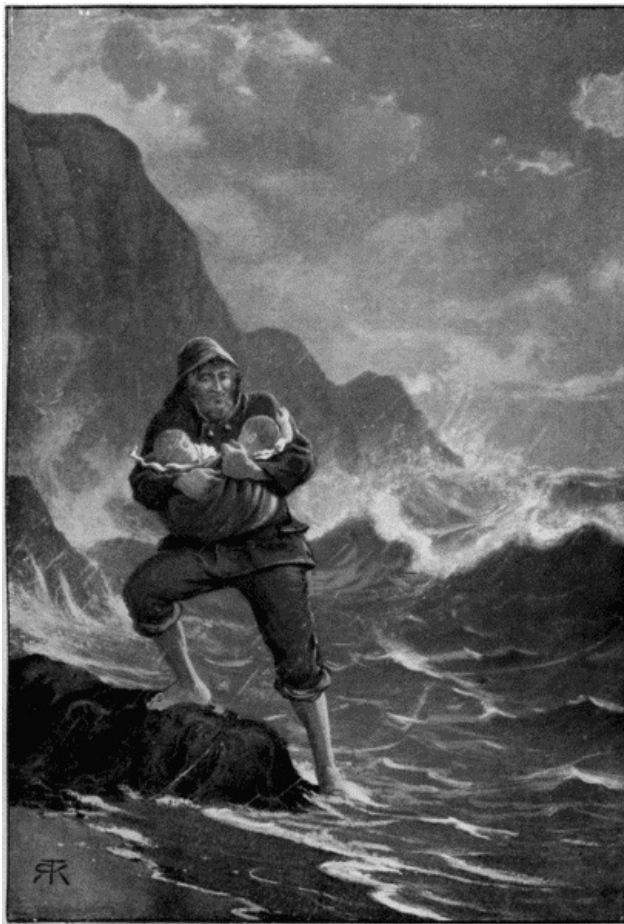
"You'll have to advertise 'em," suggested some one. But Dan demurred. [Pg 13]

"Can't afford that kind of thing," he said.

"Oh, but we must! Hat round for subscriptions," exclaimed some one, "to find the owner of these babes!"

The hat went round, and sufficient was soon collected to pay for several insertions of an advertisement in a London paper of the day; but nothing was ever heard of any claimant to the privilege of proprietorship of the two little waifs, and it was concluded that they were sole survivors of a fine passenger sailing-ship bound for Plymouth, which was known to have gone down, with all hands, during a gale in the Channel, about the time of their discovery.

Meanwhile old Dan Mudge was at his wits' end to know what to do with the bairns. His wife was too old and sickly to care to have the charge of small children, though she adored the pair of babes as much as any of the good folk who came to weep over and kiss and admire them during their stay of a few days under her roof.



***"Dan Mudge was at his wits' end to know what to do with the bairns."***

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The children were of gentle birth, too; that was evident from the quality of their clothes, which were of the finest and best, and carefully marked, those of one child bearing the name "Noel," and the other "Granby." It would not be right, the good old couple thought, even though they were able to do so, to bring up these little ones in the station occupied by themselves, as poor Brixham trawling folk, they being, as any one might plainly see, of gentle birth.

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"Why shouldn't you see the captain and his wife, up to Weston by Totnes?" suggested some one; and Dan thought this a good idea.

Captain Brocklehurst and his wife were childless, and supposed to be well off. They had lost two children as infants; and now, though still comparatively young, lived their lives without the constant consolation which the presence of children affords in a household.

When old Dan walked across to Weston and interviewed the captain, Brocklehurst summoned his wife to the conference, and though she said but little more than that it would be impossible to say one thing or the other without first seeing the children, it was plain, from her flushed face and agitated manner after Dan had departed, that the idea of adopting these little ones was more than interesting to her. Her husband had been more inclined to reject the old trawler's proposal with a laugh and a jest, but his wife's more serious attitude sobered him, and he quickly agreed that the children might at least be brought for inspection.

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But when Dan brought them, the little things laughed deliciously up in Mrs. Brocklehurst's face, and played with her gold chain when she bent to kiss them. Her husband saw that there were tears of joy in his wife's eyes, and that the matter of their adoption was as good as settled already.

Not that he ever regretted afterwards that this had come about. On the contrary, the boys grew up fine little fellows, likely to do their adopted parents credit in the world. And many a time, when Mrs. Brocklehurst reminded him that God had been very good to them in this matter, he cordially and sincerely agreed.

Brocklehurst had retired from the Royal Navy as commander, receiving a step in rank upon his retirement, and he was never in two minds as to the profession that the boys should enter when they were old enough to do so.

"They shall serve the Queen, as I did," he would say, "and one day there shall be two ships in the navy list commanded each by a Brocklehurst."

"Good lads," he would say when pleased with them for any reason; "you shall die admirals, both of you."

Though the boys were alike in many ways, they were dissimilar in this, that Granby early betrayed an obstinacy of disposition which was most marked, and which punishment only seemed

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to intensify. Noel did not share this peculiarity. Both were kindly and affectionate, and accustomed to stand by one another through thick and thin.

At the age of thirteen, just before their admission to the *Britannia*, the twins had a misunderstanding. It was as foolish and ridiculous a matter as could well be imagined to found a standing quarrel upon; yet a breach was made, and Granby's constitutional obstinacy stood in the way of its healing.

It happened at school—a naval preparatory school of long standing at Cubberly-on-Sea, to which the captain sent his boys because he had been there himself, and would have considered no naval education complete unless founded and continued at this establishment.

Granby was an excellent sprinter, and had been considered at school a "certain card" for the hundred yards race, as well as for the hurdle race and the long jump. Now, the winning of these three events would make Granby "champion" for the year, a position greatly desired by these athletes of thirteen and fourteen years; and when Granby sallied forth on the afternoon of the great day, equipped in his racing garments, he carried an ambitious and an intensely-agitated heart within his buttoned-up greatcoat, being resolved to win that championship or perish in the attempt.

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Noel was not great at athletic sports, though an excellent cricketer, and more than pretty good at football. He therefore officiated as referee or judge on this occasion, not having entered for the races. Noel was quite as anxious as Granby that his brother should win the championship medal; and when Granby easily won the long jump, and just contrived to shake off his most dangerous rival, Evans, in the hurdle race, Noel felt certain, with the rest of the school, that the medal was as good as in Granby's pocket.

"He's all right, even if he halves the hundred yards with Bradbury," whispered an excited partisan in Noel's ear. "If Bradbury runs him a dead heat, his half marks for the hundred will still clear him. Bradbury is next up, though. The mile and second in the quarter only leave him twenty-five marks behind Granby, so it's an important race for both. Granby's 375 up to now—200 for the hurdles and 175 for the long jump; and Bradbury's 350—200 for the mile and 100 for second in the quarter. It's a near thing, isn't it?"

"Run and ask Mr. Headon to be judge for this race, will you?" said Noel. "I hardly like officiating when it means so much for my brother."

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The boy ran off to request the master named to undertake the duty which Noel, under the circumstances, dreaded; but he was too late. Mr. Headon was at the starting-place, and the race was begun before the messenger reached him.

It was a magnificent race.

Granby got off badly, his foot slipping at the mark and losing him nearly two yards.

Bradbury, seeing that he had an advantage at the start, made stupendous efforts to retain the lead, and did well for the first half of the race. But inch by inch Granby crept up behind him, and when but ten yards were left to run there was scarcely half a yard between them.

Bradbury made his effort, and for an instant it seemed as though those last eighteen inches would not be recovered by his opponent; but Granby made his own effort, and a frantic one, in the last three strides, ending with a leap forward which appeared to a few to land him in front of Bradbury. To the majority they seemed to breast the tape at the same instant; to a second minority it appeared that Bradbury had just won.

Beyond the tape Granby had shot well ahead. Had the race been five yards farther he would certainly have won it. As it was, all eyes were turned upon Noel, in whose hands the decision lay. Partisan shouts arose and rent the air. Some shouted "Brocklehurst!"—a majority, perhaps; others shrieked "Bradbury!"

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Noel's face was very pale, but he had a set, determined look about the mouth. He was going to decide as he believed to be right and just—that was clear.

The head-master bustled up, panting, having "scorched" up from the starting-mark.

"Well, Brocklehurst?" he said; "well?"

"Bradbury, sir, by two inches," said poor Noel; and, having dashed the cup of happiness from Granby's and his own lips, he turned and marched away to his study and shut himself up, quite tragically miserable. Perhaps he even shed a tear of mortification. He was only thirteen, be it remembered, and the decision against his brother had been a very hard and somewhat heroic thing.

Granby arrived presently, and entered the study, taking no notice of Noel. He was evidently very angry, for he banged the books about, and scattered a packet of chocolate—Noel's—all over the floor.

Noel was nervous as to how Granby would take his decision. Perhaps he would not understand how *more* than ordinarily important it had been that he should be absolutely impartial, or even inclined, if anything, to favour the opponent.

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"Granby, I'm awfully sorry, old man," he began, "that you didn't win. I'd give a good deal—"

"You're a liar! I *did* win! Everybody says so but you," said Granby, interrupting him furiously.

"Well, I watched both posts, and I did my best to give a fair decision," said Noel, shocked at his brother's violence.

"You have swindled me in Bradbury's favour," Granby began.

Noel laughed. He was growing angry also.

"What rot you talk!" he said; "as if I wouldn't rather you had won!"

"Then why not tell the truth and say I did, like a man?" cried angry, disappointed Granby.

Noel saw that argument was useless, and left the study; but afterwards, later in the evening, he returned to the charge.

"Come, Granby; we'd better shake hands and make it up," he began, but Granby interrupted him.

"Will you admit you cheated me?" he said.

"Certainly not!" said Noel. "I tell you I—"

"Very well; you have ruined my happiness. I was set upon getting that medal, and you have lost it to me by your unfairness. I shall never shake hands with you again so long as I possess a right hand, and it's no use your speaking to me in future, for I shan't answer!"

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"Oh, very well," said Noel, hurt and offended, leaving the room; "I daresay you'll be less idiotic about all this when you've slept over it."

Noel certainly never supposed that Granby's wrath would last, or that he would carry out his avowed intention of "remaining enemies," and of silence. Had he known what he was to learn with deep regret during the next few years of their lives—namely, that Granby would remain obstinately determined to ignore his brother when in his presence—he would somehow have contrived to soften the bitterness of his offence on that first night, or have made almost any sacrifice in order to appease the floodtide of fury and mortification which his unfortunate decision—a wrong one, as many assured him—had called forth. But from this time forward not a word would Granby vouchsafe his brother, even though affectionately addressed or treated with marked kindness. During their sojourn on board the *Britannia*, officers, instructors, and cadets were alike amused first, and afterwards incensed, by the obstinate refusals of Granby to speak to his brother. The older men, officers and instructors, devised many ways of bringing them together, for both were noteworthy among the cadets of their year, whether at work or play; but no ingenuity of theirs was successful in compelling Granby to address even an accidental word to his brother, for his own cleverness was at least equal to theirs, and he invariably contrived to escape the necessity of direct communication with Noel by employing a third party to convey the required message or whatever he might have been asked to do or say.

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As for the cadets, Granby soon showed these interfering persons that two things in connection with his quarrel with Noel must be laid to heart by them. The first was, that the said quarrel was no affair of theirs, and that interference or attempted peace-making, by trickery or otherwise, was *dangerous*. Granby was a doughty person among the cadets of his term, or any term, and not one to be lightly provoked.

The other truth they were obliged to learn was this, that though Granby might not wish, for private reasons, to maintain friendly intercourse with his brother, no one else in this world was at liberty to offend or injure Noel in his presence, whether Noel himself were by or not. Once or twice some misguided cadet attempted to curry favour with Granby by abusing Noel, imagining that he would thereby placate the brother who, to all appearances, was upon the worst possible terms with his twin. Such cadets learned very quickly that their last state was worse than the first.

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As for Noel, the state of affairs with Granby gave him much sorrow as well as shame. He was as fond of his brother as ever, in spite of his foolish, long-continued obstinacy, and this although he was at times very angry with him, and ashamed of the foolishness which Granby was apparently not himself ashamed to display before others. Was Granby waiting for an apology for the old offence at Cubberly? Well, Noel was not without a spice of stubborn will, though his obstinacy was not to be compared with that of his brother, and he for his part was firmly determined that he would never offer any kind of apology for his decision on that historical occasion, unless Granby should first own up to his great foolishness, and ask for pardon.

Nevertheless, though Granby never replied, and though Noel knew that he would never reply, Noel invariably spoke to his brother just as though he might be expected to carry on the conversation; or, if others were present, he would refer to Granby by name just as frequently, during the course of conversation, as to any other person. And on such occasions Granby would reply as though one of the others had spoken, and not Noel.

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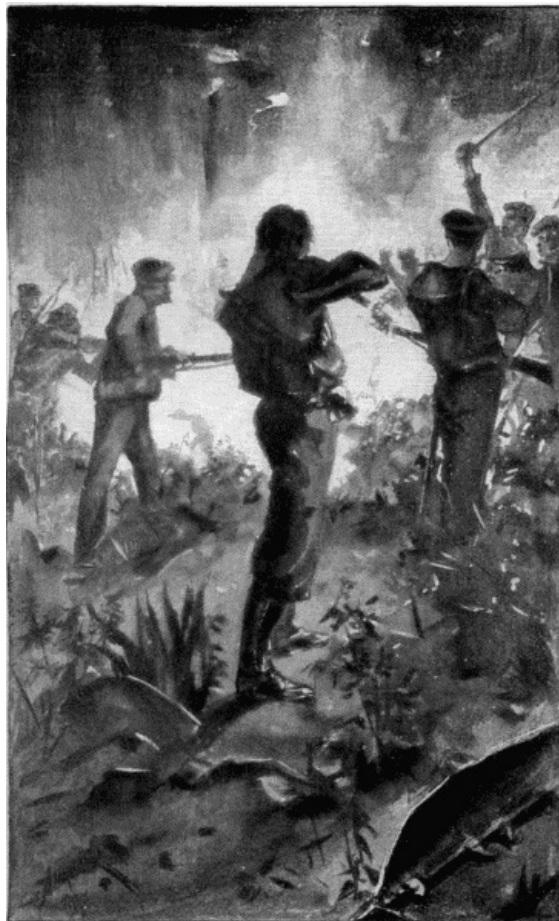
It was a queer state of things, and sometimes ludicrously exasperating, as, for instance, one day when, during a cricket match on the beautiful Dartmouth Hill, the brothers being at the wickets together, Granby ran Noel out simply because he would not so much as cry "No!" when Noel called a run and started from his wicket. Granby had been somewhat ashamed of this, and had said in Noel's presence afterwards that he was "beastly sorry he had run some fellow out"—he forgot who it was—but "he ought to have seen there was no run."

Things had not improved a couple of years later, when the twins, both serving now as midshipmen in H.M.S. *Argus*, landed upon the west coast of Africa as members of a small party sent to chastise some umbrellaed potentate of the Gold Coast, who, unwilling to be chastised without a struggle, had the effrontery to oppose a thousand or two of his black legions against the *Argus* contingent, in the hope of preventing the representatives of Her Majesty from reaching the native village, lying in the pestiferous forests which abound in those parts, which formed his metropolis.

In this attempt he succeeded so well that, long before the British marines and blue-jackets had advanced half-way to his village, they found themselves attacked by so strong a force of natives that the only course open to them was to retire at once towards the sea, in the hope of regaining their boats before King Kom-Kom's hosts should have cut them all to pieces.

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That retreat through the jungle was a nightmare experience for all, and when at length the British troops reached their boats and opened fire upon their pursuers with a small piece of ordnance which they had brought with them but could not land (this was long before these days of quick-firing guns and Maxims and such military luxuries of our day), they chased away the niggers, indeed, but became aware, having at length time and leisure to count their losses, that about half the party had fallen, and among those missing were both the Brocklehursts, the only two officers lost, barring the first lieutenant, who had dropped at the first attack, when the party of unsuspecting British had walked straight into the ambush prepared for them.



***They walked straight into the ambush.***

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Several had seen Noel Brocklehurst fall. He had been pierced by a spear in the neck, and had dropped dead apparently, for there were those present who would have risked much to bring him along. No one had actually seen Granby fall, but a sailor declared he had seen him tearing through the jungle, apparently in a fury of passion, after a "nigger—probably the Johnny as killed his brother, sir," said the sailor; "and he looked that angry I wouldn't have given a tuppenny Bath bun for the nigger's life."

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"Well, but in that case we can't possibly return to the ship," said the officer left in command. "He may turn up; and if not, I think I shall have to ask for volunteers to form a search party."

Instantly every man present volunteered.

"Thanks, lads," said the officer; "I knew you would; but we'll give him ten minutes."

Before that period had elapsed, Granby suddenly appeared out of the cover, bleeding profusely from a slight wound in the leg and another cut in the face, and carrying his brother Noel, who might be dead, by the look of him, though Granby said, as he put him down,—

"He isn't dead, doctor. Have a look at him, quick, please!"

The doctor did not waste many seconds in acting as desired. He knelt down by Noel's body and

carefully inspected his wound. The spear had passed almost through his neck, and Noel had lost much blood, which accounted for his unconscious condition.

"He may pull through," said the doctor presently, "but he's middling bad, Brocklehurst, and it'll take some nursing." [Pg 29]

All through the days of suspense and peril Granby watched by his brother's bedside. Noel lay and groaned—alive, indeed, but little more. He knew no one, and did not speak, though he was semiconscious. But presently his youth and his splendid constitution began to assert themselves, and Noel grew better.

Then, finding that his brother was apparently out of danger, and would begin to recognize faces, and to speak and be spoken to, Granby ceased to haunt Noel's bedside.

When the latter was well enough to speak, the first question he asked was whether Granby had survived the attack on the day of the ambush.

"Why, certainly," said the doctor. "He was slightly wounded, but nothing to matter. He has been nursing you till yesterday, and nursing you very well too!"

Noel shut his eyes and was silent. When he reopened them two hours later, "Did you say Granby nursed me?" he asked, and the doctor replied that he had said so.

"Dear old chap!" murmured Noel.

While his brother slept, Granby came in to see how he progressed, and sat and watched the sick man. Once Noel opened his eyes and caught him in the act of departing. [Pg 30]

"Granby!" said Noel in his weak voice; but Granby either did not or pretended that he did not hear.

After this he came no more to look after Noel.

But when Noel was able to come into the gunroom, a few days later, he said to Granby in the presence of all the midshipmen,—

"Granby, old man, I want to tell you before every one present how grateful I am for all you did for me when the niggers knocked me over that day. I—"

"You were saying we were likely to renew the attack in a few days, weren't you, Chambers?" said Granby. "It's about time we did something to take down that Kom-Kom fellow's impertinence, besides peppering them from the ship. I don't know why we've waited so long."



**"Peppering them from the ship."**

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It was no use, and Noel, weak still from his illness, and more easily upset than of old, went back to his cabin and shut himself in and—yes, cried—shed tears of disappointment and bitterness; for he thought that if Granby would not "make it up" now, he never would.

So matters went on for another year or two, or it may have been half a dozen. The brothers served for a while apart from one another, in different ships. Both were lieutenants now, Noel having been appointed to the *Thunderer*, Granby to the *Mars*. But now they were together once again, a circumstance which had caused both brothers much secret delight, though the feud still continued—the foolish, lamentable, incomprehensible breach that dated from the race day at Cubberly-on-Sea, now nearly ten years ago. [Pg 33]

As a matter of fact, Granby, hearing that Noel had been appointed to the *Irreconcilable*, applied himself for the same ship, using all the influence he could command in order to get the desired appointment. Old Captain Brocklehurst assisted the application by seconding it with a personal



request at the Admiralty, where he possessed many old friends; and his endeavours to have the brothers once more serving in the same ship met with success.

Granby had always taken care to apply for leave whenever he knew that Noel had either had his own or would not yet be taking it, for he was unwilling that his parents should become aware of their quarrel. As a matter of fact, so fond did the old captain know the boys to be of each other that he would never have believed it if assured of the existence of such a quarrel. Each brother invariably spoke of his twin most kindly and affectionately while in the presence of the old folks. In Granby this was a sign of grace, the saving clause in his foolish and obstinate perversity.

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One day, while cruising in the southern seas, some of the younger officers were amusing themselves, first by feeding a number of sharks which they had attracted to the ship's side by throwing offal and other refuse into the sea, and afterwards by fishing for the brutes, of which there were a dozen or more swimming around and about the vessel, showing, from time to time, their great dorsal fins and their tails, as they rose close to the surface in order to see what was to be had in the way of delicacies of a floating description.

Noel was officer of the watch, while Granby happened to be among the youngsters, enjoying the fun of watching and angling for the great brutes beneath just as much as the younger officers. Noel, walking up and down the deck, being on duty, took but little notice of the group of laughing and chattering youngsters. He strolled up the deck and down again, now taking a look at the sharks for a moment, now pausing to issue some order to one or other of the crew lazily busy over the varied duties that fall to Jack at sea in order to keep him employed and the ship clean and smart.

Suddenly a terrible thing happened.

A youngster, nominally busy upon a yardarm, but actually too interested in watching what went on below in the matter of the shark-feeding, suddenly lost his hold, in the excitement of gazing down, and fell from his perch.

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It so happened that Granby was at that moment leaning dangerously over the side of the ship endeavouring to entice a certain shark to take the bait he dangled in front of it, and the youngster, in falling, struck Granby so violently upon the neck that he too lost his hold and fell with the lad into the sea.

A loud, inarticulate cry arose from all who saw the occurrence.

"Man overboard!" shrieked some, and "A boat!" cried others. "Cutter's crew—quick, for Heaven's sake!"

Noel heard and ran to the side of the ship just in time to see Granby and the lad fall together, with a great splash, in front of the huge shark which Granby had angled for but a moment before.

Noel instantly seized the great knife which had been used by the anglers for cutting their bait.

"Out of the way there!" he shouted, elbowing aside the horrified crowd that looked down, shouting, each one, in more or less articulate horror—"out of the way! Heave a rope out, some of you, and shy things into the water to make a splash."

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The concluding words of the sentence were spoken as Noel shot, head downwards, through the air. He cleft the water in a beautiful header, rising just in time to see Granby lift the lad towards the rope which willing hands above quickly dangled ready for him.

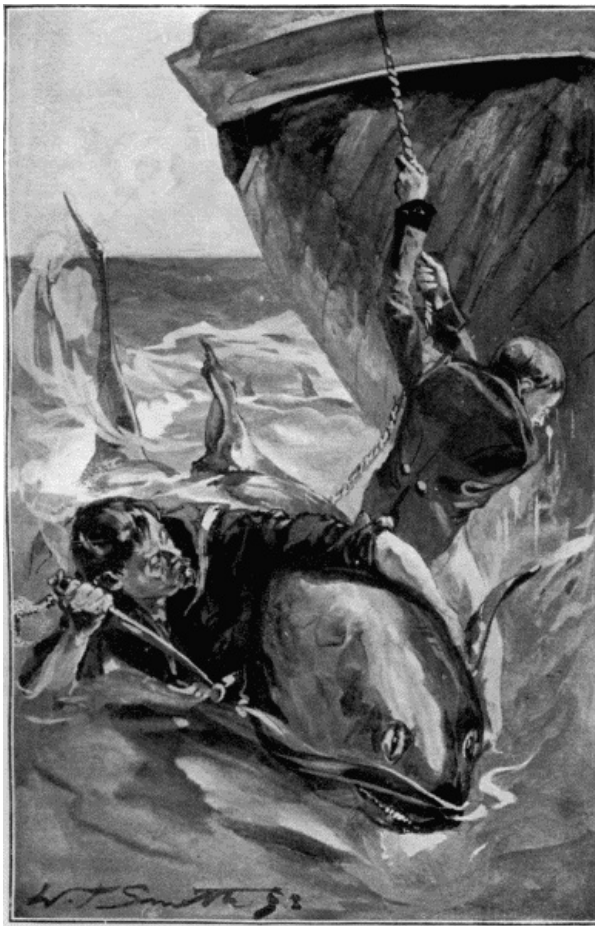
The bellowing youth laid hold of the rope, and swarmed up with amazing quickness. He was safe.

Granby was about to follow his example, when he suddenly caught sight of Noel. Up to this moment he had not known that his brother had plunged to his assistance.

Noel had dived very carefully. He had seen the huge shark disappear, probably startled, as the two human bodies fell with a great splash before its very nose; then he saw it slowly gliding forward once more, and had dived so as to emerge, if possible, at its shoulder, in order to plunge his knife into the brute's eye and blind him.

The shark had set its heart upon Granby, it appeared, for it turned slightly towards him, with the result that Noel rose to the surface, brushing against its very side, at which he viciously jabbed his knife, under water, without much effect, excepting to attract the brute towards himself. Then, getting his head out of the water, Noel placed his left arm over the shark's head, and made several stabs at the brute's eye with his right, which held the knife. But the position was awkward, and his blows missed their mark, though they seemed to rouse the fighting instincts of the huge fish, which lashed the water with its tail, and snapped viciously at its adversary, though clumsily, for it was in a bad position for taking its prey.

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**"Noel placed his left arm over the shark's head."**

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Meanwhile—for all this occupied but an instant of time—Granby had slipped back into the water, and swam behind his brother.

"Dive, Noel! Dive and rip up the beast from underneath!" he cried. These were the first words he had addressed to his brother for ten years.

"Keep out of his way then," said Noel, and dived.

But the shark would not be denied, for even as Noel dived and ripped a long slit that let the savage life out of it, the great brute made a last snap in Granby's direction, and with a cry Granby grew suddenly pale, and sank.

But help was at hand now. The cutter's crew had floated their boat with marvellous quickness, and were even now approaching, splashing with their oars in order to frighten away other sharks, of which there were many around.

Noel rose to the surface, having laid hold of Granby as he came; and as the dead shark sank, the two plucky officers were assisted into the boat. Granby was unconscious; and it was seen, to the horror of all present, that his right hand had been bitten clean off at the wrist.

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For some days the ship's doctor almost despaired of saving the gallant fellow's life. The whole crew hung with dread and excitement upon his hourly report. Noel was frantic with anxiety. But the wounded man, like Noel, had been blessed with a good constitution; and, thanks to the doctor's skill and attention, to Noel's devotion, and to his own splendid strength, Granby gradually beat back oncoming death, and took a new lease of life, maimed, indeed, for life, but healed and recovered.

He was very weak and quite unable to speak for many days and even weeks; but when at last he was able and allowed to attempt it, he asked to see Noel.

"All right," said the doctor; "you're right to thank him, my boy, for, by all that's heroic, he did a fine thing in saving you. But don't excite yourself; that's all I ask."

When Noel entered, Granby beckoned him nearer.

"I'm going to speak at last," he said, smiling. "It's time I did, isn't it? But I'm afraid I can't shake hands, dear old man. I vowed I wouldn't, so long as I had a right hand. Well, now I haven't one. I suppose it's my punishment, and I'm sure I deserve it. Will you forgive me, Noel?"

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"I've nothing to forgive," said Noel with a sob. "And as for that race—"

"Yes—I *did* win that race, you know, Noel. Nearly every one thought so."

"I really and honestly believe you did, dear old Granby," said Noel, sobbing quite freely; "and I believe I was utterly wrong. But I was so fond of you, old chap, that I was afraid of cheating the

other fellow."

"Thanks! thanks!" said Granby. "Oh, I am so happy—and so sleepy!"

Then the doctor came and turned Noel out; but Noel was happier that night than he had been for ten long years.

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## TWO HEROES.

The two young counts, Peter and Paul Selsky, were as sturdy a pair of boys as you'd find in all Russia, and as fond of outdoor life and outdoor sports as though they were very Britons. For this circumstance they were largely indebted to their tutor, a young graduate of Oxford, Frank Thirlstone, who had lived with them since the death of their father, three years ago, and had taught them, besides the English language and a smattering of classical lore, something more than the elements of cricket and of golf and other games dear to the heart of every British youth. Peter and Paul were now respectively seventeen and sixteen years old, and the period of their tutelage by Thirlstone was drawing to a close; for both must shortly enter the Lyceum at St. Petersburg, in preparation for the usual career of young aristocrats in their country, and Thirlstone would return to England.

It was winter, and most aristocratic land-owners had long since left their country seats for their warmer mansions in town; but it was not the custom of the Selskys to leave their beloved outdoor avocations for the cooped-up amusements of the metropolis for any long period at a time, and they would spend their Christmastide and the New Year at the manor house as usual.

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They were the more inclined to do so because their nearest neighbours, old General Ootin and his daughter Vera, intended to do the same. Since the death of his wife, the general had never cared to live in St. Petersburg, preferring to pass his time in the seclusion of country life with his adored and certainly most charming daughter. Old Ootin was a fine sportsman, devoted to every form of hunting and shooting, and nothing pleased the old man so much as to wander, gun in hand, among his ancestral pine trees, accompanied by pretty Vera. He was an adept in all matters of tracking, and had taught young Peter and Paul and their English tutor many a "wrinkle" in the art of bear-hunting, wolf-ringing, and even of calling the lynx and other animals from an ambush—one of the most difficult and exciting of all forms of sport.

Scarcely a week passed even in winter time without some sporting enterprise planned and undertaken by the four men (to dignify Paul and Peter by that title, scarcely yet due them by the operation of time); and when there was a battue or ambush-shooting, Vera nearly always formed one of the party as a spectator. When the sport included long runs upon the snowshoes in pursuit of lynx or elk, the girl, though no mean performer on snowshoes, preferred to leave the hunt to the sterner sex.

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One evening the young counts, with Frank Thirlstone, drove over to the general's to dinner, as they frequently did, in order to plan a campaign for the following day. To their astonishment the old servant in the hall informed them that "his excellence" was in bed ill, but that his young mistress was up and ready to receive them.

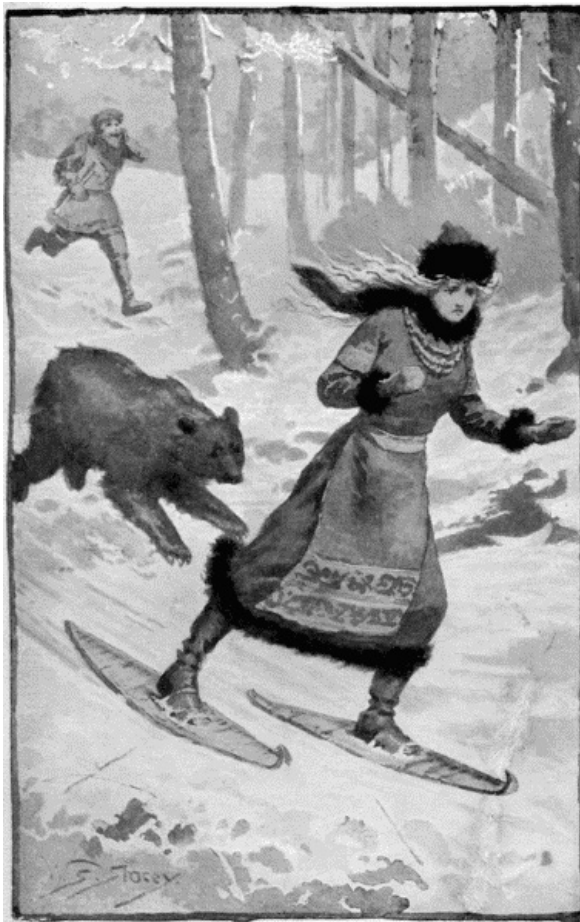
Hurrying upstairs to learn what ailed their old friend, the three young men found Vera greatly excited, and anxious to tell them the whole story, which was sufficiently exciting, and may be told in her own words.

"Father and I were wandering in the woods," she began. "He carried a gun with small shot, for I had asked him to shoot a brace of tree partridges or so for the house. We heard one whistle in the distance—you know how sharp father's ears are for that kind of sound—and stood to listen. We stood in the midst of a tangle of fallen pinetrees—what the peasants call a *lom*. Suddenly, within five yards of us, there was a startling upheaval of snow and pine twigs, and with a deafening roar a big she-bear rushed straight out at us. We had been standing unconsciously within a few paces of her winter lair, where father says she probably has a family of cubs, or she would have been asleep.

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"Father cried out to me to run for my life, which I did, skating away on my snowshoes at my very best speed. I heard my father fire a shot, but did not turn round for fear of running into a tree stump and tripping up.

"Then my father shouted again, and to my horror I found that the bear was in full pursuit of me, apparently none the worse for the charge of small shot.



**"I found that the bear was in full pursuit of me."**

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"I could scarcely think for horror. I was some thirty yards ahead; but, since the snow was fairly hard, I knew the beast would soon catch me, and if she did I had nothing but a small Circassian dagger with a silver handle—the one that Mr. Thirlstone gave me," Vera added with a glance at the Oxonian and a slight blush, "on my birthday. Then I thought I would try to reach a patch of soft snow which I remembered to have passed over a few minutes before, and in that direction I now turned my shoes. I could hear poor father shouting frantically after me, but it was impossible to distinguish what he said. I know now that he wished me to lead the bear round in a curve, so that he might shoot her. But I succeeded in reaching the soft snow, and there my pursuer floundered, while I sped quickly on and gained some yards upon her. This also enabled my father to come up closer to the bear, and as he was now nearer to her than I was, and all the noise came from him, she turned round and charged back at father.

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"Father fired when she was close, but his charge flew like a bullet, and he missed her. Apparently, however, the shot passed near enough to the brute to frighten her into discretion; for, having knocked poor father backwards, and run right over him, she took no further notice of him, and retired to her *berloga* [lair]. Father was much shaken, but not seriously hurt; he will be quite well after a day or two of resting in bed."

When Paul had an opportunity of speaking privately to Vera, he was very eloquent in his expressions of gratitude for her deliverance from danger. "Ah-rr!" he ended, "the brute; she shall die to-morrow, Vera, I swear it, for frightening you."

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"Still more for hurting poor father, I hope," she laughed; "but be careful, Paul, for she is savage."

"I am sorry that the general was hurt," said Paul, "but she shall die for the other fault."

Presently Peter took Vera aside, and said almost the same words.

"If that brute had hurt a hair of your head, Vera," he said, "I should have spent the rest of my life exterminating bears; as it is, this one shall die to-morrow for frightening you."

"It is very kind of you, dear Peter, to be my champion; but, please, be careful, for this is a very savage bear, and I would not have you hurt."

"Bah!" said Peter; "I am not afraid of a bear."

Vera was an extremely pretty girl, and as she sat at the head of her father's dinner table dispensing hospitality to her three guests, each one of the young men evidently recognized this fact, for many admiring glances were bestowed upon her. Both Paul and Peter afterwards made private inquiries as to the exact locality of the day's adventure, neither, however, mentioning his intention to his brother. Presently, while Vera sat at the piano and sang for their delight, Thirlstone standing by, she asked the Englishman with a laugh whether he did not intend, like the boys, to avenge her upon the bear. Thirlstone laughed also. He would leave the matter in the

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hands of her champions, he said; they were quite safe with the beast, and would certainly resent any interference. Thirlstone seemed very fond of music, and remained at the piano with Vera for a long while.

When Peter went upon his snowshoes early next morning to the place where, as described by Vera, the bear had unexpectedly made its appearance, he was surprised, and somewhat disgusted, to find his brother Paul already on the spot.

"I didn't know you were coming, Paul," he said. "I understood from Vera that I was to have the privilege of punishing the brute that offended her."

"I thought the same thing for myself," said Paul. "I suppose she concluded we meant to come together. It doesn't much matter, though, so long as the bear is chastised for her sin."

"If it is all the same to you, brother, I think I should like to be the one to kill it," said Peter. "I am the elder, you see, and—and, well, I've an idea she would like me to do it."

"Why?" asked Paul in genuine surprise.

"I'll tell you one day," said Peter; "but perhaps we'd better kill the bear first. If you don't mind, I'll be first spear." [Pg 51]

Good-natured Paul agreed, though sadly against his will, for he too was very anxious to serve Vera.

The brothers had come forth armed with bear spears only—that is, each carried a knife in his belt, but no firearms. They would have thought it but a shabby enterprise to carry rifles. Bear-shooting from the *berloga* was too easy to be sportsmanlike.

But a fall of snow during the night had obliterated all the tracks of the preceding day, and though they knew that they must certainly be within a hundred yards, more or less, of the exact spot from out of which the creature had charged only yesterday, they could not be sure which of many clumps of fallen pine trees and forest *débris* was the one referred to by Vera in her description of the occurrence.

"One of us had better run home and fetch Milka," said Peter. He expected that Paul would immediately volunteer to fetch Milka, and he was not disappointed.

"If you are to have first spear," said Paul, "then I'd better go for the dog, as the bear may come out while I'm away."

So away ran young Paul, skating beautifully upon his long snowshoes, anxious to reach home, fetch the dog, and bring him back before his brother should find the bear and finish operations without him. [Pg 52]

Milka was a wonderful little dog, half terrier, half nondescript, whose nose and instinct for localizing a sleeping bear were most surprising, a talent as useful to her masters as remarkable in itself.

When Paul had disappeared, Peter, not with any mean desire to steal a march upon his brother, but simply because he was tired of doing nothing, strode hither and thither upon his snowshoes examining the likely places, half hoping the bear would come rushing out upon him, yet half sorry for Paul if it should. As for any feeling of fear or even nervousness about having to withstand all by himself the rush of a furious bear, the mother of a family, and therefore very dangerous, such an idea never for an instant occurred to him.

For half an hour Peter strolled from thicket to thicket without starting the fury of yesterday. He began to grow weary of waiting. Would Paul never return with the dog? Poor old Paul, it was rather hard on him to have claimed the elder brother's privilege; but then Paul didn't know—well, something he (Peter) suspected as to Vera's feelings. For Peter had not claimed the privilege of first spear, he assured himself over and over again, with any mere selfish motive, but because he knew Vera would rather he killed this bear than Paul; and it couldn't really matter to Paul, because— [Pg 53]

Peter's reflections had just reached this stage when, with a sudden and most startling rush, and a roar such as is never heard from the mouth of a sleepy and semi-comatose creature just awakened and sallying unwillingly from its winter lair, the big bear set flying the snow and ice which had formed a covering to the hole in which, with her cubs, she lay snugly beneath the upturned root of a pine tree, and made straight for the aggravating person whose presence close to her den had roused her into the state of insensate fury so easily developed by her quick-tempered tribe.

Peter barely had time to kick off his snowshoes and push them out of his way, to plant his heels securely, and present his formidable spear at the proper angle, when the great brute was upon him, or, to be more accurate, upon his spear.

This was a weapon of tough, seasoned, most carefully tested wood, provided with a murderous steel head and point, and a projecting notch two feet from the sharp end, designed to prevent the shaft from passing right through the animal attacked. Down upon the slightly-raised point came the heavy bear, with an impetus which nearly carried Peter over backwards. That is the first crisis of bear-spearing, and a dangerous one it is, for should the hunter fall upon his back, the [Pg 54]

bear would fall over him, to tear and maul at his discretion, or until his own terrible wound put an end to his power to do mischief.

Peter withstood the shock with difficulty. He had never had to deal with a bear, up to this time, either so large or so savage. The way it now bit and tore at the hickory shaft, which had entered into its flesh to the depth of at least nine inches, was truly terrible by reason of the relentless savagery displayed in the onslaught. But the shaft was strengthened with iron side-supports, and was, moreover, a magnificent piece of wood, and Peter felt little fear that the wounded beast would rip or break it; she might tear off a few splinters—she was busily doing so already—but the good shaft would stand the strain. As for the power she would presently exert in pushing back at her assailant, that would be a different matter. She was hugely heavy, and Peter greatly feared that he would have trouble.

Only for a few moments she bit and tore at the spear handle; then she suddenly abandoned these tactics, and, looking full at her aggressor, she roared loudly, and began to push forward in order to get at him. [Pg 55]

Peter was prepared to exert his strength, and exerted it. For a minute—two minutes—he checked the bear's advance. Then she seemed to gather strength, and, pulling herself together, made a supreme effort. It was as though the heavier forwards in a scrimmage at football forced back the weaker side inch by inch and foot by foot. Peter felt himself giving ground. He, too, made his effort, stemming the advance for five seconds, no more. Then again the bear pushed him steadily back, and Peter now began to realize that unless Paul came quickly to his assistance this bear-hunt might end after a fashion which would be unpleasant for himself as well as for the bear.

He shouted aloud, repeating Paul's name half a dozen times. The bear replied with a couple of loud roars and many quaint moans and complaining noises; but there was no reply from Paul. Peter's strength was failing rapidly, but the bear was still strong. How long could her strength hold out? Back went Peter step by step; he would continue to grip the spear at any rate.

"You're booked anyway, my friend," he panted aloud. "You're punished for frightening Vera; and if you kill me she'll cry till her eyes are red, but no one will cry for you. As for your cubs, Paul will come along and kill every one of them." [Pg 56]

Back went Peter, a step or half a step at every word. Suddenly the butt of his spear came full against a pine trunk.

"Thank God!" said Peter; "that will give me breathing time."

Strong as she was, and full of indomitable courage and of fight, the furious bear could not now push her assailant an inch farther. This enraged, maddened her, and with a curious moaning roar she pressed herself forward an inch or two farther upon the shaft. Peter laughed aloud, and mocked her. "I have you now," he said; "push as hard as you please, you can't uproot a pine tree."

She did her best, however, and for several minutes she strove madly to break down Peter's guard, but vainly. Then suddenly he heard the yelping of Milka, and knew that help was at hand.

Peter was terribly tired, and his strength was nearly spent, nevertheless he determined to make one great effort to finish the fight unaided. Pulling himself together, he drew in his breath; then, with a great backwardpush against the tree, he put all his remaining strength into one great rush forward. [Pg 59]

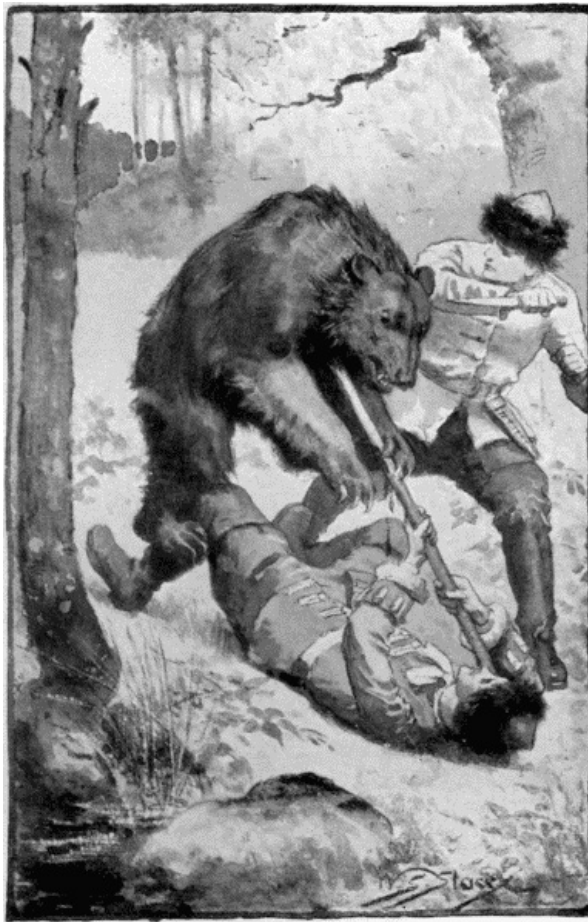
For a moment his success was complete and signal. Just as he had given ground but a few moments before, the bear now yielded to his renewed attack. For a second or two she slipped and scrambled backwards, and was within an ace of toppling over, which toppling is the end and object of the bear-spearer, for once down, he has the creature at his mercy; but this bear was a grand specimen of endurance and of splendid savage courage and fortitude. She made yet another effort.

Back a second time went Peter. He was far too young and weak to pit himself against so doughty a champion as this. Back he went, step by step. He shouted for Paul, and Paul replied. Would he never arrive?

"Come quickly; I am worsted," cried Peter. He looked half round for his friendly tree trunk, and saw it. If he could walk backwards straight for it, he might still do without his brother. The spear butt touched the trunk. "Ah!" panted Peter, "now I may breathe!"

But, alas! the shaft met the tree trunk at an angle and slipped. Peter had slightly slackened his hold, and as the expected support from behind failed him, he slipped and fell backwards. In an instant his hands let go the spear; the great brute, impaled upon it, fell forward upon him. [Pg 60]

"Paul, Paul!" screamed poor Peter. "God help me!"



**"Paul, Paul!" screamed poor Peter.**

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Had Paul arrived one moment later, he might have remained at Selsky for all the good he could have done his brother. The bear would have won the victory, which, to speak the strict truth, she thoroughly deserved. But Paul arrived just in time to snatch the victory from Madam Bruin's grasp; the fates were dead against her.

Young Paul knew very well indeed where to plant his knife-blow, so that even so large and powerful an animal as this would not require a second. He was upon her, and had delivered his attack, striking hard and straight from over her shoulder, in a moment of time. Down went the brave, fearless beast—all her courage and all her strength had not availed her—falling right over Peter, and in her last gasp of life still consciously striving to involve her enemy in her own ruin. She opened her mouth and actually took Peter's arm between her teeth, but had no strength to use her jaw in order to rend it, dying with open mouth, showing immense, formidable teeth, which were harmless to wound the prey that lay at her mercy just one instant too late. Paul with difficulty dragged her away, and allowed his brother to rise to his feet.

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"Whew!" he said, "she's heavy—thirty-five stones at least. She pushed thee over, Petka, I guess, like a ninepin."

"I was like a wheelbarrow in her hands," laughed Peter. "She pushed me where she would. Thy coming was well timed."

"Well, you've killed the bear that offended our Vera," said Paul, "and that is the chief thing."

"It is thanks to you that there is not more to avenge than Vera's feelings," said Peter, with some emphasis. "I am grateful for your help, Paul; but do not say too much of the danger I stood in when we report the adventure to Vera. She might, you will understand, be somewhat upset to hear of the narrow escape I have had."

"What I understand, and I suppose you mean me to understand, is that Vera's heart is yours," said Paul softly; "and if that be so, it is a possession which you must value highly, and which many would envy you."

"But not you, I trust, brother? Though I am but a year older, I have looked upon you as too young to think of such things, and have assumed that you would have observed for yourself that Vera and I are not indifferent to each other."

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"No, I have not observed it," said Paul; "on the contrary, I have thought that you, for your part, were somewhat indifferent to her, while she—but no, I will not say that which I have in my mind, for I know nothing but what you have told me."

"No, speak on. As for myself, I do not think I am in love, as it is called; maybe I am not yet old enough. But I have certainly thought that Vera has long regarded me differently from others. Now say what you were going to say."

"I confess, then, that I have wondered more than once whether our good Thirlstone has not anticipated us—I mean you—in the matter of Vera. She loves us as brothers, no doubt, but Thirlstone—"

"No, you are wrong," interrupted Peter; "for some while ago I accused her of this very thing, which she utterly denied. 'How should I have room in my heart for any besides father and you?' she said; and she added, 'Please, please, dear Peter, say nothing of what you have suspected either to my father or to the other.' She blushed very much, and was quite ashamed, I could see, that I should have connected her name with Thirlstone's. Well, since that she has been so gentle and so affectionate with me that I have quite made up my mind that she regards me, as I say, with particular favour. One day I shall be in love with her, I suppose."

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"I see," said poor Paul. He said little more, and made no mention of the fact that he himself had regarded Vera with boyish admiration ever since he could remember, and had always looked upon her as his future bride, in the foolish, taken-for-granted way of persons of his age.

As a matter of fact, Vera had never looked upon either lad as anything more than familiar friends and playmates, and would have laughed with exquisite merriment had she overheard the conversation of the two boys, as recorded above. But, as small things ape the larger, both Peter and Paul were entirely in earnest, the one in his conviction that he owed special allegiance to this fair lady because, as he imagined, he had been chosen as the object of her special affection, and the other in his determination to sacrifice himself without a murmur in pure devotion to the idol his imagination had set up.

Neither of the brothers said much about the adventure with the bear. They brought the skin home and presented it to Vera, who thanked them both in her quiet, undemonstrative way, and asked who killed it.

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"I speared her," said Peter, "but Paul finished her off with his dagger, so that we both had a hand in avenging you, Vera."

"Oh, I had not much to do with it," said Paul. "Thank Peter, not me, Vera."

"I thank both my knights," said Vera, offering her hand to each in turn to raise to his lips, Russian fashion.

It was but a few days after this adventure with the bear that the two lads were involved together in another and even more dangerous one, if that were possible.

It was the eve of the new year, and both were, of course, invited to see the year in at the Ootin mansion—a function which they had attended every thirty-first of December since they could remember.

Frank Thirlstone, the tutor, had driven over earlier in the day in order to sit with the general, with whom he was a favourite, and who was still more or less an invalid after his late "rough-and-tumble" with the since exterminated bear.

The young counts chose the forest road in preference to a shorter one through the open country, and they did so because the forest is always full of possibilities—such as hares, foxes, tree partridges, and even, on exceptionally lucky days, a stray wolf. They drove in a light sledge drawn by two wiry Finnish ponies, sitting together on the floor of the sledge, which was not only without a box seat, but also without further accommodation for passengers than that which was supplied by a bag of straw thrown into the loosely-constructed shell of the vehicle. Peter handled the reins, having his gun loaded with slugs at his feet, while Paul held his own in his hands.

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The weather had been exceptionally cold for the last few days, and in view of this fact the brothers were not without hope of seeing a wolf or two. They had, indeed, brought with them what, in their part of the world, was frequently used as a lure for hungry wolves—namely, a young pig securely fastened in a sack, and carried in the bottom of the sledge at their feet. The unusual sensation of being shut up in a sack and of being jolted about as the sledge bumps its way over the uneven road causes the little creature to squeal almost without ceasing, and the noise is certain to attract any empty-stomached wolf within a mile or two.

This is especially the case when the weather has been very severe, and food scarce, under which circumstances a wolf becomes wondrously courageous and venturesome; and if the occupant of the sledge keeps his eyes open, he will be pretty sure to be rewarded with a sight of one or two of the grey fellows for whom he has prepared a special charge of large shot.

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Both Paul and Peter were of the kind who keep their eyes very wide open indeed, especially in the forest. The moon was up, and the pines, covered with rime, like silver wire-work, made a fairyland of the scene as the two drove silently along the narrow road. They were silent of a set purpose, for wolves will not so readily make their appearance if the squealing of the pig is accompanied by the voices of human beings.

"Peter," whispered Paul suddenly, "move your head cautiously and look on your left, just behind the sledge, and forty paces away among the trees."

Peter turned his head round very gradually.

"Yes," he said; "all right; that's he. Keep quite quiet and he'll come much nearer."



A few moments later Paul whispered again,—

"There's another on the right—no, two more."

"Ha!" Peter whispered back, "that's good. This looks like business. We're in luck to-night."

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"If one comes within twenty-five paces, I think you might shoot," Peter added presently; "only remember how slugs scatter."

"I see five now," said Paul. "Three on the left, and two on the right."

"And there are three more cantering along ahead of us on the left, and—yes, two nearer in on the right."

"That's ten then," said Paul. "If there are many more to come, Petka, it will amount to a pack, and that, they say, is dangerous."

Peter whipped up the horses, which had begun to lag, snorting and turning their ears backward and forward. They had become aware of the wolves, and were not altogether comfortable in their minds.

"I never saw a pack yet," said Peter. "I shall be glad if I do now. It is difficult for me to believe that a skulking beast like a wolf can be dangerous."

"Anyway we are all right with our guns and plenty of cartridges."

"I haven't many slugs though—six, I think; the rest of mine are smaller shot," said the elder brother.

Every moment one brother or the other reported more wolves in sight, and more again. Presently there were over twenty. Several were now much nearer than before, and somewhere in among the pines one wolf bayed. Instantly there was heard a babel of sounds. A score of wolf throats responded to the call, and there rose a perfect pandemonium in the forest—howls and bayings and snarlings sufficiently alarming to cause even the stoutest heart to beat a little quicker.

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Peter laughed. "We are in for it, I verily believe, Paul," he said. "Shoot a couple of the rascals, and see whether they'll stop to pull them to pieces."

Paul fired both barrels, and in a moment a pair of gaunt, grey creatures were down and struggling in their death-throes. Two or three of their fellows stopped for a moment to snarl over and worry the flesh of their expiring comrades, but the squealing pig was too tantalizing to be allowed to die away in the distance and be lost, with all its luscious possibilities, and they left the cannibal feast and continued the chase.

Now they grew momentarily bolder. They ran in, baying and howling, and dared to approach quite close to the sledge.

"Shoot again, and keep shooting," said Peter. "This is grand."

Paul shot another, and missed one, and then killed two more; but the slaughter did not seem to thin the ranks. There appeared to be as many as ever when these had been left behind half eaten.

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Now one rushed in and leaped up at the off pony, which shied and nearly upset the sledge. Paul promptly shot it. Another took its place, and Paul wounded this one also, its fellows quietly giving it the happy dispatch.

Peter began to look grave, and calculated the distance still to be traversed; it was about three miles.

"We are in danger, Paul; there isn't a doubt of it," he said.

"Keep shooting and give them no peace, especially any that attack the horses. That's the chief danger."

A few minutes later this danger had become acute and imperative.

The wolves were now attacking, not the horses only, but also the edges of the sledge, leaping up and evidently trying to get at the pig, whose squeals seemed to madden them with the desire to taste pork.

"Peter," said Paul suddenly. He had been silent for several minutes, and Peter had concluded with some displeasure and some scorn (for he loved and admired his brother) that he was frightened. Paul's speech soon disabused him of this erroneous idea. "Peter," he said, "I have just been thinking that it would be a better chance for both of us if one stopped here and kept the brutes at bay, and the other went on. Very likely only a few would follow the sledge. I choose staying here. I shall be all right with my gun. Yours is the more valuable life, you see; you know why—what you told me the other day. So drive on, dear brother, and if God wills it I shall join you later in the evening."

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Before Peter had half taken in the meaning of this rigmarole, Paul, to his brother's infinite astonishment and horror, deliberately stepped out of the sledge. As Peter whirled away he saw his brother stumble, recover himself, walk to the nearest pine tree, and place his back to it. Nearly all the wolves had meanwhile stopped, and for the moment disappeared, after their own

mysterious manner. Seeing that a succulent human being had remained behind for their delight, the great majority remained also, very few resuming the pursuit of the sledge.

In two minutes a second human being came running down the road and joined the first. The wolves were charmed. This was better luck than they had expected. The few which had continued the chase presently pulled up and consumed the two ponies. They also found the pig and ate him, sack and all.

"Paul, how could you?" cried Peter, embracing his brother in spite of all the wolves. "You are more to me than ten Veras. Did you think I should leave you to fight these fellows alone?" [Pg 73]

Paul said nothing, but he returned his brother's embrace with interest.

"Place your back to mine, old Pavlushka," said Peter, "and shoot and shoot till we scare them. We shall be as safe as possible, now we are together."



***"Place your back to mine, old Pavlushka!"***

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And shoot they did. Never was such a fusillade heard in the peaceful forest as on that night. Never were wolves so disgusted, so disenchanting, as on that painful occasion. A dozen or so fell, never more to prowl and howl; the rest, after much baying and snarling from a safe distance, retired in order to go forth and tell all young wolves and strangers of the discovery they had made that night—namely, that it is better to follow a sledge and eat horses and young pig than to stay behind to feast upon human creatures who fall out, and would thus seem to be the easier prey. This has since become a maxim among wolves.

Then the brothers walked quietly home. They passed the broken sledge and the bones of the poor ponies. A wolf or two still lingered here, but they discreetly retired; they were well fed, now, and no longer courageous.

"Get into the sledge, Paul, and I'll drag you home," said Peter, "like the hero you have proved yourself."

"Nonsense," said Paul; "you mock me, brother."

"I mean it," said Peter, and would have insisted, but that the sledge was found to be too much damaged for use.

"I hope they are not anxious about us," said Peter, as the pair reached the Ootin mansion and passed upstairs. "We will pretend we walked for choice; no need to alarm them."

But no one was alarmed. The little party awaiting their arrival here had been too busy to have time for anxieties. It was Vera who told the news. She took a hand of Paul and a hand of Peter. "Dear brothers," she said, "you both love me so well, and I you, that no other lips but mine shall tell you of the happiness the new year has brought me. I am to be married to one who is dear, I know, to both of you—Mr. Thirlstone."

"It is strange," said Peter that night, as the brothers lay in bed and talked over the events of the day, "how little I seem to mind Vera being engaged to the Englishman. How could I have been such a fool as to think—you know—what I told you?" [Pg 75]

"I expect we are both rather young for that kind of thing," said Paul, with a sigh. "I think hunting is more in our line, brother; we understand that better."

In spite of which wise and true remark, Paul cried himself to sleep that night, Peter being fast asleep long before, and quite unconscious that his younger brother was engaged in a second attempt to play the hero—an attempt which, this time, was partly a failure. [Pg 76]

## LOST IN THE SOUDAN.

Bimbashi Jones, or, as he was called at the beginning of the story, Lieutenant Jones, did not know much. He only knew that England, or Egypt, or both together, were about to administer what he would have called "beans," or perhaps "toko," to a person called the Khalifa, who had merited chastisement by desiring to "boss it" at Khartoum, which city, Jones was assured, belonged by right, together with the rest of the Soudan, to Egypt, and therefore in a way (and not a bad way either, Jones used to add with a look of intelligence, when talking of these things with his peers) to England.

Jones had not read "With Kitchener to Khartoum," unfortunately for himself; but this was not his fault, because that excellent work was not yet before the public—indeed, it was not written.

But though the lieutenant did not know much of matters that happened so very far away as Khartoum and "the district," yet he had proved himself a capital officer during the four or five years he had served with his regiment, the King's Own Clodshire Rifles, and had contrived to make himself a general favourite both with officers and men; so that when Jones, having most unfortunately fallen desperately in love with a lady who was, as he found out too late, already engaged to be married to some one else, determined to volunteer for the Egyptian army, in order to get out of the country for a change of surroundings, the colonel and the rest of the mess, though recognizing the wisdom of the step, were sorry indeed to part with the young officer, and gave him a send-off from the barracks at Ballycurragh which went far to cause poor Jones to consider whether, after all, life might not still be worth living, in spite of all things tending to the opposite conclusion.

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The actual campaign against the Khalifa and his city was about to commence at this time—nay, had commenced, after a fashion; for the active brain of the Sirdar had for years been engaged in preparing for it, and though the British troops chosen to take a hand in subduing the Dervishes were only now setting out upon their mission, the campaign was, intellectually considered, rather beginning to end than beginning to begin.

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Jones had met with little difficulty in obtaining the commission he sought as an officer in the Egyptian army. His reputation in the regiment was so good, and the recommendation of his colonel so strongly worded, that his application was among those considered as "likely" from the first. He was able to reply to all the questions put to him quite satisfactorily; but one of these especially, when addressed to him by the officer empowered by the Sirdar to examine would-be members of the Egyptian force, he answered with so much vigour and emphasis as to draw a smile from the colonel's lips, and to cause that gallant individual to form certain conclusions with regard to the youngster which were not far from being very correct indeed.

This question was, "Are you married, or engaged, or likely to become so?" To which poor Jones had replied without hesitation and with absolute conviction, "Oh no, sir; I am neither married nor engaged, and I hope I never shall be."

"What! a woman-hater?" said the colonel with a twinkle in his eye; "the Sirdar would be none the less pleased—"

"Not exactly that, sir," faltered Jones; "but—"

"Oh, I see," said the colonel, smiling kindly. "Well, I think I may say, Mr. Jones, that the Sirdar will be glad to give you an appointment as bimbashi in one of the native regiments. You will sail —"

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And so on; the upshot of the interview being a commission for young Alaric Jones—who was but twenty-three years of age—as bimbashi, which is, being interpreted, major in the Egyptian army.

Know him, then, in future, as Bimbashi Jones, a title which pleased him greatly, and puzzled his people quite as much until they realized that the word stood for major; and when they became aware of this the knowledge acted as a wonderful consolation to them for his departure, for it was clear that the lad was "getting on" in his profession, and that he was destined to do great things. A major at twenty-three! It was glorious—unprecedented.

But Bimbashi Jones had a piece of outrageously bad luck at Cairo. He fell ill of fever, and was delayed for months; first nearly dying, then partially recovering, then suffering a relapse, and then wearily picking up his strength from day to day and week to week, while more fortunate individuals started southwards for the front. And already reports came to hand—from Halfa, from Abu Hamed, from Berber—of troops, English and Egyptian, marching and massing; of the Khalifa's hordes, which were expected at any moment; of Osman Digna, of Mahmoud, lying in wait, Heaven knew where, ready to pounce upon the advancing army, or more likely, some feared, to remain safely in ambush, and pretend to know nothing about the proximity of the Sirdar and his men.

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Bimbashi Jones prayed heartily that the enemy might for a while be too frightened to show itself—at any rate until he should be able to join his regiment. After that, let Mahmoud and all his emirs become possessed with a new spirit—that of the irresistible desire to fight.

It was very trying, nay, maddening, for him to be left behind at Cairo; only think of it—*left*

*behind*, and his regiment, it might be, at any moment distinguishing itself, and reaping glories and honours in which he could have no share.

What a confession to make to his friends in England! There would be a big battle, and, of course, a great victory for the Sirdar, at Berber, some said, or at Fort Atbara. Perhaps the struggle was going on at this very minute, and he must pass the rest of his life explaining how it had happened that he was not present and did not possess this medal and that. Bah! it was too bad!

Still, he was well now, and getting stronger daily, and the doctor had promised him that by the last day of February he should set out for the front, unless anything happened to cause him to modify his permission.

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From that hour Jones determined that he would fret no longer, but consent, like a reasonable being, to devote all his energies to quiet recuperation. Soon there was but a week longer of waiting, then three days, then a day. At last the hour of his departure arrived, and with much good advice from the doctor, more good wishes from many friends, and a great quantity of luggage, some of which he hoped to convey, somehow, to the front, Bimbashi Jones launched himself against the Khalifa and all the hosts of evil, as represented by the Dervish masters of the Soudan.

His journey as far as Berber was uneventful. The railway was by that time finished up to this point, or very near it, and there remained but a day or two of camel riding between him and the army at Fort Atbara.

But what with the weakness which was the legacy of fever, or the weariness of the long journey down from Cairo, poor Jones was by the time he reached the terminus of the railway the very wreck of a bimbashi. He ought to have rested a few days at Berber. He was advised to do so by the garrison doctor there, but he laughed the idea to scorn. He had rested long enough at Cairo, he declared; he must go on and join his regiment.

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"But there's no hurry, bless the man!" said the garrison doctor; "they haven't found Mahmoud; Heaven knows where he is."

"Mahmoud may find *them*," said Jones; "and I should like to be on the spot when he does."

"No such luck!" laughed the other; "that's what we should all like, but Mahmoud knows better."

However, Jones would listen to no advice. He hired camels for himself and his servant, and started in the cool of the evening to cover as much of the thirty miles or so which lay between him and the haven of his desires as could be done before the heat of the morning, leaving his kit to follow as quickly as blacks and donkeys would condescend to bring it along.

But more misfortunes attended the bimbashi.

Jones was very weary and half torpid with the heat of the past days. He fell asleep on the top of his billowy, bumpy mount, and presently, sliding off into the sand, lay and snored, with the Soudan for a bed, unconscious as a log, and so remained for some hours. His servant, dozing also on the back of his beast, which followed a score of paces behind that of his master, saw nothing of the bimbashi's collapse into the sand, and jogged past the place in which he lay sleeping, entirely unconscious of the accident.

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As for Jones's camel, that sagacious creature was far too clever to say anything about the circumstance. It was pleased to be rid of its load, though recognizing the fact that the journey must be continued without him. Perhaps it had friends or an important engagement at Fort Atbara. At any rate, it continued its journey not less rapidly than before, keeping well ahead of its travelling companion—perhaps anxious to be asked no questions as to the load it had shot into the sand, for fear of being reloaded.

The servant dozed and waked and dozed again till morning, never so soundly asleep as to fall off his beast, yet never wide enough awake to realize that the bimbashi was not on the top of the camel looming in front of him through the darkness. Only when morning light and the on-coming heat thoroughly roused him did he become aware that his master was gone. Then the man, who was an Egyptian soldier, and had been invalided, like Jones, in Cairo, where he came in handily enough to accompany the bimbashi as servant to the front—the man Ali did the wisest thing possible. After weeping copiously and swearing at Jones's camel until that shocked beast careered madly out of earshot, he covered the remainder of the journey to Fort Atbara as fast as his own animal could be induced to go; and, arrived there, he greeted the first English officer he met, weeping and explaining incomprehensibly.

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"Stop blubbing, you pig," said the subaltern, "and say what you want."

"O thou effendim," cried Ali, drying his tears with marvellous suddenness, "I have lost my bimbashi—Bimbashi Jones!"

Explanations revealed that the man had, in truth, started from Berber in company with an English bimbashi, and that the bimbashi's camel had certainly arrived, but not the bimbashi.

A search-party was therefore sent back without delay, but unfortunately a high wind had risen during the morning, and a dust storm was now in full blast, so that though the party thoroughly searched the road on both sides as far as Berber, taking two or three days over the job, and duly execrating the object of their search for possibly losing them the chance of being present at the

big event—namely, the battle with Mahmoud, now expected daily—they found no trace of poor Bimbashi Jones.

They returned, therefore, empty-handed, and returned, as it chanced, just in time to have a hand in certain great events which were about to take place on Atbara River.

Meanwhile Bimbashi Jones slept very soundly and dreamed very absurdly. He dreamed that he had arrived at Atbara in the nick of time. A terrific battle had raged for many hours, and the result up to the moment of his arrival had been most disastrous to the Anglo-Egyptian forces. The Khalifa himself and two of his emirs, hearing of the bimbashi's approach, had personally pursued the hero almost up to the muzzles of the British guns, in order to prevent the great disaster to their hosts which his arrival among the British and Egyptian forces would be sure to entail. He would lead them, the Khalifa knew, to victory, once he placed himself at their head, and triumph would at the last moment be snatched from his hand. For, indeed, every English officer from the Sirdar to the youngest subaltern of a British regiment was already either killed or incapacitated. Our troops were on the point of collapsing. Already the Soudanese and Egyptian regiments were throwing down their rifles and looking over their shoulders for the safest point of the compass, with an eye to successful flight. Far away on the left a long line of hussars disappeared in the dim distance, pursued by countless hosts of Bagghara horsemen, shouting "Allah," and shaking spears like leaves in the south-west wind. English sergeants went along the lines with tears in their eyes, crying like babies, entreating, imploring, threatening; the Sirdar sat with his back to a gun-carriage, badly wounded.

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**"The Khalifa himself and two of his emirs pursued the hero."**

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"Is that you, Bimbashi Jones?" he cried faintly. "Thank Heaven! hurrah! We shall save the show yet.—Orderly, ride round and spread the news quickly; say Bimbashi Jones is here and about to take the field. Let the enemy know it too; let Mahmoud know it—the rascal! He would attack us before Jones could arrive, would he?"

The effect of the news was electric—nay, magic! From company to company, from regiment to regiment, from brigade to brigade, the word went round. Then a low murmur began to spread; it grew and grew; like the sound of the wind in the tree-tops it widened and thickened, until the whole air was cleft and shivered with the mighty roar that spread from end to end of the battle plain. "Bimbashi Jones has arrived! The bimbashi has taken the field! Die, Dervishes, like dogs!"

And a wail, like the cry of a million souls in torment, rose from the Dervish ranks. "The bimbashi has come! We are lost! Run for your lives, ye servants of Mohammed, for your lives!"

The Khalifa heard it as he sat and trembled in his palace at Omdurman, to which he had quickly returned, seeing that the bimbashi had escaped him. (Jones, it will be observed, had, like most dreamers, annihilated time and space.) The Khalifa ordered his best white Arab steed, and mounted it, and rode forth to learn what the noise was about. Jones met him as he and his troops chased the Dervish host towards Khartoum, and shouted to him to yield.

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"I surrender to no one but the Sirdar or Bimbashi Jones!" cried Abdullah, who, during the late pursuit, had not caught sight of the hero's face.

"You are too young to be either of these great men.—Allah! Allah! Turn and strike, sons of the Prophet! down with the dogs!"

His followers whispered to the Khalifa.

As when rude Boreas, suddenly remembering that he is due in another portion of the globe, ceases abruptly to beat the tortured sea into foam, and a beautiful calm overspreads the waters of the storm-tossed ocean, so suddenly the countenance of the Khalifa changed from rage and

defiance to an expression of timorous incredulity.

"Impossible!" he muttered—"so young, and so great a general!"

"Undoubtedly it is Bimbashi Jones!" said an emir.

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Jones heard him quite distinctly.

"Yes, I am Bimbashi Jones," he said; "yield, Abdullah; there is no other course. Yield or perish!"

"You will not cut off my right hand and ear?" asked the Khalifa.

"Certainly not, richly though you deserve it," said Jones.

"Nor my left?" added the Khalifa quickly, glancing cunningly in Jones's face.

The bimbashi disclaimed any such intention.

Then the Khalifa surrendered, placing his sword in Jones's hands with the inimitable grace of a cavalier of olden time; which circumstance, however, did not strike the bimbashi as in any degree strange, but only highly decorous and proper.

And now telegrams of congratulation poured in. Every one of the wounded British officers quickly recovered; even several whom the bimbashi knew to have been killed turned up again (without causing him any surprise) to shake the hero by the hand. In the gilded halls of Omdurman he was the admired of all beholders. The ladies vied to dance with him, though none of them explained how they got there; while the men spoke of impending promotions, peerages, and what not.

As for the Khalifa, he sat next to Bimbashi Jones at supper, and did his very best to convert the young man to Mohammedanism; and to everything that the Khalifa advanced, the Sirdar, sitting on Jones's left, would remark,—

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"There's a good deal in what the old boy says."

There was indeed, Jones thought, for—and this was the only circumstance in the whole affair that caused him some surprise—the Khalifa simply preached at him a sermon which Jones's own father (Vicar of Stoke Netherby, Yorkshire, and certainly not a follower of the Prophet) had delivered from his own pulpit on the very last Sunday that the bimbashi had spent in the old home.

"Why," he remarked, when the Khalifa had quite finished, "you are a pious fraud, my good man. Are you aware that you have stolen that sermon, word for word, from my own father, who preached it—"

"Bimbashi Jones—Alaric, my boy—don't you know me?" said the Khalifa very gushingly; and Jones was just about to recognize his parent, whom indeed the Khalifa promptly declared himself to be in very flesh, and to rush to his arms, when he awoke, and the whole thing was spoiled, the dream ending and the curtain falling upon a highly-dramatic situation, somewhat mysterious withal, and left entirely unexplained. Poor Bimbashi Jones was now no longer the victorious preserver of the honour of England and the safety of Egypt; he was but his own unfortunate self, a forlorn piece of jetsam cast ashore upon the sand-ocean of the Soudan, with sand-scud flying like solid sea-spray, and filling his eyes and nose and mouth and clothes, blotting out tracks and directions, and reducing poor Jones to a condition of great misery and wretchedness. He would have felt even more wretched had he realized that, by falling off his camel and sleeping on while it walked away, he had landed himself in a very serious position indeed. He was in the midst of a sand-storm.

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The bimbashi stood and raged, shouting for his servant Ali, upon whose head he showered many useless abuses and sundry flowers of speech.

But Ali was far away by this time, and so was Jones's camel; and after waiting for half an hour or more, the lost youth decided that he must make a guess at the direction to be pursued, and at any rate keep moving, even though he followed a wrong course; better that than be buried alive in the abominable moving desert of flying and stinging sand.

It was only natural that Jones's guess as to the direction in which lay Atbara should be somewhat out; it would have been strange indeed if he had guessed right. As a matter of fact, his attempt to do so was by no means a bad one; for, had he directed his steps but a point or two less towards the east, he would have hit off the English position nicely, and would soon have encountered the search-party which presently came out to find him, or have been overtaken by some other friendly company hurrying forward from Berber towards the scene of operations at the junction of Atbara and Nile.

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Luckily Jones had sandwiches in his pocket, though he would rather have had a gallon or two of water. The drop or so of whisky in his flask did nothing to assuage his thirst. His throat was parched with the sand, his tongue dry and hot and gritty. He could scarcely see; his ears were clogged. Jones plodded along, now praying for help in his most serious plight—he knew that it was serious, though he scarcely realized perhaps *how* serious; now recalling his dream and laughing at it; now thinking of every conceivable thing that would serve to blot out the disagreeable present, if but for a few minutes.

Meanwhile the sun had come out, and was blazing away in a manner which made life under its

direct rays an unpleasant and almost impossible function. Soon it became unbearable. The wind had dropped, and the sand ceased to fly—a mercy for which Jones felt devoutly grateful. But the heat! The poor lost bimbashi scooped a hole in the ground, piling the displaced sand as high as he could, and lying behind it, in order to get a little shade for his face; and there he lay and sweltered until the sun climbed too high, and drove him out of his shelter. Then he travelled on, his brain on fire, until the burning disc above him had sunk sufficiently to allow him to repeat his expedient of earlier in the day; and now he lay half asleep, half comatose, until the cool of evening revived him, and he rose and plodded forward once more.

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"I shall go on till I drop, anyway!" soliloquized Bimbashi Jones, like the brave man he was; and then, because he was still a very young man, and because he felt, as any one justly might do under the circumstances, extremely sorry for himself, he shed a few tears of pity over the melancholy fate which impended. "I might have done rather well," he reflected. "I had made a good start—every one said so; but misfortune dogs me wherever I go!" and Jones thought of his disappointment in England, of his illness at Cairo, of this crowning disaster; and he shed a few more consoling tears.

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That night Jones, plodding obstinately forward, stumbling, weary, only half conscious, nearly dead with thirst, struck suddenly into country of a different character from the unbroken sand plain through which he had been travelling up to this moment. There was scrub to be pushed through, mimosa bushes, and other greenery.

"Thanks be to God!" exclaimed the bimbashi, for even his baked brain was able to comprehend the significance of the change. "I am coming to the Nile!"

It was not the Nile but the Atbara which Jones had struck well above the Anglo-Egyptian portion; but, oh! the joy of that first big drink of nasty water, and the long-continued, delicious sluicing of the burning head, wherein the fire had raged without ceasing for a twelve-hour round, and would scarcely now be extinguished even though Jones would bring the whole flood of the Atbara to bear upon it.

Then Jones finished his sandwiches and felt a man once more, though a weary one. He thanked Heaven for mercies received, and lay down to sleep until wakened by—yes, actually by the cold. He must move on.

How different the travelling was now! He would not leave the river again, the wanderer wisely resolved. He would follow it until the British position was reached; it could not be far now.

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Poor bimbashi! The British fort lay behind him, and he was speeding away in the wrong direction—into the arms, indeed, of Mahmoud, had he only known it.

Part of the night he pushed forward, and part of it he rested and slept.

"It's a ghastly long journey when one does it on foot," thought the lost bimbashi. "However, I shall be in camp by breakfast time," and his mouth watered over imaginary repasts of tinned meats and tea and other delights.

Morning came, and the sun, and still there were no signs of the camp. Jones was very hungry, but the tinned delicacies were still the fair offspring of imagination, which filleth not the stomach.

He travelled on, in despite of the sun, for the camp *could* not now be far off; and he would have continued to plod forward until he dropped, but that he received before noon a terrible fright, which sent him into cover for many hours of dangerous daylight.

There were sounds of hoofs, and the soul of the bimbashi rejoiced. "It is some of our fellows doing a cavalry reconnoitre," he reflected; and when they came, as he judged by the sound, within earshot, he treated them to a "coo-ee," and stood up to look out for a view and to hear their reply.

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Presently the troop passed across an open patch between mimosa bushes, and Jones saw, not hussars or lancers, but a number of Bagghara horsemen pushing rapidly upstream, and evidently looking about for the owner of the voice lately upraised.

Down bobbed Jones behind a mimosa bush, his heart beating loudly. He drew his revolver in case of accidents. Would they see him? if so—

There were ten men, dirty, savage-looking fellows. They wore white, patched, linen garments, which fluttered behind them, and carried spears. They passed within twenty paces, peering about, and repassed again fifty yards away, talking together and arguing; then they disappeared.

"Thank God for that!" thought the bimbashi. "One wouldn't care to be chewed up by a set of such forsaken-looking fellows at close quarters!"

So he lay low till dark, and then pushed on once more—desperately hungry now, nearly starving. Would that breakfast never come? Could he have made some mistake? Ought he to have gone downstream?

Reason said no—upstream undoubtedly. But, you see, the bimbashi's geography was imperfect, and he was not aware of the existence of the Atbara, as a river, or he had forgotten it. He only knew of Fort Atbara; he thought he was following the Nile.

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So Jones tried to satisfy the cravings of his appetite by chewing leaves and grasses, failing utterly; and long before morning came he sank exhausted to the ground, assuring himself that he

could not possibly walk another yard.

Then, or soon after, a wonderful thing happened.

The dozing bimbashi heard in his dreams the droning of bagpipes, the sharp notes of the bugle, the dull booming of guns. His old dream began to flutter vaguely through his brain. He was the conquering hero again; he had put the Dervishes to flight; he had—but the noise was too loud for dozing and dreaming, and he awoke with a start.

"Good Heavens!" said poor Jones, half demented with weakness, "it is really the battle; my dream is coming true."



**"It is really the battle."**

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The firing increased; it became almost continuous; it could scarcely be more than a mile or two away. The noise deafened and bewildered the youth, who was, as a matter of fact, *in extremis*.

Jones listened a little while. Then he started to his feet and rushed madly towards the din.

"I must have a hand in it!" he cried; "they may want me!"

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A mile and a second mile the bimbashi covered, now running, now forcing his way through dense scrub, now stopping a moment to recover breath. He was very near the scene of operations now; the din was deafening. He had come up, though he guessed it not, behind Mahmoud's position. The entire Dervish host lay between him and the Sirdar's men. Already the British storm of lead was pouring over his head; already bodies of flying, frightened creatures, camp followers of the Dervish army, dashed by him, some close, some more distant. A party of these nearly ran over him, rushing blindly forward, jabbering to one another.

Jones fired his revolver in their faces. One of them, as he passed, swung some weapon at him, striking the bimbashi flat-wise on the shoulder. The thing was blunt, and made no wound, but it needed only a touch to send the scarcely animate youth upon his nose in the sand; and straightway upon his nose he went, dead as a log for the time being; and in the sand, half hidden by a mimosa bush, he lay, while the subsequent proceedings, to quote a great poem familiar to most of my readers, interested him no more.

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When the bimbashi returned to conscious existence, the battle of Atbara, or Nakheila, was over. A great flood of escaping humanity had passed over and around him, fleeing for dear life, but he had known nothing of it. He was roused by English voices. A sergeant was directing his men.

"Look out there, Bill," said the sergeant; "see that chap doesn't let out at you as you pass."

"I'll cook him if he does," said Bill, blood-hot and savage. He had been struck at by wounded Dervishes, and was not disposed to treat treachery with loving-kindness. "Why," he continued, "darn me if it isn't an Englishman—an orficer, too. See here, Joe!"



The sergeant came and looked. Jones had opened his eyes, and looked mildly around.

"Good Lord!" said the sergeant; "you're right; badly wounded, too. Go back for an ambulance, Bill.—Hold up, sir; he won't be long. Are you badly hurt?"

"I want something to eat. I haven't had anything for three days," murmured poor Jones.

The sergeant was too amazed to reply.

"I'm Bimbashi Jones," continued the officer, "and I want my breakfast."



***"I'm Bimbashi Jones, and I want my breakfast."***  
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Then the bimbashi fainted.

The name of Alaric Jones, bimbashi, 20th Egyptian Regiment, was included among those entitled to receive a medal for the battle of Atbara. Jones had qualms of conscience as to accepting this, but his friends said, "Rot, my good man; you fired your revolver during the fight, and perhaps wounded an enemy; it's all right." And Jones admitted that he had certainly taken this share in the hostilities. [Pg 105]

Later on, at the battle of Omdurman, the bimbashi, having recovered now, and a stronger man by many breakfasts and other meals, did well. He was mentioned in the dispatches, as all may see for themselves. He is still a bimbashi, of course, and will not be a bey for a long while; but there is an old man in Stoke Netherby who is proud indeed to be the father of Bimbashi Jones. His mess-fellows in the old "Clodshires" often drink his health as of one of their most distinguished companions; indeed "our bimbashi" is quite a favourite toast on guest days, when the explanation, "Bimbashi Jones, of ours, you know," is added for the information of the ignorant. [Pg 106]

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## **THE WOLFMAN.**

There was weeping and wailing at the village of Dubina, in northern Russia. Women went about with red eyes, and men with grave faces; for a dreadful calamity had happened upon this quiet summer afternoon, and the hearts of all were heavy with grief and sympathy. But loudest of all rose the lamentation from the house of the widow Fedosia, a widow of but six months' standing, and the mother of four small children, the youngest of whom, a child of eight months, had this day met with a terrible fate.

No wonder the poor mother lifted her voice in lamentations which the whole village could hear, for the little chap she had just lost had been a splendid specimen of baby humanity, and the wise woman of the village had prophesied great things for him; and now!

Let me explain what had happened. Fedosia, being a house-serf at the mansion of the manor-lord—for all this happened towards the close of the fourth decade of this century, and in the days of serfdom—and being busy up at the big house, had permitted her eldest daughter, a child of twelve, to wander away into the woods mushroom-hunting, and to take the baby Petka for an airing. She had often been entrusted with her little brother before, so that, the mother thought, there was no risk in allowing her this responsibility. But Katinka came back alone, and told a terrible tale. The poor child could scarcely speak for fright and horror; but when the distracted mother had succeeded in persuading her to find her tongue, the tale she told was sufficient to horrify the whole village, as indeed it did. The children had been some little distance from home, Katinka said—perhaps a mile and a half from the beginning of the forest, but quite close to the path, so that they were perfectly safe, as she thought; and Katinka had laid the child down while she filled her basket with the beautiful mushrooms which abound in that spot. The baby fell asleep, and Katinka wandered about from place to place, but always, as she believed, remaining within a few yards of the child. Suddenly, on looking up from the ground, she was horrified to hear a savage growl, and to see just in front of her, glaring at her with big eyes, and showing its large white teeth, a huge wolf, accompanied by seven or eight little ones. She could not, of course, be sure of the number, and there might have been fewer. Katinka rushed back to where she imagined little Petka was lying asleep, but to her horror she found that he was no longer there. Either he had crawled away, or she had mistaken the place. Frantically she rushed from spot to spot, calling to the boy, and peering under every tree; but all in vain. He was nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile, the big wolf and the little ones stood and looked after her, following her with their eyes wherever she went, and the mother growled and showed her teeth, so that Katinka, after a time, became so frightened that she was obliged to give up hope of finding the baby, and ran away homewards as fast as she could, leaving the wolves behind—for they did not follow her—and reaching home more dead than alive, to tell her mother the terrible story of her adventure and poor little Petka's dreadful end. Of course no one could for a moment doubt that the wolf family had made a meal of him by this time, even supposing that the poor little man had not already been torn to pieces and bolted while Katinka was still looking for him in the forest.

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On learning the news, a party of men had immediately set out to search the place for any evidence they might find as to the child's fate, but they had returned without having obtained the slightest clue. The wolves had disappeared, naturally enough, and so had the baby. There was no use to hope any longer. Poor Fedosia must resign herself to the inevitable: little Petka was dead, eaten by the wolves. Of this there could no longer be the slightest doubt. Enough that it was God's will, and He knew best what was good for the child; but for all that, the poor, bereaved mother was inconsolable. Petka had been her favourite, her baby boy, and she should never see his bright face and his splendid limbs again! No wonder she wept, and that her lamentations were to be heard by the whole village, or that she cried incessantly over the needlework that her mistress gave her to do next day up at the big house, thereby incurring the wrath of the lady, and bringing upon her head sundry bracing but heartless truisms, such as the following:—

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"What are you crying about, fool? Are you so rich that it is not a true blessing to have got rid of one of your brats? It is I who have a right to weep, for by your carelessness I have lost a future serf. Stop crying at once, or you shall be fined for spoiling my dress-stuff."

The family up at the mansion were of the worst type of the Russian serf owners of former days—cruel, stupid, unsympathetic, utterly unable to understand the peasants whom fate had placed at their mercy, or to treat them with intelligent consideration; not even wise enough to keep within the laws as to the rights of manor-lord and peasant, but exacting more labour than they were by law entitled to, and, in a word, treating them as very slaves, instead of as—what they really were, or ought to have been—semi-free peasants holding land allotments for which they paid rent by the labour of their hands.

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For two whole months and a week the poor mother wept as much as she dared, for she could in no wise get over the loss of her darling. In vain the mistress threatened, and her companions, fatalists all, argued. The soul of the mother refused comfort; she still mourned for her baby boy.

Then, one glad day, the most astonishing, marvellous, and joyful thing happened that any one in the village had ever heard tell of. The wise woman said that it was certainly a miracle, and pointed out that she herself had always prophesied a wonderful future for the little son of the widow Fedosia. The marvel, for it was nothing less, was in this wise. A moujik happened, as he declared, to be walking about in the woods (he was stealing firewood, as a matter of fact, but that detail did not appear in the man's tale) when he suddenly saw one of the most astonishing spectacles that ever the eye of moujik beheld. A large wolf, a she-wolf, lay fast asleep under the shade of a spreading pine, and around her gambolled a whole family of little wolves, amongst which was a small form which Ivan first of all took to be a *lieshui*, or wood-spirit, but soon decided could be none other than a human child. It played quite naturally with the little wolfings its companions, and presently went for refreshment to the old she-wolf, just exactly as they did.

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Ivan did not know, what is nevertheless the case, that ever since the world began there have been tales and legends, some well authenticated, of lost human babes being fed and protected by she-wolves, the maternal instincts of which animals seem to be most highly developed.

The peasant was, naturally, much alarmed. He stood and stared, crossing himself and praying, as he declared, for quite a long while, not able to decide what would be the best course to pursue. It was Fedosia's child. He was soon certain of that fact, for when he had collected his scattered wits he recognized the infant; but what was to be done in order to make sure of securing the boy

while driving away the wolf to a safe distance? He was not afraid for himself, for he had his axe at his girdle, but he was in terror lest the old wolf should awake suddenly, and, perceiving him, either make off with the baby, or else gobble it up or injure it, then and there, in the excitement of the moment. However, something must be done, for he must have the baby at all hazards; so, after reflection, Ivan decided to awake the old mother with a shout, and then rush in before she should have time to attend to her human foster-child.

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Ivan crossed himself, took a deep breath, yelled his very loudest, and ran in. In an instant big wolf and little wolves were all on their feet and half a score of yards away, galloping through the pines in a long grey procession, quick as the flight of a thought, the little human baby trying its utmost to follow and keep up with them, scrambling on feet and hands, but lagging hopelessly behind, though it crawled quickly—far quicker than Ivan had ever before believed a child capable of getting over the ground in that way. The wolves disappeared in the density of the forest, and Ivan made after the poor little scrambling amateur wolf, and caught him without much difficulty, though the savage little thing bit and scratched at him, emitting queer growls and snarls, as though it had acquired the ferocious spirit of its foster-mother. Ivan had considerable difficulty in carrying the little savage home, for it struggled and fought the entire way. Once or twice he put it down upon the ground in order to rest his arms, when it would make off on all fours as fast as it could in the direction of the forest.

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I must not attempt to describe the joy of the mother when, in the evening, she returned to find her house filled with neighbours who surrounded, and cried over, and attempted to fondle the little one, recovered, as it were, from the very depths of the grave. The wise woman was there among others, pronouncing charms over the fierce little creature, in order to exorcise the savage spirit which had usurped its breast. It did not appear that these exorcisms produced much discernible effect, for as soon as any one touched or attempted to approach the child, it still bit and clawed at them with its tiny brown hands and long, sharp nails with the greatest energy and spirit. Even the poor mother, weeping and laughing, and thanking God by turns, was scarcely more successful than her neighbours in placating it; but in her joy at finding the child alive and well she thought little of so trifling a drawback to her perfect happiness. "He will soon learn to know his mother again," she said, with true maternal instinct. "God has sent him back to me from the jaws of the wolves. That is enough of mercy for the present. My Petka will soon love his mother. If a savage wolf could teach him to love her so well, cannot I, his own mother, find his heart? Good-night, neighbours, and thank you all for your sympathy. God has been good to the poor widow. In a week Petka will be wholly mine."

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The widow was right. Gradually the child, who had temporarily forgotten his own mother during his association with his foster parent and brothers and sisters, became humanized; and gradually the present began to efface the lately past, just as it must have done when he first fell into the company of the wolves; and his mother day by day enjoyed the rapture of seeing how her own influence was perceptibly gaining ground in the child's affections. From the very first evening he no longer bit and scratched at her when she came near, for he soon comprehended that there was nothing to fear from this amiable human being whose presence had filled him, at the beginning, with terror and suspicion.

The key to the heart with animals, and, to a certain extent, with little children, is through the stomach, and the tiny wolf-boy soon learned whence to expect his rations. He was fed upon bread and milk, and took kindly to the new food, though it was impossible to administer it with a spoon. He would, for the first day or two, lie upon the floor with the basin in front of him, and get at the food as best he could, making a terrible mess of the place, and growling in a ridiculous cat-like manner as he consumed it, and until the last drop was finished.

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He had arrived at his old home naked, as might be expected, and it was some little while before he could be persuaded to wear any clothes put upon him by his mother. Gradually, however, he learned to sit upon his mother's lap, and allowed himself to be nursed, and washed, and fondled, and dressed, like ordinary children. He was not, indeed, to be touched by any of the neighbours. It was long before he would trust any one but his mother, but to Fedosia herself he was tame.

As the boy grew older and learned to talk, he lost all his wolfishness, excepting that it occasionally showed itself in bursts of savage passion if irritated, when he would relapse into wolfish ways until the fit passed off, giving vent the while to the most curious sounds, half growling and half articulate, which at once betrayed his connection with the lower animals.

Moreover, he never lost that love for the open air and for the freedom of the forest which he had acquired while in the society of his foster-brethren. He loved to roam about the woods seeking mushrooms, or dreaming beneath the pine trees; but as years went on, and he became strong enough to carry a gun, he became a matchless wood-craftsman. He was a hunter from the top of his head to the sole of his foot—savage in the pursuit of every bird and beast, with one exception: nothing would ever induce him to shoot a wolf. Whether his aversion to the very idea of killing one of those animals sprang from any natural instinct of personal connection with them, or whether from an equally natural sense of gratitude for the great service which his foster-mother had undoubtedly rendered him in cherishing and suckling him in the old days, it is impossible to say, but the fact remained that he would never raise his hand to do hurt to any member of the family, nor would he suffer any one else in the village to injure one. For this reason, and on account of his experiences as a baby, Petka had been christened by his companions "Volkitch," or Wolfson, and by this name alone he was known.

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As time went on, Volkitch came to be renowned for miles around by reason of his marvellous skill

and courage as a hunter of every conceivable animal, great or small. He had inherited from his foster-relations a singular faculty for tracking and stalking, and could glide through the cover as stealthily as one of themselves, or as one of the foxes which formed an important objective for his hunting expeditions. He made his living and supported his mother by means of this instinct or talent in the pursuit of game, selling the skins to a dealer in the nearest town, and hawking grouse, black-game, and other birds about the country on those days when he was free to do so—that is, when his services were not required by the manor-lord.

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The latter was a late acquisition to the community. His father and predecessor as lord of the manor was, happily for the peasants, dead. He had been a thoroughly bad master to them while alive—cruel and unjust, disregarding alike the laws of the emperors Paul and Nicholas and those of common humanity, exacting four and even as many as six days in the week in labour from the serfs, instead of the maximum three, as by the law of Paul enjoined. Worse than this, he had sold or exchanged serfs, separating families which had in any way made themselves obnoxious to him, and thus severing their connection with the land of their fathers, of which he had no right to deprive them.

The present lord was a young fellow of about five-and-twenty, scarcely older than Volkitch himself, who was now of age, and a strapping, strong lad, active and powerful as the creatures which gave him his name. The young lord, though infinitely juster and more humane than his late father, was still imbued with some of the autocratic spirit of his predecessor—haughty and arrogant. He treated the moujiks as beings of an altogether inferior order, and though he bore himself towards them with strict legality, and allowed them the full rights and privileges to which they were by law entitled, yet he never showed them the slightest personal sympathy or took any notice of them beyond occasionally swearing at them or gruffly bidding them do this or that. There was, however, one exception to this rule of hauteur towards his serfs; for the manor-lord invariably showed himself kindly disposed towards Volkitch, the great hunter. Sportsman himself, he admired this young Nimrod's wonderful skill in every matter bearing upon the pursuit of wild animals, and was glad enough to have Petka with him when out in the forest after game. Together they hunted the wily lynx, pursuing it on snowshoes until they tired it out and "treed" it; or attacked the sleepy bear in his den, disturbing his winter's rest with the rude awakening of the long pole, and smashing in his brain with axe or bullet as he rushed out to wreak his vengeance upon the destroyers of his peace.

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But it was an understood thing between the lord and his hunter that wolves were to be exempt from attack. It was a sign of grace on the part of the young man that he should thus have humoured his companion in this matter; but there was another reason for his concession besides that of desiring to keep on good terms with the wolfman. It was a very remarkable thing, and yet nevertheless an actual fact, that wolves, though occasionally known to be in the neighbourhood of Dubina—indeed, any one could hear them howling at night often enough—never either attacked the peasants of that privileged village, or attempted to carry off their dogs, their cattle, or anything that was theirs. The wise woman declared that the reason for this friendly abstention on the part of the wolves was undoubtedly the presence in the village of Volkitch, the beloved of wolves, and in a manner their relative. The fact that the same wolves, while sparing Dubina, frequently carried off the property of dwellers in neighbouring villages, certainly seemed to lend colour to the statement of the wise woman, though the priest at Lvof and perhaps a few other sceptical persons in the district were of opinion that the "gentlemen in grey," being about as astute and cunning as any creature that has a vested interest in the forest, were well aware of the wolfman's presence certainly, but that they kept away from that great hunter, not out of a sentimental regard for his connection with their family, of which connection they were probably ignorant, but simply out of respect for the prowess of Volkitch and the safety of their own grey skins. However this may have been, it is a fact that they did no hurt to any fellow-villager of Volkitch, and that was a very admirable characteristic about the Dubina wolves.

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One day, however, something occurred which looked rather as though this millennium were at an end. A wolf broke into the manor sheep-fold one winter night, and stole a young lamb. The lord heard the news, and grew grave and thoughtful, but decided to let the matter pass, out of consideration for his favourite, the hunter Volkitch. But when, a few nights later, a second lamb was taken, its haughty owner lost his temper and sent hurriedly for the wolfman.

"Volkitch," began the barin, when the latter appeared, "you have heard the news. What is to be done?"

"I will pay for the two lambs," said the hunter, "and I will watch by night and see that your fold is not robbed again."

"You shall neither pay for the lambs nor watch," said the young lord; "but it is time this nonsense about wolves was ended. You shall go out and rid me of this thief, Volkitch."

"I?" said the horrified hunter. "Would you have me slay my own foster-mother or a relative?"

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"Nonsense," said the other. "Your foster-mother, as you call her, and her children and grandchildren have died out long before this. You have shown your devotion to her pious memory long enough. Go out and shoot this beast, as I command you, or—or—well—yes, I will go and rid the world of the infernal thief myself."

Volkitch looked wolfish and wicked, but he kept his temper.

"I will not go, your mercifulness," he said; "and if you will believe my honest word, it were better

that you did not slay this wolf either. A worse thing may happen to Dubina than the loss of two lambs."

"I have said that I will slay the thief if I come across it," the barin insisted. "Now go to your work. Stay; come back here at twelve o'clock with your gun. I have a fancy to track a hare or two with you this afternoon."

Volkitch sighed, crossed himself before the ikon, and left the room.

On hearing the wolfman's tale, which that worthy quickly made known at the village drinking-shop, every moujik present was horrified with the sacrilegious words of the lord. To them it seemed no less than sacrilege to speak of slaying wolves, so accustomed were they to the idea that the wolf was a sacred and privileged creature at Dubina. As for the wise woman, she did not hesitate to declare that a great calamity would befall the community if such a thing were to happen as the violent death of a wolf at the hands of an inhabitant of the place. The hunter himself did not say much—he was never a great talker; but he looked moody and wolfish, as was his way when crossed. Nevertheless, he went obediently to the mansion at noon, as commanded, in order to accompany his master into the forest for the purpose of ringing and driving a hare or two for the shooting of the lord of the manor.

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Volkitch was as capable in the matter of ringing and driving a hare as any man that ever wore snowshoes. Within a few minutes a track was found and singled out from among the mazes of old footprints which covered the snowy surface of the land (Volkitch could tell at a glance how many days or hours each track had been made), the barin was placed in position, and the driving commenced. But before he had proceeded many yards the young hunter's practised eye detected the track of another and a larger animal—a wolf. There was evidence that two of these animals had supped beneath a thicket on the left, for there were the remains of the feast strewn the ground—bones and the unfinished portion of the carcass of a lamb. Tracks led away from these remains in the direction of the place in which the manor-lord had taken his stand: probably Volkitch had disturbed the wolves in the midst of their mid-day siesta. Filled with apprehension for the consequences of this unfortunate circumstance, the hunter rushed at full speed towards the right, in order to drive the wolf out of dangerous quarters. The next moment came a shot, followed by a second, and then by a cry of "Volkitch! help!"

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The wolfman was not without love for his master, and though angry with him at this moment, he was not so angry that he would stand still while the young lord stood in deadly peril of his life.

"I come!" shouted the wolfman.

He came quickly as the wind travels, but he was only just in time. The young lord had missed a wolf with his first barrel, and firing again had slightly wounded the savage beast, which instantly turned upon him, and with a rush and a spring bore him to the ground.

It was at this moment that Volkitch appeared, when the second wolf, which had been about to dash in to the assistance of its companion, saw him and made off.

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For an instant only the wolfman hesitated, then with a shout of rage he sprang upon the savage beast that stood snarling and showing its teeth over the prostrate count.

"You fool!" cried the wolfman. "Would you attack one of my own? I would have protected you; now you shall die!" He plunged his knife, with the words, into the heart of the great brute, which glared at him for an instant with glazing eye, then fell forward, expiring. The count arose to thank and praise his hunter, but the wolfman took no notice.

"You shall have your freedom, Volkitch, from this day," said his master; "for you have well earned it." But Volkitch neither smiled nor thanked him.

For a minute or two the wolfman leaned up against a tree close by, weeping bitterly; then he turned and fled through the forest.

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When the young lord realized, a few days after this, that the wolfman had finally fled, he inaugurated a great hue and cry after him, for he was concerned about his hunter, whom he really liked and valued. The peasants of the villages upon the estate were all pressed to take part in the search, which lasted for many days; but, though rewards were offered for his discovery, and though threats of punishment in case of his non-capture were freely scattered, the moujiks entirely failed to find any traces of him.

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There had been a fresh fall of snow, which had obliterated, they explained, all tracks. It was impossible to find him; so the chase was, eventually, abandoned. The young lord rightly conjectured that the peasants knew more about the matter than they chose to reveal, and punished certain selected individuals whom he suspected to be more guilty than the rest; but his severity did not result in the discovery of the missing hunter.

Meanwhile, the wolfman was not very far away. After his disappearance he was, at first, invisible, but after a while he began to make occasional visits to his old home, though only for an hour or two at a time, to see his mother, and to obtain ammunition and tea. He inhabited an abandoned woodman's hut in the forest, and was rarely seen by man. It was a curious and significant

circumstance that after his departure the number of wolves that prowled about the neighbourhood increased quickly; neither did the village any longer enjoy that immunity from their depredations which it had known in former days.

Then something happened which changed the whole tenor of the wolfman's thoughts and opinions in the matter of his foster-relations.

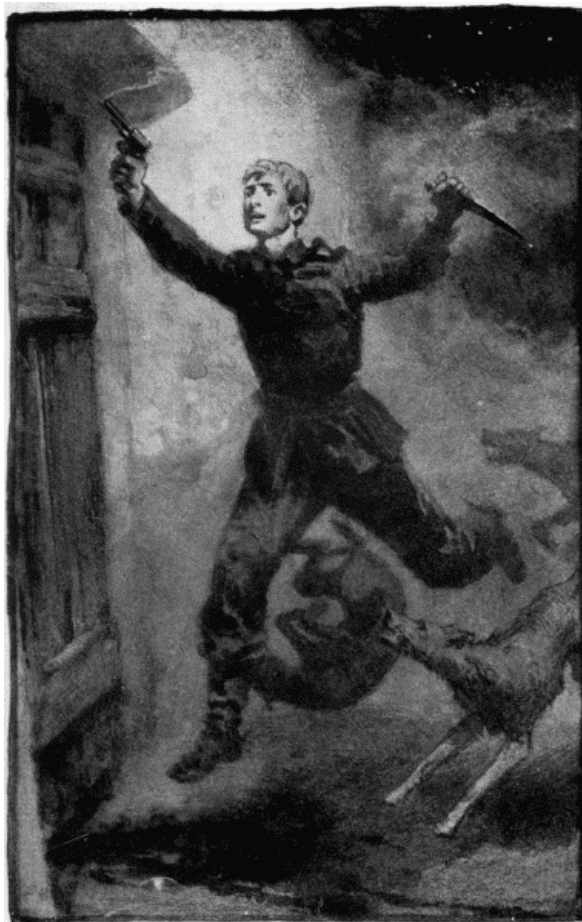
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His mother, to whom he was entirely devoted, now an elderly woman, was wandering through the forest one evening filling her basket with broken firewood, when she was suddenly attacked by three wolves. Having a small hatchet in her hand she bravely kept the brutes off, killing one and wounding another, but being herself badly bitten by the third before she reached home, more dead than alive with the shock of her adventure and the terror of it.

When the wolfman heard this, and saw his mother suffering, the scales fell from his eyes. The sacred animal, from occupying the premier position in his strange affections, next to that of his own mother, had suddenly fallen to the lowest. From that day and until he had cleared the surrounding forests of the enemy, there was terrible warfare between Volkitch and the wolves. They had become abominable in his eyes, and he in theirs; he chased them when there were but two or three of them, and when they were assembled in a pack they chased him.

Once he was seen by a terrified peasant to cross the road, pursued by a score of howling brutes. The wolfman led by half a dozen paces or so, and stabbed at his foes, when one presumed to come within reach, with the dagger he held in one hand, or struck at it with the pistol he carried in the other. "The wolfman uttered fierce yells as he ran," said the peasant, "and laughed in a terrible manner. For certain," he ended, "he was caught and killed."

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***"The wolfman uttered fierce yells as he ran."***

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Yet a week after that evening the wolfman appeared at the manor-house and announced, to the delight of the lord, that he had come to be his hunter once again, as of old.

The count laughed, and shook his hand, and spoke kindly to him.

"You are welcome, Volkitch; and for your service to me of last year both your mother and yourself are free peasants, and shall till your own soil." After a while he added, "But what of the wolves, Volkitch? Will you hunt them also now? For there have been many of late, so that they become a terror in the place. Only last week the peasants say that—"

The wolfman laughed strangely, and his eyes glistened.

"A week ago is a week ago," he said; "but to-day is to-day. The wolves that lived are dead. Volkitch slew them. I am their enemy. Find me a wolf and I will kill it."

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## IN HONOUR BOUND.

"Hullo! What's up?" cried Elbridge Harland as he woke out of a deep sleep with a sense of being choked, while he struggled to free himself from the grasp of strong hands suddenly laid upon him. No answer came but deep guttural grunts; his struggles were futile, his head was pressed hard into his blankets, and his hands were tightly held behind him and tied there. The thongs seemed to cut into his wrists, and then his captors rose and relieved him of their weight. With difficulty he turned his face round, only to see the copper-hued forms of Indians all about him, and their bead-like black eyes watching him.

"What is it?" he gasped, recovering his breath. "Tom, where are you? Are you alive?" He was calling to his companion, Tom Winthrop, another young Harvard man with whom he had been spending the last three weeks in camp on the outskirts of Estes Park in the Rocky Mountains. [Pg 131]

"I'm here," came the reply in a half-smothered voice. "I'm tied up fast. How are you? What's happened?"

"I don't know, but I'm tied up fast too," answered Elbridge, by a violent effort turning over and raising himself to a sitting posture in spite of his bound hands.

The sight that met his eyes was alarming enough. A dozen armed red-skins were in possession of their camp; they had seized the two young men's guns, and were eagerly ransacking the rest of their belongings in search of plunder. A bunch of Indian ponies stood a little way off. Tom Winthrop was lying bound upon the ground close by.

"I never dreamed of this," said Elbridge with a groan. "The Longmont people said"—Longmont was the little town where they had fitted themselves out for their mountain trip—"that no hostile Indians ever came up into these mountains, and that the Utes were always friendly, didn't they?"

"Yes," said Tom, turning stiffly towards his comrade; "I wonder who these wretches can be. Hi there, amigo," he continued to an Indian that stood guard over them with a pistol; "say, you Ute? you Ute?"

The redskin nodded; apparently he understood the question. [Pg 132]

"Ute, Colorow; Colorow, Ute," he ejaculated, grunting out a string of unintelligible Indian words as well.

"Colorow!" broke in Elbridge. "Of course. Don't you remember, Tom, that old fellow in the store at Longmont who was talking about the different Indians, and said that he wouldn't trust some of the Utes very far? Don't you remember he said there was a chief called Colorow who would bear watching; that his band of Utes was ripe for mischief?"

"What do you imagine they'll do to us?" asked his friend. "They've robbed our camp, but they haven't tried to kill us. Do you think they mean to torture us, and that that's why they don't kill us at once?"

The tortures inflicted by Indians on their captives were before his mind. These young men from Harvard were new to the west, and had only come out for a summer holiday; but the cruelty of savage Indians was a familiar idea to them, and they shuddered at the thoughts of it.

"Let's ask them what they want of us," said Elbridge; "it may be that we've been trespassing on what they consider sacred territory, or something of that sort. We might perhaps be able to satisfy them somehow if we could make them understand."

But the Indians could not or would not talk, and all attempts to parley were vain; ponies were brought, and they were forced to mount and be led away wherever their captors chose. [Pg 133]

All day long they rode; and at evening, tired and stiff from their bonds and the rough mountain ride, they reached the lodges of a large band of insurgent Utes. Here they were rudely pulled from their horses and thrown on the ground. An eager debate ensued as the captors proudly exhibited their prisoners, and the helpless pair, though they could not understand a word, needed no interpreter to reveal the subject. Close by stood two long, upright sticks, and between them there dangled a small hoop of willow, across which was stretched a round piece of what seemed to be parchment, kept tight and flat by a neat buckskin lacing. While they were looking at this, a puff of wind caught the hoop and caused it to spin slowly round. The side of it now revealed to view was covered with a bushy mat of short, red, curly hair, and just off the centre a white streak across it showed up as a parting.

Elbridge looked inquiringly at his friend. He saw Tom's face become a strange ashy grey. His lips were almost bloodless and seemed to move stiffly as he said in a thick voice, "That thing must be a scalp. It's fresh, and it's a white man's." [Pg 134]

"Yes, young man, that's a nice scalp, and yours'll look pretty beside it," burst in a harsh, rasping voice close behind them in tones that made them shiver.

"An American here among these Indians!" thought Elbridge; "why, he must be a renegade, another Simon Girty."

With an effort he twisted his head round to see who had startled them so. No white man was visible to his eye, but right above him towered a huge Indian, a head and shoulders taller than

the other Utes. He wore a cruel face of mockery, as he opened his great mouth to speak. "You'll have a high old time, won't you, when you're tied to the stake, and the fire begins to tickle up your toes." His English was perfect.

"Who are you, in the name of goodness?" cried Elbridge, "and what are we prisoners for?"

"You don't know me, eh, Tenderfoot?" was the contemptuous reply. "I'm Big John, John St. Elmo. My father was old Colonel St. Elmo that St. Elmo's Fork's called after. Oh yes, you needn't be surprised at my speaking English. Why, I was years at school in St. Louis with the Christian Brothers. You bet, folks all know me on the frontier now, though."

This was no empty boast. He was indeed well known, far too well known, on the frontier. Big John, the half-breed son of the old French fur-trader, St. Elmo, was as entirely an Indian in his nature as in his features, though his superior intelligence as well as his gigantic frame bore witness to the white blood that flowed in his veins. His cruelty and his cunning were known far and wide. [Pg 135]

He stood over his victims for long, boasting of his own black deeds in the past, and threatening them with the torture for to-morrow. Then they were shoved into a lodge, a guard set over them, and they were left to get such rest as they might.

Darkness fell, and they lay silent and sleepless, stupefied with pain and misery, until Elbridge rolled himself close to his comrade and began in a low voice,—

"Tom, do you think there is any chance for us?"

"I can't see any whatever," replied Winthrop.

"This fellow, Big John, seems to me our only hope," said Elbridge. "At least he knows something. He could understand us if we were to offer him a ransom. That's our best lookout now. Escape is quite out of the question. Here we are, tied and watched, and even if we could slip away we should only get lost in these mountains, and be caught again directly. We must try and talk him into letting us go, somehow." [Pg 136]

The hours dragged on wearily, till just before dawn they heard a sudden trampling of horses, followed by loud talking among the red men. Presently Big John rushed into the lodge and burst out,—

"The governor's sent the soldiers from Fort Russell, and it's got to be stopped."

He was furiously excited. Was he come to butcher his captives on the spot, or what did he intend?

"We're ready to make peace if the governor wants peace," he cried. "We've driven every white man out of our country already, and we won't have the soldiers coming into it. But if he'll call them back, we'll treat."

"When did all this begin?" inquired Elbridge eagerly.

"Five days back," said John. "Oh, we've made the Americans pretty sick. In five days we've cleared the settlers all out of our country. But we won't stand the soldiers coming now."

"Look here, John," exclaimed Elbridge, assuming a friendliness that he was far from feeling; "if you want to let the governor know that you're willing to make peace, why not let us go and tell him? That's your safest way to let him know." [Pg 137]

"And how am I going to get his answer if I do?" asked Big John.

"Why," replied Elbridge promptly, "of course he'll send some one to tell you when and where to meet him."

"He'll none send," briefly interjected the half-breed. He paused a moment, revolving plans in his mind. "Look here; I don't mind doing this. One of you go and take my message to the governor, and I'll keep t'other here till he gets back with the answer. If he don't come, then—" And with an expressive pantomime he indicated the torture and the scalping-knife. Vainly they urged him to send both; he was obdurate.

"We pledge our honour to return," cried Elbridge Harland. "Be it peace or war, we'll come back and give ourselves up to you."

"What's an American's honour worth?" retorted the half-breed contemptuously. "I don't do business that way. One of you can go. There's my terms; take 'em or leave 'em."

"Then you must go, Tom," began Elbridge, but Big John cut him short.

"You stay here," said their captor, indicating Tom, "and you go," pointing to Elbridge; "but first you give me your word of honour to come back here in three days and surrender, whatever the governor says, and swear you won't tell where we are or lead any one here." [Pg 138]

"I give it then," said Elbridge; and turning to his companion, "Tom," cried he, "don't despair. If it be possible, I'll save you."

Eighteen hours later he stood, with an Indian guide beside him, upon a summit whence they looked into a dark valley where fires were glowing.



"Americans camp there," said the guide, pointing to the distant fires. "You go talk governor one sun. When moon there," and he pointed to the eastern sky, "you come here find me." And thus Elbridge left him.

In two hours he reached the watch-fires of a company of Colorado volunteers, hastily called out to resist the Ute outbreak. He learned that the governor of the state was actually on the spot. "You better believe," said the guard who conducted him to the governor's quarters, "he ain't no slouch. He's a western man, he is. You don't find Governor Bates at home in Denver when there's a Ute war on. It's 'headquarters in the saddle' with him every time."

Elbridge was soon introduced to him, and told his story.

"Very rough on you and your companion, Mr. Harland," said the governor sympathetically, when Elbridge had finished. "I'm sorry for you both, but for Mr. Winthrop especially. It's too bad you should have just dropped in for such a reception as this in our Centennial State this particular year. We reckon to give eastern tourists a good time here, and we're particularly pleased to welcome to the Rockies cultured gentlemen from good old Harvard that can appreciate the splendour of our mountain scenery. Now here's my idea. Mr. Winthrop's one solitary chance is for you to lead my volunteers right to where these Indians are, so that we can surround 'em, and it's just possible we may succeed in rescuing him alive."

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"But," said Elbridge astonished, "I have just told you how I passed my word to return and put myself in their hands again, and show no one where they are."

"Rubbish," said Governor Bates—"positive rubbish, my dear sir. Indians don't keep faith with us, so we're not bound to do it with them. You bring us to them, and we'll fix things."

"I couldn't do it," said Elbridge quickly, his colour rising; "I passed my word, and I must go back alone."

"That you'll not do," said the governor, "if I have any authority here. I'll have to put you under arrest if you try," and with a forced laugh he added, "We can't have you communicating with enemies of the United States, you know."

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And rather than yield, Elbridge actually passed the day under honourable arrest at the governor's quarters. He remained proof both against ridicule and upbraiding.

"Well, sir," said Governor Bates finally, "I can only hope that Captain Waldo himself may arrive. He's the one man that really knows these northern Utes and speaks their lingo, and they think a heap of him. He can do anything with them almost. The moment they broke out I telegraphed to Washington for him. He might be here to-night, but he hasn't come; and if he don't, I wouldn't give a red cent for your partner's chance."

Elbridge took his arrest so easily that the guard believed him to be secretly glad to find an obstacle put in the way of his return to the Indians. Consequently he found little difficulty in escaping at midnight and rejoining his guide. They reached the Indian camp once more on the following evening.

"Governor don't want peace, eh?" said Big John. "Then we're going to just sicken him of war."

Elbridge again spent the night in bonds with his comrade. In the morning a council was held by the Indians, at the end of which two stakes were planted in the ground on the outskirts of the camp, and firewood heaped round them. The preparation for the torture had begun.

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The two victims were brought out of the lodge, and dragged to the spot amid the taunts of Big John. Elbridge cast a despairing look on the ring of dark faces encircling them, but no glance of pity met his. Indians are cruel.

"Tom," he cried, "this is the end. We must bear it as best we may. Good-bye, old man."

Suddenly there was a great shouting among the Indians. The crowd parted asunder, and they caught sight of the figure of a horseman in army blue riding out of the timber towards them. He reined up his horse sharply, and then extended both hands with the two forefingers interlocked. It was the peace-sign. Some of the Indians ran forward to meet him, uttering cries of recognition. Others, of whom Big John was one, hung sullenly back.

"Elbridge," said Tom, "who can this be?" His voice shook with the nerve-strain he was undergoing, but he mastered it and went on. "What can he be doing here among the Indians? They seem to mind him."

"It must be Captain Waldo. He has come to save us," said Elbridge in firm tones. He would let no hysteric emotion betray to the red men how bitter the prospect of the torture had been to bear.

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Captain Waldo it was. He came up to them and spoke.

"I fear you have had a sad experience, gentlemen," said he, "but I have hopes that all may yet be well. I have some little influence over these people, but they are terribly excited just now. I must leave you for a while to speak to the chiefs in council. Till they decide I think you will be safe."

"Can we do anything to help you?" asked Elbridge eagerly.

"No; there is nothing to be done," said Captain Waldo, "except to wait for the end patiently. Make

no struggle or attempt to escape. It all depends on moral force now."

"You have no soldiers with you, then?" inquired Tom. "You are alone?"

"Quite alone," said Waldo, with a look of deep seriousness in his eyes. "We can look for no human help;" and turning away, he strode over to the council tent and disappeared.

Their bonds were now untied, to their intense relief, and they were left to stroll where they would within the bounds of the camp. Hour after hour they could hear from within the tent the voices of the Indian orators, and sometimes they were able to recognize the calm tones of Waldo addressing them. Then the strident voice of Big John was heard; and presently a messenger came and signed to them to come to the council tent. Anxiously they approached and entered. [Pg 143]

"Look at this young man, you John St. Elmo," said Waldo, pointing to Elbridge Harland. "You tell the chiefs that if they trust me and come in and make peace they will all be massacred. They are not to trust us, because no white man ever keeps his word. Here is a young white man whom you made prisoner; whom you set free on the promise of his return; who was arrested by the governor to keep him from returning; and who, rather than break his promise to you, escaped secretly from arrest, and came back to you to face the torture. I pledge you my word, and so will he, that if the Utes come in and make peace, and give up their captives, no one of them shall suffer for it."

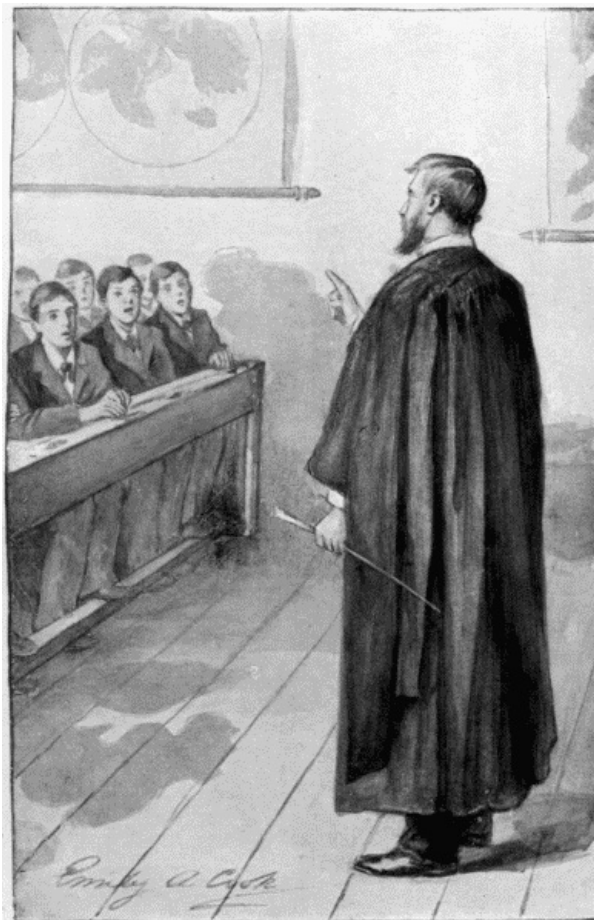
Big John was silent, and Waldo said it over again in the Indian language to the chiefs. Then an old grey-haired red-skin arose and delivered their decision. "We know you, captain," said he, "and your word is straight. Other white men have told us many lies. But here is a white man"—and he pointed to Elbridge—"whose word is true. We will come." [Pg 144]

The crisis was over; the momentous decision was for peace, and the frontiers were to be spared the horrors of a prolonged Indian war. Captain Waldo, accompanied by the two released prisoners, led the way to a point where the insurgent Utes could safely surrender themselves to the authorities; and Elbridge Harland had the consciousness that he had not only saved his honour, but had helped to save his countrymen as well. [Pg 145]

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## "GUNPOWDER, TREASON, AND PLOT."

"There will be no fireworks this year."



***"There will be no fireworks this year."***

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From the consternation depicted on the faces of the sixty odd boys to whom this announcement was made, it might have been supposed that they had just heard there would be a famine in the land, or that some other calamity of an equally serious nature was about to befall them.

Mr. Chard, the headmaster of Yatby Grammar School, was the speaker. He had held this position since the commencement of the winter term, and it was now the 2nd of November.

"I don't intend there should be any more of these firework displays," he continued. "They are dangerous, and often result in accidents, the consequences of which have to be suffered for a lifetime. As you know, I am anxious to encourage healthy outdoor sport, and in fact any kind of rational amusement; but I see no object in these gunpowder carnivals, and the subscription which Brookfield says you received on former occasions from the headmaster I will hand over to the treasurer of the Games Club. Pass on in order."

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Desk after desk, the boys filed out of the big schoolroom into the square, gravelled playground at the back of the school buildings, where, freed from the enforced silence of assembly, the air was immediately filled with a babel of voices.

"No fireworks!" cried one; "what rot!"

"Well, I do call this beastly shabby!" exclaimed another. "Old Gregory never objected to our having fireworks on the Fifth, and why should Chard?"

Away in one corner Brookfield, the captain of the football club, and a leading spirit among the boarders, stood addressing a little group of his companions.

"I stopped him in the passage this morning," said Brookfield, "and asked him if he would give us something towards our fireworks, as Mr. Gregory used to. He said at once that he didn't intend there should be any fireworks this year, and that he would mention it at the close of morning school."

"I call it a bit too thick," continued the speaker, working himself up into a great state of excitement. "He's been altering rules ever since he came until the place is becoming a regular dame's school. I believe, if he had his way, we should do nothing but work, and go out walking two and two."

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"He isn't quite so bad as that," said Collins. "You must admit he's taken more interest in footer than Gregory ever did. He saw that we had a new set of goal-posts, and made better arrangements for the matches."

"Ye-es," admitted Brookfield reluctantly. "But he's made no end of vexatious little rules that we never had before. Why shouldn't we go into town when we like, instead of having to ask permission, and have our names entered in a book? Then what's the object in our being obliged to go into certain shops only? and why should we have half an hour's extra work before breakfast?"

The audience nodded. That having to get up half an hour earlier, especially on cold winter mornings, was certainly a sore point with everybody.

"Now," went on Brookfield, "we aren't to have any more fireworks; and why? Just because he chooses to think we're such babies that we should blow ourselves up with a pinch of powder. I tell you he's come here with the notion that this place is an old dame's school, and it's high time we showed him it isn't."

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"How?" inquired Shadbury, moodily grinding his heel into the damp gravel.

"How? Why, all take a stand, and show him we don't mean to put up with any more of this humbug."

"Oh yes," answered Shadbury, with a smile of incredulity. "I fancy I see us doing it, and then getting packed off home next morning."

"Not a bit of it!" returned Brookfield, whose ideas were fast shaping themselves into a definite line of thought. "The only thing is, we must all pull together. Take, for instance, a strike. If one workman came and said he wouldn't work unless he had higher wages, why, he'd simply be told to take his hat and go; but if all the hands in a factory agree to go out at the same time, their employer's bound to listen, for if he sacked the whole lot, why, his business would come to a standstill. It's the same in this case: Chard might expel one fellow, but he couldn't send every chap in the place going, or the school would cease to exist, and he'd get into trouble with the governors."

"Yes," answered Collins, "that's all very well; but in instances of this kind they have a way of picking out the ringleaders and making an example of them, and giving all the others a milder punishment."

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"Pish!" retorted Brookfield. "There'd be no ringleaders. What I should say is, let every chap buy some fireworks, and then on the Fifth we'll rush out and let them off after prep., whether Chard says we may or not. He can but keep us all in for an afternoon, and it'll teach him not to interfere with our privileges. I'll do it if any one else will."

Among the bystanders was Jarvis, a reckless young ne'er-do-weel. "All right; I'm game," he cried. "Now then, we must get the other fellows to promise."

There is a certain flavour of romance in a rebellion which has brought about the undoing of many a hot-headed youth, who perhaps had no deep concern in the cause of the rising; and the scheme mooted by Brookfield appealed to the more adventurous spirits among his school-fellows. In

addition to this, it was a fact that the school, as a whole, were highly indignant at the headmaster's edict. As far back as any boy of the present generation could remember, there had always been fireworks on the Fifth; and to rob a boy of a legitimate excuse for burning gunpowder is to touch him on his tenderest place.

The afternoon which followed the conversation which has just been recorded was, in itself, conducive to the spread of any mischief which might be afoot. It was too wet for football; the rain fell in a steady downpour, and the boys were confined to the schoolroom and passages, or the gymnasium shed in the yard.

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Brookfield and Jarvis moved from one group to another; they buttonholed classmates in out-of-the-way corners, and joined themselves to the little crowd that had collected before the schoolroom fire. In each case they commenced a conversation with some remark about the fireworks; the talk would grow more confidential, and be carried on in lower tones until it probably ended in nods and winks. Even Mr. Wills and Mr. Draper, the two assistant masters, were boldly questioned as to whether they didn't consider it a shame that the fireworks should be forbidden; but both gentlemen were too discreet to offer any opinion. Mr. Chard had said there was not to be a display this year, and that was enough for them.

By the end of the afternoon all the boarders had been sounded. Some were never expected to share in any act of lawlessness or bad behaviour, but the majority had proved themselves ripe for mischief by agreeing to take an active part in the conspiracy.

At tea, though several of the small boys' faces were flushed with excitement, there was an ominous calm, the meal being partaken of in a silence which, to a keen observer, might have suggested the thought that something was going to happen.

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On the following afternoon Brookfield and Jarvis, together with two other boys named Perry and Roden, who had both fallen in heartily with the scheme, held a consultation just before tea in a corner of the shed.

By this time things had progressed so far that it was tacitly understood that all arrangements for the execution of the plot should be left in the hands of the four boys mentioned, one of whom, it was agreed, should purchase the fireworks, and thus lessen the risk which would be run if a number of boys entered the shop at different times. Meeting thus in the darkness made the business in hand seem almost as exciting as if it were some part of the original Gunpowder Plot, and the conspirators conversed in tones raised little above a whisper.

"Now look here," began Brookfield. "All the fellows have given me what money they mean to subscribe, and the first question is, Who's to get the fireworks?"

"Draw lots," suggested Perry.

"Oh no!" broke in Jarvis. "You get them, Brookfield; and while you're in the shop I'll keep *cave* at one end of the street, and Perry and Roden can at the other. Get the things done up in three packets, and we can stick them under our jackets."

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"All right. And what am I to get?"

The question was one which, on former occasions, had been a difficult one to answer; the proper proportion of rockets, Roman candles, coloured fire, and other combustibles which should be procured to make up a proper display, always needing a good deal of discussion before anything like a satisfactory conclusion could be arrived at. Certain boys had always clamoured for a set piece, while others had yearned to fire shells from a mortar. This year, however, it seemed likely that the display would not be of the kind previously attempted, but would probably be subjected to an abrupt interruption before it had progressed many minutes.

"Get something that will go off easily," said Jarvis—"mostly squibs and crackers, I should say. It's more for the lark of the thing, and to show Chard we don't mean to knuckle under, than for the sake of a show. I should say, get it all over in ten minutes, and hook it. Then there'd be some chance of escaping without being collared."

"There's one other thing," said Brookfield. "Where shall we keep the fireworks when we've got them? It won't do to put them in desks and lockers; they might be seen."

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"I'll tell you what," said Roden. "Put them in that chest over there in the corner. It's got nothing in it but dumb-bells, and they won't be touched again before we have drill on Monday."

There was a pause as the four conspirators stood considering whether there was any other matter which it would be well for them to discuss before separating. As they hesitated, somewhere in the darkness there was a slight shuffle.

"Hush! What's that?" whispered Perry.

The exclamation was followed by a patter of feet outside in the playground.

"Some young beggar must have been hiding away here," muttered Jarvis, "and has just bolted. Let's see after him."

"Bother it! He must have heard what we have been talking about. He may let the cat out of the bag."

"No fear," answered Roden. "Every one knows now what's going to happen, and nobody would dare to go and sneak to Chard."

"I hope it wasn't that little rascal Downing," said Brookfield uneasily, as he prepared to return to the schoolroom. "He's such a dirty young toady, always trying to curry favour with Draper or Wills; and of course if it got to their ears, it's as bad as if any one had told old Chard himself."

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"Oh, there's no danger of that!" said Jarvis, as the quartet sauntered slowly across the gravel. "Young Downing has too much regard for his own skin to do a thing of that kind. He'd know too well what he might expect. Besides, there's no reason to suppose it was Downing."

"No, only it's just like one of the little wretch's sly, sneaking tricks," answered Brookfield, and so the conversation ended.

As might have been expected, those day boys to whom the project was mentioned displayed no great readiness to take part in the rebellion. Most of them had private celebrations of the Fifth at their own homes, or were invited to assist at similar undertakings at the houses of friends, and for this reason were unwilling to go out of their way to join in a spree which might be followed by serious results. Only one, an arrant duffer nicknamed "Sloper," from some supposed facial resemblance to that popular hero, volunteered to assist, and that in a manner which could scarcely be said to entail any special display of courage.

"Let me know what time it happens," he said, "and I'll come outside, and chuck squibs over the wall."

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One boy alone tried to use his influence in such a manner as to prevent the revolt taking place, and he was a senior named John Oliver, who sat next in form order to the head of the school. The conspirators had not taken him into their confidence, feeling pretty certain that he would not approve of the project; but from remarks let fall by one and another, he could form a pretty shrewd guess as to what was intended.

"Look here," he said, encountering Brookfield as the latter stood warming his hands at a coil of hot-water pipes in the hall. "What's all this nonsensical talk about letting off fireworks to-morrow?"

"Who's talking about it?" asked the football captain with a grin.

"Oh, nearly everybody; and they say you're at the head of it all. Don't think I'm such a deaf and blind old moke that I don't know what's going on in the place."

Brookfield liked Oliver, who played full back with him in the team; he might have resented another boy's right to cross-examine him, but Oliver was an old friend, and could never be regarded as strait-laced or a prig.

"Well, what if I am at the head of it? I haven't asked you to join," was the laughing retort.

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"Now don't you be a fool, Brooky!" said Oliver earnestly. "There's no sense in it, I tell you. Chard'll be frightfully angry about it. Some of you will get expelled before you've finished, and we can't afford to lose our football captain."

"Oh, don't you fret yourself, old man," was the careless rejoinder. "I know how to take care of myself—of that you may be certain."

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The eventful Fifth dawned as any other dull November day might, and by the end of the afternoon all preparations had been made. A good stock of explosives had been obtained and stowed away under an old bit of sacking in the chest with the dumb-bells. Out of the thirty-four boarders, twenty-six had promised to take part in the demonstration, and all had been carefully instructed how to act. As Brookfield explained, only united action on the part of all would prevent vengeance being taken on individuals. It would be impossible for Mr. Chard to expel twenty-six boys in a lump, and an imposition or the loss of a half-holiday would not be too heavy a price to pay for the lark and excitement.

The conspirators were all provided with boxes of fusees. As soon as preparation was ended, the whole body were to rush out to the gymnasium shed in the playground, and there receive their supply of ammunition. A sharp fusillade of squibs and crackers was to be kept up for about ten minutes, at the end of which time the headmaster might be expected to be approaching the scene of action; then the signal would be given to cease fire, and the rebels were to "make tracks" as speedily as possible.

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"I know what it'll be," said Brookfield. "He'll ring the bell, and order us to assemble in the schoolroom. Then he'll ask who's been letting off fireworks, and when he does we must all stand up together, and that'll show him we don't mean to be treated like babies in future. There musn't be any shirking; if there is, the fellow will catch it hot, I promise him."

All the twenty-six professed themselves ready to carry out these instructions to the letter; never were champions of liberty in such deadly earnest before.

If there were any whose hearts began to fail them as the appointed hour drew nearer, they gave

no outward sign of lessening determination. Some young madcaps, who never counted the cost of a lark, looked forward to the revolt as a huge joke; others, who had more sense, but who had promised to take part in the display, may have been ashamed to draw back at the last moment.

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Among the latter, strange to say, might possibly have been numbered the promoter and leading spirit of the whole business. He and Jarvis had slipped out before tea to make sure that the fireworks were safe in the chest.

"I say," he muttered, as they lingered for a moment before returning, "you and I'll catch it hot over this affair."

"How d'you mean?"

"Why, Chard will be sure to drop on us more than on fellows lower down in the school. I shouldn't wonder if he expels us both."

"Well, let him; I don't care," answered Jarvis recklessly. "You've been telling a different tale all along; if you're afraid of the consequences, why in the name of fortune did you ever set the thing going?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid," answered Brookfield with a short laugh. "I only said what he *might* do, if he chooses to regard us as the ringleaders. By the way, I saw that little rascal Downing talking to Wills this morning. I wish I knew for certain if it was that young beggar who was hiding away here yesterday."

"It seems to me you're getting in a funk already," cried Jarvis. "Buck up! You aren't the sort of chap to lead a forlorn hope. Come on; there's the bell!"

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That evening's "prep." seemed the longest that the boys had ever known. Mr. Draper was on duty. He stood three youngsters out for inattention, and reprimanded and cautioned a number of others. Firework displays had already begun in the town; muffled pops and bangs, and the occasional flare of a soaring rocket seen through the neighbouring windows, all served to keep the subdued excitement up to concert pitch. The sound of whispering and the restless shuffling of feet broke the usual stillness of the room, in spite of the sharp demands for silence repeatedly made by the assistant master.

Presently the door opened, and Mr. Chard himself entered the schoolroom. His eye fell on the three luckless urchins standing in the centre aisle, and his brow contracted into a frown.

"What have these boys been doing?" he asked.

"They have been very inattentive," answered Mr. Draper. "In fact, I've been obliged to say I should keep the whole assembly for an extra half-hour unless they did more work."

Something seemed to have ruffled the headmaster's temper.

"I suppose this is owing to the decision I came to about the fireworks," he said sharply. "If so, let it be clearly understood I won't stand any insubordination of that kind. Go on with your work at once. If I find to-morrow that any boy has been wilfully idle and inattentive, I shall punish him severely."

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Slowly the hands of the clock crept round the dial; then at last they stood at half-past eight.

It was with a more than usually audible sigh of relief that the boys obeyed Mr. Draper's order to put away their books; and now came the crucial moment, thoughts of which had been in nearly every one's mind for the last three days.

Brookfield did not hesitate. Having gained the passage, he produced his cap from his pocket, and ran straight out into the playground. He was closely followed by Jarvis, Roden, and Perry, and behind them came a straggling line of dark forms. It was not a good night for fireworks, for the moon was shining, but its light enabled Brookfield to see and marshal his followers.

Half-way across the playground he stopped.

"Hullo!" he cried in a low tone. "This isn't all. Where are the others?"

Only eight boys had turned out in addition to those whose names have been mentioned, so that the whole party numbered a round dozen. Where were the twenty-six?

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"Where are the others?" repeated the leader, as the stragglers, breathing hard with excitement, came up and formed round him in a group.

"They've funked!" growled a voice in the gloom. "I thought from the first some of them would."

"Beastly sneaks!" added another. "I collared hold of young Thomas and tried to make him come, but he wouldn't."

For a second time in the history of the project Brookfield hesitated. Here was an end to all his ideas of united action, and the whole responsibility for the rebellion would rest on the shoulders of himself and the few bolder spirits who stood before him. He could not draw back now—it would be too much of a climb-down; and it would never do for him, the football captain, to show the white feather.

"Come on! Don't waste time!" muttered Jarvis, but not in quite such a confident tone as that in which he usually spoke.

"Come on, then!" repeated the leader desperately. And turning on his heel he made for the adjacent wooden building styled on the prospectus the "gymnasium," but commonly known among the boys as the "shed."

Exactly what happened next perhaps Brookfield alone could afterwards clearly explain, and he was rather chary of repeating his experience. He opened the door and went cautiously forward in the darkness, feeling his way with outstretched hand to prevent his coming into violent collision with the parallel and horizontal bars. The windows, which in former times had been constantly broken with tennis balls in a game known as "shed cricket," were protected with wire latticing, and this served to obscure the struggling moonbeams which faintly illuminated the farther end of the building.

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Exactly how or when he first caught sight of it, Brookfield could hardly have told, but as he neared the chest in which the fireworks were stored, he became conscious of the presence of *something* standing in what was usually an empty corner.

The moonlight strengthening, or his own eyes becoming every instant more accustomed to the gloom, enabled him to make out a tall, dark figure, erect and motionless as a statue; then his heart gave a jump as he recognized the outlines of a mortar-board and gown.

In an instant he realized that he and his comrades had walked into a trap; and without a second's hesitation he turned and bolted, coming into violent collision with Jarvis and Roden, who were following closely on his heels.

"*Cave!— Scoot!*"

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The retreat became a rout. At the moment no one clearly understood what was the matter; but those who had not entered the shed, seeing their companions rush out like rabbits from a furze bush, joined in the stampede.

As they ran, and as if to increase their confusion and hasten their flight, a big squib came whizzing over the playground wall and exploded with a bang in their very midst. This single firework formed the whole of Sloper's contribution to the entertainment; for, finding that there was no response, he came to the wise conclusion that something must have happened; and so, putting the rest of the squibs in his pocket, he ran off home.

It was not until the entrance to the school building was reached that Brookfield found breath enough to gasp out,—

"'Twas old Chard himself! I nearly walked into his arms! Some one's split, and he was waiting there to collar the whole pack of us!"

Shamefacedly, and with looks of apprehension, the discomfited band assembled in the schoolroom for prayers.

"Hullo!" whispered Oliver to Brookfield in a bantering tone. "How about the firework display?"

The football captain was in no mood for joking, and answered with a surly "Shut up!" He was momentarily expecting the door to open, and the headmaster to enter and commence an investigation.

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To the surprise of at least a dozen young gentlemen, nothing of the sort happened. Mr. Draper read prayers, and gave the order to pass on to bed.

Brookfield was the senior in charge of No. 5 Dormitory, and all the other occupants of the room being numbered among the faithful dozen who had mustered in the playground, the conversation naturally turned on the unexpected termination to their adventure.

"How is it Chard has said nothing? Perhaps he won't kick up a row after all."

"Oh, won't he! He's keeping it till to-morrow; don't you fret."

"Who could have told him?"

"Why, that young sneak of a Downing," said Brookfield, getting into bed. "He told Wills. I'll half kill that young hound in the morning!"

The getting-up bell rang at the accustomed time, and early school proceeded as usual. This suspense was worse almost than the row itself, and Brookfield began to wish that the thundercloud would break.

At length the dreaded moment seemed to have arrived, when at the end of breakfast the headmaster rose from his chair and rapped on the table as a signal for silence. Jarvis and Roden exchanged a meaning glance, which was repeated between other boys at different tables.

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"I told you the other day that I did not wish you to have any fireworks," began Mr. Chard. "It is not my intention to take away any legitimate enjoyment to which you have been accustomed, without, if possible, giving you something in its place; and as it is a fine day, I shall grant a half-holiday for a special game of football."

There was a burst of applause as the boys rose from their seats; but Brookfield, without waiting to join in the cheers, slipped out of the room and made for the entrance to the playground. Half-way across the stretch of gravel he heard footsteps behind him, and turning saw Jarvis following at top speed. The same thought had evidently suggested itself to them both—a possible solution of the mystery.

Rushing into the empty shed, they paused, and then burst into a laugh.

"Well, I'm blest!" cried Jarvis. "We were a set of muffs! Fancy all our grand plot being knocked out by *that!*"

In one corner stood one upright of the high-jump gallows; about it was hung an old tarpaulin; while perched on the top was a battered mortar-board, the property of some departed hero.

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"Some of the kids must have done this," said Brookfield—"the one who was in here the other evening, and heard us talking. He slipped out last night, and rigged this up after tea. It wasn't Downing, after all; but I wouldn't mind betting sixpence 'twas young Markham."

"Cheeky little beggar!" cried Jarvis. "I saw him sniggering this morning at breakfast. I vote we haul him in here and give him a licking."

"Oh no!" answered Brookfield. "It's a jolly day for footer, and we've got the extra half, so perhaps it's as well this blessed guy did spoil our revolt."

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The fireworks were subsequently disposed of on easy terms to the day boys, and though the story soon leaked out among the boarders, causing a good deal of harmless chaff and hearty laughter, it is probable that Mr. Chard himself never knew how much he was indebted to an old tarpaulin and battered mortar-board for the part they had played in so effectively nipping in the bud a promising rebellion.

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## THE COCK-HOUSE CUP.

There was great excitement on the Big Side cricket ground at Hadbury College, though play for the day had finished. The last of the inter-house matches had just been brought to a conclusion, and the coveted trophy, known generally as the "Cock-house Cup," was about to be presented to the winners.

At Hadbury there were many honours of this kind to be won—the "footer" shield, the racquets trophy, and other prizes of a similar nature, which excited keen competition between the different boarding-houses. But among all these coveted rewards of skill and endurance the cricket challenge cup was perhaps the most highly valued. It took the form of a handsome and elegantly-chased vase of solid silver, on which, each succeeding year, the name of the holders was engraved.

Directly in front of the pavilion the ground was raised into a small terrace, round which the whole school had assembled in a dense crowd. At the top of the slope, as though on a platform, stood the headmaster, the Rev. T. A. Wedworth, M.A., Mrs. Wedworth, several of the house-masters and their wives, Brise the captain of cricket, and other notables too numerous to mention.

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The late afternoon sunlight flashed like fire on the precious metal as Mrs. Wedworth handed the cup to Herbert, the captain of the winning team; and a mighty roar of applause went up from the crowd, who had been patiently bottling up their shouts all through the headmaster's speech.

"Hurrah! Bravo, Conway's! Three cheers for Conway's! Hurrah!"

A boy who, considering his size, contributed as large a share as any one to the general hubbub, was young Harry Westcott, commonly known among his more intimate associates as the "Weasel." In a voice of remarkable power and shrillness he shrieked, "Bravo, Conway's! Bravo, Herbert!" until a bigger boy, standing just in front, whose teeth were set on edge by these yells, turned round crying, "Shut up, you little beast! You're enough to deafen anybody!"

At first sight there seemed little cause for such a display of feeling. Westcott was a day boy, and did not wear the green and orange cap of Mr. Conway's house. He was, however, a cricket enthusiast, never absented himself from a big match, and knew all the great men's scores and averages. He was a stanch admirer of Herbert, and secretly flattered himself that his own style in batting closely resembled that of the captain of Conway's. As his own team had been knocked out in the first round, he had hoped that Conway's would win, and hence his satisfaction at the result of the final contest.

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At Hadbury the day boys were, for the sake of the games, nominally divided into two "houses," Mr. Beard's and Mr. Hutton's. Westcott wore the blue and white cap of the latter; and though Hutton's had never been favourites for the challenge cup, yet the "Weasel" continued to possess his soul in patience, feeling quite sure that when *he* should be awarded his house colours, a great change would come over the character of the team, and the name of "Hutton's" would then stand



a very good chance of being engraved on the Cock-house Cup.

The sunlight flashed again in a dazzle of ruddy gold, as Herbert turned and held up the trophy as a sign of victory. Another roar burst from three hundred throats; the handsome cup being regarded almost with awe and reverence by the spectators, as though it were some relic of the heroic past, a trophy for which doughty knights had struggled in the ages of romance. It had been in existence now for years, and many players who had helped to win it had since then done great things on county grounds, and made names in first-class cricket.

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One set of boys there was among the crowd who, for the most part, looked glum and surly, and refused to cheer. They wore the red and black cap of Morgan's, and curiously enough were not members of the house which had been defeated in that day's encounter. Morgan's had been beaten by Conway's in the semi-finals. There had been ill will and dissatisfaction about an umpire's decision on which hung the fate of the game, and, ever since, Morgan's had been consoling themselves with the rather malevolent hope that Conway's would be defeated in the final.

An oak box, lined with baize and fitted with a lock and key, had been specially constructed to hold the cup when it was carried to and from the cricket ground; and, as the assembly began to disperse, Herbert carefully deposited the trophy in its appointed case, which he then locked, and put the key in his pocket.

"I say," he remarked, handing the box to Buckle, the long-stop, "I wish you'd take care of this, and carry it back with you. I want to run down town and send off a telegram. I told my people I'd wire if we won."

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The interior of the pavilion was forbidden ground except to the privileged few; but on an occasion such as the present the rule was not so rigidly enforced, and a motley crowd pressed in after the players to congratulate the winners and glance at the scoring sheets.

Buckle was a good-natured giant, a strong tower as long-stop, but rather a clown in many ways; and, as might have been expected in the present instance, he became the subject of a good bit of friendly chaff and joking.

"Take care of that cup, Buckle; don't lose it!"

"No fear!" answered the long-stop with a grin.

"Well, don't bang it about; we shall want it returned next year exactly as you got it."

"You've got to win it first," chuckled Buckle, putting the case down upon a locker, and preparing to take off his spiked shoes.

Brise, the captain of cricket, elbowed his way through the crush.

"Is Herbert here?" he asked.

"No, he's gone down town," answered the long-stop.

"Oh, bother!" was the answer. "I wanted to speak to him. I'm going away for a couple of days to see my pater before he leaves for India. Well, I must see him when I come back."

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"All right," answered Buckle. "Look here," he added; "how about getting this cup engraved?"

Brise was already moving away. He turned his head and said something, but the remark was lost in the babel of noises. The crowd and hubbub increased; there was some shoving and indications of horse-play.

"Now then, all you fellows who haven't any business here, just clear out!" shouted Buckle.

"Clear out! Hook it, you kids!" echoed two or three prefects, at the same time picking up old leg-guards and other weapons with which, if necessary, to enforce obedience to their commands. "Out you go!"

Among those who joined in the helter-skelter rush which followed was Master Harry Westcott, who, with his usual self-assertion, had forced his way into the pavilion, and now dashed out headlong to escape the consequences of his temerity. Glancing at his watch, he found the hour was later than he expected, and so, starting off at a trot across the level playing-field, he made the best of his way back to the house of his aunt, Mrs. Arden, with whom he lodged during the school terms.

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Aunt Polly had finished her tea when her nephew arrived, but she still sat at the head of the table, while Harry gulped down huge mouthfuls of bread and butter, at the same time pouring forth an excited account of the match, describing with great animation Herbert's big hits, Smith's sensational catch, and the magnificent manner in which Vincent had kept wicket. Mrs. Arden smiled and nodded, but it was perhaps excusable if her mind wandered, and she mixed some points in her nephew's narrative. To her the Cock-house Cup was but a silver vase. She knew none of the traditions which belonged to it, the long story of gallant and honourable warfare told by the names engraved upon its side; and though she was aware of the fact that each summer term one house gained the cricket challenge trophy, yet it did not seem of vital importance to her whether it went to Conway's or Morgan's. She was, however, pleased with Harry's enthusiasm, and anxious for him to grow up a thorough Englishman, and, therefore, she tried to sympathize

with him in the interest which he took in the great national sport, and made up for her lack of knowledge by being a ready listener when the boy came home with tales of the playing-field.

Meanwhile, Buckle had changed his boots, found his coat, and started off to return to Conway's, bearing the oak case in triumph, and surrounded by a small group of wearers of the green and orange cap. As they turned into the road a pebble clattered past them.

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"Swindle!" yelled a shrill voice, and a youth with a red and black band to his "straw" disappeared quickly round a neighbouring corner.

"Some young beast of Morgan's," growled an indignant Conwayite. "They've all gone home in a sulk. Precious poor sportsmen, I call 'em. All because Bell gave that chap 'run out' in our match against them, and they said he wasn't."

"He was out right enough," said Buckle. "Of course, I couldn't see from where I was standing, but Vincent told me the beggar's bat never came within a yard of the crease; and Vincent isn't the sort of chap to tell a lie for the sake of a wicket. He always plays the game."

"Well, Morgan's have made up their minds that we swindled them out of that cup," said another. "They've got a grudge against us. They were all hoping that we should be beaten to-day, and they're jolly sick that we aren't."

"Let 'em be!" retorted the sturdy long-stop. "One thing I know; we've got the cup, and they'll have to wait a whole twelvemonth before they can take it away from us again."

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"They might come over and steal it!" said a rather shallow-brained small boy vaguely, for which remark he was promptly smacked on the head, and the conversation terminated.

Buckle took the case to the house-master's study, and deposited it on the end of the writing-table. The boy would have liked to have another look at the trophy, but Herbert had the key of the box, and Mr. Conway himself was out spending the evening.

The following morning at breakfast the master referred to the recent victory, and congratulated the cricket team on having won such distinction for the house.

"By the way," he said in conclusion, "while the cup remains with us (which I hope may be for many seasons to come), I think it may as well stand here on the sideboard with our other trophies. Will you fetch it from my study, Vincent?"

The boy named rose from his place at the prefect's table and left the room, reappearing again two minutes later with the oak case in his hand.

"It's locked, sir," he remarked.

"Who has the key?"

"Here it is, sir," said Herbert, producing it from his waistcoat pocket.

At each of the four tables the boys had paused in their eating and drinking, and were waiting in silence for another sight of the famous trophy. Mr. Conway turned the key and opened the box.

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*It was empty!*

For a moment the incident seemed rather more comic than serious. It appeared a sort of first of April joke, and a ripple of laughter went round the room.

"How's this?" said Mr. Conway with a slight indication of annoyance in his tone. "Where is the cup?"

The members of the cricket team stared at one another in silent astonishment.

"Where is the cup?" repeated Mr. Conway. "Who brought it back from the field yesterday?"

"I did, sir," answered Buckle. "I put it in your study."

"Did you make sure the cup was in the case before you started?"

"Yes, sir; I saw Herbert lock it in the case, and he's had the key ever since."

"Did you leave the case about anywhere?"

"No, sir; I brought it straight home, and put it on your table."

"Do you know anything about it, Herbert?"

"No, sir," answered the cricket captain, whose face was as long as a fiddle. "I locked the cup in the case, and gave it to Buckle; and I only just remembered that the key was still in my pocket."

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"Well, this is most extraordinary!" said Mr. Conway blankly. "It sounds like one of those tricks shown by Maskelyne and Cook. You must be mistaken, Herbert. This must be inquired into at once."

A few minutes later an excited crowd surged out of the dining-hall. Every one was talking at once, the result being a perfect babel of sound. The Cock-house Cup was missing; by some extraordinary means it had been spirited away from its rightful owners. In the whole history of

Hadbury College such a thing had never been heard of before.

Each boy had a different opinion to offer: one thought that Herbert or Buckle must have left it behind on the ground; another believed a burglary had been committed; while a third made the somewhat rash assertion that the Morganites might have collared it out of spite, though how this could have been done he was not prepared to explain.

A few of the seniors did not doubt that the cup would be found somewhere in the house-master's study, but a careful search afforded no further clue towards a solution of the mystery; in fact, the theory of a robbery seemed untenable, since not a single article in the room had been disturbed or removed from its accustomed place.

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The startling fact at length forced itself upon the minds of all concerned. The Cock-house Cup, Hadbury's most cherished and honoured trophy, had, in some mysterious manner, disappeared; added to which was the unpleasant reflection that Conway's would be held responsible for its loss.

Ill news travels fast, and before morning school the tidings had spread far and wide. Westcott, arriving in the big quadrangle ten minutes before the bell rang, was told it by his chum Lawrence.

"I say, Westcott," cried the latter; "what d'you think? The Cock-house Cup's gone!"

For a moment the day boy seemed overcome with the shock of this announcement. He gulped in his throat, and then blankly said, "Oh!"

"Yes, it's gone, right enough," continued the other excitedly. "Lost, or stolen, or something. Awful rum business. I've just heard all about it from young Redfern, who's at Conway's."

And the speaker launched out into a vivid account of what had happened, not forgetting to embellish the story with a little addition, prompted by his own imagination.

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"If they can't find where it's gone, they'll have a detective down from London."

Westcott opened his mouth as though to reply, but he only gave forth a kind of inarticulate gasp.

The excitement grew as the morning progressed. That a big silver cup could have totally disappeared, and in such an extraordinary manner, when the case which contained it was locked, was almost inconceivable; and added to this was the fact which has already been stated, that the challenge vase was the most valued trophy competed for by Hadbury boys.

"My eye!" exclaimed one member of the Sixth to another. "Brise will be in a pretty way when he comes back. He'll pitch into those Conway beggars for not being more careful, I know."

As the foregoing remark seemed to imply, the winners of the cup were held in a way responsible for its loss, and the Conwayites were destined to come in for a good deal of blame and reproach. Nowhere did the feeling rise higher than in the Middle Fourth, of which form Westcott was a member.

Mr. Blake, the master, happened to be a little late in appearing in his classroom, and his pupils availed themselves of the opportunity of airing their views on the topic of the moment.

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"Yah, you miserable Conwayites!" cried Steward, who hailed from Morgan's. "You can't keep that cup for a day, which shows you only won it by a fluke."

"We didn't," shouted a youngster named Cay, firing up at once. "We won it fairly enough, and you know that, Steward!"

"Then why can't you take proper care of it? You don't deserve to be trusted with anything better than a pewter mug."

Like an assembly of foxhound puppies, several other youngsters now gave tongue. Cay called Steward a liar, who promptly fired a book across the room; and in another moment something in the form of a general action might have taken place, if the appearance of Mr. Blake had not quelled the disturbance.

At eleven o'clock the usual "break" took place in the morning's work, and towards the end of the half-hour Herbert was crossing the road, when Cay and another young Conwayite rushed up to him in a state of the greatest excitement.

"I say, Herbert! Look what we've got! Sam says he found it in our yard this morning."

The thing in question was a black flannel cap with red stripes.

"Well, what of it?" said the cricket captain. "It belongs to one of Morgan's chaps."

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"Yes, that's just it," cried Cay. "One of them must have been in our yard last night. Sam found this before he blacked the boots this morning. I say, Herbert, perhaps this was the fellow who carried off the cup!"

"Oh, rubbish!" answered the senior. "How could he? And besides, what object could there be in doing such a thing? You don't suppose we've got any burglars in the school?"

"No, but they might have done it out of spite," persisted Cay. "It may have been a sort of practical

joke."

"Not it!" answered the senior. "No chap would be such a fool as to run such risks for the sake of a joke. That isn't good enough!"

Though Herbert pooh-poohed the suggestion, he took possession of the cap, and carried it away in his pocket. After dinner Mr. Conway called the senior members of the house together for a consultation as to what steps should be taken towards recovering the lost trophy. The first thing seemed to be to ascertain in what manner it had disappeared; and though several theories were advanced, not one of them seemed to offer a satisfactory explanation of the mystery.

At length Herbert produced the black and red cap from his pocket, and repeated the remarks which had been made by young Cay.

"I can't think that has anything to do with it," said the house-master. "One of Mr. Morgan's boys may possibly have been in our yard last night, and dropped his cap when climbing over the wall, but I can't bring myself to believe that he stole the cup. Besides, how could he? The thing's impossible!" [Pg 184]

The events of the morning had left a feeling of soreness in the breasts of most of the Conwayites, and no one offered a word in defence of Morgan's.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Mr. Conway. "I'll give this cap to Mr. Morgan, and report the matter to him. But, as I said before, I don't believe for a moment that it has any bearing on the disappearance of the cup. Well, unless we find out something between now and tea-time, I really see no course open to us but to report the matter to the police."

Now, certainly, the plot began to thicken. On the following day, after morning school, Mr. Conway once more summoned the senior boys of the house for a consultation in his study. There was a peculiar look on his face, which showed that the announcement he had to make was rather unexpected.

"Mr. Morgan has just been over to see me with reference to that cap which was found in our yard. He says that, from a mark inside it, it has been identified as belonging to Southby. Now Southby admits that he was in our yard on the evening in question, between suppertime and prayers, but, beyond denying altogether that his visit had anything to do with the disappearance of the cup, he refuses to give any explanation of his conduct." [Pg 185]

"Then I should say he's telling a lie, sir," blurted out Vincent. "If he wasn't up to mischief, then why doesn't he say what he was doing on our premises?"

"Well, that's just what Mr. Morgan has been trying to find out. He has promised to bring Southby over here. We shall both question him; and, if he still refuses to give an explanation, he must go before the headmaster. Of course the matter will be thoroughly sifted; but I must say I don't believe that Southby, or indeed any other boy, took the cup from my study."

There was a moment's silence. To a man, the bystanders were inclined to believe that the Morganites were answerable for what had happened.

"Look here, Buckle," said Mr. Conway suddenly. "Are you *sure* that the cup was in the case when you brought it away from the field? You see," continued the speaker, lifting the oak box from the floor at his side, "the case itself is heavy, so, even if it had been empty, you might not have noticed the difference in the weight." [Pg 186]

"But I saw Herbert put the cup in myself, sir," was the answer. "Then he locked the box and gave it straight into my hands. Besides, if the cup had been left lying about anywhere, some one would have seen it, and we should have heard about it before now."

This reply seemed reasonable enough, and so the conference ended, Mr. Conway promising to renew it after he had had another interview with Mr. Morgan.

As might have been expected, a report of the conversation which had taken place in the house-master's study soon spread like wildfire, the story receiving numerous sensational additions as it passed from mouth to mouth, until, especially among the junior boys, it was openly declared that Morgan's had organized a raid upon the rival house, and carried off the cup. It was not likely that any community would allow itself to be publicly charged with theft without some show of resentment, and the unfriendly feeling with which Morgan's already regarded the rival house now found vent in a blaze of indignation.

"Dirty sneaks!" cried one young gentleman. "They swindle us out of the cup; and now, when they've got it and lost it, they want to make out that we're nothing better than a gang of robbers. Wait till we play 'em at football next term, and we'll show 'em the stuff we're made off!" [Pg 187]

So high did feeling run that it was dangerous for wearers of the black and red and the green and orange caps to approach within striking distance of one another; indeed, if it had not been for the prompt intervention of a stalwart prefect, two hot-headed youngsters would have done battle just before dinner on one of the fives courts.

It was a lovely, hot, summer afternoon, and practice at the various house nets was in progress.

Mrs. Arden sat by the open window in her parlour, doing some fancy work. Suddenly the door opened, and her nephew entered. His face was flushed, and he still wore the "blazer" and flannels

in which he had gone to cricket.

"You're back early," said his aunt.

The boy made no reply. He sat down on a chair, and a moment later buried his face in his hands.

Mrs. Arden had thought he looked queer.

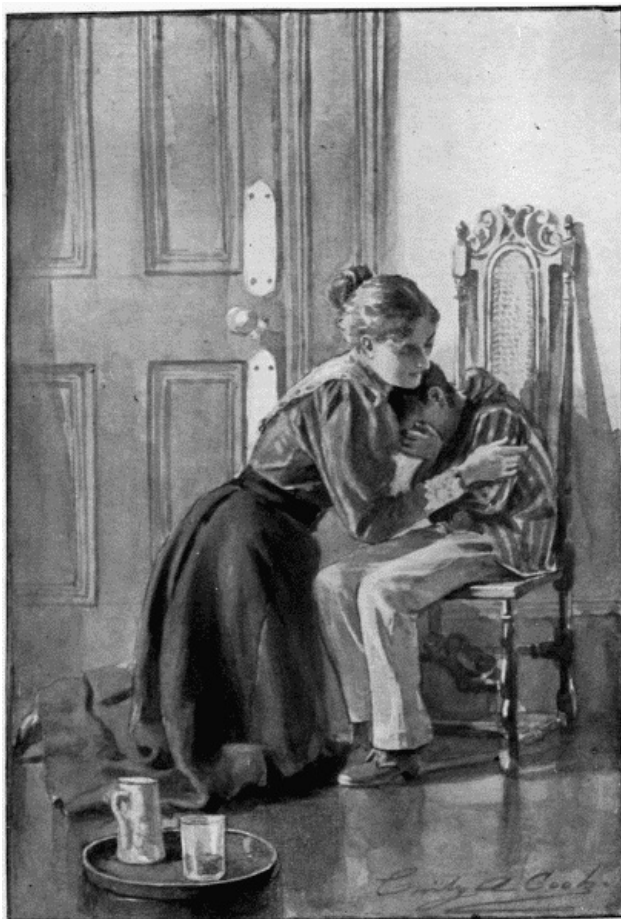
"What's the matter?" she asked, laying down her work. "Have you been hurt?"

The "Weasel" shook his head, and gave vent to what sounded like a stifled sob.

"It's this hot sun, I expect," said his aunt. "I daresay you've been running about in it without your cap." [Pg 188]

And hurrying out of the room, she returned a moment later with some cold water.

"Now," she said, kneeling down by the boy's side, "tell me what's the matter. Are you feeling giddy or faint?"



**"Tell me what's the matter."**

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"Oh no, aunt," moaned the "Weasel," raising a face on which was depicted an expression of unutterable woe. "It isn't that! It's the cup—the Cock-house Cup! It's gone, and can't be found!"

"Well, what of that?" answered Aunt Polly, who could not realize the immense value which the trophy possessed in a schoolboy's eyes.

"Why—why," faltered the unhappy juvenile, almost weeping, "it's my fault! I did it!"

"You? What nonsense! Tell me directly what you mean."

When once started on the work of unburdening his soul, words came quickly enough.

"It was like this. You know I told you how Conway's won the cup. It's worth pounds and pounds; besides which, it's the one that has been played for ever since there was a Cock-house Cup, and it has all the names of the winners engraved on it, so it could never be replaced; and, oh! I believe the fellows would kill me if they knew it was my fault!"

"Yes; but how *was* it your fault?" interrupted the aunt.

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"Why, after the match was over, there was a crowd in the pavilion, and I squeezed in too. Buckle had the cup, and he put it down close to me on a locker. Lots of fellows were chaffing old Buckle. I happened to have a key in my pocket that fitted the case, and, just for a lark, I managed to unlock it when no one was looking, and I slipped the cup inside the locker. I thought Buckle would notice at once that the box was lighter than before, and I never meant that he should go away without the cup; but just then Brise ordered us all to clear out of the pavilion. Young Roberts trod on my foot, and I chased him; and, somehow, I forgot all about what I'd done until

yesterday morning, when some one told me that the cup was lost. Now they say one of Morgan's fellows stole it, and Mr. Conway is going to put the matter in the hands of the police."

"But, my dear boy, why didn't you go and tell some one at once what you'd done, and where they will find the cup?"

"That's just it," groaned the "Weasel." "I don't know where the cup is—it's gone! I made an excuse and went and looked in the locker, but it wasn't there; and I know Herbert has searched every corner of the pavilion. It must have been stolen; and oh, aunt, it's all my fault! What *shall* I do?"

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Aunt Polly could be firm if she liked, and her answer was prompt and decisive.

"Go at once and tell Mr. Conway exactly what you've told me," she said. "And say you are sorry you were too much of a coward to do so before. If a theft has been committed, every hour you leave it makes it less likely the cup will ever be recovered."

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Standing together in the house-master's study were Mr. Conway, Mr. Morgan, and Southby, the last named a strong, pleasant-looking boy, who it was difficult to believe could be guilty of any mean or underhanded action.

"Come, Southby," said Mr. Conway; "don't be foolish. This is a serious matter, and it becomes all the more serious from your refusal to give us the explanation we demand. What brought you into our house yard the other evening?"

"I can't say, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because it would be acting unfairly to some one else."

"Oh, so there is some one else concerned in this matter besides yourself?"

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and Master Harry Westcott entered the room. He was pale and trembling, and that air of jaunty self-confidence which usually distinguished him had entirely vanished. With a great effort, and in faltering tones, he made his confession. The room seemed to swim before his eyes, but somehow he got through to the end of his story, and then breathlessly awaited the result.

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"Why didn't you tell me this at once, sir?" demanded the master sharply. "No doubt the cup has been stolen from the pavilion. Tut! We must send at once and tell the police."

Then came what was, perhaps, the most extraordinary part of the whole business; for, as Mr. Conway stepped forward to ring the bell, there was a knock at the door, and a servant entered, carrying what at first sight looked like a bundle of green baize.

"Mr. Daniels has sent this, sir, and the boy's waiting to take back the cloth."

Mr. Conway sprang forward, stripped off the covering, and held up to the astonished gaze of all beholders—*the Cock-house Cup!*

"Why—why, where does this come from?" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Daniels, the jeweller, sent it, sir. The boy says you will find the bill for the engraving inside."

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There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and Brise, the captain of cricket, burst unceremoniously into the room.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he began, "but I've been away for two days, and I only heard about the bother a few minutes ago. I told Buckle I would see about having the name of the house engraved on the cup if he liked to leave it in my hands. I found it, after the others had gone, in one of the lockers, and I thought it had been left there on purpose; so I took it down straight away, and handed it over to Daniels. I didn't mention the matter, because I thought there was no necessity."

The mysterious disappearance of the cup was now fully explained; only one question remained to be answered.

"Come, Southby," said Mr. Conway. "Tell me in confidence what it was brought you into our yard."

"Well, sir," answered the boy, "I borrowed a saloon pistol from one of your boys, and I came to return it. I didn't like to tell you for fear of getting him into a row."

"Oh, that's the explanation, is it?" replied the master, laughing. "Well, if I find the pistol I shall confiscate it; but in this instance I won't press you to tell the boy's name, though I think I could guess it, if I tried."

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So the matter ended, and except that the "Weasel" got a licking for his presumption in laying irreverent hands on such a sacred treasure as the Cock-house Cup, there is nothing further to relate.

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