

By
HERBERT J. GRATTON,

Author of "Town v. Gown, etc"

CHAPTER I.

A Morning-School "Skirmish."

ON the whole, boys are not naturally selfish. Nay! Lest anyone should object to a merely negative statement on so important a topic, I will go further and assert, conscientiously, that the average English schoolboy is the most unselfish and forgiving little scamp under the sun. He is also—mind, I am still thoroughly in earnest, and let it not be forgotten, that I said "average"—the most thoughtless, careless, and inconsiderate (where the feelings of others are concerned) specimen of humanity beneath the shade and dominion of the British flag. To others, my acquaintance does not extend.

Take Master John Elliott—of the Upper Fifth of Clifford School—for an instance. Tall; well-built; good-looking; the perfection of health; excellent at work; and at games a host in himself; consequently popular with masters and boys alike. He scorned to tell a lie, as every one of his masters and school chums knew; and no one could rightly accuse him of any mean or under-hand trick. Constantly he lived up to the motto, unconsciously his, "Play the Game."

Yet he was always in the proverbial "hot-water"; nor can it be said that his frequent immersions did anything at all to improve the complexion of his character. Whose growlings and muttering did the Detention-room "wall-ears" hear oftenest? Whose fingers tingled most frequently from unwilling and long-restrained applications of the form-master's cane? Who could "dash off" an "impot" with such speed and skill; or so accurately compute the time required to "do" a given number of lines—both the outcome of long experience?

Alas! John Elliott! Strange? Not a bit. There wasn't a straighter, manlier, more popular boy in the school, or one that had more "real grit" in him than John; but, unfortunately, he had coupled with these excellent attributes a notorious degree of thoughtlessness, and love of mischief, which accounted for numbers of his every-day "skirmishes," and deluded casual observers, as to his real character.

When the matter was brought home to his notice, John excelled in generosity and sheer kindness of heart, and would defend or assist any untidy, blubbering "scally-

wag" from the Lower School, even to his own detriment in "Form," or the sacrifice of out-of-school pleasures; but in his *natural* state, he possessed about as much regard for the feelings of other people as does the crocodile, when he partakes of Hindoo baby for his lunch.

He had a habit, too, of blurting out, on the spur of the moment, with appalling vigour and baldness of speech, his own particular and unconsidered views upon any theme or thing, which in itself was more than sufficient to upset the temper of many a better and more patient man than Mr. King, the genial master of his form. John Elliott was not the first gentleman since the days of Socrates, whose unbridled tongue, and disregard for other people's fads and fancies have involved their owner in overwhelming calamity. Thus was the chief character of this present narrative, to be designated hereafter as hero or villain, according to the good or bad, kind or unkind judgments of all who read herein.

Now it so happened, that owing to the enforced absence, through illness, of Mr. Hemming, the junior master, Mr. King, and his co-workers were taking extra school duty, which fact did not tend to lighten the day's labours, already—thanks to the boisterous, though not ill-intentioned merriment of Ringleader John and a willing band of followers—sufficiently heavy. Also was it well-known in Mr. King's form that that gentleman, who went by the name of Bluebeard, owing to the blue tinge of his clean-shaven chin, was preparing for a rapidly approaching University examination, for which he was studying far into each night. It was also a fact, that on more than one occasion recently, warning had been given concerning the row (to quote Mr. King—"unseemly, unwarranted and inconsiderate tumult") which was nightly kicked up in a certain dormitory after "lights-out," which said dormitory was unfortunately (from the *popular* point of view, though the official opinion differed somewhat) situated immediately over the study tenanted by the long-suffering master of the "fifth."

On the particular evening in which our story opens, "Prep" had been tossed by an increasing restlessness; indeed, the "upper fifth" section of it had been very nearly akin to that type of mass-meeting which is characterized as "stormy" by the political journals. Consequently, it

was not unreasonable to expect that the dormitories, and more especially, THE dormitory, would present a scene of unusual gaiety and animation after "lights-out," and—inevitably—the morrow would see sad repining. However, contrary to all past experience, and much to Mr. King's gratification, the dormitories soon settled into silence (which state of affairs was surely suspicious), and between the hours of "lights-out" and 10.30 p.m., that gentleman toiled laboriously and uninterruptedly, in his study, to his own intense satisfaction.

Precisely at half-past ten, he laid aside his books and stepped from his sanctum, *en route* for the supper room, and the company of his confrères. HA! What was that? As he opened his door the silence of the corridor above seemed to be filled with ghostly whisperings and patterings which subsided almost instantly. Mr. King paused, startled and suspicious. Suddenly, from above, there came a half-stifled exclamation, followed by a strange soft falling sound, repeated quickly at intervals, and sounding uncommonly weird in the night silence.

The next moment, a pillow, bounding down the stairs, came to rest only a few feet from where Mr. King stood, and well within the halo of light cast by the hanging lamp. Instantly he stepped further back into the shadows, and waited not a little amused at what he knew must inevitably follow. Presently, stealthy, pattering footsteps followed, and a moment later John Elliott, attired only in a night-shirt, presented himself at the foot of the stairs, glanced cautiously round, grabbed the tell-tale "arm of warfare," and quickly turned again, to make his way back to the upper regions.

"STOP!" If a volcano had suddenly opened at his feet, Elliott's surprise and dismay could not have been more complete, as Mr. King, looking very severe, stepped from the darkness. "What is the meaning of this, sir?" he roared, not ill-pleased to have caught such an oft-offending culprit at last. Too much stupified to answer, Elliott maintained a wise silence. "Go into my room at once," said Mr. King. Trembling, as well he might—for one feels strangely undignified and unsafe, standing with bare legs before a wrathful master—Elliott obeyed, and stood on Mr. King's hearth-rug, waiting and casting apprehensive glances, during an uncomfortable interval, at a lithe-looking cane

which lay by the master's desk.

It is quite true that Mr. King was human, and that he felt strongly tempted to avail himself of so unique an opportunity to discharge all old, and prevent new grievances; but it is also true that beneath a somewhat severe exterior there was a kind heart, the presence of which few of his unthinking boyish tormentors suspected; while in addition, Mr. King had a deep-seated (though by the boys, unrecognised) objection to taking anything which seemed to approach an unfair advantage. So after a few words of warning, Master Elliott, much relieved and for a moment penitent, scudded back to his waiting and fearful confederates of the nocturnal fight, to be received with subdued acclamation, when he announced that no punishment had been given, and no incriminating questions asked.

One would have thought that any ordinary mortal would have been, at the least, a bit "subdued" after such a narrow escape, but the fact of the matter was that John Elliott mistook Mr. King's leniency for weakness, and consequently regarded him with just a suspicion of contempt. Strange it is, though true, that boys frequently respect the arm that strikes rather than the heart that forgives. It is more than probable that Mr. Hemming would have rewarded Master John's misdeeds and disturbances with vigorous cuts of the cane, indiscriminately applied, having no scruples regarding "fairness," and measuring the culprit's offence only by the degree of his own annoyance. But then, Mr. Hemming was an ideal athlete, so was of course idolized by the aspiring young



PRESENTLY, STEALTHY PATTERNING FOOTSTEPS FOLLOWED.

"bloods" of the upper fifth, Mr. King, on the other hand, took little or no interest in games (though tradition said he was one of the front-rankers of his own college), generally erred on the side of leniency rather than harshness, and lived for the most part with his head in his beloved books, for which things he was esteemed lightly, as a muddle-head, with whom it was perfectly safe to take reasonable liberties.

Next morning the game commenced with a couple of vigorous "shunts," by which process the end boy on a form is violently shot on to the floor. This, producing no more than a mild reprimand, matters soon became, in turn, "lively" and "exciting," and when, a little later, Elliott was put on to construe, open

giggles at his blunders, and sly "asides" became the order. After floundering through five or six lines, Mr. King, whose face should have been a warning, sharply told him to sit down and write the lesson after school.

"Thank you, sir," returned Elliott, saucily. "And please do me a hundred lines also for your impertinence," the master added. "Yes, sir; thank you" was the answer. "Say, old fellow," remarked Elliott's chum, Rea Pearce, who sat next, "You're sailing too close to the wind." "Rats!" returned Elliott, with a laugh which he hardly troubled to hide. "What! Are you now *talking*, Elliott?" asked Mr. King, his voice trembling with anger; "pray what subject is it you find so interesting?" "I only said 'Rats,' sir," said Elliott, who had now fairly lost his head, and whose temper had got beyond control. The master's face was a study. The whole form shuddered and looked on in silence, feeling that the crisis had at last come. Down the room strode Mr. King, his face as black as a thunder-cloud, his gown streaming out behind him. He stopped dead before Elliott and raised his hand to box his ears. The form held its breath, for surely the threatened blow would knock the recipient clean off his feet. A moment of suspense and uncertainty followed, then with an effort Mr. King said quietly, "You are not yourself to-day, Elliott; come to my study on Saturday morning (which day was a whole holiday) for a punishment." A moment later the clock struck, and morning school was dismissed in silence.

Elliott and Glendower were cousins, both in the "upper fifth," and both about the same age. Ten minutes after the dismissal of morning school, the door of the study which they jointly occupied was slammed to, with more than usual vehemence. "Miserable beast!" exclaimed Elliott, flinging his books on to the sofa; "I'm about sick of this shop. The place is nothing more or less than a prison-house—" "Shut up," said Glendower, philosophically, "and don't make an ass of yourself. You jolly well know you deserved all you got!"

"DESERVE?" This with a look of the most utter annihilating astonishment. "I like that." "How long, Sir Saint, have you been looking after old Blue-Beard's morals?" enquired Elliott with fine satire. "And pray what are *your* deserts, good

little boy, I should like to know?" "Goodness me, *you'll* be too good to look at soon." "A fine chum *you* are to round on a fellow in this fashion." "I'll—." "Serves you right," retorted the philosopher, dodging a book as he spoke. "Old King isn't half as bad as you make out. Besides, didn't he let you off last night, for which you ought to think yourself lucky. Old Hemming would have made hay while the sun shone I can tell you."

"Yes, and don't the sneak mean to keep me in stewing all next Saturday, when he knows I'm down to play in the Melksham match," snapped Elliott. "Talk about meanness, that's it if you like." "You couldn't expect anything else," Glendower argued; "You make him as mad as a hatter." "My eye! I thought he was going to trounce you, and no mistake, when he came down the room." "He knows better than to try," said Elliott, airily. "His pluck evaporates too quickly." Glendower was about to retaliate, when he was cut short by an exclamation from Elliott, who was beginning to feel that he had done Mr. King an injustice.

"Hullo! The post's in. Here's a letter, and it's from home, too. I wonder what's up." "Jove, here's a go," he ejaculated, after reading the epistle. "'Dad's throat is worse, and the doctor has ordered him to spend the rest of the winter abroad; and the family are starting for Cairo immediately.' I'm to go, and you're invited. The whole thing has been fixed up with your parents and the Head—and—HURRAH!—we're not to wait till the end of the term. The ship sails next Thursday, and we are to start at once, and—and old Blue Beard, can visit his study on Saturday morning himself, if he likes"—whereupon in his wild glee, at so unexpected a piece of good news, Master Elliott seized a piece of chalk and wrote above the mantelpiece, "Engagement! J.E., to visit Blue Beard, *alias* Mr. King, on Saturday morning next, at nine o'clock, 'RATS.'"

Later in the day, two extremely model boys were in consultation with the Head, who was quite cheerful and obliging, and even went so far as to indulge in one or two mild jokes. It appeared that he had known of the proposed visit to Egypt for quite a week, but at Colonel Elliott's request, had kept the matter quiet in order that it might come as a birthday surprise

to John, who was fifteen that week. "Well," said the Head, at parting, "I wish you a safe journey and return; a pleasant holiday and a happy Christmas; and—one moment, Elliott, please don't be in such a hurry—try not to get into any more scrapes than you can help, while in Egypt. Cairo isn't Clifford; you know! I wouldn't like to say what the consequences might be if you do. *And*, it's not unlikely that I shall get to hear of your misdoings." This last was accompanied by an extraordinary look of intelligence, and on the journey John Elliott often wondered what the Doctor meant by his last remark. They shook hands cordially, and four days later the "P & O" steamship sailed, having on board, among others, Masters John Elliott and Ralph Glendower, *en route* for the Land of Tombs.

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CHAPTER II.

The Land of Tombs.

Christmas in Cairo is always strange, always enjoyable, and always interesting. It is strange because one misses the usual accompaniments of the old-fashioned English festive season. It is enjoyable, because the weather is ideal, and Europeans do not experience the choking, baking sensations which make themselves felt during the Egyptian Summer. It is interesting because the place is just full, but not too full, of that class of people who make it interesting.

The crowds of English and American, rushing, bustling, and snap-shotting tourists have not yet arrived, and one can see Egypt in peace, but to the junior, male, members of the Elliott party matters were proving a little "slow." Three whole days had passed since Master John had placed a piece of "cobbler's wax" (obtained from goodness knows where), on one of the verandah chairs of Sheppard's, the chief English hotel of that city, at which their party was staying; they had watched from a safe distance, while a young Oxford man, clad in immaculate flannels, and surrounded by a bevy of young ladies, sat himself thereon; they had also witnessed the *finale* when the said gentleman had risen (or attempted so to do) a few moments later, to bow to the rather sour looking mother of the said fair friends, since which auspicious and highly successful accomplishment they had lacked any serious occupation,

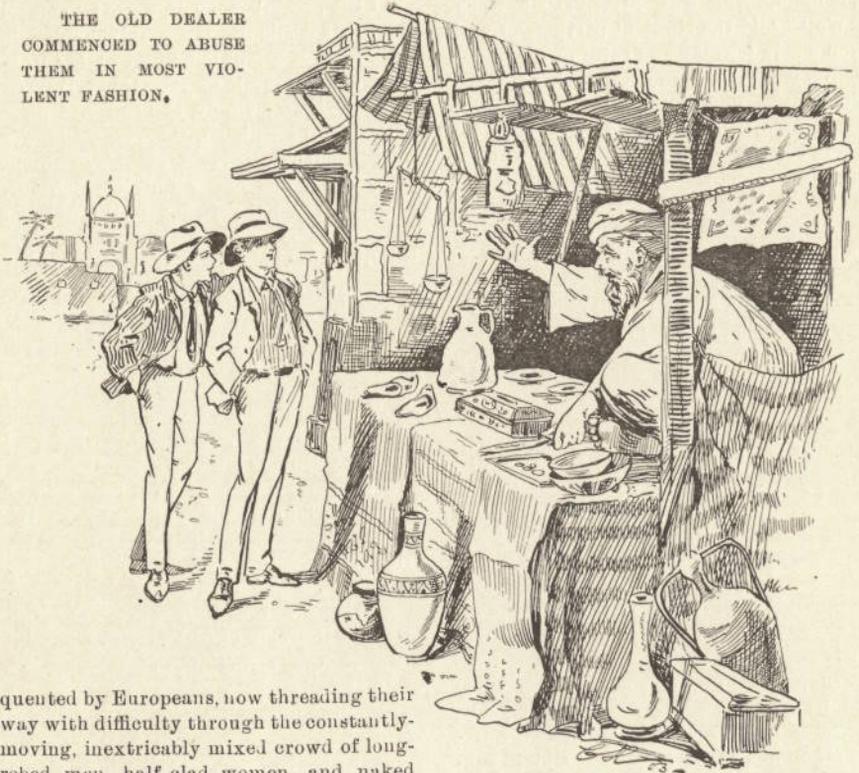
At the present moment, these two model English schoolboys lay snugly hidden in the centre of a stunted, dusty little shrubbery, in the middle of the Grand Terrace, Jack holding, lovingly, the end of a piece of string, of which the further end was inconspicuously tied round the leg of a light camp stool, one of a number which surrounded a palm, adjacent to the edge of the shrubbery. "Here they come," said Elliott, nudging his companion as he spoke. A few seconds later, a party of young ladies strolled up, accompanied by a stately Dowager, and a fiery-looking retired military officer. The new-arrivals, unconscious of being watched, began to seat themselves under the palm. "Don't you think it's a bit mean?" whispered Ralph at this juncture. "Shut up, you silly ass, they'll hear us. No! it's alright," returned Elliott. The next moment the gentleman of the party, having seen all his friends safely and comfortably seated, set about performing a similar service for himself. Luck was against him; there remained only the fatal stool. At that awful moment, the string tightened, and the camp-stool fell back about a foot, and the gallant warrior, whose age *should* have saved him from such an outrage, fell, struggling, kicking and snorting—as said Jack, afterwards—like a wounded "grampus."

"I say, Ralph, we had better get out of this," said John, when the sound and purport of the fallen warrior's language reached them. "It's neither healthy nor safe." Accordingly they emerged from the shrubbery, cautiously and at the far side, and leaving the Hotel gardens, betook themselves to the neighbourhood of the bazaars.

Perhaps at no place on earth, save Benares on the banks of the sacred Ganges, can be seen such brilliant colour and variety of costume, such exquisite specimens of native handicraft; such abominable filth, such life and movement, such craft and humour, such villainy and devotion as in the lanes and shops of the chief city of this great dead land of mystery. To the artist, the student, the loiterer, or even the man of business, there is something always attractive—always something new.

Interested and delighted at all they saw, though they now regarded it for the twentieth time, John and Ralph wandered unconsciously into the byeways least fre-

THE OLD DEALER
COMMENCED TO ABUSE
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quented by Europeans, now threading their way with difficulty through the constantly-moving, inextricably mixed crowd of long-robed men, half-clad women, and naked children, dark beroused Arabs, thin-legged Soudanese, snarling dogs, Jew pedlars, beggars, sad-looking camels, and white-robed Mahommedans of the lower quarters, quite oblivious to time, and entirely forgetful of Colonel Elliott's warning not to wander from the European area without a guide. Their recent successful "operations" on the Terrace, and the variety and novelty of all that they now saw, kept them in an excellent humour.

Presently the pair stopped before a shop, where presided a most villainous looking and enormously fat old dealer, and commenced to drive a bargain with him for a paper-knife of strange and beautiful workmanship. As usual, the price asked by the vendor was "terrific" (about five times its value), but his method of haggling, in a mixture of broken English and Arabic, showed that the price was subject to considerable reductions, and, recognising this, John and Ralph continued to chaff and expostulate with the dealer in a manner which at the end of half-an-hour, tried that worthy's short temper very considerably. The more angry the Arab grew, the more

hilarious and uncomplimentary did the pair become, until the old dealer commenced to abuse them in most violent fashion, using a ludicrous mixture of English "strong language," which only caused the recipients to enjoy the situation immoderately.

Cloze by the shop, and seeming to rise right from the midst of this heterogeneous jumble of buildings, rose a tall white tower, looking, by contrast with the squat shops, no thicker than an English pillar-box, and rising to a considerable height. In the midst of one of the dealer's volleys of Anglo-Arabic expletives, a man, apparently a priest, suddenly appeared on a gallery near the top of the tower, and commenced a not unmusical sort of chant. "Hullo! what's old Punch and Judy up to?" said Ralph, his attention withdrawn by the man's strange cries. Before Elliott could answer or attempt any explanation, everybody in the vicinity of the tower broke off their occupations of the moment, and producing little carpets, apparently from nowhere, spread them on the ground, and, turning their faces eastwards, knelt to pray.

Nothing could be more astonishing than the sudden change of the various expressions on the faces of the crowd, from craft and eagerness, and greed, or idle indifference and vacancy, to one of profound devotion. Even the dealer to whom John and Ralph were talking, broke off his bargaining, and with irresistibly funny and ungainly efforts (owing to his enormous bulk) began to spread his carpet upon which to say his prayers. The instantaneous change from English curses to Arab prayer, was too excessively droll for Master John, who was convulsed with uncontrollable laughter. Pretending to fall upon Ralph for support, that worthy, unprepared for such a demand, collided with the now kneeling dealer, who in turn lost his balance, rolled over, and lay like a "stranded whale."

If it is true that the sublime and ridiculous are separated only by a step, it is true also that the space between comedy and tragedy is no greater. The old dealer, after a few violent struggles, rose to his feet using the most threatening language, and several stalwart looking young Arabs—one of magnificent physique—closed upon Ralph and John, determined to resent and punish the unintended outrage.

The situation was one of extreme and momentarily increasing danger. "Say, old fellow, we'd better get out of this," said Ralph. "Let's——" John was of the same opinion. There was not a solitary European in sight, save themselves, and the narrow lane was filled with an angry threatening crowd, who raised a Babel of indignant cries. The next moment, the boys, now thoroughly frightened, not without cause, cleared a way with their fists, and ran for their lives, pursued by the mob, of whom the foremost was the gigantic ruffian already mentioned.

Not until they had run, shoulder to shoulder, for a quarter of a mile did they realize that they had lost their way in this maze of crowded tortuous streets. Every moment did the awkward fact become more apparent, and every moment did the pursuing mob increase in size and draw nearer to the fugitives. "Come on, old man, round this corner on the left," said John, panting for breath. Turning the corner, the next moment they blundered right into a string of camels which straggled down the street. In spite of themselves, the boys were separated. Ralph, diving between a camel's legs, and thinking he

was followed by John, rushed down a filthy side alley, which appeared tolerably clear of people, while John, stumbling over a dog, fell, crashing his head against the corner of a booth. The next moment his pursuers surrounded him, and he lay insensible in their midst.

It is impossible to say how the episode *might* have ended. Ralph, in his mad flight was wholly unaware that he was not accompanied by John, until he had once more lost his way in the labyrinth of streets. Thanks, however, to a kindly Providence, John was not left to the tender mercies of this excited fanatical mob of outraged religionists, for at the moment when matters seemed at their worst, a slim-looking European, in a clean brown Holland suit, darted from a narrow alley between the bazaars, elbowing his way through the crowd, and driving a couple of brawny fists into the faces of the leading actors in the drama, gained the centre of the howling mob. Before the crowd could realize the new element in the situation, and certainly before half-a-dozen of the lustiest Arabs had recovered from the effects of percussive contact with well-directed British fists, the gentleman in brown Holland had snatched up the insensible boy in his arms, re-charged his way through the astonished mob, and disappeared down a side street.

For a few moments the crowd was too utterly non-plussed to follow, and by the time they had recovered sufficiently to realise the state of affairs, the unknown rescuer had gained a considerable start, which was not decreased, notwithstanding his burden, and, after much dodging and turning succeeded in eluding his pursuers, and a few moments later emerged, hot and exhausted, in one of the safer, wider, and less populous thoroughfares of the European quarter.

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When Jack recovered consciousness, he was in bed, and with a terrible throbbing pain in his head, which was bandaged above the eyebrows. Ralph was by the bedside and Colonel Elliott looking very fierce, sat by the open window reading an *English Times*. When the invalid "came to," Jack's father made gentle enquiries, and then suddenly remembering his former intention, professed to be very angry, and threatened that henceforth the boys should not venture beyond the hotel grounds, without his express permission, and without an approved *guardian* (with emphasis) against

which Jack protested as vigorously as his condition would allow.

Master John was not ungrateful, and naturally enquired concerning the manner of his rescue, and the name of his unknown preserver; but Colonel Elliott could not (or would not) give any satisfactory information upon the point, merely declaring that an English gentleman, resident at one of the other hotels in the city, had carried Jack in his arms to an English doctor's surgery, who had in turn dispatched his patient, after treatment, to the hotel. Nor could Ralph throw any light upon the subject. His own version of the affair was, that after discovering that Jack was not with him, and having again lost his way, he wandered for several hours in the native quarter, before finding his way back to the wider and better known thoroughfares. When, finally, he succeeded in reaching the hotel, Jack had been in bed several hours, and messengers were looking in all parts of the city for the missing Ralph, for whom the worst fears were entertained. As for the big Arab who had headed the pursuit, no one had any information regarding him. But the boys were destined to meet both that personage and also the mysterious stranger in brown Holland before many days had passed over their heads."

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CHAPTER III.

A Narrow Escape.

It was night; a night that must be seen to be described or understood, and once seen never to be forgotten. Slowly the full red moon rose above the horizon, sailed across the heavens, and filled the air with her weird radiance. The great silvery-looking stars gleamed in cold, chaste silence in the bosom of space, and over the endless sea of sand was a silence like the hush of death, save for the untiring whisperings of the hot dusty leaves of the little shubbery—a night when the very air seemed pregnant with mystery and romance.

Presently, from out the blacker darkness of the shadows cast by the stunted laurels, two figures emerged, arm in arm, and engaged in earnest conversation, punctuated now and again, in spite of themselves, with sounds of subdued merriment. They were our scapegraces, John Elliott and Ralph Glendower.

"Well! what are we to do now?" Elliott

was saying after the conclusion of a recital of their most recent escapade. "I shall pine away and die, like the good little boy in the story books, if something don't happen quick," he added with sad disregard for his grammar. "What *can* we do?" replied his chum; "I'm game for anything. This monotony is enough to drive a fellow to drink for a living." There was a pause, during which the pair strolled to the end of the Terrace, from which they saw the moon, with unspeakable witchery, silvering the waters of the mighty rolling Nile.

"I know," said John after a brief space in which they had gazed at the exquisite scene before them. "let's go and explore the great Pyramid." "Don't be an ass! we've been *once* haven't we?" said his companion, adding as an afterthought, "and that confounded old donkey saddle made me ache all over for a week." "Yes, I know," answered John; "but I mean, let's go and *explore*—INSIDE—I mean." Ralph wheeled and stared at the maker of the suggestion, in sheer astonishment, being too much surprised to produce further words.

"Oh! it's quite easy," said that gentleman lightly. "Come on, and I'll tell you all about it. I was in the Reading Room a day or two ago—just after that riot with that old bargee of an Arab—and two swells were talking about the pyramids. For a time they talked an awful lot of rot about 'dead dynasties,' 'constructive principles,' and so on, which I didn't pay any attention to; but after a while one of them began to talk about the secret chamber inside. *Then* I pricked up my ears, you bet. They had forgotten all about me, apparently, and talked quite loudly, so I heard every word distinctly. You go through an awful lot of passages and down stairs, and so on, and then there's a great tomb of Rameses, or some other chap—his name don't matter. One of the swells said it was the 'eighth wonder of the world,' 'sight of a lifetime,' and so on. Then he began to describe the entrance, and pulled out a bit of paper and made a sketch and plan to show the other. When they went out, he left the paper on the table, and I bagged that, you bet. It's all as plain as daylight after you have heard the explanation. What do you say, old man? Are you on?"

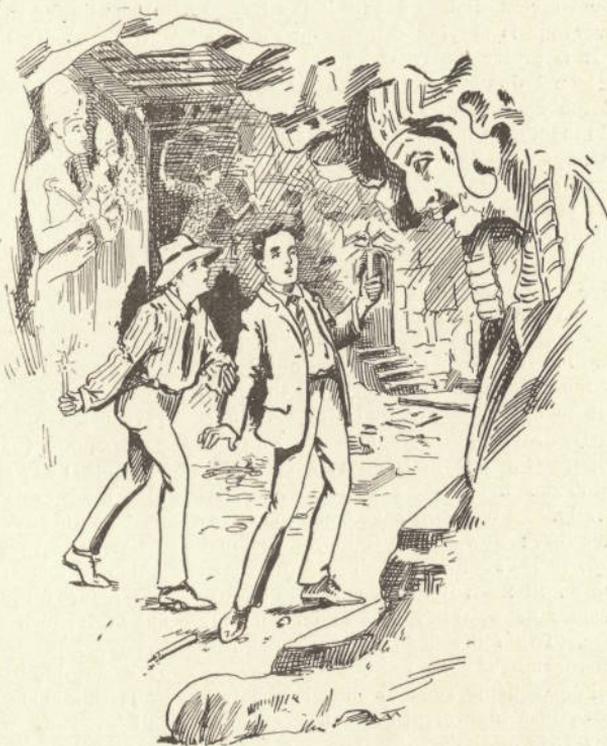
"It sounds all right," said Ralph, more cautious and less headstrong than the

other. "but how can we get away? The Colonel is sure not to let us go." "Oh, we can manage that easily," replied John. "The day after tomorrow will do splendidly. I heard Dad talking about it: some swell party—a German Duke or Prince, or something of the sort—is coming up the Nile on his yacht, and there is to be a big reception and ball in his honour. Dad and mother are going—everybody's going; we can slip away early without being missed." "Right you are, old man," said Ralph; tomorrow we will make arrangements, and turn explorers two days from now."

About two hours after dawn, on the second day after that on which the proposed "exploration" scheme was broached, the two boys might have been seen hurrying eagerly towards the outskirts of the city. "How did you manage it?" questioned Ralph presently. "Oh, dad wasn't up, so I asked Mother if we might go for a short ride. She said we might, if we had a guide, and I said 'yes,' so it's all right. They will have forgotten all about us by lunch, in the hurry of getting ready for the show."

"Have you got everything?" was Ralph's next question. "Of course, fat-head; do you think its likely I should forget? I've got the plan, and matches and candles, the wedges and string, and 'grub'; that's all, isn't it?" Ralph assenting, they continued their journey in silence until the few straggling mud hovels showed that the outskirts of Cairo were reached.

"Here we are," said John presently, as they came into sight of an Arab in charge of three wiry-looking mules; "I told the native servant at the hotel what we wanted, and he said he could secure us a guide. I reckon this must be the one.



A GREAT GHOSTLY SHAPE EMERGED FROM THE GLOOM.

Say! he's a big one, isn't he?" As they spoke they came up to a tall, muscularly built Arab who was waiting in the shade. A few words sufficed to show that he was there by appointment, and was waiting to accompany them to the pyramids. Without wasting any more time, for the Sun was already beginning to make himself felt, John gave the word, the mules were mounted, and the three commenced the journey which they were destined never afterwards to forget.

Quickly the fifteen or so miles were passed which separated Cairo from the mighty tombs. Under ordinary circumstances, the way is exceedingly monotonous and uninteresting, though as a rule, quite busy with parties going to, or returning from similar missions. But to-day the great sandy track across the desert was absolutely devoid of any travellers, save the boys, who never noticed the tediousness of the journey, as they talked eagerly between themselves while the guide rode on in front.

"We have the road pretty much to ourselves to-day," said Ralph, during a lull in

the conversation. "I expect it's because everyone is staying at home for the ball." "It is pretty lonely—I expect that's the reason," John answered. After a pause, Ralph again broke the silence, "Say, John, old man, does it strike you that that Arab is anything like the big fellow in the bazaar the other day?" John turned in his saddle with a start, and his face paled slightly. "That's just what I've been thinking," he said slowly, "but I couldn't make up my mind, and didn't want to scare you unnecessarily. We have scarcely had a good look at him yet, he keeps so far in front." "I hope it's not," said Ralph, "though he is very like the other one in build." "But he is dressed differently," said John, catching at a straw of hope; "the one in the bazaar had a blue patch on his robe; I remember it distinctly." "Well, we have come too far to turn back now," said Ralph, "we must hope it isn't the same, and keep a sharp eye on him. Anyway we are two to one. Besides he wouldn't dare to harm us out here. The folks at home would guess where we have come to."

Endeavouring thus to buoy themselves up against the weight of their suspicions, they rode on after the guide, who seemed determined to keep in front, and at the end of another hour, the pyramids came into sight. Arrived at their destination, they dismounted and gave their mules into charge of the guide—who upon closer inspection seemed more than ever like their previous ill acquaintance—and began to climb the great weather-worn steps which form the faces of the pyramids.

Before commencing the climb, John pulled out a pocket compass, and took their bearings. "This is it," he said after a pause; "the stone which conceals the entrance is the centre of the eighteenth course on the north face." After fifteen minutes of hard climbing, and at a height of about forty feet from the ground, the eighteenth course was reached, and the boys commenced to feel about for the pivoted stone which gave access to, and concealed the entrance to the pyramid. After pushing against several stones with their united strength, the visit seemed likely to end in failure, for every stone seemed to be solid and immovable.

Ralph suggested a way out of the difficulty. "Let's measure it," he said, "perhaps we are not quite in the middle."

Accordingly the string was produced and stretched, after many dangerous slips and narrow escapes—for it was a "breakneck" place—from corner to corner of the obelisk. This accomplished it was only necessary to double the string to find the centre with mathematical accuracy, which being done, the boys found that they had been trying to find an entrance several feet to the right of the proper spot. Once more they applied their joint strength, and pushed at the stone indicated by the measurement. Slowly the great block of stone which conceals the entrance, working on a pivot which has done duty for nearly forty centuries, rolled back and revealed a passage something less than a yard square (but increasing in size as it advanced) and sloping sharply downwards into the bowels of the tomb of Egypt's ancient kings.

Carefully they drove home the wedges, which had been brought for the purpose, and secured the stone, so that it could not of its own accord slip back and make them prisoners. Then they tied the end of something like a mile of string to a projecting stone, intending to unwind the ball as they went, as a sufficient and necessary precaution against any possible chance of losing their way in the passages of the interior. To light their candles was the work of a few moments only, then after a final glance down the rugged walls of rock, at the guide who appeared to be asleep, they commenced their perilous journey to the heart of this cold, silent relic of a long-buried race.

For forty yards the smooth walls of the tunnel sloped downwards at a fearful angle; then the direction changed, and the boys had to climb on hands and knees for a like distance. Next came a most puzzling series of inclined planes, which served the purpose of a spiral staircase, and descended deep into the foundations of the pile. Then one or two branches, several turnings, and the boys found themselves in the lofty black chamber, containing the actual sarcophagus—now broken open—of the royal dead.

Spell-bound with awe, and trembling with excitement, the pair stood silent in the dimly lighted chamber, trying to pierce the awful gloom which seemed to cover and choke them with its weight. Before them, dimly revealed by the light of their candles and looking twice its proper size in the uncertain light, rose the

outlines of the last resting-place. Recovering themselves somewhat, John lighted an extra candle, and the boys stepped forward, only to recoil with an exclamation of unparalleled dismay. A great ghastly shape emerged from the gloom. For several minutes the boys were too paralyzed with fear to think or speak; then after an agony of suspense, Ralph found his voice, but it sounded strangely, unnaturally, dead and heavy in the awful blackness of the vault.

"John, old man, it's only the paintings on the wall." Jack breathed again, and both boys were braver for the relief and reaction of spirits which rushed upon them, but it was impossible for them to escape from the sense and fear, of cold, dead, burial—the unutterable loneliness—that cloaked them like a shroud.

"Let's get out of this awful darkness," said John, "it fairly stifles one——" He would have continued, but the deep reverberations of his own voice silenced him. For answer, Ralph took his arm and they made their way back to the corridor. "Thank God we thought of the string," said Ralph at one of the turnings, "or we should never have found our way back." "And the wedges," answered John, shuddering at the thought; "one of those swells said a Frenchman came early in the century and didn't securely prop the stone. It slipped back—and—and it's immovable from the inside. He was found dead, just inside the entrance of the tunnel, by another traveller, six months after—and it was his own college chum——"

"Don't," said Ralph, "it's too awful." As if to seal an epoch of mutual, unspeakable dread, a dull thud, followed by long booming echoes, rolled down the black tunnel towards them; then all was silent as the grave. The two boys stared at each other wildly, then went madly down the last incline but one—then up, only to stop half way, petrified, for the welcome blue sky—the light of day—was not there—
—THE DOOR WAS SHUT.

Scarce knowing what they did, tearing their clothes and hands in the journey, Hope and Despair struggling for their hearts' mastery, the two chums traversed the last tunnel, and flung themselves with frantic energy against the stone which formed the door. They might as well have tried to tear out the foundations of the earth. In vain they called, pleaded, promised, implored, until the deafening

tumult of the echoes of their own voices forced them into silence—long silent moments, seeming years of agony. And then, as if to mock them, out of the bosom of the blackness a shrill scream rang and palpitated—a dark shape with fierce eyes whirled upon them; something cold and soft and clammy struck the boys in their faces. They fell forward into a merciful oblivion.

* * * * *

Simultaneously the two boys opened their eyes and found themselves supported by strong arms, under the glorious, fresh, free, blue expanse of Heaven. Only those who have experienced such a time of dread can understand or appreciate the thrilling ecstasy of life at such a moment.

After a brief interval, during which they wondered at their white-suited "nurses," the cool water on their faces and so forth, they naturally, boy-like, commenced to ask a multitude of questions. One stranger of herculean build, whose jacket pocket bore the blue shield with the "open shield and lion-rampant" of Balliol, took upon himself to answer Jack's questioning.

"Well, my son, lie quiet till you have pulled yourselves together a bit, and I will tell you all about it. I wished to show a couple of friends of mine the Sarcophagus chamber in the middle of the pyramid here; we knew it would be rather quiet to-day, on account of the Royal Visit to Cairo, so we hired mules and rode out after breakfast. About two miles away, one of our party met a tremendous Arab riding a mule and leading two others, and galloping towards Cairo as hard as he could go. Our friend is a bit odd, at times, you know—gets all sorts of strange ideas in his head. He thought he had seen this Arab before—which we said wasn't unlikely—and said it was very funny that one Arab should have three mules, so he asked the coloured gentleman to stop. The Arab seemed very unwilling, and even used strong language, in Arabic, so our friend just overtook him and knocked him clean off his mule with a blow of his fist, and then gave him the best licking with an ash-plant which he carried that ever any poor hound had since—well, since Egypt was first started, I should think. Then he made 'darkie' accompany us back here and—well, after a while we climbed up, and found some wedges lying about—and that's how we

found YOU. If you take my glasses and look at that ridge yonder, you will see your friend the big Arab shortly."

"But the ghost?" exclaimed John, shuddering involuntarily, as the recollection of the awful nightmare of the tunnel rushed upon him. At this their jovial friend laughed heartily. "Whose Ghost? old Rameses?" he queried. "We found two boys in a dead faint looking rather ghostly, and we revived their spirits with a little *spirit*, but I do not remember seeing any other spirit about," he added; whereupon Jack drew a fearful verbal picture of the visitant of the tunnel, calculated to inspire the stoutest heart with dread. Jack's listener endeavoured to maintain a serious expression. "I don't think the explanation is far to seek," he said, as the recital concluded. "When we opened the door, an enormous bat flew out and knocked off our friend's hat. You probably disturbed it with your lights and shouts."

Both boys had listened to this narrative with astonishment. "And who is your friend, sir?" exclaimed Ralph. "He

must be a plucky one," said John; "we must thank him when he comes." "Oh, no! he is quite an ordinary person," said the young Oxford man, smiling; "indeed, some people—between ourselves you know—think he's a bit of an ass."

The next moment a slim gentleman in a brown Hollanô suit, with a scrupulously shaven chin, strolled into visibility. Both boys started to their feet with an exclamation—"Mr. King!" "Yes, young gentlemen, alias 'Bluebeard,'" said the newcomer, smiling.

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Before five minutes were out Jack Elliott had sincerely apologised and both boys had feebly expressed their thanks. A week later they sailed for England, accompanied by Mr. King, who proved an "excellent sort," and when, later, they met the Doctor, he looked at them from under his eyebrows and—just smiled. The two boys never forgot their holiday adventure. The awful nearness of death had made them inseparable friends—and Jack had learned to curb his tongue.

