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HELD FAST FOR ENGLAND: A TALE OF THE SIEGE OF GIBRALTAR (1779-83)

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Preface.

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The Siege of Gibraltar stands almost alone in the annals of warfare, alike in its duration and in the immense preparations made, by the united powers of France and Spain, for the capture of the fortress. A greater number of guns were employed than in any operation up to that time; although in number, and still more in calibre, the artillery then used have in, modern times, been thrown into the shade by the sieges of Sebastopol and Paris. Gibraltar differs, however, from these sieges, inasmuch as the defence was a successful one and, indeed, at no period of the investment was the fortress in any danger of capture, save by hunger.

At that period England was not, as she afterwards became, invincible by sea; and as we were engaged at the same time in war with France, Spain, Holland, and the United States, it was only occasionally that a fleet could be spared to bring succour and provisions to the beleaguered garrison. Scurvy was the direst enemy of the defenders. The art of preserving meat in tins had not been discovered, and they were forced to subsist almost entirely upon salt meat. During the first year of the siege the supply of fresh vegetables was scanty, in the extreme, and the garrison consequently suffered so severely, from scurvy, that at one time scarcely half of the men of the garrison were strong enough to carry a firelock, and perform their duty. The providential capture of a vessel laden with oranges and lemons checked the ravages of the scourge; and the

successful efforts of the garrison to raise vegetables prevented it from ever, afterwards, getting a firm hold upon them.

In such a siege there was but little scope for deeds of individual gallantry. It was a long monotony of hardship and suffering, nobly endured, and terminating in one of the greatest triumphs ever recorded in the long roll of British victories.

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: "Something Like An Adventure."

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Had Mr. Tulloch, the headmaster and proprietor of a large school at Putney, been asked which was the most troublesome boy in his school, he would probably have replied, without hesitation, "Bob Repton."

But, being a just and fair-minded man, he would have hastened to qualify this remark, by adding:

"Most troublesome, but by no means the worst boy. You must understand that. He is always in scrapes, always in mischief. In all my experience I have never before come across a boy who had such an aptitude for getting into trouble; but I have nothing else to say against him. He is straightforward and manly. I have never known him to tell a lie, to screen himself. He is an example to many others in that way. I like the boy, in spite of the endless trouble he gives, and yet there is scarcely a day passes that I am not obliged to cane him; and even that does him no good, as far as I can see, for he seems to forget it, five minutes after it is over. I wonder, sometimes, if he has really got hardened, and doesn't feel it.

"He is sharp, and does his lessons well. I have no difficulty with him, on that score; but he is a perfect imp of mischief."

With such characteristics, it need hardly be said that Bob Repton was one of the most popular boys at Tulloch's school.

School life was, in those days--for it was in August, 1778, that Bob was at Tulloch's--a very different thing to what it is, at present. Learning was thrashed into boys. It was supposed that it could only be instilled in this manner; and although some masters were, of course, more tyrannical and brutal than others, the cane was everywhere in use, and that frequently. Lads, then, had far less liberty and fewer sports than at present; but as boys' spirits cannot be altogether suppressed, even by the use of the cane, they found vent in other ways, and there was much more mischief, and more breaking out of bounds, than now take place. Boys were less trusted, and more harshly treated; in consequence of which there was a kind of warfare between the masters and the boys, in which the masters, in spite of their canes, did not always get the best of it.

Bob Repton was nearly fifteen. He was short, rather than tall for his age, but squarely built and strong. His hair could never be got to lie down, but bristled aggressively over his head. His nose was inclined to turn up, his gray eyes had a merry, mischievous expression, and his lips were generally parted in a smile. A casual observer would have said that he was a happy-go-lucky, merry, impudent-looking lad; but he was more than this. He was shrewd, intelligent, and exceptionally plucky; always ready to do a good turn to others, and to take more than his fair share of blame, for every scrape he got into. He had fought many battles, and that with boys older than himself, but he had never been beaten. The opinion, generally, among the boys was that he did not feel pain and, being caned so frequently, such punishment as he got in a fight was a mere trifle to him.

He was a thorn in the side of Mr. Purfleet, the usher who was generally in charge of the playground; who had learned by long experience that, whenever Bob Repton was quiet, he was certain to be planning some special piece of mischief. The usher was sitting now on a bench, with a book in his hand; but his attention was, at present, directed to a group of four boys who had drawn together in a corner of the playground.

"There is Repton, again," he said to himself. "I wonder what he is plotting, now. That boy will be the death of me. I am quite sure it was he who put that eel in my bed, last week; though of course, I could not prove it."

Mr. Purfleet prided himself on his nerve. He had been telling the boys some stories he had read of snakes, in India; among them, one of an officer who, when seated at table, had felt a snake winding itself round his leg, and who sat for several minutes without moving, until some friends brought a saucer of milk and placed it near, when the snake uncurled itself and went to drink.

"It must have required a lot of nerve, Mr. Purfleet," Bob Repton had said, "to sit as quiet as that."

"Not at all, not at all," the usher replied, confidently. "It was the natural thing to do. A man should always be calm, in case of sudden danger, Bob. The first thought in his mind should be, 'What is this?' the second, 'What had best be done, under the circumstances?' and, these two things being decided, a man of courage will deal coolly with the danger. I should despise myself, if I were to act otherwise."

It was two nights later that the usher, having walked down between the two rows of beds in the dormitory, and

seeing that all the boys were quiet, and apparently asleep, proceeded to his own bed, which was at the end of the room, and partly screened off from the rest by a curtain. No sooner did he disappear behind this than half a dozen heads were raised. An oil lamp burned at the end of the room, affording light for the usher to undress; and enabling him, as he lay in bed, to command a general, if somewhat faint view of the dormitory. Five minutes after Mr. Purfleet had disappeared behind the curtain, the watching eyes saw the clothes at the end of the bed pulled down, and caught a partial view of Mr. Purfleet as he climbed in. A second later there was a yell of terror, and the usher leapt from the bed. Instantly, the dormitory was in an uproar.

"What is it, Mr. Purfleet--what is the matter, sir?" and several of the boys sprang from their beds, and ran towards him; the only exceptions to the general excitement being the four or five who were in the secret. These lay shaking with suppressed laughter, with the bedclothes or the corner of a pillow thrust into their mouths, to prevent them from breaking out into screams of delight.

"What is it, sir?"

It was some time before the usher could recover himself sufficiently to explain.

"There is a snake in my bed," he said.

"A snake!" the boys repeated, in astonishment, several of the more timid at once making off to their beds.

"Certainly, a snake," Mr. Purfleet panted. "I put my legs down, and they came against something cold, and it began to twist about. In a moment, if I had not leapt out, I should no doubt have received a fatal wound."

"Where did it come from?"

"What is to be done?"

And a variety of other questions burst from the boys.

"I will run down and get three or four hockey sticks, Mr. Purfleet," one of the elder boys said.

"That will be the best plan, Mason. Quick, quick! There, do you see it moving, under the clothes?"

There was certainly something wriggling, so there was a general movement back from the bed.

"We had better hold the clothes down, Mr. Purfleet," Bob Repton said, pushing himself forward. "If it were to crawl out at the top, and get on to the floor, it might bite a dozen of us. I will hold the clothes down tight, on one side, if someone will hold them on the other."

One of the other boys came forward, and the clothes were stretched tightly across the bed, by the pillow. In a minute or two, Mason ran up with four hockey sticks.

"Now, you must be careful," Mr. Purfleet said, "because if it should get out, the consequences might be terrible. Now, then, four of you take the sticks, and all hit together, as hard as you can--now."

The sticks descended together. There was a violent writhing and contortion beneath the clothes, but the blows rained down fast and, in a very short time, all movement ceased.

"It must be dead, now," Bob Repton said. "I think we can look at it now, sir."

"Well, draw the clothes down very gently; boys, and be ready to strike again, if you see the least movement."

The clothes were drawn down, till the creature was visible.

"It must be a cobra," the usher said, looking at it from a distance. "It is thick and short. It must have escaped from somewhere. Be very careful, all of you."

Mason approached cautiously, to get a nearer view; and then exclaimed:

"Why, sir, it is an eel!"

There was a moment's silence, and then a perfect yell of laughter from the boys. For a moment the usher was dumbfounded, then he rallied.

"You will all go to your beds, at once," he said. "I shall report the matter to Mr. Tulloch, in the morning."

The boys retired, laughing, to their beds; but above the din the usher heard the words, in a muffled voice:

"A man should always be calm, in sudden danger."

Another voice, equally disguised, said:

"Yes, he should first ask himself 'What is this?' then 'What had best be done, under the circumstances?'"

A third voice then took it up:

"It follows that a man of courage will deal coolly with the danger."

Then there was a chorus of half a dozen voices:

"I should despise myself, if I were to act otherwise."

"Silence!" the usher shouted, rushing down the line between the beds. "I will thrash the first boy who speaks."

As Mr. Purfleet had one of the hockey sticks in his hand, the threat was sufficient to ensure silence.

To the relief of the two or three boys engaged in the affair, Mr. Purfleet made no report in the morning. Mr.

Tulloch by no means spared the cane, but he always inquired before he flogged and, as the usher felt sure that the snake story would be brought forward, by way of excuse for the trick played upon him, he thought it better to drop it; making a mental note, however, that he would get even with Bob Repton, another time--for he made sure that he was at the bottom of the matter, especially as he had been one of those who had listened to the snake story.

Mr. Purfleet was held in but light respect by the boys. He was a pale young man, and looked as if he had been poorly fed, as a boy. He took the junior classes, and the belief was that he knew nothing of Latin.

Moffat, who took the upper classes, was much more severe, and sent up many more boys to be caned than did the junior usher; but the boys did not dislike him. Caning they considered their natural portion, and felt no ill will on that account; while they knew that Mr. Moffat was a capital scholar and, though strict, was always scrupulously just. Above all, he was not a sneak. If he reported them, he reported them openly, but brought no accusation against them behind their back; while Mr. Purfleet was always carrying tittle tattle to the headmaster. There was, therefore, little gratitude towards him for holding his tongue as to the eel; for the boys guessed the real reason of his silence, and put it down to dread of ridicule, and not to any kindliness of feeling.

"Purfleet would give sixpence to know what we are talking about, Bob," one of the group talking in the corner of the playground said.

"It is worth more than that, Jim; still, we shall have to be extra careful. He suspects it was our lot who played him the trick about the eel, and he will do his best to catch us out, in something.

"Well, as I was saying, Johnny Gibson has got a first-rate dog for rabbits, and he says there are lots of them up on the Common. I told him that I would come, and I expected two or three more; and we would meet him at the top of the hill, at four o'clock tomorrow morning. It will be getting light by that time. Of course, we shall get out in the usual way, and we can be back by half past six, and no one will be any the wiser. Old Thomas never comes down till a quarter to seven. I have heard him a dozen times. He just comes down in time to ring the bell for us to get up."

"Oh, I ain't afraid of Thomas," one of the others said, "but I am afraid of Purfleet."

"There need be no fear about him. He never wakes till the bell rings, and sleeps like a top. Why, he didn't wake, the other morning, when we had a scrimmage and you tumbled out of bed. Besides, we all sleep at the other end of the room and, even if he did wake up in the night, he wouldn't notice that we had gone; especially if we shoved something in the bed, to make a lump.

"My only fear is that we shan't wake. We ought to keep watch till it's time to get up, but I am sure we shouldn't keep awake. We must all make up our minds to wake at three, then one of us will be sure to do it. And mind, if one wakes, he must promise not to go to sleep again before he hears the hall clock strike, and knows what time it is. If it is before

three, he can go off to sleep again. That way, one of us is sure to be awake, when it strikes three."

"I say, shan't we just be licked, if we are found out, Bob?"

"Of course we shall; but as we get licked pretty well every day, that won't make much difference, and we shall have had awful fun. Still, if any of you fellows don't like it, don't you go. I am going, but I don't want to persuade any of you."

"Of course we are going, if you are going, Bob. What are we going to do with the rabbits?"

"Oh, I settled Johnny Gibson should keep them. He is going to bring his dog, you know; besides, what could we do with them? We can't cook them, can we?"

As it was clear to all the party that this could not be managed, no objection was raised to this disposal of their game.

Bob Repton slept but little that night. They went to bed at eight, and he heard every hour strike after nine; dozing off occasionally, and waking up, each time, convinced that the clock would strike three next time. At last he heard the three welcome strokes, and at once got up and went to the beds of the other three boys.

They were all sound asleep, and required some shaking before they could be convinced that it was time to get up. Then each boy put his bolster in his bed, rolled up his night shirt into a ball and laid it on the pillow, and then partly covered it up with the clothes. Then they slipped on their shirts, breeches, and stockings and, taking their jackets and shoes in their hand, stole out of the door at their end of the room, and closed it behind them. They then crept

downstairs to the room where their caps were kept, put on these and their jackets, and each boy got a hockey stick out of the cupboard in the corner in which they were kept. Then they very cautiously unfastened the shutter, raised the window, and slipped out. They pulled the shutter to behind them, closed the window, and then put on their shoes.

"That is managed first rate," Bob said. "There wasn't the least noise. I made sure Wharton would have dropped his shoes."

"Why should I drop them, more than anyone else?" Wharton asked in an aggrieved voice.

"I don't know, Billy. The idea occurred to me. I didn't think anyone else would do it, but I quite made up my mind that you would."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't be so fast about making up your mind, then," Wharton grumbled. "I ain't more clumsy than other people."

"You are all right," Jim Sankey put in. "Bob's only joking."

"Well, he might as well joke with somebody else, Jim. I don't see any joke in it."

"No, that is where the joke is, Billy," Bob said. "If you did see the joke, there wouldn't be any joke in it.

"Well, never mind, here is the walnut tree. Now, who will get over first?"

The walnut tree stood in the playground near the wall, and had often proved useful as a ladder to boys at Tulloch's. One of its branches extended over the wall and, from this, it was easy to drop down beyond it. The return was more difficult, and was only to be accomplished by means of an old ivy, which grew against the wall at some distance off. By

its aid the wall could be scaled without much difficulty, and there was then the choice of dropping twelve feet into the playground, or of walking on the top of the wall until the walnut tree was reached.

Tulloch's stood some little distance along the Lower Richmond Road. There were but one or two houses, standing back from the road between it and the main road up the hill, and there was little fear of anyone being abroad at that time in the morning. There was, as yet, but a faint gleam of daylight in the sky; and it was dark in the road up the hill, as the trees growing in the grounds of the houses, on either side, stretched far over it.

"I say," Jim Sankey said, "won't it be a go, if Johnny Gibson isn't there, after all?"

"He will be up there by four," Bob said, confidently. "He said his father would be going out in his boat to fish, as soon as it began to be daylight--because the tide served at that hour--and that he would start, as soon as his father shoved off the boat.

"My eye, Jim, what is that ahead of us? It looks to me like a coach."

"It is a coach, or a carriage, or something of that sort."

"No, it isn't, it is a light cart. What can it be doing here, at this hour? Let us walk the other side of the road."

They crossed to the left, as they got abreast of the cart. A man, whom they had not noticed before, said sharply:

"You are about early."

"Yes, we are off to work," Bob replied, and they walked steadily on.

"He couldn't see what we were like," Jim Sankey said, when they had got a hundred yards further.

"Not he," Bob said. "I could not make out his figure at all, and it is darker on this side of the road than it is on the other.

"I say, you fellows, I think he is up to no good."

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"Well, what should a cart be standing on the hill for, at this time in the morning? That's Admiral Langton's, I know; the door is just where the cart was stopping."

"Well, what has that got to do with it, Bob? The cart won't do him any harm."

"No, but there may be some fellows with it, who may be breaking into his house."

"Do you think so, Bob?"

"Well, it seems likely to me it may be his house, or one of the others."

"Well, what are we to do, Bob?"

"I vote we see about it, Jim. We have pretty nearly half an hour to spare, now, before Johnny Gibson will come along. We have got our hockey sticks, you know."

"But suppose there shouldn't be any men there, Bob, and we should be caught in the grounds; They would think we were going to steal something."

"That would be a go," Bob said, "but there isn't likely to be anyone about, at half past three; and if there were, I don't suppose he would be able to catch us. But we must risk something, anyhow. It will be a bit of fun, and it will be better than waiting at the top of the hill, with nothing to do till, Johnny Gibson comes."

They were now past the wall in front of Admiral Langton's, and far out of sight of the man in the cart.

"There is some ivy on this wall," Bob said. "We can climb over it, by that. Then we will make our way along, until we can find some place where we can climb over into the admiral's garden."

"Perhaps there are some dogs about," Wharton objected.

"Well, if there are, they are most likely chained up. We must risk something.

"Well, here goes. If you don't like it, Wharton, you can stay behind."

So saying, he put his hockey stick between his teeth, and then proceeded to climb up the wall, by means of the ivy.

The wall was but nine feet high and, as soon as he gained the top, Bob said:

"Come on, you fellows. I am going to drop down."

In two minutes he was joined by the other three.

"There is a path, just beyond," Bob said; "let us go by that. Don't you fellows say a word. As Wharton says, there may be some dogs about."

Quietly they stole along the path, which ran parallel to the road, until it turned off at right angles.

"Now, the first tree that grows against the wall we will get over by," Bob whispered.

After going twenty yards, he stopped.

"This tree will do."

"But what are you going to do, if there should be some men?" Wharton asked, in a tone that showed he objected, altogether, to the proceeding.

"It depends upon how many of them there are," Bob replied. "Of course, the admiral has got some men in the house; and they will wake up, and help us, if we give the alarm. Anyhow, we ought to be able to be a match for two men, with these sticks, especially if we take them by surprise.

"What do you say, Jim?"

"I should think so," Jim replied. "Anyhow, if you are game to go on, I am.

"What do you say, Fullarton?"

"Oh, I am ready," Fullarton, who was a boy of few words, replied.

"Only, if there is anyone, Bob, and we get into a row with them, of course it will all come out about us; and then shan't we get it, just!"

"I suppose we shall," Bob admitted, "but I don't see we can help that.

"Well, we are in for it, now," and he began to climb the tree and, working along a limb which extended over the wall, he dropped down into the garden.

The others soon joined, Wharton being more afraid of staying behind, by himself, than of going with the rest.

"Now, what are we to do next?"

"I should say we ought to find out whether anyone has got into the house. That is the first thing. Then, if they have, we have got to try to wake up the people, and to frighten the men inside.

"Have you got some string in your pockets?"

"I have got some."

They all had string.

"What do you want string for, Bob?"

"String is always useful, Jim. We may want to tie their hands. But what I was thinking was, we might fasten it across the stairs, or some of the passages; and then set up a sudden shout, and they would think the watchmen had come, and would make a bolt; and when they got to the string over they would go, and then we would drop on them with these hockey sticks, before they could get up.

"Well, come on. There mayn't be anyone here, after all. Now we will go up to the house, and creep round."

The house stood thirty or forty yards away and, stepping as noiselessly as they could, the boys crossed the lawn and moved along the front. Suddenly, Tom Fullarton caught hold of Bob's arm.

"Look, Bob, there is a light in that room! Do you see--through the slit in the shutters?"

"So there is. Well, there is no mistake, now. There must be some fellows belonging to that cart inside. That must be the drawing room, or dining room, and they would never have lights there at this time of night.

"Now, let us find out where they got in. This is something like fun. It beats rabbit hunting all to nothing.

"Now mind, you fellows, if we do come upon them, and there is a fight, you remember the best place to hit, to begin with, is the ankle. You have only just got to fancy that it is a bung, and swipe at it with all your might. Anyone you hit there is sure to go down and, if he wants it, you can hit him over the head, afterwards.

"Now, come along. I expect they got in at the back of the house."

They soon came upon a door at the side of the house. It was open.

"That looks as if they had been let in," Bob whispered. "See, there is a light in there, somewhere! Come on.

"Now, let us take our shoes off."

The others were thoroughly excited now, and followed Bob without hesitation.

"Bob, is the key in the door?" Jim whispered.

"Yes, on the inside. They have been let in. I wish I dare lock it, and take the key away. Let me see if it turns easy."

Very gently he turned the key, and found the bolt shot noiselessly. It had doubtless been carefully oiled. He turned it again, shut the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

Then they crept on tiptoe along the passage. At the end were two large chests, strengthened with iron bands. A lighted lantern stood upon them. Bob peered round the corner into the hall. No one was to be seen, but he heard a noise through an open door, from which came a stream of light.

Motioning the others to stand still, he crept forward noiselessly till he could look into the room. A man was occupied in packing some articles of massive plate, clocks, and other valuables into a sack. He was alone.

Bob made his way back to the others.

"There's only one fellow there," he said. "If there are any more, they are upstairs. Let us have this one first--his back is to the door.

"Now, Wharton, you hold our handkerchiefs and the string. If he don't look round, I will jump on his back and

have him down.

"The moment he is down, you two throw yourselves on him, and you shove the handkerchiefs into his mouth, Wharton. In the surprise, he won't know that we are only boys; and we will tie his hands before he has time to resist.

"Now, come on."

They were all plucky boys--for Wharton, although less morally courageous than the others, was no coward, physically. Their stockinged feet made no sound, and the man heard nothing until Bob sprang on to his back, the force sending him down on to his face. Bob's arm was tightly round his throat; and the other two threw themselves upon him, each seizing an arm, while Wharton crammed two handkerchiefs into his mouth. The man's hands were dragged behind his back, as he lay on his face, and his wrists tied firmly together. He was rendered utterly helpless before he had recovered from the first shock of surprise.

"Tie his ankles together with the other two handkerchiefs," Bob said, still lying across him.

"That is right. You are sure they are tight? There, he will do, now. I must lock him in."

This was done.

"Now, then, let's go upstairs.

"Now, fasten this last piece of string across between the banisters, six or eight steps up.

"Make haste," he added, as a faint cry was heard, above.

It did not take a second to fasten the string at each end; and then, grasping their sticks, the boys sprang upstairs. On gaining the landing, they heard voices proceeding from a

room along a corridor and, as they crept up to it, they heard a man's voice say, angrily:

"Now we ain't going to waste any more time. If you don't tell us where your money is, we will knock you and the girl on the head.

"No, you can't talk, but you can point out where it is. We know that you have got it.

"Very well, Bill, hit that young woman over the head with the butt of your pistol. Don't be afraid of hurting her.

"Ah! I thought you would change your mind. So it is under the bed.

"Look under, Dick. What is there?"

"A square box," another voice said.

"Well, haul it out."

"Come on," Bob Repton whispered to the others; "the moment we are in, shout."

He stood for a moment in the doorway. A man was standing, with his back to him, holding a pistol in his hand. Another, similarly armed, stood by the side of a young

woman who, in a loose dressing gown, sat shrinking in an armchair, into which she had evidently been thrust. A third was in the act of crawling under the bed. An elderly man, in his nightshirt, was standing up. A gag had been thrust into his mouth; and he was tightly bound, by a cord round his waist, to one of the bedposts.

Bob sprang forward, whirling his hockey stick round his head, and giving a loud shout of "Down with the villains!" the others joining, at the top of their voices.

Before the man had time to turn round, Bob's stick fell, with all the boy's strength, upon his ankle; and he went down as if he had been shot, his pistol exploding as he fell. Bob raised his stick again and brought it down, with a swinging blow, on the robber's head.

The others had made a rush, together, towards the man standing by the lady. Taken utterly by surprise, he discharged his pistol at random, and then sprang towards the door. Two blows fell on him, and Sankey and Fullarton tried to grapple with him; but he burst through them, and rushed out.

Bob and Wharton sprang on the kneeling man, before he could gain his feet; and rolled him over, throwing themselves upon him. He was struggling furiously, and would soon have shaken them off, when the other boys sprang to their assistance.

"You help them, Jim. I will get this cord off!" Fullarton said and, running to the bed, began to unknot the cord that bound the admiral.

The ruffian on the ground was a very powerful man, and the three boys had the greatest difficulty in holding him

down; till Fullarton slipped a noose round one of his ankles and then, jumping on the bed, hauled upon it with all his strength--the admiral giving his assistance.

"Get off him, he is safe!" he shouted; but the others had the greatest difficulty in shaking themselves free from the man--who had, fortunately, laid his pistol on the bed, before he crawled under it to get at the box.

Jim Sankey was the first to shake himself free from him and, seeing what Fullarton was doing, he jumped on to the bed and gave him his assistance and, in half a minute, the ruffian's leg was lashed to the bedpost, at a height of five feet from the ground.

Just as this was done there was a rush of feet outside; and three men, one holding a cutlass and the other two armed with pokers, ran into the room. It was fortunate they did so, for the man whom Bob had first felled was just rising to his feet; but he was at once struck down again, by a heavy blow over the head with the cutlass. By this time the admiral had torn off the bandage across his mouth.

"Another of them ran downstairs, Jackson. Give chase. We can deal with these fellows."

The three men rushed off.

"Well, I don't know who you are," the admiral went on, turning to the boys, "but you turned up at the nick of time; and I am deeply indebted to you, not only for saving my money--although I should not have liked to lose that--but for having captured these pirates.

"That villain has not hurt you much, I hope?" for both Bob and Jim Sankey were bleeding freely, from the face, from the heavy blows the robber had dealt them.

"No, sir, we are not hurt to speak of," Bob said. "We belong to Tulloch's school."

"To the school!" the admiral exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here, at four o'clock in the morning?

"But never mind that now. What is it, Jackson, has he got away?"

"No, sir; he was lying in a heap, at the bottom of the stairs. There was a lanyard fastened across."

"We tied a string across, sir, as we came up," Bob explained.

"Well done, lads!

"Are there any more of them, Jackson?"

"Don't see any signs of any more, admiral. There are the two plate chests in the passage, as if they had been brought out from the butler's strong room, in readiness to take away."

"Where is the butler? He must have heard the pistol shots!" the admiral exclaimed angrily.

"He is not in his room, admiral. We looked in to bring him with us. The door was open, but he isn't there."

"There is another man in the drawing room, tied." Bob said. "He was putting a lot of things into a sack."

"The scoundrel! Perhaps that is the butler," the admiral said.

"Well, Emma, you had better go back to bed again.

"Jackson, you stand guard over these two villains here, and split their heads open, if they venture to move.

"Now, let us go and see to this other fellow."

The admiral proceeded downstairs, followed by the boys. The other two servants were standing beside the third

robber, who was still insensible.

"You keep watch over him, John," the admiral said.

"William, you come with us. There is another man in the drawing room, but he is tied."

"There is the key, sir," Bob said, producing it. "We thought it safest to lock him up."

"Upon my word, young gentlemen, you seem to have thought of everything. If I were in command of a ship, I should like to have you all as midshipmen."

The door was opened. The man was still lying on the ground, but had rolled some distance from where they had left him. He had succeeded in getting his feet loosened from the handkerchief, but the whipcord round his wrists had resisted all his efforts to break or slacken it. He was panting heavily from the exertions he had made.

"It is Harper," the admiral said, in a tone of indignation and disgust.

"So, you treacherous scoundrel, it was you who let these men in, was it? Well, it is a hanging matter, my lad; and if any fellow deserves the rope, you do.

"You had better go and get some more cord, Williams, and tie all these four fellows up, securely. Let Jackson see to the knots.

"Where did the scoundrels get in?" he asked, turning to the boys.

"At the door at the end of the passage, sir, where the plate chests are standing. We found it open--here is the key of it. We locked it, after we came in, so as to prevent anyone from getting away.

"There is another man, with a cart, in the road."

"We will see to him, directly we have got the others all tied up safely," the admiral said. "That is the first thing to see to."

In five minutes, the four men were laid side by side in the hall, securely bound hand and foot.

"Now, Williams, you keep guard over them.

"Jackson, do you and John sally out. There is a cart standing outside the gate, and a fellow in it. Bring him in, and lay him alongside the others."

The boys followed the two men, to see the capture. The light had broadened out over the sky, and it was almost sunrise as they sallied out. They went quietly along, until they reached the gate--which stood ajar--then they flung it open and rushed out. To their disappointment, the cart was standing about fifty yards lower down the hill. The man was in it, with his whip in one hand and the reins in another, and was looking back; and the moment he saw them, he struck the horse and drove off at the top of his speed. The pace was such that it was hopeless for them to think of following him.

"I expect he heard the pistol shots," Jackson said, "and sheered off a bit, so as to be able to cut and run if he found his consorts were in trouble. Well, we cannot help it; we have taken four prizes out of the five, and I call that pretty fair."

"I think we had better go, now," Bob said. "We have got a friend waiting for us."

"Then he must wait a bit longer," Jackson said. "The admiral will want to ask you some more questions. But if

your friend is anywhere near, one of you might run and tell him to back and fill a bit, till you come to him."

"Tell him to do what?" Jim Sankey asked.

"Tell him to wait a bit, lad."

"I will run up," Wharton said.

"Shall I tell him we shan't want him at all, today, Bob?"

"I think so, Wharton. You see it is four o'clock, now; and we mayn't be able to get away for half an hour, and it will be too late, then. Besides, Jim and I have been knocked about too much to care for rabbit hunting, now. You tell him we will go some other day."

"You needn't tell him that, Wharton," Fullarton put in. "It will be some time before we get a chance, you may be sure."

"All right! Tell him to go home then, Wharton. Tell him I will make it all right with him, for losing his morning's work. Of course, you will come in here, when you come down the hill again."

Wharton nodded, and started at a run up the hill; while his companions accompanied the two men into the house. The admiral was down in the hall again. He had now had time to add to his former, scanty costume.

"Get the shutters of the drawing room open, Jackson," he said, after hearing the report of the man's escape, "and tell the maids--I suppose they are all up--to light a fire and get some coffee ready, at once, and something to eat.

"Now, young gentlemen, sit down and tell me all about this business. Now, which of you will be spokesman?"

Jim nodded to Bob.