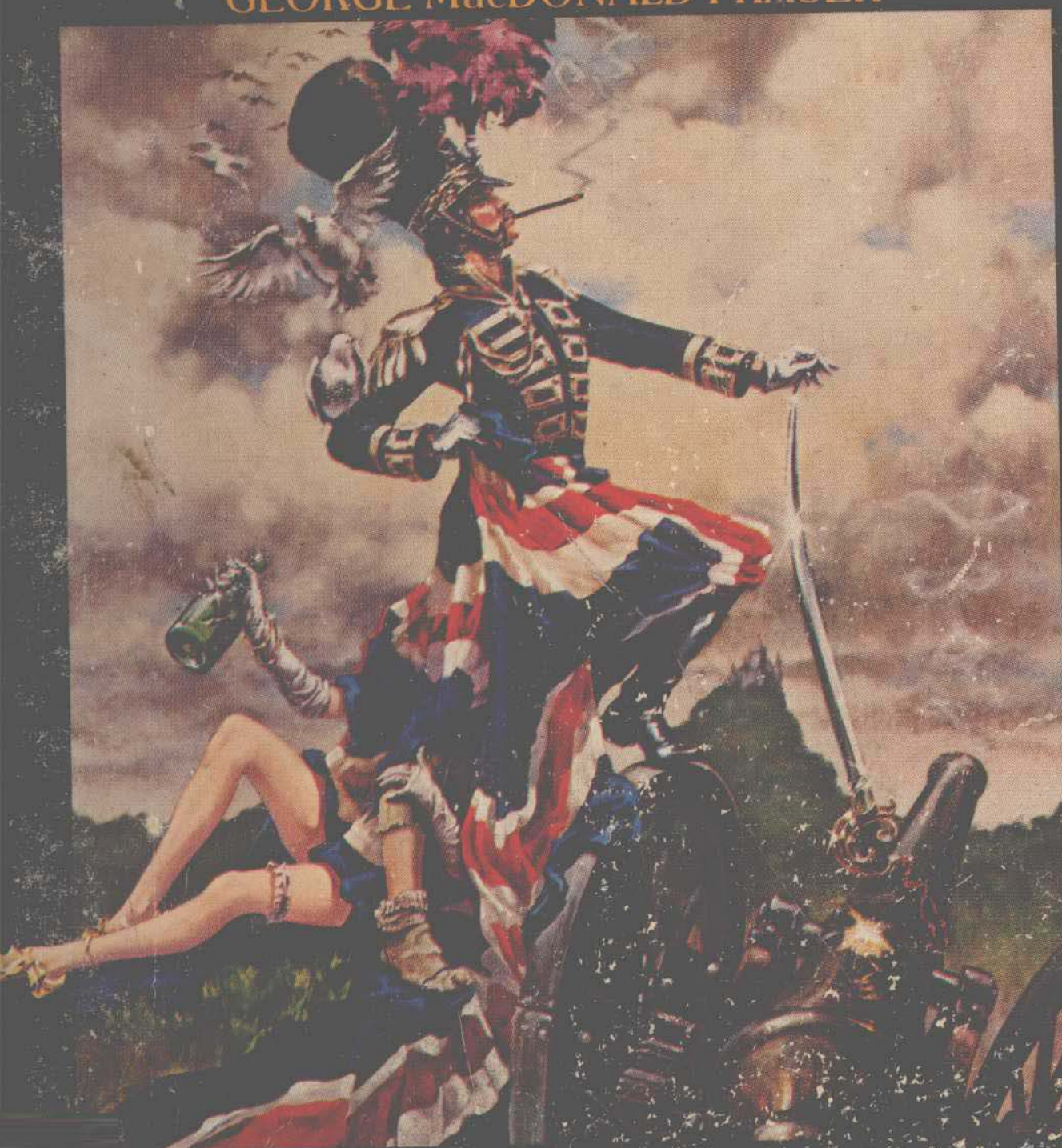


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# ROYAL FLASH

*From the  
Flashman Papers*

1842-3 and 1847-8

Edited and arranged by  
GEORGE MACDONALD FRASER



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For KATH, again,

and for

Ronald Colman,

Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.,

Errol Flynn,

Basil Rathbone,

Louis Hayward,

Tyrone Power,

and all the rest of them.



## Explanatory Note

The second packet of the Flashman Papers—that great collection of manuscript discovered in a saleroom in Leicestershire in 1965—continues the career of the author, Harry Flashman, from the point where the first instalment ended in the autumn of 1842. The first packet described his expulsion from Rugby School in 1839 (as previously referred to in Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*) and followed his subsequent military career in England, India, and Afghanistan; the second packet covers two separate periods of several months in 1842–43 and 1847–48. There is an intriguing four-year gap which the author seems to indicate he has covered elsewhere in his memoirs.

The present instalment is of historical importance insofar as it describes Flashman's encounters with several persons of international celebrity—including one most eminent statesman whose character and actions may now be subjected to some reappraisal by historians. It also establishes a point of some literary interest, for there can be no doubt that a link exists between Flashman's German adventures and one of the best-selling novels in the Victorian period.

As with the first packet (entrusted to me by Mr. Page Morrison, the owner of the Flashman Papers) I have confined myself to correcting the author's occasional lapses in spelling. Where Flashman touches on known history he is remarkably accurate, especially when one considers that he was writing in his eighties; wherever he appears to make a minor slip I have left it uncorrected in the text (as, for example, where he describes the pugilist Nick Ward as "the Champion" in 1842, when in fact Ward had lost his title the previous year), but I have added such notes and comments as seemed appropriate.

Like most memorialists, Flashman is vague about exact dates; where these can be established I have entered them in the notes.

G.M.I



# The Duchy of Strackenz



Strackenz  
City

Jotunberg

Volsungs  
Camp

Jotun-  
schlucht

Farmhouse

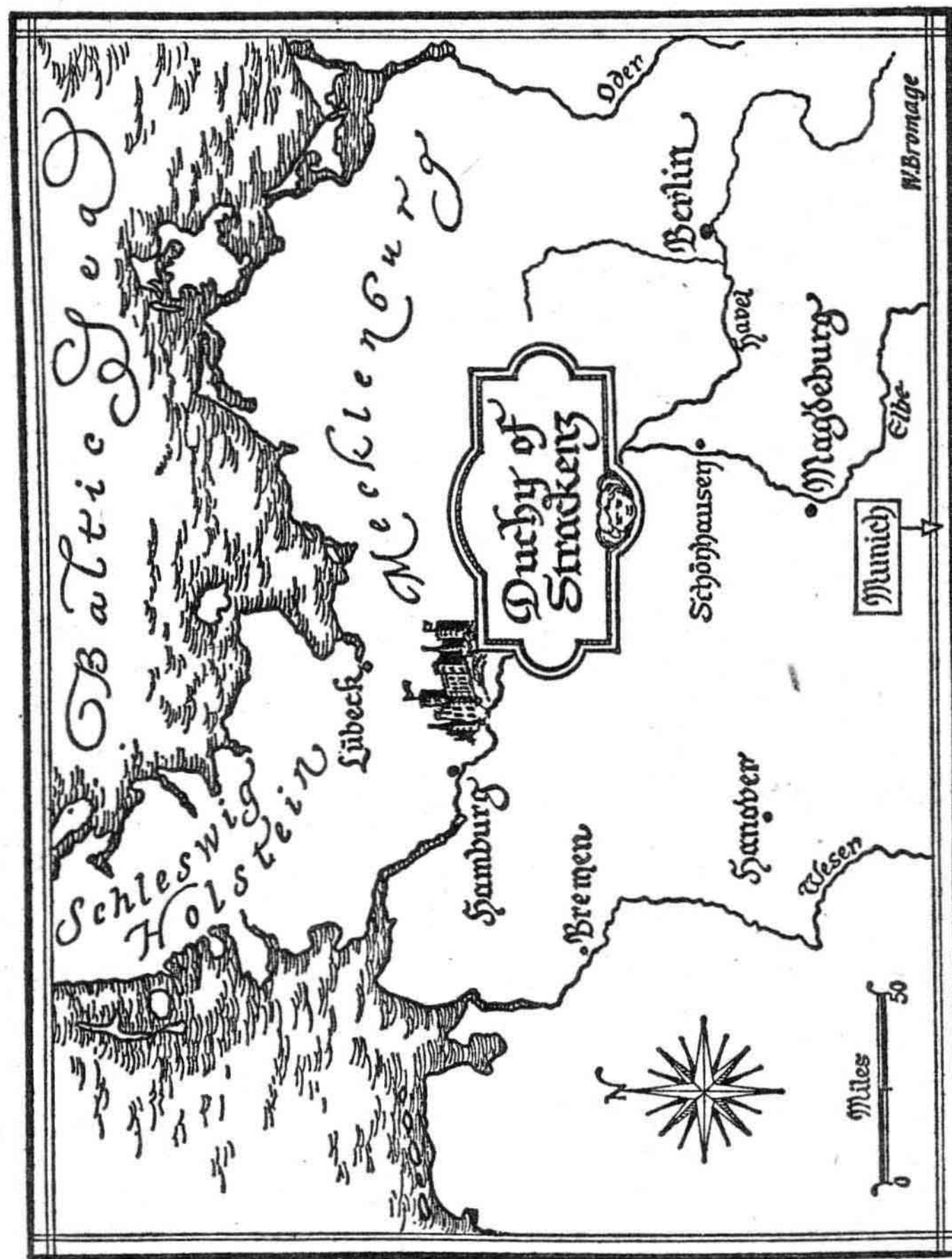
Hunting Lodge

Mecklenburg

Border  
Roads  
Tracks  
Lakes



W.Bromage





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If I had been the hero everyone thought I was, or even a half-decent soldier, Lee would have won the battle of Gettysburg and probably captured Washington. That is another story, which I shall set down in its proper place if brandy and old age don't carry me off first, but I mention the fact here because it shows how great events are decided by trifles.

Scholars, of course, won't have it so. Policies, they say, and the subtly laid schemes of statesmen, are what influence the destinies of nations; the opinions of intellectuals, the writings of philosophers, settle the fate of mankind. Well, they may do their share, but in my experience the course of history is as often settled by someone's having a belly-ache, or not sleeping well, or a sailor getting drunk, or some aristocratic harlot wagging her backside.

So when I say that my being rude to a certain foreigner altered the course of European history, it is a considered judgement. If I had dreamed for a moment how important that man was going to be, I'd have been as civil as the devil to him, yes-me-lording and stroking his back. But in my youth and ignorance I imagined that he was one of those to whom I could be rude with impunity—servants tarts, bagmen, shopkeepers, and foreigners—and so I gave my unpleasant tongue free rein. In the long run it nearly cost me my neck, quite apart from changing the map of the world.

It was in '42, when I was barely out of my 'teens, but already famous. I had taken a distinguished part in the fiasco known as the First Afghan War, emerged with a hero's laurels, been decorated by the Queen, and lionised all over London. The fact that I had gone through the campaign in a state of abject terror—lying, deceiving, bluffing, and running for dear life whenever possible—was known to no one but myself. If one or two suspected, they kept quiet. It wouldn't have been fashionable to throw dirt at the valiant Harry Flashman just then.



(If you have read the first packet of my memoirs, you will know all this. I mention it here in case the packets should get separated, so that you will know at once that this is the true story of a dishonest poltroon who takes a perverse pride in having attained to an honoured and admired old age, in spite of his many vices and entire lack of virtue—or possibly because of them.)

So there I was, in '42, big, bluff, handsome Harry, beloved of London society, admired at the Horse Guards (although I was only a captain), possessed of a beautiful wife, apparently affluent, seen in the best company, gushed at by the mamas, respected by the men as the perfect beau sabreur. The world was my oyster, and if it wasn't my sword that had opened it, no one was any the wiser.

They were golden days, those. The ideal time to be a hero is when the battle is over and the other fellows are dead, God rest 'em, and you take the credit.

Even the fact that Elspeth was cheating me made no real difference. You would never have thought, to see her angelic face, golden hair, and expression of idiotic innocence, that she was the biggest trollop that ever wore out a mattress. But I was certain, before I'd been home a month, that she was having it off with at least two others; at first I was furious and plotting revenge, but she had the money, you see, through that damned old Scotch moneybags of a father of hers, and if I had played the outraged husband I'd have been in Queer Street, without even a roof over my head. So I kept quiet, and paid her out by whoring to my heart's content. It was a strange situation; we both knew what was what (at least, I think she did, but she was such a fool you could never tell), but we pretended to be a happily married couple. We still bounced about in bed together from time to time, and enjoyed it.

But the real life was to be had outside; respectable society apart, I was in with the fast set, idling, gaming, drinking, and raking about the town. It was the end of the great days of the bucks and blades; we had a queen on the throne, and her cold white hand and her poker-backed husband's were already setting their grip on the nation's life, smothering the old wild ways in their come-to-Jesus hypocrisy. We were entering into what is now called the Victorian Age, when respectability was the thing; breeches were out and trousers came in; bosoms were being covered and eyes modestly lowered; politics was becoming

sober, trade and industry were becoming fashionable, the odour of sanctity was replacing the happy reek of brandy, the age of the Corinthian, the plunger, and the dandy was giving way to that of the prig, the preacher, and the bore.

At least I was in at the death of that wicked era, and did my bit to make it die hard. You could still gamble in the hells about Hanover Square, carouse with the toughs in the Cyder Cellars or Leicester Fields, take your pick of the wenches in Piccadilly, set on the police at Whitehall and pinch their belts and hats, break windows and sing bawdy songs all the way home. Fortunes were still lost at cards and hazard, duels were fought (although I stayed well clear of that; my only duel, from which I emerged by fraud with tremendous credit, had taken place some years before, and I had no intention of risking another). Life could still be openly wild, if you cared for it. It has never been the same since; they tell me that young King Edward does what he can nowadays to lower the moral tone of the nation, but I doubt if he has the style for it. The man looks like a butcher.

One night my chum Speedicut, who had been with me at Rugby, and had come sucking round me since my rise to fame (he was well off) suggested we should go to a new haunt in St James—I think it was the Minor Club, in fact.<sup>1</sup> We could try our luck at the tables first, and then at the wenches upstairs, he said, and afterwards go to the Cremorne and watch the fireworks, topping the night off with devilled ham and a bowl of punch, and perhaps some more girls. It sounded all right, so after collecting some cash from Elspeth, who was going to Store Street to listen to one Mr Wilson sing Scottish songs (my God), I set off with Speed for St James.<sup>2</sup>

It was a frost from the start. On the way to the club Speed was taken with the notion of boarding one of the new buses; he wanted to argue with the cad about the fare and provoke him into swearing: the bus cads were quite famous for their filthy language, and Speed reckoned it would be fun to have him get in a bate and horrify the passengers.<sup>3</sup> But the cad was too clever for Speed; he just turned us off without so much as a damn-your-eves and the passengers tittered to see us made asses of, which did nothing for our dignity or good temper.

And the club turned out to be a regular hell—the prices even for arrack and cheroots were ruinous, and the faro table was as crooked as a line of Russian infantry and a damned sight harder to beat. It's always the same; the



more genteel the company, the fouler the play. In my time I've played nap in the Australian diggings with gold-dust stakes, held a blackjack bank on a South Sea trader, and been in a poker game in a Dodge City livery stable with the pistols down on the blanket—and I've met less sharping in all of 'em put together than you'd find in one evening in a London club.

We dropped a few guineas, and then Speed says:

"This ain't much fun. I know a better game."

I believed him, so we picked up two of the Cyprians in the gaming-room and took them upstairs to play loo for each others' clothes. I had my eye on the smaller of the two, a pert little red-haired piece with dimples; thinks I, if I can't get this one stripped for action in a dozen hands then I've lost my talent for palming and dealing from the bottom. But whether I'd taken too much drink—for we had punished a fair amount of arrack, dear as it was—or the tarts were cheating too, the upshot was that I was down to my shirt-tail before my little minx had removed more than her shoes and gloves.

She was trilling with laughter, and I was getting impatient, when a most unholy din broke out on the floor below. There was a pounding of feet, and shouting, whistles blowing and dogs barking, and then a voice yelled:

"Cut and run! It's the traps!"

"Christ!" says Speed, grabbing for his breeches. "It's a raid! Let's get out of this, Flash!"

The whores squeaked with panic, and I swore and struggled into my clothes. It's no joke trying to dress when the peelers are after you, but I had sense enough to know that there wasn't a hope of escaping unless we were fully clad—you can't run through St James on a fine evening with your trousers in your hand.

"Come on!" Speed was shouting. "They'll be on us in a moment!"

"What shall we do?" wails the red-haired slut.

"Do what you dam' well please," says I, slipping on my shoes. "Good-night, ladies." And Speed and I slipped out into the corridor.

The place was in uproar. It sounded like a battle royal down on the gaming-floor, with furniture smashing and the Cyprians screaming, and someone bawling: "In the Queen's name!" On our landing there were frightened whores peeping out of the doorways, and men in every stage of undress hopping about looking for somewhere to

run to. One fat old rascal, stark naked, was beating on a door bawling:

"Hide me, Lucy!"

He beat in vain, and the last I saw of him he was trying to burrow under a sofa.

People nowadays don't realise that in the forties the law was devilish hot on gaming-hells. The police were forever trying to raid them, and the hell-owners used to keep guard-dogs and scouts to watch out for them. Most hell also had special hiding places for all gambling equipment so that cards, dice, and boards could be swept out of sight in a moment, for the police had no right of search, and if they couldn't prove that gaming had been going on they could be sued for wrongful entry and trespass.<sup>4</sup>

Evidently they had caught the Minor St James Club napping with a vengeance, and it would be police court and newspaper scandal for us if we couldn't cut out pretty sharp. A whistle shrilled at the foot of the stairs, the trollops screamed and slammed their doors, and feet came pounding upwards.

"This way," says I to Speed, and we darted up the next flight. It was another empty landing—the top one—and we crouched by the bannisters, waiting to see what happened. They were hammering on the doors below, and presently someone came scampering up. He was a fair chinless youth in a pink coat.

"Oh, my God!" says he, "what will mother say?" He stared wildly around. "Where can I hide?"

"In there," says I, thinking quickly, and pointed at a closed door.

"God bless you," says he. "But what will you do?"

"We'll hold 'em off," says I. "Get out of it, you fool."

He vanished inside, and I winked at Speed, whipped his handkerchief from his breast, and dropped it outside the closed door. Then we tip-toed to a room on the other side of the landing, and took cover behind its door, which was left wide open. From the lack of activity on this floor, and the dust-sheets in the room, it obviously wasn't in use.

Presently the peelers came crashing up, spotted the handkerchief, gave a great view halloo, and dragged out the pink youth. But as I had calculated, they didn't bother with *our* room, seeing the door open; and naturally supposing that no one could be hiding in it. We stood dead still while they tramped about the landing, shouting orders and telling the pink youth to hold his tongue, and presently they all trooped off below, where by the sound of things



they were marshalling their prisoners, and being pretty rough about it. It wasn't often they raided a hell successfully, and had a chance to mistreat their betters.

"By George, Flashy," whispered Speed at last. "You're a foxy one, and no mistake. I thought we were done."

"When you've been chased by bloody Afghans," says I, "you learn all there is to know about lying low." But I was pleased at the way my trick had worked, just the same.

We found a skylight, and as luck had it there was a convenient flat roof close by over what proved to be an empty house. We prised up another skylight, crept down two flights of stairs, and got out of a back window into a lane. So far, excellent, but Speed thought it would be capital to go round the front and watch from a safe distance while the peelers removed their victims. I thought it would be fun, too, so we straightened our clothes and then sauntered round into the end of the street.

Sure enough, there was a crowd outside the Minor Club to see the sport. The bobbies were there in their high hats and belts, clustering round the steps while the prisoners were brought down to the closed carts, the men silent and shame-faced or damning their captors for all they were worth, and the trollops crying for the most part, although some had to be carried out kicking and scratching.

If we had been wise we would have kept well clear, but it was growing dusk, and we thought we'd have a closer look. We strolled up to the fringe of the crowd, and as bad luck had it, who should be brought out last, wailing and white-faced, but the youth in the pink coat. Speed guffawed at the woebegone look of him, and sang out to me:

"I say, Flashy, what will mother say?"

The youth must have heard; he twisted round and saw us, and the spiteful little hound gave a yelp and pointed in our direction.

"They were there, too!" he cries. "Those two, they were hiding as well!"

If we had stood fast we could have brazened it out, I dare say, but my instinct to run is too deep ingrained; I was off like a hare before the bobbies had even started towards us, and seeing us run they gave chase at once. We had a fair start, but not enough to be able to get out of view and duck into a doorway or area; St James is a damned bad district to fly from the police in—streets too broad and no convenient alleyways.

They were perhaps fifty yards behind for the first two