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THE BOYS' FRIEND 1^D

EVERY TUESDAY.

The object of THE BOYS' FRIEND is to Amuse, to Instruct, and to Advise Boys.

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ONE PENNY.

[WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 3, 1910.]

SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.



By STANLEY PORTAL HYATT.

Some Splendid Incidents from Stanley Portal Hyatt's Superb New Adventure Serial. It is Just Starting.



SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

Early Chapters of a
Superb New Serial,
Specially Written for THE
BOYS' FRIEND by that
Well-known Globe-trotter
and Author, STANLEY
PORTAL HYATT.

TO INTRODUCE TO YOU:

DUDLEY AND MARCUS SCARFIELD, two jolly young British boys who are setting out to find Mr. Douglas, a hunter, who is beyond civilisation in the wilds of Matabeleland. And they have strong motives in finding the hunter, for he was the friend of their dead father, and holds the rights of a wonderful new rifle the British War Office are taking up, and which their father invented. If they can find Douglas and prove their claim, they will share in the enormous profits from the rifle.

JOSEPH SCARFIELD is cousin to the two boys. He comes to hear of the plan to trace out Douglas, and resolves to reach the hunter first, and steal the rights. He is well provided with money, whilst his cousins, after paying their passage money, have little but their adjustable bicycles.

Motherless and fatherless, Dudley and Marcus have few friends to leave behind, and they sail cheerfully from Southampton third-class on their perilous quest. Their cousin is a first-class passenger on the same liner.

All goes well for a time, until Madeira is reached, when the two boys, going ashore to stretch their legs, are kidnapped by Portuguese at the instigation of Joseph, and

threatened with slavery

on the cocoa plantations. After miraculous adventures, they escape from their prison, and meet with Captain Batson, master of the tramp steamer Bulgaria, on which vessel they continue their journey to the Cape, their own ship in the meantime having proceeded on her voyage.

By the irony of fate, the liner breaks down, and the Bulgaria takes her in tow, landing Dudley and Marcus at Cape Town at the same time as Joseph Scarfield.

Scarfield takes the lead, and travels up to Vryburg well in advance of the two lads. Finding this out, Marcus and Dudley follow on the journey north under most severe conditions, and there they come in contact with an old Basuto named Amous, who takes a liking to them, and offers to guide them on their perilous journey.

Their cousin Joseph travels in a coach laden with money, and this is waylaid and relieved of its specie by robbers, Joseph and the coachman being securely bound with ropes and left in the

wide stretch of open desert.

Marcus and Dudley come upon them, finding both men in a critical condition. In spite of Scarfield's treachery, the two lads help him, but only to revive him to a fit condition for making a fresh attack. They find that, in spite of his promise to discontinue his spiteful plot, he has played false, and taken the lead again.

The two lads go to the hut where they had slept, and there they find their bicycles lying on the earthen floor with their tyres absolutely cut into ribbons.

(Now read this week's splendid chapters.)

The Work of a Traitor.

THE bicycle tyres had been cut all to pieces, absolutely beyond any hope of repair, slashed across and across with a sharp knife. Neither of the boys had any doubt as to who the culprit must be.

"Joseph has done it," Dudley said. Marcus merely nodded. Already he was thinking, not of what had been done, but of what they were going to do next.

They went back to the main hut, and saw the sergeant, who had just returned from his unsuccessful chase of the highway robbers. When they had finished:

"I've no doubt it was your cousin," he said, "no one else would have done it; but we've no proof, and so we can't stop him and accuse him. It's rough luck on you. I don't quite see how you can get on now, except on foot."

It was Amous who suggested a way out.

"Baas," he said to Dudley, "this coach has got to go on, and the driver is still sick. I will drive it, if the sergeant will agree, and you can travel on it. You have done them good service, and they owe you something for it."

The sergeant scratched his head when the suggestion was made to him. "Yes," he answered slowly, "the coach has got to go on, and Amous is a splendid driver. It's not the regular thing, of course, but still I'll

take the responsibility. Tell Amous he can inspan the mules."

Within half an hour they were off. Their bicycles were stowed on top of the coach, whilst Amous's pony had been left behind in charge of the sergeant. The Basuto himself suggested this arrangement.

"It couldn't keep up with the coach, of course," he said. "We shall change mules six times to-day, you see. Afterwards, when we get to the bad country, it would only have died of horse-sickness, and, anyway, I can travel as quickly on foot as you can on your bicycles. Oh, yes, I can, baas. You will understand what I mean when we come to the bad country."

The Cape-cart in which Joseph was travelling was far lighter than the coach, and had a team of eight mules; moreover, it had got a start of several hours. On the other hand, those eight mules could not be changed at the coach-stables, consequently they had to stop for rest and food, whilst the coach always went on. The result was that, soon after midday, they caught sight of the cart outspanned beside the road, with Joseph and his host, the Deputy-Commissioner, sitting in the shade of it having their lunch. Amous drew his battered old hat well down over his eyes, whilst the boys crouched in the bottom of the coach out of sight. The Deputy-Commissioner hailed Amous.

"Are you going right on to Palapye?" he asked.

The Basuto shook his head. "No, baas. The sergeant told me to go to the next stable only, pick up some passengers, and then turn back. He said you had the mails, and so on."

The Commissioner nodded, and turned to Joseph.

"Then you had better remain with me, Mr. Scarfield. The coach won't help you at all."

The boys crouching on the floor could hear it all, and chuckled with delight. At last they were ahead of Joseph.

Hour after hour Amous drove on, and they knew that each hour their lead was increasing. About four o'clock in the afternoon they stopped to change mules at a stable where there was also a store.

"It's going to be a bad night," the storekeeper remarked, as he watched the new team being inspanned. "It's been raining heavily up in the hills, and you may find the river in flood. Better stay here to-night." He turned to Amous. "You're days overdue already, and it won't make much odds."

But the Basuto shook his head.

"I was told to try and make up the lost time, baas."

The storekeeper went away grumbling:

"You're going to lose coach and mules and everything unless you're careful. That's the worst of trusting things to niggers."

It was dark when Amous drew up on the river-bank, a nasty night, with dense clouds obscuring the moon. He peered anxiously in front of him, then clambered down from his seat.

"The river is coming down in flood," he said to the boys. "There have been great rains somewhere. Still, I think we can get through." And he went down the slope of the drift, followed by Dudley and Marcus.

The Basuto did not trouble about getting wet. He went straight into the river as far as midstream, then he turned back.

"It is all right. We can go ahead. But soon there will be a flood indeed, and we might stay here on this bank for days, for weeks even. I was here once for nearly two months with Baas Cooper's waggons."

He mounted to his seat again, cracked his whip, and the mules started off, picking their way carefully down the drift. Amous

encouraged them with voice and with the sound of his lash, and they had nearly reached the middle of the river when suddenly the coach stopped with a jolt.

"Yeek—yeek!" the driver's shout sounded out, and his whip went like a Mauser pistol. The mules responded loyally, straining fiercely at their traces, but still the coach did not move. Five minutes passed, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour; then Dudley struck a match, and turned to his brother.

"Look, Marcus, the water is rising fast! It's above the floor of the coach already."

At the same moment Amous cried: "Baas, the river is really coming down now, and the coach is stuck! One of the wheels must have got between two rocks. I cannot leave the mules. Will you get out, and try to free it?"

The boys scrambled into the water—it was over waist-deep already—and bending down, tried each wheel in turn.

"It's the off hind-wheel!" Marcus shouted. "There's a big rock in front of it. Come on, Dudley. Now, together—heave!"

They were both very strong for their age, and they knew the peril in which the coach was. The force of the stream was increasing every minute, swelling to a torrent, red with the sand from the long-dry watercourses, bearing down all the debris which had accumulated during the winter months, when, as a rule, there is no rain.

"Heave!" Again and again they tried.

Once the rock moved a little, then it sank back, and all the time the water grew deeper and the current stronger. The terrified mules were beginning to plunge furiously, only the leaders standing really firm.

"Won't it move, baas?" There was something very like fear in Amous's voice now. "In a few minutes the coach, the mules, and all your kit will be swept away!"

"Heave! All your strength this time!" The boys put their last ounce of muscle into the attempt. Possibly the swirling water, eddying round the wheel, had helped to loosen the rock; at any rate, it came this time.

The mules, feeling the coach free, plunged forward, and in a few moments were out of danger. Marcus managed to seize the big leather flap at the back, and was dragged through into safety. It was too dark to see anything, but he presumed his brother had done the same. As the mules breasted the other side of the drift, he called out to Dudley, then put out his hand to feel for him, and after that he gave a cry of dismay. Dudley had disappeared.

The Brothers Divided.

IN answer to Marcus's shouts, Amous pulled up his team as soon as it was on the level road again. He was breathless and exhausted from shouting to the mules, and it was some seconds before he really understood what had happened. Then:

"We can do nothing to-night, baas," he said sadly. "It is far too dark. One cannot see a yard ahead. If the river has washed Baas Dudley down he will doubtless land somewhere."

Marcus gulped at a big lump in his throat. He felt sure that Amous had already given up his brother for lost, and as he glanced back at the stream and heard its rapidly increasing roar, he was only too certain that no one could live many minutes in it once he had been swept off his feet.

"Get inside, baas," Amous spoke again. "We must go on; the rain is just beginning."

"Go on!" Marcus echoed angrily. "We must stay here. How can we go on and leave him?"

"The mule-stable is only half a mile from here, baas," the Basuto answered soothingly. "If we stay where we are Baas Dudley will be no better off, and the lions will fry and kill our mules. It is a bad place for those schelm."

Marcus shivered. He remembered his own experience of the previous night, when there had been a bright moon, and he had had a rifle. Now he thought of Dudley—if Dudley were still alive—soaked and cold and hungry, without a weapon of any kind.

The weary mules toiled up to the stable, and whilst Amous was helping the stable Kaffirs outspan them, Marcus made his way to a little hut in which a light was burning. It was evidently only the dwelling-place of the mule-boys, but now there was

a grey-haired old Britisher sitting on a heap of blankets, smoking a huge Boer-pipe, and staring into the fire which, Kaffir-fashion, was burning in the middle of the earthen floor.

He greeted Marcus with a nod.

"Too bad to go on—eh? What's the use when there's another flooded river a mile ahead? I outspanned my donkeys here. Kerridge, my name is. I'm a prospector, you see," jerking his thumb in the direction of a pile of prospecting kit beside the doorway.

Marcus barely heard the words. He himself was wet through, and his teeth were chattering with the cold, but he was totally unaware of these things. He was thinking only of Dudley, swept away by that savage torrent, without a word of warning, a word of farewell. He stood beside the fire and warmed his hands mechanically, whilst the prospector watched him curiously.

At last:

"Anything gone wrong?" the old man asked kindly.

Marcus started, then told him in a few words. It was good to have one of your own colour to sympathise with you. Kerridge shook his head when the story was finished.

"It's a bad business, of course, but you mustn't assume the worst. He may have got ashore. I know this river well, every inch of it. A mile down from here it becomes a string of big pools, and he could swim ashore. Oh, we shall find him in the morning. I'll go with you. Now, you get into some dry things, and drink up this coffee."

Marcus obeyed without question. He was longing for the dawn, when he would be able to go in search of his brother, but he was too sensible to make himself ill unnecessarily. Kerridge made him turn into his blankets, then, in the hope of distracting his thoughts, began to tell him stories about the neighbourhood. "There's two hippo in those big pools," he said. "I wanted to shoot them once, but the niggers stopped me; said they were sacred. They say that in one of the caves near there are a couple of stone models of hippo, and that every night these turn into real hippo, and go down to the pool to meet the others. It's a silly yarn—most nigger yarns are silly—but they believe them. Yes, I've come across cases—!" He rambled on for a time, then stopped suddenly, for Marcus had gone to sleep.

The old man covered him over gently.

"Poor lad!" he muttered. "Your brother is gone, right enough. Even if he was carried down as far as the pool without being smashed to pieces on the rocks, that old bull hippo would have him most probably."

Marcus awoke at the first streak of dawn, looked round for Dudley, then remembered what had happened the previous night. He threw off his blankets at once, and jumped up, to find that Amous was already busy with the early morning coffee.

"It is no use starting till we can see clearly, baas," the Basuto said. "We must follow the river-bank, and look for spoor everywhere. The ground is soft from the rain, and he must have left footprints."

Old Kerridge, the prospector, joined them a minute later, and as soon as it was sufficiently light, they set off down the river-bank, accompanied by two local natives from the stable.

It was a typical South African river, with a broad sandy bed, broken here and there by great masses of granite rock. Ordinarily, only a small proportion of the bed would be covered, but now the water was bank to bank, and only the tops of the reeds on the little islets were visible. At first it was an easy matter to keep close to the bank, for there was a stretch of open grass between that and the bush. They saw the spoor of many animals, fresh spoor, made since the rain of the previous night. Rietbok, and brindled gnu and water-buck were there in plenty, whilst once they found the great hoofprints of a giraffe, so fresh that the bubbles were still oozing out of the mud; but there was no trace of Dudley's tracks.

Two miles down they came to a small kopje right on the river-bank.

"We must go right over this," old Kerridge said. "There are caves in it where he might have taken shelter and have gone to sleep."

They clambered up the steep slope, but found nothing, except a troop of baboons, who began to run away, barking vigorously at the intruders.

"Ugly brutes," the prospector remarked. "They can be dangerous, too, at times. See that huge chap there, almost as big as a man, and

twice as strong. He's not going to run away from us, not he. No, by Jove, he's coming nearer."

It was quite true; the hideous creature was walking slowly towards them, stopping every few yards to give a bark of defiance. The rest of the troop, seeing their leader was not afraid, had ceased to retreat, and had now faced round, evidently to watch the course of events.

Instinctively, Marcus raised his rifle—it would have been a very easy shot—but Kerridge laid a hand on his arm, whilst the local natives cried out to him in their own language, "Don't fire, chief—don't fire, or they will all attack us. They are evil beasts, indeed."

Marcus lowered his rifle again, and they hurried forward in the hope of leaving the baboons behind; but the big fellow came on, too, followed now at some distance by the rest of the troop. Then suddenly he made a dash, covering the ground at an amazing speed, and heading straight for one of the local natives. Amous fired at him as he ran, and merely grazed his back, but neither Marcus nor Kerridge dare fire, as he was now practically in line with the Kaffir. The latter saw the hopelessness of flight, and faced round, his assegai poised. He struck savagely at the baboon as it came within reach, but the weapon seemed to glance off the tough hide, and almost before the others could see what had happened, the brute had wrenched the assegai out of the man's hand, and was stabbing at him in turn, fortunately with the wrong end, though even then the iron shoe made it a dangerous weapon.

Marcus dashed forward just in time, and firing from a foot away, without even bringing his rifle to his shoulder, shot the baboon clean through the chest. The animal fell, screaming, and his screams were echoed by the others, a dozen of whom now ran forward, smelling blood, and thirsting to avenge their leader.

The prospector shot one, reloaded, got another, then had to club his rifle, as two more made for him. Amous also hit a couple, and then he too, clubbed his rifle. Marcus fired coolly, emptying his magazine, but he had no time to refill it, for more and more were coming on now, shrieking and yelling with fury.

Marcus had a long hunting-knife in his belt, and he whipped that out, dropping his rifle. The first beast to reach him got the blade fairly in the throat, but before it could be withdrawn a second one had its teeth in his left arm, though a moment later a thrust from one of the natives' assegais made him loose his hold. The knife was free again now, and two stabs in rapid succession put two more assailants out of action, but still they were coming on, more and more of them scrambling down the hillside, another troop having come up to join in the attack.

Vaguely, Marcus was aware that Kerridge was fighting now merely with a rifle barrel, his weapon having broken off at the grip, whilst Amous was tearing with his hands at the throat of a big male, which had got his teeth into the Basuto's leg.

Still they were coming, closing in more cautiously now, as though preparing for a great rush altogether. It seemed to be only a matter of a few seconds before the hideous brutes would be actually tearing them limb from limb, as is their way in such cases. They were coming—there must have been hundreds of them by now—and then suddenly they stopped.

There was a scream from one of the young female baboons who were watching from the hill-top, a scream followed by a deep growl, then another scream, and more growls. For a moment the attackers paused, irresolute, then, with one accord, they turned and raced back up the kopje side.

A couple of leopards, the deadliest foes of the baboon, had seized the opportunity to make a raid on the unprotected females and little ones. In face of this new danger, the idea of revenge on the party of men became of no importance.

"They won't come back, baas," Amous panted. "The leopards will make them forget us. Give me your knife, baas. I will finish this one, who has bitten me." He still had hold of his big adversary, who had now been half-stunned by a blow from Kerridge's rifle barrel. In the Basuto's hand, the knife did its work speedily. He cast the body from him, then glanced down at his lacerated leg. "He was a schelm, indeed," he remarked; "but it will soon heal. Has that other one bitten you badly, baas?"

Marcus shook his head. He had

Soldiers of Fortune

(Continued from the previous page.)

wrapped a handkerchief round his wounded arm, and did not intend to lose time in doing anything more to it just then. They had to find Dudley first.

The two local natives had been clawed and scratched, though not seriously, whilst the old prospector had got off unharmed.

"We were lucky, very lucky indeed," Kerridge remarked. "I thought it was all up with us, and so it would have been but for those leopards." He looked ruefully at his rifle. "I guess he's not much more use now, though I've got another at the stable, fortunately. Well, we had better get down to the river and wash these wounds or they may poison. I told you baboons were nasty brutes"—he shook his head solemnly—"very nasty brutes, as ugly as they're nasty. I've heard of them doing this sort of thing before, but it's the first time I've seen it done, and I hope it'll be the last."

When they reached the water one of the local natives went in search of certain leaves, which he chewed up in his mouth, and plastered on the wounds. Kerridge nodded his head approvingly.

"That'll heal them in no time. Wonderful stuff. No"—in answer to a question from Marcus—"I've no idea what the plant is. Niggers always keep those secrets to themselves. Well, shall we get on again in search of your brother?"

They tramped on and on, until the sun was nearly vertical overhead; and with each mile they covered Marcus began to grow more and more despondent. It seemed impossible that Dudley could have been swept down so far alive. There was, of course, the other bank yet to search; but they knew that Dudley, if he had remained conscious, would have made for the bank on which they were then.

At mid-day they halted for some food. It took the old prospector all his time to make the boy eat, and then he only succeeded by pointing out that it was necessary for Marcus to keep up his strength.

"You won't help your brother by getting ill," he added.

Just as they finished their meal a deep sound, half bellow, half roar, came from round a bend in the river. Marcus looked quickly at Kerridge, who nodded wisely.

"That's a hippo—the big bull, by his voice. The pools are just here, and the cave where the stone models of the hippo are supposed to be is up on that kopje"—pointing to a big granite hill about a mile away.

A moment later there was another roar, and yet another.

"A great bull, indeed," Amous remarked.

"The biggest I've ever seen," Kerridge answered. "A savage brute, too. As a rule, they're pretty harmless; but this one will go for you. I wish I could shoot him, but it would mean a scrap with the niggers, who look on him as a kind of god."

Marcus got up quickly. Somehow that horrible roar had made him go very cold. It seemed so full of possibilities of evil.

"Let's get along again," he said.

They went about half a mile down the bank, then, as they rounded the bend, they came in sight of the first pool, a broad expanse of water, with a big reed-bed at the lower end. At the edge of that reed-bed was a granite kopje, which, sloping up easily from the bush, ended in a regular cliff on the riverside, practically overhanging the reeds.

Kerridge paused a moment to look round.

"That's where the hippo spend their time, and—Ah, there he is, the big bull! Do you see the flat part of his head just above the water?"

Marcus followed the direction of the pointing finger, and even as he looked, the bull opened the immense red cavern of his mouth, and gave vent to another roar.

"What a brute!" Marcus began, but a cry from Amous, who had walked on ahead, cut him short.

"Baas, baas! Here is the spoor of your brother." They hurried forward eagerly. Yes, there was no doubt about it. There were the footprints stamped clearly in the damp ground. Amous stooped down and examined them carefully. "It is Baas Dudley certainly. There is the mark of the iron he had on his heel. Now we shall find him quickly. Evidently,

too, he was not hurt, for he is walking well."

Ten minutes later, Amous stopped and frowned.

"He is going straight away from the river," he said. "One would have thought he would have gone up stream, towards the road."

Marcus, whose spirits had gone up wonderfully now that he knew Dudley had not been drowned, shook his head.

"I doubt if he could find his way in the dark. Probably, he was just looking for shelter, hoping to stumble on a big bush or something of that sort. I expect he is pretty well back on the road again by now. We may have passed within a hundred yards of each other."

However, he proved to be wrong, for the spoor led, with a curious directness, to the kopje on which old Kerridge had said the cave of the stone hippo was. The prospector and Amous, knowing the veldt well, exchanged glances of surprise, remembering how dark the night had been.

Right to the foot of the kopje the spoor went, then on up the kopje side.

"There is the cave, or, at least, a cave," Kerridge said suddenly. "But how on earth did he know it was there?"

Marcus hurried forward, scrambling up ahead of the others. The entrance to the cave was quite small, and by contrast with the bright sunlight it seemed very dark inside. Thinking that possibly his brother was still asleep from sheer exhaustion, Marcus called out his name, but there was no answer. A moment later he was joined by Amous, who peered round curiously.

"There was a fire here last night," he said. "I thought it must have been so, and the baas could not have lighted it because his matches must have been wet. Moreover, only a light could have led him here."

He went out again, quickly fashioned a torch out of some dry grass, and then they explored the cave.

"They have not gone long. That fire was raked out but an hour ago," Amous said, and Kerridge nodded in confirmation.

The cave was long and very narrow, the floor sloping up slightly.

"It has been partly made by men. See how smooth the walls are," Marcus exclaimed, and once more the prospector nodded. He had an idea what they were going to find.

A few seconds later he knew he had been right. The torch was nearly out, but Amous waved it a couple of times, and it flared up, showing them two very crude representations of hippo chipped out on the face of the rock. Amous snorted.

"Bah! How foolish the people of this part are to worship such things!" But, none the less, there was an uneasy note in his voice. Somehow, a chill seemed to have fallen on the whole party.

As they came out into the open: "It's no use waiting about here," Kerridge said. "Your brother has gone again, and we must try and pick up his spoor. The easiest way really will be to look at the foot of the kopje, as he may have clambered down over the rocks."

They searched the ground on the up-river side first, but found no trace of human spoor; then they worked round carefully, until they came to the point opposite the kopje which overhung the hippo pool, and there Kerridge stopped abruptly. "Niggers' spoor," he said. "A dozen or so, but not a trace of a white man's boots."

Vaguely alarmed, they completed the circuit to the point where they had started the search, but they found no other spoor, save, of course, Dudley's, of the night before.

"Where is he? Where can he have got to?" Marcus asked breathlessly.

Old Kerridge shook his head. "We had better follow those niggers," he said quietly. "They know where he is."

In the Hippo's Lair.

IT was the sudden jerk forward of the coach which caused Dudley to lose his footing, and before he could regain it the current had swept him to a point where the river suddenly narrowed down and the water became much deeper. Even then, however, he was not literally out of his depth, though the stream was so strong that he had no control over his own movements, at least for the greater part of the time. He was buffeted about severely, and once,

when he had gone nearly half a mile, he received an ugly graze on his shoulder by being thrown against a huge rock.

It was too dark to see much, though he knew that once he was within a few feet of the north bank, almost in safety, then the current caught him again and swung him into mid-stream, more exhausted than ever. Still, he had not lost heart. Every now and then he could actually touch the bottom, even though he could not keep his feet there, and gradually, though slowly, he managed to work towards the bank again.

An overhanging bough touched him on the head. With a fierce effort, he thrust up his hand and caught it. For the moment it seemed as though he were saved; then, even whilst he was gathering strength to pull himself along it, there was a cracking of dead wood, and the whole branch came down with a heavy splash.

Still, he was far better off than before. The solid part of the wood served to support him in the water, whilst the lighter branches really acted as a cushion to save him from being dashed against the rocks, which now became more and more numerous.

the bough and try to propel that and himself with his feet only?

Wisely, he chose the latter alternative. It was slow work; but, still, the bank was soon a definite thing—no longer a mere shadowy line. A few minutes' more effort and he would be there, safe at last from death in that horrible torrent.

A few minutes more and the sound of heavy breathing—of something heavy moving through the water, moving towards him—seemed to bring his heart into his mouth. A crocodile? He had heard many tales of them—of how they would bite a swimmer's leg off at the thigh—and already he could almost feel those ghastly jaws closing on him.

It was coming very close—coming very swiftly. Could it be a crocodile making so much noise? Then it opened its mouth and bellowed. He guessed at once what it must be—a hippo! Once more the moonlight shone out, and he saw that he was right. The great mouth opened, showing a vast red cavern and the gleaming ivory tusks—a mouth which could cut a man clean in half at one bite—and then again the roar went booming across the water.

You think very quickly, and some-

Dudley. He was out of the water and scrambling up the bank before the animal himself grounded. He had never heard of a hippo attacking a man on land, and so he was not surprised when the animal turned back, with a bellow of wrath, and swam slowly down the pool towards his own reed-bed.

For some time Dudley lay on the bank utterly exhausted—too exhausted even to think what he was going to do next. It was a hyena, howling mournfully on the opposite bank of the river, who brought him back to full consciousness. He remembered Marcus's experience with the lion, and he realised the absolute necessity of finding shelter. He stood up stiffly, and glanced round, looking for a tree in which he could perch, and it was then he caught sight of a light up on the hillside.

The boy heaved a great sigh of relief. Where there was a fire there would be men and warmth, for on a night like that no bush fires would be burning. The stiffness seemed to leave him suddenly, and his teeth stopped chattering. The rain had now ceased, and the clouds were breaking fast—consequently there was sufficient moonlight for his purpose. It did not take him long to reach the foot of the kopje, and as he climbed up the steep slope he was sure he could hear voices. At the mouth of the cave, however, he paused, for, squatting round the fire, were a dozen natives—eleven of them ordinary raw savages, huddled up in old rags of blankets, whilst the twelfth was in European costume.

It was this man who caught sight of Dudley standing irresolute in the entrance of the cave. He gave a little cry of surprise, then an evil grin spread over his face.

"Come in, sir!" he said, in excellent English. "We are very glad to see you!" And after that he turned to his companions, and exclaimed in the native language: "See, my brothers, the bones did not lie, after all. They said someone would be sent to us. Lo! he has come—the best one possible; a white man!"

Dudley did not like the look of affairs at all, but he could not draw back. For one thing, he was a white man, and must not show fear; and for another thing, he realised that flight would be useless. So he entered the cave, and, at the invitation of the English-speaking native, took a seat by the fire.

The circle of natives gazed at him with a kind of gloomy satisfaction, whilst their leader began to question him, translating both questions and answers to the others.

"He comes from the water—indeed a good omen—and the Great Bull already tried to kill him—another good omen!" one of the men muttered. And the rest wagged their heads in assent.

There was some biltong—dried meat—and a bowl of mealie—porridge—at the back of the cave, and at a word from the leader one of the younger men fetched this, and thrust it, none too politely, into Dudley's hands. The boy ate a little, then put it down. He was too exhausted to feel hungry.

The English-speaking native watched him with a grim smile, then:

"I should eat if I were you, sir, whilst you can. I should have introduced myself. I am the Reverend Jonkis M'Zimba, late of a mission station in Cape Colony. I regret to say we did not agree too well, and so I came back to my own people—perhaps a little hurriedly. Now I have rejoined our local sect. It is a very small one, and we—or, at least, the others—worship your friend the big bull hippo."

"Every now and then they like to make a sacrifice to the bull—a human sacrifice—you understand?"

He gave an evil grin.

"You, sir, have arrived just in the nick of time. We had met here, in the cave of the stone hippo, to discuss whom we could get for the purpose. You have saved us trouble, and we thank you. To-morrow we shall throw you from a kopje into the reed-bed, when the bull will kill you, and the crocodiles will then eat your body."

Suddenly the expression of his face changed, and his eyes blazed with savage fury.

"Don't think I am joking! The police in Mafeking flogged me, and I hate you white men! Hate you—hate you—hate you!"

He made a sign to the others, and a couple of minutes later Dudley, bound hand and foot, was lying at the back of the cave, just below the grotesque stone hippos.

(Another grand instalment of this powerful adventure serial next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)

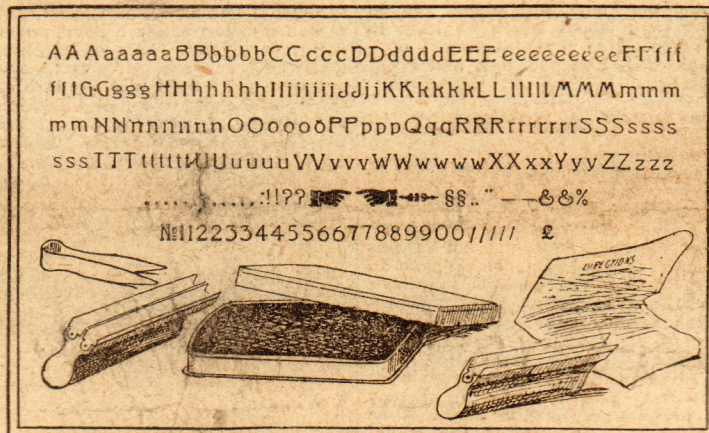
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REMEMBER: 9d. and Six Coupons for This Unique Outfit. The Coupon Appears on Our Front Page.

But for that bough, he could never have survived the passage down to the Hippo Pool.

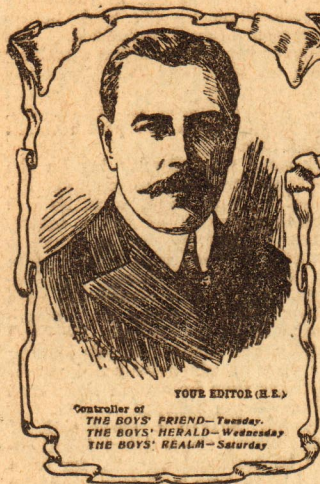
Swifter and swifter the stream grew during the last two miles. Not only was the river narrower, but the flood was increasing all the time—every donga or sluit pouring in its contribution. Gradually the cushion of small branches and twigs became less and less, smashed off against the rocks. Dudley's trousers were now in ribbons, half his shirt was gone, and he felt as though before long he would lose consciousness. It was no use trying to make for the bank—he dare not leave go of his bough—all he could do was to go on and on, and trust to luck.

He never knew how long he had been in the water when there was a sudden change. The stream was no longer rapid, its surface was no longer broken with little waves. Vaguely he was aware that he must have been swept into a large pool. Then the moon suddenly showed through a rift in the clouds, lighting up the scene for a few seconds, and he saw that his idea was correct. Now, however, he was a full fifty yards from the shore, and he was utterly exhausted. Could he swim it by himself—he could no longer touch the bottom—or should he retain hold of

times very clearly, when you are in great danger. Dudley knew that a hippo only eats green food, and that most of the species are harmless—timid, even—but he knew, too, that an old bull resents man's presence in his pool, and that many men have been killed by these vast, ungainly brutes.

He did the best thing possible in the circumstances—struck out wildly with his feet, splashing the water as much as possible, and drawing a little closer to the shore with every stroke. The hippo swam round slowly, puzzled. He had seen, and killed, men in the water before—many of them, as it afterwards appeared—but the combination of the man and the slowly-moving bough was strange to him.

He roared uneasily again and again, but he came no nearer. Then, to his unspeakable relief, Dudley felt his own feet touch the ground. A few seconds later he was clear of the bough which had done him such good service. At the same moment the hippo seemed to realise that it was only a man, after all, and made a dash forward. But the bough was in his way. He blundered against it, and drew back, finding he had to swim round it. The delay was only one of seconds, but it sufficed to save



YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

I want all my boys to look upon me as their firm friend and adviser. There are few men who know boys as well as I do, and there are no little trials and troubles, perplexities and anxieties, in which I cannot help and assist my readers.

Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. Tell me about yourself; let me know what you think of THE BOYS' FRIEND. All boys who write to me, and who enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply.

All Letters should be addressed: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.

* * * The contents of this number copyrighted in the United States of America.

A DOWN-HEARTED CHUM.

ONE of my friends writes to me on a very difficult topic. He says that his father and mother have unfortunately had a serious disagreement, with the result that they have separated, and now he does not know with which parent to live because he likes both his father and mother. The result is that he is utterly downhearted.

It is a very sad case, and I think I would advise this lad to live with the parent who most needs his help. Possibly this will be his mother, and, on second thoughts, I should be inclined to suggest that he should live with her. After all, I think that a mother's love for her children is greater than that of the male parent, and certain it is that in this case the mother is more likely to need the help and financial support which my reader may be able to give her.

But there is no reason why he should not keep on very good terms with them both, and endeavour to bring about a reconciliation, and I think that by living with his mother he is more likely to succeed in this design; certainly by so doing he is better able to protect her from any scandal that might arise. Moreover, I do not doubt in my own mind that she would be glad, very glad indeed, if he went to live with her.

A FACT ABOUT RAILWAYS.

A keen reader of mine, who lives in Tiverton, wants me to tell him when railway locomotives first picked up water as they ran along.

I believe that the trough device, by means of which express engines pick up water whilst travelling, was first adopted by the London and North-Western Railway some years ago, although the plan is now in general use, excepting on railway lines running only very short distances.

OFF TO AFRICA.

An Irish friend of mine, whose initials are F. J., and who lives in Belfast, tells me he is 15, and working in a small office in that great Irish city, and he is just sending me a little farewell note before he leaves for South Africa, where, I am glad to say, he expresses the hope that he will be able to get THE BOYS' FRIEND.

He tells me he hates the thought of leaving his Motherland, but it is for the best, he thinks, for he has no father or mother, and a friend is sending him to South Africa to get a start in business there.

F. J. sends me very kindly wishes for the paper which I have had the pleasure of editing for so many years.

It is quite evident from my chum's letter that he is feeling a little downhearted and lonely about this departure for a new country, so I am glad that he has written to me, because it gives me a chance of cheering him up.

First of all, I may tell him he will be able to get THE BOYS' FRIEND quite easily in South Africa. It is on sale at all the principal towns there, and can be obtained from any news vendor by ordering it.

I think that my friend F. J. is very wise in taking this chance of gaining fortune in a new country. It is almost needless for me to say that I appreciate very highly the kind wishes which he sends to me, and I send him in return the very best and most sincere hopes for his welfare and prosperity in the new land to which he is going. I trust that he will make many friends

there, and I hope that he will gain a very great success.

I would like to give him one or two tips about his life in South Africa. Let him remember one thing, and that is that new countries have new—or I won't say exactly new, but different—methods of doing things. When he is set a task let him do it unquestioningly, let him put his whole heart and soul into the job and show that he means to make good; let him use his head in everything he undertakes, and let him make himself as useful as he possibly can to his employers, and he will speedily find that the result will be that he makes a lot of new friends, of which the best will be the man employing him.

In this way opportunities will come to him, and he will get those chances which, properly availed of, will lead him to the success I am sure his efforts will deserve.

I shall be glad at all times to hear from my chum and advise him on any topic about which he likes to write, and in the meantime I once more wish him godspeed and every success.

OBTAINING A COMMISSION IN THE NAVY.

One of my friends writes to me to know whether he can purchase a commission in the Navy.

I thought I had quite destroyed this idea in the boy mind of this country. Would-be officers have to pass very severe examinations both in the Navy and Army. These examinations are held under the control of the Admiralty and the War Office.

Before securing a commission in the Navy a lad must first of all pass a preliminary examination and be accepted as a cadet at the Naval College. On passing certain examinations from time to time, he receives an appointment as a midshipman, and his future steps up the ladder of officers' rank then depend to some extent upon the number of years he has served.

The training of a lad who wishes to become an officer in the Navy is a somewhat expensive procedure, and rather out of the question for the sons of people of ordinary position.

On very special occasions, and in cases of great merit, petty officers, who have risen from the ranks in the Navy, are given commissions, but the number of commissions granted to petty officers is not very large.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

My friends are no doubt getting curious about our Sixteenth Christmas Double Number. I have already told them something about it, and now I am able to give them a complete list, although I do not want to disclose the whole of the many secrets which this number will reveal.

Two new serial stories will start in the Christmas Double Number, and there will be ordinary instalments of "Soldiers of Fortune" and "Yorkshire Grit." There will possibly be four long, complete stories. Other features will be a page of editorial chat by myself, with an extra large portrait of Your Editor. There will be a page of music and words of a very popular song, which many of my friends may like to learn. Puzzle pictures and riddles will also take a prominent place in the Christmas Number.

Among the articles will be found some dealing with Boy Scouts' work in the winter-time, a Sandow article, Christmas-party fun, How to Make a Panorama, How to Make Christ-

mas Cards, a long, complete recitation by a famous man, a short play for three boys, articles on how private detectives work, Secrets of the Secret Service, and How to Run a Nigger Minstrel Troupe.

But these do not exhaust the list. I have heaps more to go in the Christmas Number, and I am sure my friends will find it the most popular one we have ever published.

WHAT DOES A BOY WANT?

One of my friends who lives at 14, Valetta Street, E.C., and who does not sign his name, says he writes to complain, not about the paper, but about me.

This young gentleman says: "I wonder if you have ever been a boy yourself? If so—as I suppose you must have been—you must have had queer ideas, because you do not seem to understand what a boy is."

I suppose my young friend is entitled to his opinion, but I think that a man who has edited a boys' paper for some sixteen years of his life, and who even at the present time is not very much on the shady side of thirty, can claim to know something about boys. I, who have spent my life from boyhood upwards amongst boys, and spent that life, too, in catering for their needs, and listening to their wants; I, who have had more letters from boys than any other man in the world—and this is an enormous claim to make, but a claim which I can substantiate beyond all question—surely I ought to be credited with a certain experience, with a certain knowledge of boy life.

I do not know that I had any particularly queer ideas when I was a youngster. I certainly made up my mind to keep my body clean and my mind healthy; but these are not queer notions. If I may be pardoned for speaking about myself to this young gentleman who seems so anxious to condemn me, I would say that I was a pretty popular boy amongst the lads I knew—popular for the reason that I was always willing to take my share in any boyish prank that was going; and

what is more, popular also because I could always take my own part.

There is not a lad's sport that I have not gone in for, and I certainly think that when it comes to knowing boys, I have had the pleasure of seeing into the lives of many more lads than has my young friend.

His letter strikes me as being a foolish one, a letter which could only have been written by a young gentleman of somewhat superior notions of boys and boy life. He evidently knows precious little of the world as it really is. I doubt whether he has ever, in the period of his existence, gone short of a meal for a day; he has not known little lads as I have known them, whose daily food for weeks and weeks has been a bowl of soup and bread, which has had to last them the whole day through.

He has not known poor little lads who have had to work from six in the morning to eight or nine at night for ninepence or a shilling, and a few damaged vegetables thrown in as a sort of makeweight, which provided his mother, brothers, and sisters with a Sunday meal. I could go on repeating many instances of little lads like this, who play the parts of heroes in daily life.

So that when this young man presumes to tell me that I do not know and do not understand boys, he is talking in an extremely supercilious and unjustifiable way. But there! I suppose I have been severe enough upon this lad.

I would, however, give him one little warning; it is dangerous to speak without knowledge, and much more dangerous to criticise without experience, and I hope that in future, when he writes a letter of complaint or criticism, he will first of all make sure in his own mind whether his remarks are justified before putting them on paper.

FREE COUPONS FOR PICTURE THEATRES.

It is with very great pleasure that I am able to tell my friends that I have made arrangements with a large number of the leading cinematograph theatres for the issue of half-price admission coupons in the pages of THE BOYS' FRIEND. You can understand that this has represented a very great deal of hard work and patient thought, but as it is a plan through which my boys will largely benefit, I do not grudge the time or trouble.

Starting next week, a coupon will appear in THE BOYS' FRIEND. This coupon will take you into certain picture theatres at exactly half the usual price of admission to all parts of the house. A list of the theatres where the coupon will be available will be printed, and the first list will comprise something like fifty theatres with which I have been able to come to the arrangement.

If you are fond of cinematograph entertainments—and who is not, nowadays?—be sure and order your copy of next week's THE BOYS' FRIEND to be saved for you. It will contain the first free coupon for the picture theatres.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

HOW BOYS CAN MAKE MONEY.

IN my article last week I told you that I was going to write a series of hints on the subject of spare-time employment for boys. Almost every boy has certain leisure hours beyond those he devotes to play, and he is naturally on the look-out for something that he can turn into an additional source of pocket-money.

My subject last week was rabbits. This week I am going to talk about something quite different—about cycle repairing, in fact. This is a side line that can be easily mastered by the practical, energetic lad who is an experienced cyclist, and who knows the needs of those who ride.

Punctures will, of course, prove to be the mainstay of this class of spare-time employment, and the boy who gets plenty of practice will soon become so proficient that the work will give him but little trouble or occupy much time. He must be prepared to encounter tyres with beaded edges, tyres that are wired on, and

the single tube racing-tyre, and it would undoubtedly pay a boy who is going to set up as a cycle-repairer to put in a little time at a cycle-maker's shop.

The material for repairing punctures, for which the amateur pays sixpence in a neat tin box, may, of course, be bought far more cheaply. The rubber solution, for instance, should be purchased in tins, french-chalk by the pound, and valve-rubber in lengths. As for the rubber for repairs, this may be obtained from discarded inner tubes.

Do your work promptly and well, and you will speedily get a name as an expert puncture repairer, with the result that your connection will quickly grow.

Then, again, you must be able to take bearings apart, clean, and oil them. You must have spare links and screw-nuts for mending chains. You should understand the repairing of lamps and bells, and saddles should not come amiss. As for enamelling, this should not prove a difficult matter if you can first experiment on an old machine.

I have known many boys who have added quite considerably to their resources by setting up as cycle-cleaners and repairers, and it is a line any bright boy with an engineering turn of mind could safely adopt.

THE END.

BOXING NOTES.

By J. G. B. Lynch.

Owen Moran.

BIRMINGHAM has at one time or another turned out some first-class boxing men, but of these Owen Moran is certainly one of the best.

You would hardly think he was a boxer if you met Moran casually in the street. You would only see a small, sturdily-built man, very well-dressed, and with a quiet, gentlemanly manner. It was at an hotel in London that I first met him to speak to. I ran into him in the hall one day as I was hurrying out, and stopped to apologise. The next moment I recognised him, and said so, and we began to talk of the boxing prospects of the year. I was at once struck by his determined manner. Moran does not boast of what he can do and will do, but just gives you the feeling that he is bound to be successful.

Of principal contests there have been fifty-three. Of these he has won no fewer than thirty-six, and lost only six. Three have been drawn, while in eight no decision has been given, as decisions are not allowed in some of the American States where he has done a great deal of boxing.

It is chiefly by skill

—he is a supremely scientific boxer— that he has won his battles, for only six of them have been won by knock-out blows.

Amongst other well-known men Moran has beaten are: Digger Stanley, Jim Kenrick, Johnny Hughes, Andrew Tokell, Ted Moore, George Dixon, Al Delmont, Chris. Clarke, Frankie Neil, Matty Baldwin, and Tim McCarthy—the last three of America.

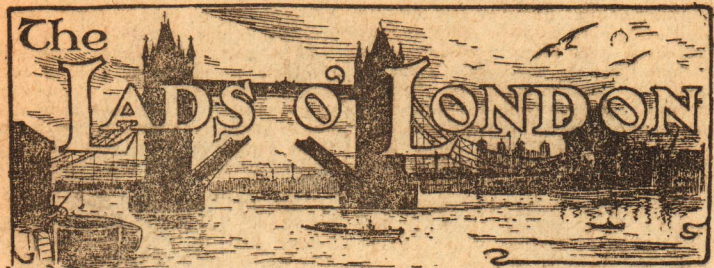
It is hard to believe that such a splendid mass of muscle and strength can be packed up into so small a parcel, for Owen Moran weighs only nine stone—that is to say, he is a featherweight, and stands only five feet three inches. He is just over twenty-six years of age.

THE END.



A reduced facsimile of our front page for next Tuesday's Number. Please tell all your chums about "Soldiers of Fortune."

"THE FIGHT FOR THE WORLD'S CHAMPIONSHIP," A Splendid Long, Complete Tale by Arthur S. Hardy, in "THE MARVEL," Out To-morrow!



No. 5 of Our New Series: PIRATE'S GOLD.

It was nearly closing time. Barber Wortle was in his little shop parlor brushing his clothes and preparing to visit the "second house" of a music-hall. And Jack Scott, his lather-boy, was sitting on a form in the shop, with his eyes glued to a page of an evening paper.

The door opened suddenly, and a man stood on the threshold blinking in at him.

"Why do ye stare so, boy?" rasped the man, reaching Jack in a stride and gripping him fiercely by the shoulder. "Do ye think ye see a ghost? Speak—speak, drat ye!"

The man scanned the boy's face, holding his own so closely to Jack's that his hot, spirit-smelling breath scorched the youngster's cheeks. Big and strong though he looked, he was trembling violently.

Jack met the man's gaze fearlessly. "I'm sorry, sir," he replied respectfully, detaching himself from the man's grip. "I was reading the paper, and you startled me."

"Ah!" gasped the man, with a sigh of relief. "This way, sir!" cried Jack, indicating a chair. "Hair cut, sir, I suppose?"

The man threw a peaked seaman's cap on the form, and flung his heavy cloth jacket on top of it.

"No, no!" he cried, bending a fierce glance on the boy's face. "I want this off—all the lot, d'ye understand?"

He caught his chin in his hand as he spoke, and seated himself in the big chair.

"You want the beard and moustache off, sir?" said Jack, unable to restrain his surprise. "Very good, sir. I'll fetch the guv'nor."

Mr. Wortle flung off his hat and overcoat, none too well pleased, and came into the shop.

"Evening, sir!" he said, tying his white apron around his waist. "Did I hear you say as you wanted the beard off, sir?"

Snip, snip, snip was the only noise for a few moments, while Jack sat on the form and watched the strange customer. The seaman, for such Jack knew him to be, was also watching Jack, whose face and movements he could see reflected plainly in the big mirror before him.

"Jolly strange," thought Jack, "a chap hopping in and having his whiskers off like this! And he's ratty about it, too. Wonder what it means? Of course, he's a bit up the pole, but—"

He hurried outside at Mr. Wortle's command to put the shutters up to the front of the little shop. When he came back the barber was making an attempt at conversation.

"It ain't a pleasant time of the year for your business, sir," said Mr. Wortle. "There ain't much to be got out of barbering nowadays, but, bless me, if I'd like to be on the sea when there's a gale blowing like it is to-night. When do you sail again, sir?"

"Mind yer own blessed business!" snarled the customer, fidgeting in the chair.

Mr. Wortle relapsed into silence and did not speak until the seaman had got up from his chair with smooth chin, cheeks, and lips.

The seaman examined his face and grinned. In removing the beard a great white scar had been brought to light on his skin, and he felt it with the tip of his forefinger.

He didn't answer, nor did he utter a word of thanks when Jack held the heavy jacket for him to thrust his arms into, and he stalked out of the shop, ignoring the barber's cheery "Good-night!"

Jack tore off his white jacket, and hurrying into overcoat and cap, passed out into the street. In the strong light outside a jeweller's window he saw the barber's customer hastening along.

Impelled by some strange force, Jack followed the man. There was a mystery about this fellow, Jack felt convinced, and Jack loved mysteries.

Mr. Wortle's toilet saloon was situated in a street within a short distance of the Elephant and Castle. The man had no idea that he was being shadowed, for not once did he look round. When he reached St. George's Circus he dodged between the electric tramcars and swung off in the direction of the Borough Road.

Jack followed him, a dozen yards or so behind, keeping well in the shadow of the wall.

In the Borough Road, however, he nearly made a mess of things, for when he had got almost opposite to the big Polytechnic the seaman swung round on his heels and seemed to be making straight for Jack. The boy darted quickly into the shadow of a doorway and trembled lest he had been discovered, but the man paused outside the window of a small second-hand clothes shop, only a few feet away from where Jack crouched.

For quite three minutes Mr. Wortle's customer stood looking in the window at the array of garments, boot, hats, and clothes of all description. At last he stepped inside the shop.

Jack now ventured to come out of his hiding-place and to listen near the doorway.

"Suit to fit you, captain!" the clothes-dealer, a fat, oily-faced man of alien breed, exclaimed.

Soon the counter was covered with an array of clothing, and when at last a pair of trousers, vest, and jacket, were found to fit the big seaman, the two haggled over the price.

A quarter of an hour later the seaman, altogether unrecognisable now, came out in a light tweed suit, with a felt hat pressed well down over his forehead.

For a second or so he stood on the doorway of the shop with a brown-paper parcel under his arm, glancing furtively to the right and left, then he swung off sharply in the direction of London Bridge.

Had he not seen that white scar shining in the gaslight, Jack might have failed to recognise the seaman in the burly-looking man who strode quickly along.

Over London Bridge tramped the man, and a dozen yards behind him trudged Jack. The gale that had been blowing all the evening seemed to have become suddenly worse as Jack peered over into the dark waters, over which a barge was at that moment silently passing, and a squall of rain broke and beat with stinging force in his face. But Jack kept on.

Down the steps and round to the bottom of Fish Street Hill to the wharf from which the pleasure steamers start in the summer for Margate and Yarmouth, went the man, till he had reached the water's edge.

"Splash!" When the man turned on his heels, Jack, pressed tightly against the wall, saw that the bundle was gone. The seaman had thrown it into the river.

With a heart that throbbed like a steam-hammer, Jack wondered what he should do. Should he go and recover the parcel? Should he continue to shadow the mysterious man? He decided to attempt to do both.

It was pitch-dark down on the wharf. Only a few lights twinkled on the other side. It was too wretched a night for people to be hovering about the banks of the river. The seaman hurried away, Jack distinctly hearing the grunt of satisfaction that passed his lips.

Jack was down by the water's edge before the man's footsteps had scarcely died away. The Thames was at high tide. The water was washing right up to his feet as he bent and peered over the surface of the river. "Crumbs, there it is!" chuckled Jack.

The seaman had flung the parcel some way into the stream, but it had not sunk. The tide had seized it and hurled it to the side. Jack had caught grip of it against a pile.

He crept cautiously along the slippery edge of the wharf, and, with one hand gripping the side, lowered him-

self so that he could reach the parcel. Scarcely had his fingers touched the bundle, however, than he shrieked with alarm and pain.

A heavy hand had come down on his gripping fingers. They slipped, and he clutched at the slimy post to arrest his fall. His grip would not hold. He turned a terrified, ashen face to the sky.

Mr. Wortle's customer—the man whom he had followed—was glaring down at him with fiendish rage.

"Drown, ye young rat—drown!" snarled the man. "It's a fitting end for ye for prying—"

Jack heard no more. His head buzzed with the waters that rushed over him. He seemed to be falling into a place of inky blackness that was bitterly cold.

When he rose to the surface again and shook the water from his eyes, his fingers were still clasping the brown-paper parcel, but he had drifted some way down stream, and the man had passed out of his vision.

Little Jack Scott was by no means a bad swimmer. He struck out manfully for the side, and coming to another wharf, clambered ashore, dragging the parcel after him.

Suspecting a lurking figure in every dark patch of shadow, Jack made his way up the narrow street till he emerged into the broad thoroughfare of Eastcheap, then, with the saturated parcel under his arm, he raced after a passing van and swung himself on the tailboard.

Mr. Wortle himself opened the door when Jack thumped heavily upon the panels. As luck had it, his last customer had delayed him sufficiently to spoil his chance of getting a seat in the music-hall, and he had hurried home out of the rain to read the evening newspaper.

"My word, Jack, if you knock like that, I'll—" the barber began. "Where've you been? How did you get in that state?" he added, dragging the boy into the shop.

Jack breathlessly explained as he hurried into the warmth of the little shop parlour. With feverish haste, Jack cut the string and removed the paper surrounding the parcel.

A jacket of heavy cloth, a thick woollen vest, a peaked cap, and a pair of cord trousers were all that were revealed. They were just the clothes the seaman who had entered the little shop had been wearing.

Jack Scott was disappointed. Had he been hoaxed after all? Yet why should the man attempt to drown him by the river's edge? There was no joke about that, Jack reflected, with a grim smile.

The barber kept up a fire of questions whilst the two examined the clothes. There was nothing in any of the pockets save a small case containing needles and thread and buttons such as most seamen carry. There were stains on the waistcoat, but Mr. Wortle pooch-pooched the idea being anything but the remains of spilt beer.

The top button of the jacket was missing, but Jack had noticed that fact when he had helped the man into it before he had left the shop.

"You've been had, my boy—done fair in the eye!" grinned the barber. "Not much!" replied Jack, half-way up the staircase. "I'm going to pop on some dry clothes, then I'm off to Scotland Yard with that lot!"



The man whom he had followed was glaring down at him with fiendish rage. "Drown, ye young rat—drown!" snarled the man.

"The facts are these, Bayne!" exclaimed the keen-faced Detective-inspector Murgatroyd as the two men sat in the latter's office at Scotland Yard. "At half-past five to-day, when the landlady of 13, Johnson's Rents, Bethnal Green, took up the tea, as was her custom, to her lodger, a strange old man, named Phineas Parsons, she found the room of his door locked."

"Suspicious, because she knew the old man had not gone out, and because he had been strangely nervous for some days, she got her husband to burst open the door. Phineas Parsons was on the floor with a bullet in his heart and a revolver beside him."

"Hum! Looks like suicide," remarked the sergeant. "Had he received visitors? Was the room disturbed?"

"No one had entered the house by the front door, the landlady was certain," answered the inspector. "The room was in perfect order. I saw it myself. I've just come from there. Curiously enough, no report of the revolver was heard. But for two things, I should conclude at once that it was a case of suicide. One is that, according to the landlady's evidence, Phineas Parsons had lately had a terrible fear of somebody or something."

"But that fear may be responsible for his suicide," suggested Sergeant Bayne. "Anything known about his history?"

"Very little indeed. I searched his belongings. There was nothing in them to give any clue whatever—nothing to arouse suspicion in any way. He had been with the landlady for three years; but other than that he had spent most of his life on the sea. Little was known about him, and he seldom talked of himself. Only on rare occasions did he go out, though he always had sufficient money to pay his way. In one of his pockets I found a bag containing over ten pounds in gold and silver."

"Hum, very strange!" commented the sergeant. "And what is the second reason why you do not agree with the suicide theory?"

"Phineas Parsons had a button tightly clenched in his right hand," was the answer. "Now—"

The telephone-bell rang. The inspector ran to it.

"Boy and man just come in, sir," said the constable at the other end of the wire, "with a suit of seaman's clothes which the boy fished out of the river. Tells a tale about following a seaman who had his beard and moustache shaved off, and then went into a second-hand clothes-shop and changed from the suit, which the boy afterwards saw him drop in the Thames. Nothing remarkable about the clothes, except that the top button of the jacket is missing. Shall I—"

The inspector whistled. "Send them up at once, Garratt!" he cried, hanging up the receiver and returning to his chair with a grave face.

Jack and Mr. Wortle appeared a few moments later. Jack told his tale from beginning to end, not omitting a detail.

"You've acted very pluckily, my lad," said the inspector warmly, patting the boy on the shoulder. "We'll have to find this man, if only to punish him for his attempt to drown you. Would you know him again?"

"Rather, sir!" cried Jack. "He had a scar about an inch long on his chin. I could swear to him by that, as well as the clothes he bought off old Manselle in the Borough Road. What's he been up to, sir?"

"Ah," smiled the inspector, "you're setting me a conundrum which we're unable to answer just at present. But you shall help us to find the solution, my boy. Just wait in that room over there while we make preparations."

From where he sat by the big fire he could see Inspector Murgatroyd and Sergeant Bayne turning over the leaves of a shipping book, and now and again jotting down particulars on a sheet of paper. The faces of both officers were serious, and they discussed the affair in whispers.

At length they were ready.

"You had better go home, sir," said the inspector to Mr. Wortle. "We'll look after this lad. We're going to take him for a motor-car trip, and they'll be little danger as far as he's concerned, but you may not see him again till daylight to-morrow."

Wondering what was going to happen, Jack bade Mr. Wortle goodbye and hurried on the heels of Sergeant Bayne.

Big Ben was striking half-past ten as the car swept out on to the Thames Embankment and made for the City.

As they sat there, with the keen wind blowing in their faces, and Jack, exhilarated and excited on his first motor ride, stared out at the buildings and the lights which seemed to flash by them, the inspector bade the boy give him full details of the man's appearance and clothes.

"This man," said the famous detective, "has acted very suspiciously—as if he had committed some act for which he is ashamed and afraid. Being a seaman, he will probably, if what we suspect is true of him, endeavour to get out of the country at the first opportunity. That is why we are going to make a search of every vessel that is leaving the London Docks by to-night's tide."

More than that Jack was unable to learn, for he dared not ask questions. Soon the motor-car swung round by the Mansion House, its wide asphalt now practically deserted by the traffic which congests it in the daytime, and shot off into Cornhill. Through Aldgate and the alien land surrounding Commercial Road the motor-car flew, and then, when they had reached Limehouse, it made its first stop.

Jack hurried after the officers into the Basin, and boarded a small tramp steamer, where the work of loading was busily in progress. None of the hands, however, answered to the description of the man they wanted.

Two vessels were boarded in the West India Dock, and another in the Royal Albert Dock without success, and the motor-car was just sweeping away from the landing-stage when Jack espied the mysterious man talking with a shore purser beneath a gas-lamp.

"That's him—that's the man!" muttered Jack excitedly.

In a trice the two officers had leapt out of the motor-car. They were almost at the man's side before he noticed them. For an instant he reeled, and then he suddenly brushed the purser aside and attempted to leap into the dock.

Inspector Murgatroyd caught him, and dragged him back on the very brink, and as he held him, Sergeant Bayne snapped the handcuffs on the man's wrists.

"I arrest you for the murder of Phineas Parsons at 13, Johnson's Rents, Bethnal Green!" exclaimed the inspector severely.

The seaman turned an ashen, twitching face from the two officers to the excited boy standing up in the motor-car.

"Ye're right!" he groaned. "I done him in, the cur! He was a shipmate of mine years ago, when we found a hoard of gold—pirates' gold it was—what we knew of on an island. The cur robbed me of my share, but I found him at last, and got even with him. I climbed into his room from the outhouse in the yard, and shot him with his own revolver. It's that young rat what's given me away!"

Subsequent examination and inquiries proved the truth of the man's assertions. Promotion was gained for both Inspector Murgatroyd and Sergeant Bayne for their "commendable promptness," and Jack did not go unrewarded. A ten-guinea cycle was bought for him by the officers at Scotland Yard.

THE END.

FREE COUPONS TO THE PICTURE THEATRES! (See "Your Editor's Den" in This Number.)



Being a Grand New Serial of the Great Detective, and His Assistants Tinker and Pedro.

NEW READERS START HERE.

The opening of this story finds Sexton Blake and his assistant Tinker on the night previous to their embarkation to East Africa on a pleasure shooting trip. At the very last moment this long-anticipated holiday is abandoned.

Sidney Temple is a young engineer, at present engaged in a large undertaking at Redcliff Dale to construct a scheme for supplying three neighbouring towns with water from a broad, swift river. This clever young engineer will make his name famous in the engineering world if he can only successfully finish the job in the contracted time. Everything goes well for six months, but now some unknown enemy is destroying all his plans and completed work.

Sexton Blake and Tinker, disguised as navvies, obtain employment in the workings of this great scheme at Redcliff Dale. This village is better known by the fancy name of "Ginger Town," and the famous detective and his assistant get lodgings at the cottage of Job Peckchaff some distance away from the workings.

Black Jock is an exceedingly harsh and suspicious foreman, under whom Tinker is working. In the night the work of months is mysteriously made a complete wreck, and the machinery put in a dishevelled condition.

So far, Sexton Blake has not struck the slightest clue to the mystery he has come to solve, and nothing but ruin stares Sidney Temple in the face.

The detective, now known as Bob Packer, is promoted to ganger, or sort of petty foreman, and by his strong personality assumes control whilst Temple is on the sick list.

One Saturday afternoon, when all the boys leave off work for the day, Sam Bleek, a nasty sort of youth, lures Tinker into a trap. He coaxes the detective's assistant to take Pedro into the woods to hunt a badger. Upon arriving there Tinker is stunned by two gipsies, and Pedro is stolen.

Sexton Blake is in an office at the works, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Tinker with Pedro. But Tinker does not appear, and the great detective becomes concerned.

Then comes a sharp tapping at the door of the office. His mind full of forebodings, Blake jumps off his stool and runs to open it.

Job Peckchaff stands there, his usually sunset-red face very white, his sleepy eyes very wide with alarm.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

How Sexton Blake Found Tinker.

"WHAT is the matter, Job?" exclaimed Blake quickly and anxiously. "Something bad has happened. What is it? Quick, man—quick!"

"I'm afeared summut bad has took place, Mr. Packer," said Job. It was Mr. Packer now, with the

workmen. "The boy bean't come home!"

"What! Ted?" exclaimed Blake. "Ted" being the name Tinker went by at the works. "When did he go out, and where to?"

"He went out soon as he'd had his dinner," replied Peckchaff, "an' he told tha missus that he wur goin' oop into tha woods to catch a badger—him an' another boy."

"What boy?" asked Blake. "Didn't say," answered Job. "An' Ted took tha dawg, an' he ain't come home nuther!"

"Took Pedro!" exclaimed Blake. "Then something has happened to both. For if Tinker alone had come to harm, Pedro, if free and unhurt himself, would have come to me and given warning. No; there is a plot in this, and both are either captured—or worse."

This latter sentence was not spoken aloud, but muttered to himself.

"You see, there's a lot of them rioters hiding oop in the woods, so they sez," remarked Job, "an' tha boys might 'a' coom across some of 'em."

But the detective's own suspicions took another direction. He said

nothing of that, however, but bidding Job wait, went into the office, hastily gathered the plans together, and locked them in the safe. Then he took a lantern—one of several always kept there ready for immediate use—and rejoined Peckchaff outside.

He locked the office door, then turned to the Yorkshireman, and said:

"Job, I'm going to search the woods. I am afraid there is but little hope of finding either boy or dog, but there is at least a chance, and it is the only thing we can do. Will you come with me, or would you rather go home?"

"I'll coom with you," said Peckchaff decisively. "I'd rayther not go home an' face tha missus without news of neither the boy nor dawg, for she's in a rare takin' about 'em, bein' main fond o' both. Noa; I'll coom with thee."

"Have you any idea what part of the woods they were going to?" asked Blake, as they strode away from the works. "Was any hint dropped as to where they expected to find this badger?"

"Ted said summut about the upper part of the woods," answered Job, "an' that'd be in Squire Ardoise's preserves."

"Ha! Worse and worse!" muttered Blake. "It is as I feared; the boy has been led into some trap. I wonder who this other lad was? Some tool of Ardoise's, I'll be bound. But it must have been cleverly done, a well-contrived affair, for Tinker is no greenhorn to be easily snared."

"I'm afeared we've got an uncommon big job afore us," said Peckchaff ruefully. "Redcliff Wood bean't no small place. It'd take a score o' men mony an hour to search right through it in broad daylight. An' now it's night, an' we doan't even know where to begin. We'd better wait till we get some help, hadn't we? Looking for a needle in

a haystack'd be easy to this! Better wait till we get some help." "No, no," said Blake; "we have no time to waste in seeking help. Every moment is exceedingly precious now. They have been missing so long. No; we must try to find them ourselves. We can do it as well as twenty, if it is to be done at all."

"Ay, ay!" muttered Job, shaking his head. "If it's to be done at all. That's just it. Hanged if I see how we're going to begin even!"

And he shook his head again. The task seemed to him a quite impossible one. But then he did not know the powers of the man who walked at his side. The astonishing abilities of Bob Packer, the foreman, had made him stare many a time, but his eyes were opened a good bit wider that night.

His astonishment began at the very start.

Blake did not go direct to the woods, but went a little way down the road towards Peckchaff's cottage. Here he lit the lantern, and examined the chalky surface. A moment sufficed for that.

"Here's their trail," he said—"Ted's and the dog's. There was no other boy with them at the start."

Job stared. The road was very hard and dry, and the marks by which Blake read this off, as though he saw it in clear writing, were invisible to him, and would have conveyed nothing had he seen them.

They passed on up the road towards the woods, Blake using his lantern now and then, but walking with a rapid, assured stride. At the corner on the edge of the woods, where Slimy Sam had waited for Tinker, he stopped.

"The other boy met him here," he said, "and he, too, had a dog with him, but a much smaller animal; just a cross-bred mongrel, and quite untrained, I should say, from the way

(Continued on the next page.)

HOW TO DEVELOP MUSCLE.

A Superb Series of Articles Specially Written for the BOYS' FRIEND by EUGEN SANDOW.

WHENEVER I am writing a series of articles on strength and muscular development, I never fail to point out that the mere attainment of great strength and splendid muscular development is not the sole object of my endeavours.

Undoubtedly success in both these directions is an achievement to be proud of, but if these were the limits of my physical culture teachings the present world-wide popularity of scientific bodily exercise would never have been accomplished.

It is because people appreciate the fact that the acquisition of strength means a corresponding increase of health and greater immunity from illness, and the development of muscle means greater mental fitness and the development of will-power.

The correct culture of the body when young implants into the boy the habit of health, and ever afterwards he is temperate in all things in order not to undo the good work of his youth.

There are also material benefits to be considered. Scientific exercise will give him greater skill at any sport or pastime, be it football, hockey, cricket, boxing, wrestling, or what not.

The exercises here given develop and strengthen the muscles which are called upon in the performance of these sports, and enable them to respond more quickly and accurately to the demands of the mind.

In business, too, whether the occupation be of an active or sedentary character, the benefits of physical culture are daily proved, as the man of good physique, fit in every respect, is better able to withstand fatigue than the man of poor physique.

The man with splendid health and strength is the one who succeeds in far-off lands, where hard and continued manual labour is necessary to make money; the man with upright carriage, manly bearing, and mental quickness is the one who is selected at home to fill a position of responsibility and take charge of others.

Wherever we turn it is the "man who can" who occupies the best and most lucrative positions, and in order to make yourself one of these you

must have perfect mental and physical ability such as can be obtained by following out the instructions here given.

We are told that a change of work is as good as a holiday, so I will give you an "easy" this week by diverting your attention to the abdominal muscles.

In this exercise there are two distinct movements—the first being performed by raising the legs alternately, the second by raising both legs together.

During both movements I advise you to grip your dumb-bells fairly hard, as this brings into play the muscles of the forearm.

EXERCISE 12.—READY POSITION.

Lie flat on the back with arms stretched above the head.

Movement: Alternately raise and lower right and left legs, with a slow, sweeping motion, keeping the knees straight and the toes pointed; the heels must not touch the ground during the exercise. Muscles: Lower abdominals and psoas iliacus.



Fig. 12.—An Exercise for the Abdominal Muscles.

After performing this movement about a dozen times with each leg, do the same number of movements with both legs together, again taking care that the heels do not touch the floor when the legs are lowered.

No doubt you will find now that you can perform all these movements without the slightest inconvenience, and should this be the case, you can, with benefit, add an extra movement or two to each of the exercises given.

As you become accustomed to the work you naturally take less time to do the correct movements, and you should now arrange your morning's exercise to take from twenty minutes to half an hour, the latter period being reserved for those who are the strongest among my readers.

Exercise sufficiently to give you a healthy feeling of having had enough, but on no account over-tire yourself.

EUGEN SANDOW.

RATS.

Some Little-Known Facts About These Wily Rodents.

JUST lately there has been a great stir about rats. The rat family has been accused of carrying plague-germs, and stern warfare is being waged against these vermin.

There must be very few boys—country lads, at any rate—who have not taken part in an organised rat-hunt. With a sharp ferret in the rat-hole, and a wide-awake dog at either end, all the sporting instincts of the Britisher are aroused; and one of our most prominent dukes said not long ago that rat hunting was the most enjoyable of all sport.

However that may be—and a day in a stack-yard when thrashing is going on is not to be forgotten—rats are a terrible pest, and few boys realise the extent of their damage. A certain engineer took the trouble to calculate that rats do damage every day to the tune of £40,000, and Sir James Crichton Browne calculates the annual bill for matter destroyed by rats at £15,000,000!

It is surprising what a rat can do. Every day there are instances of the rodents carrying hens' eggs for considerable distances unbroken, and it is of common occurrence to hear that they have nibbled through leaden water-pipes.

Have you ever met

a colony of rats

—thousands of them—on the road at night? Frequently, particularly at the change of seasons, they will band together and migrate from town to country or vice-versa. They choose the night for their marches, and boldly use the road. To an inoffensive traveller they have nothing to say, but if they are attacked by a human being on these occasions they are swift to retaliate. Moreover, the rat is a great swimmer, and water proves no obstacle to a herd.

To get some idea of the number of rats there must be you have only to remember that a doe will have many litters in the course of a year, and at each litter there will be from a dozen to sixteen youngsters. Add to this the fact that a doe breeds at six weeks old, and you will see that from one pair the offspring in a year amounts literally to hundreds.

Rats originally came from China, but ships have carried them to all parts of the world.

THE END.

THE TRIALS AND TROUBLES OF A BOY SCOUT

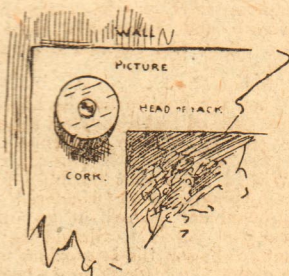
Our Helpful Series That Will Interest All Boys, Whether Scouts or Not.

Fitting Out a Club-room.

LAST week I was telling you about furnishing a club-room, but was unable to complete my remarks, so here are the remaining points in regard to this matter:

Beds: An old bedstead is quite an acquisition. It will hold such a lot of chaps sitting down. And an old sofa is a perfect godsend. And if, as you may be able to, you have a sort of indoor camp in your club-room and sleep the night there, beds and sofas are just what you want. Another jolly good plan is to make hammocks of string. The great advantage about them is that when they are not being used they will roll up into next to nothing. One day I'll tell you how to make hammocks.

Cupboards: You certainly ought to



Showing the Correct Method of Tacking up Pictures.

have some cupboards in your room to pack your things in. These are things you can make for yourselves. But if anybody but yourselves is likely to go into the room, don't forget to put locks on the cupboards, and let the patrol-leader keep the key.

Pictures: Don't bother about nice frames and all that. Get some good coloured prints with some action in them—battle pictures, hunting scenes, horses, dogs, motor-cars, yachts, aeroplanes—such as are given away with the Christmas numbers. Tack them up on the wall just as they are.

Ah, now here's a tip! You often find, when tacking pictures up in this way that the paper tears away from the tack. To avoid this, put the tack first through a thin piece of cork. The above picture shows what I

mean. This will hold the paper quite securely.

By the way, always have a looking-glass on the wall. A scout should always look neat and tidy, and it is handy to have a glass to see, after a rough-and-tumble, if your face is clean and your hair straight.

You ought to have a notice-board, too. You can easily make this with ordinary wood and a piece of green baize. Bookshelves: Any fellow who can handle tools at all can make bookshelves for the club-room. Keep a good supply of books there—books about scouting, travel, and adventure, and so on. Papers, too—a daily or weekly illustrated newspaper, and THE BOYS' FRIEND, of course.

And don't throw away your back numbers. Keep them and get them bound or done up in parcels. They will be very interesting and very useful for reference later on.

You should also keep a supply of paper, pencils, pens, and ink handy in case the fellows want to write or draw.

Blackboard: A very good thing to have is a blackboard against the wall. When your scout-master or patrol-leader is explaining anything to you, a sketch on the blackboard often makes what he wants to explain much clearer than any words could do.

Next, of course, you want to know some games for playing in the club-room. But I must leave that for another week.

An Awkward Fix.

Here's another poor chap in a fix—"Senior Patrol-Leader" this time.

His Scoutmaster is a very good officer, but the Assistant S.-M., he says, is "an out-and-out rotter." He goes about with fellows who sneer at the scouts. He tears down orders that are posted up. He laughs at the S.-M. behind his back, and generally behaves in a way which ruins the discipline of the troop.

"Senior Patrol-Leader" has the interests of the troop at heart. What is he to do about it?

You can't do anything on your own, "Senior P.-L.," old chap. Get all the other P.-L.'s together. Draw up between you a written statement of your charges against the Assistant S.-M. You should all sign it, and send it to your Scoutmaster with a letter asking him, in the interests of the troop and the Scout Movement, to get the Assistant S.-M. to resign.

he fussed about. The boy who brought that kind of dog didn't come to the woods badger-hunting."

"How d'ye know all that?" gasped the amazed Job.

But Blake did not reply. He strode on into the woods as though he actually saw the two boys with their dogs walking before him. He used the lantern now and then; just a sweep of its light to right or left, but that was all.

He seemed never at fault, and did not pause again until they reached that sandy hollow, with the scathed oak-tree, that has been described before.

He passed across this swiftly, for the trail was clearly marked upon the loose sand, but he stopped, with a muttered exclamation, at the foot of the bank upon the farther side.

"There has been a struggle here!" he said. "One, two, three, four, five men were here besides the boys. And look! There are spots of blood!"

If he could not make out the other signs, Job Peckchaff could see those ominous stains upon the light, chalky bank well enough.

"Snakes alive! What's it mean?" he gasped.

Blake did not answer. He did not dare to think what it might mean. He took a cast round with the light, and it was almost in a tone of relief that he exclaimed:

"One of the dogs—the smaller one—has been killed. See here!"

He pointed to the body of the little mongrel lying among the bracken.

"The keepers coom down upon 'em, an' shot the pore little beggar, I s'pose?" said Job. "An' as likely as not collared the two lads an' the bloodhound, an' took 'em away to lock 'em oop."

He said this eagerly, as though it disposed of all worse forebodings. But Blake again shook his head.

"No," he said. "This dog has not been shot, but stabbed, and that is not a gamekeeper's way."

"It's some of them rioters, then," suggested Peckchaff. "They must 'a' been hiding about here, an' the little tyke nosed 'em out an' got killed. Maybe Ted had Pedro on the leash, or he'd 'a' coom in for it, too. But I expect the little 'un was a long way on in front, nosing about everywhere, loike mongrels allus do."

As the reader knows, he had hit upon the actual truth, or very near it, but Sexton Blake was not convinced.

News of the capture of Cronk and his fellow-fugitive had not yet got about—or, at least, neither he nor Job had heard of it—and Blake was inclined to doubt if the lurking rioters had anything to do with the affair. It was far more likely, he thought, that Tinker had been betrayed into some ambush, and he and Pedro captured—or worse!

The killing of the little dog puzzled him, but he had no time to try and fit that in then. He could think of nothing but Tinker. What had happened to him? He forgot all else in that one grim anxiety. His work, even his precious plans—all was forgotten now.

Even his nerves of steel were hardly proof against that terrible strain of suspense. The lantern shook a little in his hand as he began to search around the spot where he had found the small mongrel's dead body.

Job Peckchaff followed him with straining eyes. His own anxiety, if less bitterly keen, was very genuine, for he, too, thought the world of "Ted Packer."

Suddenly, Blake gave an exclamation—almost a shout of relief.

"The boys went on from here," he cried; "both of them, and the bloodhound!"

How he knew that Job had not the least idea, for the signs that conveyed so much to the detective were not for such untrained eyes as his. But he was overjoyed just the same, and fairly roared out in his relieved feelings:

"Hoo-ray! Then they've only been nabbed by the keepers, an' we shall find 'em all right. They've been taken to Squire Ardoise's place, an' looked up for the night. That's it, for a pound!"

Blake did not feel quite so elated. It was a momentary relief to find that the boys had passed that spot apparently unharmed, and had gone on deeper into the woods, as if to carry out their badger-hunt after all; yet they had still to be found, and the mention of Squire Ardoise's name only served to reawaken his worst misgivings.

In silence he led the way, following the boys' trail without difficulty, until they came to the old fence marking the boundary of the squire's preserves.

There he halted, but speedily saw that they had passed through. He vaulted over the fence, and soon found the track again upon the other side, striding on with his former rapid, assured step.

Job followed, wondering how on earth he knew which way to go.

"Ha!"

The cry burst from Sexton Blake's lips, ringing sharp with anguish.

"What is it? What d'ye see?" cried Job.

He got no answer. Blake sprang forward, and dropped on his knees beside some dark object which Peckchaff could not as yet make out.

He went nearer, and then he saw what it was. The big, strong man turned pale, and fell to trembling.

"He ain't dead! Doan't say he's dead, Packer!" he gasped, in a thick, husky voice.

Sexton Blake gently lowered the limp head back upon the ground. Then his own head was bowed very low. Not loud, but intensely deep, sounded his voice.

"They have killed him—they have killed him! Would to Heaven it had been me!"

Diamond Out Diamond.

THE Gipsy Squire's home was a fine old mansion on the outskirts of the woods. It was a house of great size, and had been one of "the stately homes of England" in the past, but it had fallen upon evil days when Ralph Ardoise became its lord.

His father, the late squire, after many years of wild wanderings abroad, returned to England with a Spanish gipsy girl as his bride.

She was a woman of rare beauty, but possessed of a fierce, ungovernable temper, and the squire himself being no meek saint in that way, their quarrels were frequent and bitter. One night she put an end to a discussion in a final manner by stabbing her husband with a stiletto, which from lifelong habit she always wore, even in her home in England.

That done, she turned the weapon upon herself, and Ralph, their only child, became an orphan.

He was a mere lad when this happened, but he showed even then that his mother's wild gipsy blood flowed strongest in his veins. And when he reached manhood, and became "Squire Ardoise" in his turn, he showed it still more.

He made few or no friends among the people of his own rank in the neighbourhood, but he harboured gipsies and every species of vagabonds on his lands, and even received them in his house, seeming to prefer their society to that of the gentle-folks, whom he knew shrank from him, if they did not despise him.

The splendid state-rooms of the grand old house were shut up, only a small portion of the mansion being inhabited. For the squire, although possessed of immense wealth, entertained no guests but those doubtful wasters just mentioned, and kept few servants.

His own favourite apartment was a small room on the ground floor, fitted as a sort of study. For, oddly enough, he was a great student, and in many ways a man of great abilities—a man who would have shone in the world but for a warped and embittered nature.

In that room he was seated alone on the evening of that day when Tinker went out badger-hunting, and did not return.

With the light of his shaded lamp turned upon his book, and the rest of the room in shadow, Ralph Ardoise, a cigar between his lips, seemed to be very much at his ease.

Yet he was not so; for now and again he would lift his head, listening intently, turning towards the glass doors, which, covered with heavy curtains, opened on to the dark grounds without.

A hundred times he did this, and each with a more anxious, impatient glance.

"He is bound to come!" he muttered. "He will not dare to disobey a message from me!"

At last—it was almost precisely at that moment when Job Peckchaff, arriving home late that evening, heard from his alarmed wife about the missing boy and dog—almost precisely at that moment, Squire Ardoise dropped his book with a smile of satisfaction. He heard a low tapping at the glass doors.

He crossed the soft carpet with a catlike tread, noiselessly drew the curtains, and opened the door.

Bates, the ex-groom stepped into the room.

The man was woefully altered for the worse.

Always of hangdog appearance, he looked more so than ever now. His clothing was begrimed and ragged, his hair unkempt, his face haggard and pale. A rough black beard of some days' growth covered his chin. The expression of his eyes was sullen and ferocious, and yet had something of fear about it.

A half-wild beast, just dragged out of its cage to perform, would have much the same look.

He had been in hiding. As one of the worst and most violent of the ringleaders in the recent riots, he was "wanted" by the county police. But they had not captured him yet, although they had scoured the country far and wide, and he had been living under their very noses all the time.

The gipsy camp in Oakley Copse had been his place of refuge. And a better one no gentleman in difficulties could possibly find.

The police searched it thoroughly several times, but they did not find their man, because they were not quite up to the resources of the place in the way of snug concealment.

They did not know of a certain cave in the sandstone bank at the back of the copse, because, the entrance being beautifully covered by a dense curtain of trailing brambles, no one could possibly know of its existence unless they were let into the secret, or stumbled upon it by the purest chance.

And Bates had made his home there ever since the outbreak in

this country afore it's too late! Give me that, and let me go!"

Ardoise gently moved his delicate white hand, dispersing the smoke from before his face.

"Not so fast, not so fast, my friend," he said. "I never break my word. But I have one more piece of work for you to do before we part; probably I shall not need your services again. When that's done, you shall have the money, and more. And you may go to the Antipodes for all I care! But you will do what I desire first."

The ex-groom growled.

"I'll do no more for yer!" he cried again, his tone just as violent as the squire's was low and smooth. "I know what your work is! It's all of a piece, with the gaol or the gallows at the back of it! As likely as not there's killing in this new job of yours!"

Ardoise never took his eyes off him—the tamer and the wild beast.

"There might be, there might be, if you like that ugly word," he said, quite easily. "But what is it to you if there should be? You were no novice at that when you first came my way. It was not I who taught you the gentle art of slaying."

The face of Bates began to work violently; his eyes took on a dangerous glare.

"Listen!" said Ardoise, changing to a harder tone, although he did not raise his voice. "You entered my house that midnight, two years ago, of your own accord, a professional

be lodged in Slagford Gaol!" said Ardoise.

"No—by the powers of fury, no!" cried Bates. "I have been your slave long enough! You have about you all the money, or money's worth, I need. I'll have that, and I'll be free at last! For I'll have your infernal life as well!"

And the wild beast turned upon its tamer at last!

He sprang upon Ardoise to grip him by the throat. But the squire rose to meet him, and the muzzle of his revolver almost touched the ruffian's forehead.

Bates slunk back with a muttered imprecation. The squire smiled.

"Now I think we understand each other," he said. "Let us get to business. All I want you to do is to go with me to Temple's office at the works, and crack the safe there. It is a simple, rather old-fashioned affair; only intended to keep casual pilferers from the petty cash kept in it. It will give no trouble to an expert like you, and I have your kit of tools, carefully preserved in my private collection of curios since that night."

"But there's a big dawg there—a bloodhound!" growled the cowed ruffian sullenly.

"No; I have seen to that," smiled the Gipsy Squire. "The dog is now chained in a cellar under this house."

"Then that fellow Packer, the new foreman, always sleeps there," objected Bates, "and he's a tough chap to run agen!"

"Sandbag," said the squire calmly. "We needn't have any killing in this affair if it can be avoided. All I want is to knock him out while I take a tracing of some plans that interest me—a few minutes work. Are you ready to start at once?"

"I s'pose so," growled Bates. Within a few minutes they set forth, the squire so admirably disguised as a workman that Sexton Blake himself might almost have passed him without recognition. Bates depended upon a crape mask and his newly-grown beard; the former to be donned when they reached the scene of action. For by the route they took there was little risk of encountering anyone on the way.

They reached the isolated office at the very moment when Job Peckchaff got to its door with his alarming news.

Concealed behind a stack of timber at no great distance from the shanty, they actually overheard all that passed between the Yorkshireman and Sexton Blake, and finally saw them set off together on that forlorn quest through the woods.

That was an unexpected piece of luck for Ardoise and his rascally henchman.

The coast being thus cleared, their task was quite simple. And it was soon done.

The End of a Clover Plot.

HAVING shown the object of the plot to capture Pedro, and shown, too, how it worked out even better than the villain who concocted it could have hoped for, we will return to the scene in Redcliff Woods.

In that first moment of overwhelming shock, Sexton Blake did not doubt that the boy was dead.

After that one wild outburst of grief, he remained upon his knees as he had fallen, gazing down upon the deathlike face through eyes that swam in tears, and not uttering another sound.

Job Peckchaff also stood in absolute silence. A word would have choked him had he tried to speak just then.

But the first stunning shock having passed, Sexton Blake resumed something of his self-control. With fingers that were clumsy at their work for once, he opened the boy's clothing at the breast and laid his hand upon the region of the heart.

Was it the throbbing of his own pulse? No! There was a slight movement. Yes! He felt it distinctly now!

"He is not dead! Oh, Job, he is not really dead!" he cried.

"Hoo—" began the big Yorkshireman; but his voice broke before he could get the cheer out, and he finished with a fit of choking.

"Take the lantern, Job!" cried Blake. "Let us get him home!"

He picked Tinker up in his arms as though he had been a mere infant instead of a big, sturdy boy, and, burdened thus, set off with such

THE SEARCH FOR THE WHITE CHAMPION.

Read the Tale of

TOM SAYERS,

the Great Boxer, in this week's issue of

THE

"MARVEL"

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PRICE - - - ONE PENNY.

which he had cut an all too prominent figure.

It was safe, but cave-life did not suit him so well as an African bushman, and he had had about enough of it.

Having let him in the squire fastened the doors, drew the thick curtains carefully over them, and returned to his chair. By accident, or otherwise, he touched the shade of the lamp, tilting it so that it threw a light upon the face of the visitor, but left his own features in shadow.

He then resumed his cigar, looking at Bates steadily for several moments—very much like the tamer of the wild beast testing the power of his eye before resorting to the whip or red-hot iron.

"So you have come?" he said at length, having removed the cigar from his lips and blown out a slow, graceful curl of smoke from between his strong white teeth.

"Yes, I've come," growled Bates. "But why did yer fetch me here when yer well know there's a risk in every step I take outside of that hole over yonder? Why couldn't you 'a' sent?"

"Because the business I want you for to-night is only suitable for a personal interview," was the smooth response.

"Business! There's no more business between us! Understand that for a start!" said Bates, with violent emphasis. "I'll do no more 'business,' as yer calls it, for you! All I want, and all I've come here for to-night is the money yer promised me—money for me to get away out o'

burglar come to rob, and prepared for anything if anyone came in your way. Well, it happened that I came in your way, and things went the other way round, and I could have killed you had I chosen. But I spared your life."

"Small thanks to you for that!" growled Bates.

"Nor did I hand you over to justice as I might have done," continued the squire, "for I knew the instant I tore the crape mask from your face that you were the man 'wanted' for the Ashhill Bank robbery, combined with the shooting of the manager. Because, you see, I am a bit of an amateur detective, among many other things, and I was interested in that case."

He paused, and more and more of the wild beast glared from the ex-groom's eyes.

Ardoise calmly continued:

"I struck a bargain with you. As the price of my silence about these delicate matters, and that protection against awkward inquiries which no one could give you better than I, you were to enter my services and do any additional piece of work I might require."

"And I've done it!" growled Bates. "Give me that money, and let me go!"

"I had need of a man like you at the time," Ardoise went on, ignoring the interruption calmly, "and I have need of you now. You will do this piece of work for me to-night."

"I will not! I swear I will not!" Bates shouted.

"Refuse, and in an hour you shall

rapid strides that Job, who was supposed to light the way with the lantern, was hard put to keep even a decent distance in the rear.

In this manner of going they were not long in reaching the cottage. Mrs. Peckchaff, who was waiting at the gate, screamed at the first sight of Tinker, as he lay limply in Blake's arms. She took it for granted that he was dead. And not without cause, for there was little sign of life about him yet.

But a word from Blake that he needed her help, put the little woman's coming hysterics to flight in a moment.

She was a capital nurse, and Sexton Blake, as we have mentioned before, possessed no small amount of medical knowledge. He soon saw that Tinker was not seriously injured, only badly stunned; that cruel blow upon the temple having plunged him in a state of coma terribly like death at the first glance.

For some time their efforts to restore him were fruitless, and more than once Blake despaired.

But they were rewarded at last by a feeble twitching of the boy's white lips. Then they parted, and a long-drawn sigh came forth. He opened his eyes, and even raised his head.

Blake would not allow him to speak until he had rested for some considerable time, and drank off a big mug of hot milk, than which there is no better restorative in the world.

Then, and not till then, he permitted him to tell his story, taking care to send Job and his wife out of the room beforehand on some plausibly-sounding errand. For he did not want the real facts to become matters of gossip in the neighbourhood. There were certain villains concerned whom he meant to drop upon presently, and he did not wish them to get a warning hint.

He heard Tinker's account of that afternoon's adventures with gathering brows, and when the boy had concluded, he said:

"It was clearly a plot to get possession of Pedro. Of course, the boy, Slimy Sam, as you call him—and it is a very fitting name!—was merely the tool of these gypsies, and they in their turn of—of one with whom I will have a heavy reckoning sooner or later!"

"You mean Squire Ardoise?" said Tinker.

The detective nodded. "But what about Pedro?" cried the boy. "Do you think they will have killed him, sir?"

And his voice broke as he said it. "It is impossible to say," replied Blake. "I can only hope that they will merely keep him shut up somewhere for a time. But it is only a slender hope," he added, with a sigh, "for these men, who would not stick at taking a human life if it stood in their way, are not likely to be over merciful to a mere dog! Stop! What are you about to do?"

He broke off with this exclamation as Tinker suddenly sat up, as if to get out of bed.

"I'm going after Pedro!" he declared, putting one leg to the floor. "If he's alive I'll bring him back! If they've killed him, I'll—I'll—"

Blake pushed him back into the bed, and shook a finger at him, half in jest, half in earnest.

"It would be sheer madness, even if you were in a fit state to go," he said. "There is not the slightest hope of getting the dog back to-night, or I would go myself. For Ardoise would deny all knowledge of the dog, and what proof have we that Pedro was taken to his house at all? We can only guess at it."

"True enough, gov'nor," Tinker had to admit ruefully. "All the same, I can't lie here when old Pedro might be saved after all!"

"You've got to!" said Blake, with mock sternness. "If you attempt to get out of that bed before you get my leave, I'll give you the licking of your life!"

"All right, gov'nor; give you my word I won't try," grinned Tinker, who knew that Blake was in earnest in spite of his half-jesting tone.

"As for getting Pedro back," said the detective, "that, if it can be done at all, will be possible only by more serious means than an excited rush to the house, and a hot-headed demand for him. And now, good-night! Remember your promise!"

"Good-night, gov'nor!" responded Tinker. "I'll keep my word. But it's rotten hard luck to be shoved into bed and kept there like a kid!" he groaned, as Blake closed the door and came away.

The detective smiled as he left the cottage, but the smile soon faded from his lips, and his face became grave and anxious again.

Tinker's recovery lifted an immense load from his heart; but, relieved of that, his thoughts instantly flew to his precious plans. The bloodhound—his joint guardian—had been cleverly got out of the way, and he himself had left the place for upwards of an hour. What if the attempt had been made already in his absence?

He quickened his pace almost to a run.

The little office, when he came in sight of it, was in darkness, as he had left it on that hurried journey. But as his hand sought the door he knew at once that his fears were not groundless, for it yielded readily at a touch, and he had left it locked!

He entered cautiously, prepared for a struggle, and fervently hoping that he might get the chance of one—that the thief was not gone.

But an instinct told him that the place was vacant. With a sigh of disappointment he relaxed the taut muscles of his arms, and, crossing to the switch, turned on the electric light.

His eyes instantly sought the safe. It stood wide open.

"It is done!" he groaned. "I might have known it—I might have known it!"

He went closer. The safe was empty. The books, even, had been taken out, and now lay flung anyhow upon the floor. Amongst them was the cashbox, burst open and emptied, the money it had contained, a few pounds and some loose silver, being gone.

This was by Ardoise's suggestion, to give the thing the look of a common robbery. Naturally, Bates was not slow to take the hint—and the cash.

But the loss of the money, had it been fifty times the amount, would not have troubled Blake one jot—in fact, it relieved him rather, for it suggested a common thief. And what should he care for those plans? Some tools, which he knew instantly to be part of an expert cracksmen's kit, lying also upon the floor, near the rifled safe, confirmed this idea.

He looked round the office almost hopefully, and to his joy saw the roll of plans lying on the floor under a desk, as though the thief had tossed it there in disgust, finding them out of his line.

He picked them up eagerly. They were intact, and although crumpled and dusty, did not seem to be otherwise tampered with.

But stay! He opened out one of the plans and held them flat and level with the light. It hardly needed such keen eyes as his to see the indentations of a hard pencil-point over every line, letter, and figure upon it.

"So the thing has been done!" he muttered, almost with a groan. "The clever scoundrel has scored his last trick! The plans have been traced!"

Blake and Ardoise Come Face to Face.

THE discovery that his secret plans, which he had guarded with such infinite care and watchfulness through all the many weary nights that he had laboured upon them, were now in full possession of the enemy was a cruel blow to the great detective.

Many a man would have dropped his hand and given up the battle against a foe so subtle and relentless as hopeless. Not so Sexton Blake! The defeat only served to stiffen his fibre and make him the more resolute.

There was no time now to alter a single detail of the scheme he had so patiently built up, little by little, to perfection. It must be carried out as it stood. Only he would have to redouble his vigilance, and guard with a thousand eyes, as it were, every point, so that Ardoise, with all his cunning, should not find an opening through which to strike his final, fatal blow.

He went on with his preparations just the same as though the plans were still a secret of his own brain.

For the weeks sped rapidly, and the day was fast drawing near on which—through the medium of Sidney Temple; for to the world at large he was still "Bob Packer" the foreman—he had promised that the new water-supply should reach the three great towns.

And in the meantime many things happened.

First, and best of all, Tinker got quite well again, thanks to a sturdy frame and a sound constitution, and went gaily back to work.

And then one evening Pedro arrived at Peckchaff's cottage. The great bloodhound looked thin and gaunt, as if he had refused to take a particle of food from the hands of his captors, and his once sleek coat was faced with the grime of the cellar where he had been imprisoned and scored across with many a cruel lash. Otherwise he was not much the worse for his adventures, whatever they may have been.

But he still wore a strong muzzle. His gaolers, when they released him, had not dared to remove that! Or was it just possible that he had not been released at all, but had somehow contrived to escape?

But he was back again safely, and Blake and Tinker were overjoyed.

For they had hesitated to take any full between the eyes, and sending him headlong down the remaining steps to recover the dog, fearing that if they did so Ardoise would instantly have the animal destroyed, to conceal his share in the plot.

Then last, but, of course, far more important to the outside world, came the trial of the imprisoned rioters.

That had only waited for the Assize to open. Needless to say, Slagford Court-house, where the assize was held, was crowded that day, and a huge throng of those who could not obtain permission to enter filled the market-place outside.

Blake, as "Robert Packer, the

foreman of the works," was down as one of the chief witnesses—a role that was by no means to his liking, but, of course, not to be avoided.

There is no need to give an account of that trial here. It has little to do with the thread of this story, and other events, far more thrilling in their nature, and more closely connected with the lives of our chief characters, are crowding on to be told.

Yet it was an impressive and dramatic scene.

The silent and awestruck crowd that lined the walls of the court, filling every inch of space allotted to the public; the judge, in his robe of scarlet and ermine, seated under the canopy that bore the Arms of England, and with the Sword of Justice suspended above his head; the counsels in their rustling black gowns; and then the dock, where the prisoners were brought in batches as the trial proceeded—the enclosed space, with its grim, spiked rail, not being large enough to hold more than a few of them at a time. And there were upwards of sixty of these unhappy men.

Their bearing in the dock differed, according to the character of the men. The grinders—bold and hardy fellows, of half-gypsy type—were, for the most part, sulen or defiant. But the men from the towns—mechanics, who had led quiet and respectable lives until that fated hour when they

had allowed themselves to be drawn into the rash outbreak—these now stood with bowed heads, dejected and overwhelmed, as they realised in full to what pass that terrible Sunday night's work had brought them.

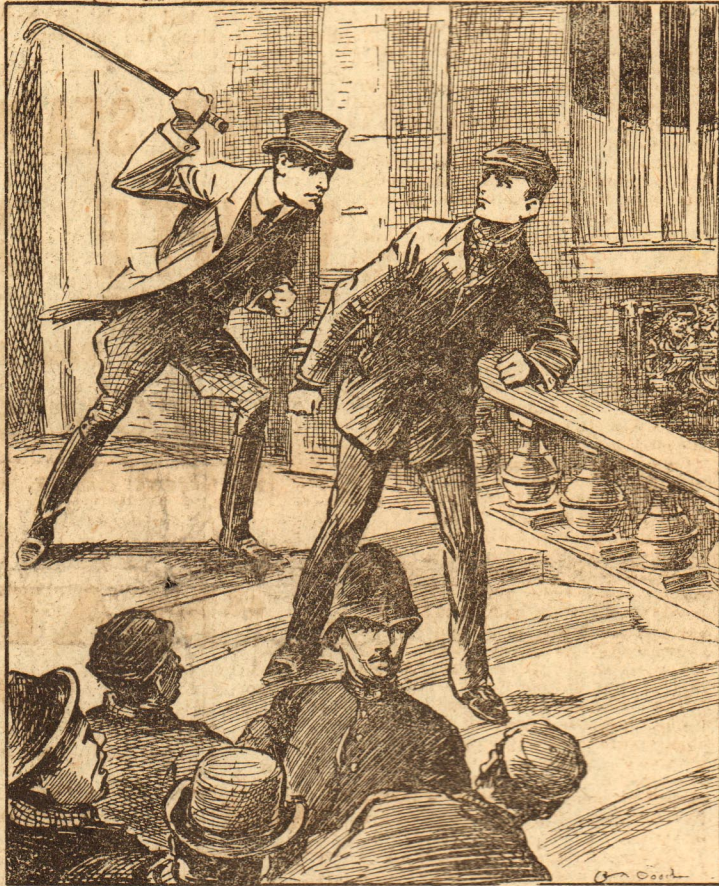
But they were dealt with mercifully—many being acquitted, and others escaping with light terms of imprisonment. The ringleaders, however—Cronk amongst them—came in for heavier sentences. Black Jock and Bates, had they been among the prisoners, would undoubtedly have received the death-sentence—the former for the murder of Lieutenant Halford, and the latter for the killing of Sergeant Rodd, for he was known to have fired the fatal shot.

But Black Jock had escaped the gallows by another form of death, as the reader is already aware, and the other villain had so far eluded capture.

The merciful treatment of the bulk of the rioters was chiefly owing to Sexton Blake.

They were defended by one of the most able barristers of the day, a famous K.C., who was supposed to have volunteered his services, but, in reality, was privately engaged by Blake himself, who paid the heavy fee out of his own pocket.

Then the great detective, as the chief witness, framed his evidence on the side of mercy.



"You dare to threaten me!" hissed Ralph Ardoise, bringing his whip down upon Sexton Blake's back with a lash that sounded like a pistol-shot.

Clearly and skilfully, he showed how the bulk of the rioters were merely thoughtless and ignorant men, misled by a few cunning scoundrels, and his word had great weight with both judge and jury.

His lordship—who, of course, had not the slightest idea who the witness really was—even complimented the supposed workman upon the lucid and intelligent way in which he had given his evidence, at which the famous detective smiled slightly as he left the witness-box.

He had made no allusion whatever to Squire Ardoise in his evidence, well knowing that it would be useless, and even dangerous, to drop any hints as to his share in promoting the riots unless he was prepared with absolute proof—and he was hardly ready with that yet.

And, strangely enough, the gipsy squire was quite the hero of the hour in Slagford that day.

First of all, the idea was somehow spread abroad that he was paying for the services of the great K.C. who defended the prisoners. And then he appeared as witness in their favour, and, with amazing skill and cunning, tried to make out that the mob would have dispersed quietly, but for the violence of the workmen and the soldiers, who, he declared, began the bloodshed without provocation.

His lying statements produced a great effect among the lower class of the spectators in court.

For the bulk of the townspeople were strongly in sympathy with the rioters, whom they regarded as brave champions of the public cause. And the tide of popular feeling was just as strongly against all, high or low, who were concerned in the hated new water-cheme.

Some cheering arose as Ardoise left the witness-box.

It was quickly suppressed by the judge's stern orders, but it had been heard by the crowd outside, and was taken up by hundreds of voices. Cheer upon cheer, coupled with the squire's name, was heard through the open windows.

And to show still more pointedly which way the tide of popular feeling was setting, each witness for the prosecution was hissed or groaned at by the people at the back of the court as he entered or left the box.

This went on in spite of the judge's repeated demands for silence, and the officers of the court seemed powerless to prevent it.

Sexton Blake came in for an especially marked demonstration of this kind.

He merely smiled in contempt, knowing full well that the fickle fools might be cheering him just as heartily as they now hissed him before long—which was actually the case.

But they were all ill-will and venom at present, and he had an uglier show of it as he left the court.

Squire Ardoise happened—perhaps by chance—to come out almost at the same moment, and preceded him by a few paces down the broad steps which led from the main entrance down to the market-place, at one side of which the court-house was situated.

This, large as it was, seemed all too small to hold the enormous crowd that had now gathered there.

A few policemen kept the steps clear, and some mounted constables made an attempt to keep a lane through the throng for those leaving the court to pass. But it was like trying to divide the sea—the dense-packed mass closed up again the instant they backed their horses out of it.

A tremendous outburst of cheering arose the instant Squire Ardoise appeared. He did not acknowledge it, but passed on slowly down the steps.

Then the crowd caught sight of Bob Packer, the foreman of the hated works, following, and the cheers changed to groans and hisses.

Sexton Blake might have been stone-deaf for any heed he paid to it. He quickened his pace, and would have passed Ardoise, but the latter stopped half-way down the steps and deliberately blocked his path.

The Gipsy Squire carried a riding-whip, for he had ridden over to Slagford. This he now raised, and, pointing to the court they had just left, said, in a tone loud enough to be heard far over the crowd:

"Now, fellow, I trust that you are satisfied with your work in there! By your lies, you have this day sent many a better man than yourself to gaol! Had I my will, I would have you whipped at the cart-tail from one end of the town to the other!"

Sexton Blake's eyes flashed, his hands clenched. Then came his reply,

"Ralph Ardoise, had I my will you should have stood the foremost of those unhappy wretches in the dock to-day! For the blood of every man who fell upon that fatal Sunday night lies at your door! And by the heavens above us, I will bring it home to you yet!"

The crowd was for the moment hushed. They heard, but they did not understand.

But the Gipsy Squire did.

His dark face became absolutely black with fury. As Blake, having spoken those grim words, turned to pass on down the steps, he hissed out:

"What, rascal! You dare to threaten me!"

And Blake's back being then towards him, he brought down his whip upon it with a lash that sounded like a pistol-shot.

The detective swung round like lightning, and like lightning his fist shot out, taking the Gipsy Squire full between the eyes, and sending him headlong down the remaining steps.

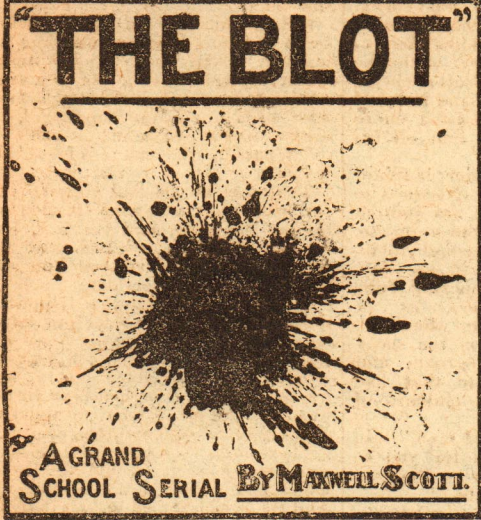
A mighty shout went up from the crowd:

"He's struck the squire! He's killed Squire Ardoise! Down him—down him!"

The mass surged forward like a great billow. The few policemen were swept aside, and the front of the crowd, driven by those in the rear, rushed up the steps where Blake stood—alone!

(Another grand instalment of this thrilling serial story next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)

YOU CAN START READING BELOW.



INTRODUCTION FOR THE NEW READER.

Philip Ashley is a brilliant lad at a Council School, but has declined an offer of a scholarship because of his mother, who is so poor that she has to char for her living. But one day comes Phil's opportunity.

Bravely he stops the maddened horses in Sir David Rendle's carriage. It is the turning-point in Philip's career, for by way of reward Sir David sends him to Rayton College, equipping him down to the smallest detail, and also engaging the lad's mother as a well-paid housekeeper.

Phil starts, light-hearted and jubilant, on the journey to Rayton; but on the way

a terrible revelation was made to him. Sir David's nephew, Godfrey Mortimer, who, in the presence of Phil's benefactor, has promised to shepherd him in his new surroundings, and show him every kindness possible between one schoolboy and another, turns out to be a humbug and a hypocrite.

No sooner is the train clear of Highfield than Mortimer stirs up trouble; but Phil sets upon him, and holds him in check till at the next station some more Raytonians enter the compartment.

The newcomers are friends of Mortimer, and when they hear Phil's story they christen him "The Blot."

After being treated with much snobbishness, Phil arrives at Rayton College, and is made Mortimer's fag.

From the time he enters the school plots of dishonesty, etc., are laid for him, and Mortimer does all he can to get Phil disgraced.

At last the long looked-for Beresford examination is to be held, and now everybody is anxiously awaiting the result. Is the Blot going to win the prize?

Dr. Paul suddenly returns from London, and on the way to the college he sees Mortimer depart from a low public-house. He also overhears a conversation in the public-house bearing upon the plot to get the Blot expelled.

Upon arriving at the school, Dr. Paul goes to the isolation room, where Philip is placed under close restrictions. He questions Ashley as to what he knows in regard to Jim Cocker, the man who has been blackmailing him.

It appears that Jim Cocker was the possessor of certain letters belonging to Dr. Paul, and to keep the contents of these letters from becoming public property the master of the college had had to pay several sums of money to Cocker. Unable at last to meet with the demands of Cocker, Dr. Paul decides

to resign his position at Rayton.

In a curious fashion Philip learns that the letters are hidden under the floor of Cocker's house, and so he and Dr. Paul make a journey to Highfield with the intention of recovering them.

Cocker has been arrested by the police for drunkenness, and his landlord has removed his furniture in consequence of arrears of rent. So it happens that the premises are empty.

Against the wish of Dr. Paul, Philip enters the house, and, to his delight, the letters are still beneath the floor. Drawing them from their hiding-place, he thrusts them into his pocket.

The next instant the dazzling glare of a policeman's lantern illumines the room.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

An Unexpected Meeting.

PHILIP'S heart stood still. For a moment he was literally paralysed with dismay.

"Hallo! What's this window doin' open?"

The sound of the policeman's voice fell on his ears and broke the spell. Swiftly, yet without a sound, he glided back into the living-room just as the policeman thrust his head and shoulders through the window and flashed the light of his bullseye around the empty scullery.

"Anybody 'ere?" he called out.

Needless to say, Philip did not answer. Scarcely daring to breathe, with every nerve in his body tingling with suppressed excitement, he groped his way to the living-room door, which opened on to the street. He laid one trembling hand on the key,

and the other on the latch. Then he held his breath and listened.

"I'd better 'ave a look round the place," he heard the policeman growl; then he heard a series of sounds which told him that the burly and somewhat clumsy constable was clambering through the scullery window.

Further concealment was now impossible. Quick as thought Philip turned the key and raised the latch. The constable heard the double click, and nearly fell through the window in his excitement. But by the time he had scrambled through, and had darted into the living-room, Philip had dragged the door

open, had quietly slipped out into the dark, deserted street, and was walking quietly and demurely up the lane towards the spot where he had left Dr. Paul.

He had not gone many yards before he heard the constable running after him and calling to him. Again Philip's heart stood still. But his fears were groundless, for it never even occurred to the constable to suspect that this well-dressed and respectable-looking schoolboy was the person who had escaped from the empty house.

"What is it?" asked Philip, pulling up and turning round.

"As a man just passed you, runnin' up the lane in this direction?" asked the constable hurriedly.

"No," said Philip.

"Then he must 'ave made off in the other direction," said the constable; and without another word he turned on his heel and ran off down the lane.

With a sigh of profound relief, Philip quickened his pace and returned to where Dr. Paul was waiting for him.

"Well," said the doctor gloomily, "have you discovered where Cocker's removed to?"

"He hasn't removed anywhere," said Philip.

"But the house is empty and to let," said the doctor.

"Yes, sir; but Cocker doesn't know. It seems that when he went to Rayton he was owing three months' rent, and as his landlord didn't know where he had gone, and couldn't get any news of him, he obtained a distress warrant, and broke into the house and sold everything by auction."

"Then the letters may still be hidden under the floor of the living-room," said the doctor eagerly.

"They were, but they aren't there

now, sir," said Philip, with a smile. "They're here!"

And he drew the packet from his pocket and handed it to Dr. Paul.

In an instant the doctor's whole appearance was transfigured. As if by magic all the anxiety, all the despair, all the hopeless misery, vanished from his face, and in their place came such a look of happiness as had not been seen there for many a week. The stoop disappeared from his shoulders, his eyes sparkled, and to Philip's gaze he seemed to grow suddenly ten years younger.

With a happy laugh, he darted to the nearest street-lamp and eagerly glanced through the letters. They were all there. Not one was missing.

"Where did you find them?" he asked. "How did you get them?"

"One of the windows at the back of the house was unfastened," said Philip. "I just slipped in through that window, found the letters under the floor, and brought them to you."

The doctor thrust the letters into an inside pocket of his coat and laid his hand on Philip's arm.

"Ashley," he said, in a choking voice—"Ashley, how can I ever thank you for the great service you have rendered me to-day? You have given me a new lease of life. I feel like a man who had been condemned to penal servitude for the rest of his life, and who is suddenly reprieved!"

"You won't need to go abroad now, sir, will you?" said Philip.

"No. I shall remain in England now."

"And you won't need to leave Rayton, either, will you, sir?" said Philip eagerly.

A little of the happiness died out of the doctor's face.

"Yes, I shall have to leave Rayton," he said sadly. "The governors have accepted my resignation, and have actually appointed a new head-master. Gladly would I stay now that Cocker's power over me is a thing of the past, but it is too late now. I shall have to leave the dear old school at the end of this term."

They walked on in silence for a little while, then Philip spoke:

"Now that you have got the letters, sir," he said, "will you spend the night here, as you originally intended, or will you go straight back to Rayton?"

"I shall return with you by the 11.55," said the doctor. "As you know, I engaged a bed-room at the Station Hotel, but I can easily cancel it. I'll do so now."

They walked to the hotel, where the doctor explained that he had changed his mind, and would not require the bed-room he had engaged. The hall-porter accordingly fetched down the doctor's bag, and the doctor and Philip were about to leave the hotel when, of all people in the world, Sir David Rendle walked in!

It would be hard to say which of the two, Sir David or Dr. Paul, was the more surprised by this unex-

pected meeting. Sir David strode up to the doctor, with an exclamation of astonishment, and shook him warmly by the hand.

"Fancy meeting you here!" he said. "I didn't know you were in Highfield!"

Then he glanced at Philip, nodded coldly, and took no further notice of him.

"I—I had to run down on business," said the doctor lamely. "Being a stranger to the town, I brought Ashley with me to act as my guide."

"Have you been here long?" "Oh, no! We only arrived by the 10.15!"

"And how long are you staying?" "We are returning by the 11.55."

Sir David looked curious. He was wondering what sort of "business" Dr. Paul could transact between a quarter-past ten and midnight! The doctor, however, gave no sign of satisfying his curiosity.

"I'm glad I have met you," said Sir David, after an awkward pause. "I was going to write to you to-morrow. A friend of mine in New York—Mr. Sharpe, the well-known railway magnate—has decided to send his boy to England to be educated. He wrote to me some time ago, and asked me if I could recommend a good preparatory school. Of course, I recommended Rayton College, and I had a letter from him this morning asking me to enter the boy for next term. Now that I have mentioned the matter to you, there will be no need for me to write, I suppose?"

"Not at all," said the doctor, glancing at his watch.

"I should like him to be in the same House as Godfrey, if there is a vacancy," said Sir David, referring, of course, to his nephew, Mortimer. "Then Godfrey will be able to keep an eye on him and make things easy for him."

At this allusion to Mortimer the doctor started, and a grave look came into his face. In his eagerness to recover the letters he had forgotten all about Mortimer and the Blue Boar. But it all came back to him now, and he remembered that he had an unpleasant but necessary duty to perform.

"I'm afraid your nephew will not be at Rayton next term," he said, in a low voice.

It was now Sir David's turn to start.

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"I am dreadfully sorry, for your sake," said the doctor. "I know that what I am about to say will be a terrible blow to you. But I have no choice. Certain facts have come to my knowledge which compel me to ask you to remove your nephew from the school no later than to-morrow!"

His nephew was to be expelled! Sir David reeled as if he had been struck. His face went deathly white, then a blaze of anger leaped into his eyes, and he turned to Philip.

"This is your doing!" he said furiously. "This is how you repay me for all I have done for you. You have poisoned the doctor's mind about Godfrey with your lying tales! You have—"

"Sir David! Sir David!" interrupted Dr. Paul. "When you learn the truth, you will be the first to acknowledge how cruel and unjust is your accusation! So far from Ashley having poisoned my mind against your nephew, it is your nephew who has— But I cannot speak of these things here. It is a long and painful story. If you will come to Rayton to-morrow, I will—"

"No, no!" said Sir David. "I insist on knowing now—at once—what the charge against my nephew is!"

Again the doctor glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve. The last train to Rayton left in ten minutes. For a moment he stood irresolute, then he turned to Philip.

"I have changed my mind again," he said. "I shall not return to Rayton to-night. It will be better for me to see Sir David now and tell him everything. I will spend the night here and return in the morning. But there is no need for you to stay. You had better go back by the 11.55 as we arranged."

"Very well, sir," said Philip. "Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, my boy!" said the doctor, shaking him by the hand. "And thank you again for all your help to-night!"

Philip glanced timidly at Sir David. "Good-night, sir!" he said, holding out his hand.

But Sir David turned his back on him without a word, and it was with a lump in his throat, and with something suspiciously like tears in his eyes, that Philip crossed the road, entered the station, and sat down on the dimly-lighted and deserted platform to wait for the Rayton train.

In the Lion's Den.

ABOUT the time that Philip left Highfield a terrific thunder-storm burst over Rayton.

Peals of deafening thunder and jagged forks of vivid lightning followed each other with scarce an interval, and the rain came down in hissing torrents.

The boys, of course, were in bed when the storm began, and most of them were fast asleep. But they didn't sleep long. The first crash of thunder woke most of them, and the second woke the rest.

In Dormitory B some of the boys buried their heads beneath the bed-clothes and tried to shut out the terrifying din. Others sat up in bed and talked to each other in loud voices, to show they were not frightened. A few, among whom was Tubb, stood at the windows and watched the almost incessant play of the lightning outside.

"Did you ever see such rain?" said Tubb. "We'll be flooded out if this goes on much longer. My! Did you feel how that last peal of thunder made the whole building tremble?"

"Fairly rocked it," said Card, in a voice that was not altogether free from a suspicion of nervousness. "I—I wonder if there's any danger of—"

Before he could complete the sentence another blinding flash lit up the darkness. Out of the sky a zig-zag ribbon of dazzling light leaped down towards the roof of the doctor's house. There was a deafening crash—a clatter of broken slates and falling masonry. Then another awe-inspiring peal of thunder tore the heavens apart.

"The doctor's house has been struck!" cried Tubb, springing back from the window with a shout of alarm. "One of the chimneys! I saw it fall!"

He was right. One of the doctor's chimneys had been struck by the lightning, and had crashed down through the roof into Dormitory A, which was occupied, as the reader may remember, by Holcroft and his chums.

Luckily, none of the boys were hurt, not even scratched. Luckily, too, this proved to be the last effort of the storm, which a few minutes later died away as quickly as it had arisen. At least the thunder and lightning died away, but the rain came down faster than ever; and when Mr. Walker and the other masters rushed up to Dormitory A, they found the rain pouring in through the hole in the roof and rapidly converting the dormitory floor into a lake.

In these circumstances it became necessary to find some other sleeping accommodation for the fifteen boys;



The four boys were bound and stood up like human skittles. Then Tubb took careful aim with the football. The leather struck the whole four, and losing their balance, they fell to the floor amid yells of laughter.

and after a hurried consultation between Mr. Walker and the matron, it was decided to send four of the boys to the isolation-rooms, and to distribute the remaining eleven among the other dormitories.

The news of this arrangement was brought to Dormitory B by Mr. Sopworth. Tubb and his chums were anxiously discussing what had happened, and wondering if anybody had been injured, when the door opened and Mr. Sopworth put in his head.

"Back to your beds, boys!" he said. "The storm is over now. I say the storm is over now. There is no further cause for alarm."

"The doctor's house has been struck, hasn't it, sir?" asked Tubb, as he and his twelve companions scrambled back into bed.

"Yes," said Mr. Sopworth. "One of the chimneys was struck by the lightning, and fell through the roof of Dormitory A."

"Was anybody hurt, sir?"

"No. But the dormitory has been rendered uninhabitable. I say the dormitory has been rendered uninhabitable, and its occupants in consequence are compelled to seek shelter elsewhere. Four of them are coming here."

Tubb sat up in bed, his eyes glittering with unholy joy.

"Do you mean, sir," he said, "that four of the Dormitory A louts—I mean boys—are coming to sleep here?"

"Yes," said Mr. Sopworth. "There are two empty beds here I perceive. They will have to sleep two in a bed. It will only be for tonight. I say it will only be for tonight. By to-morrow night the roof will have been repaired, and they will be able to return to their own quarters."

"Who are the four who are coming here, sir?" asked Tubb, striving to speak calmly.

"Holcroft, Rutherford, Carfax, and Pettigrew," said Mr. Sopworth. "They will be here in a few minutes. I look to you to give them a warm welcome. I say I look to you to give them a warm welcome."

Tubb had need of all his self-control to keep from uttering a whoop of triumph. He managed, however, to restrain himself until Mr. Sopworth had departed, and had shut the door, then he leaped out of bed and struck a dramatic attitude.

"The Fates have delivered them into our hands!" he cried. "Four of our hated rivals are to be handed over to our tender mercies! Holcroft, Rutherford, Carfax, and Pettigrew are to be cast into the lion's den! For one night only, gentlemen! Absolutely for one night only! Are we happy?"

"We are! We are!" chorused the others.

"Will we give them a warm welcome?"

"We will!"

"Have we forgotten what happened at Wragg's this afternoon?"

"We have not!"

"Do we swear to be revenged?"

"We do!"

"Then let's get ready!" said Tubb, dropping his theatrical pose and becoming matter of fact. "What shall we tie them up with? There's that rope which—No! Better idea. Four portmanteau straps. Hurry up, or they'll be here before we're ready for 'em!"

Four straps were hastily removed from as many bags, and concealed under Rigden's bed.

"They'll not give in without a fight," said Tubb. "Fists are very good weapons in their way, but hair-brushes are better when the enemy is clothed in thin pyjamas! To arms, my children—to arms!"

Each boy armed himself with his

hairbrush; and then, by Tubb's orders, they went back to bed.

"One of the masters is sure to come with them," said Tubb. "We'll have to play doggie till he has gone; then, when I give the signal, we'll all spring out of bed and rush at the bounders in a body. Then the band will play!"

In the meantime Holcroft and his three companions had been instructed to slip on their macintoshes over their pyjamas, to don their boots and socks, and to follow Mr. Walker to his house. They had no idea where they were being taken until Mr. Walker halted at the door of Dormitory B and told them to take off their macintoshes and hang them up in the corridor.

"But—but you're not going to put us in B, are you, sir?" gasped Holcroft, turning pale at the thought.

"Certainly I am!" said Mr. Walker. "Why not?"

"They'll murder us!" groaned Holcroft.

But Mr. Walker did not hear. He opened the dormitory door and switched on the electric light. Thirteen innocent-looking boys were lying peacefully in thirteen beds. The two remaining beds were empty.

"You'll have to sleep two in a bed, I'm afraid," said Mr. Walker, when the four boys had taken off their macintoshes. "But you won't mind that for one night. Those are the beds. Be quick, now. I'm in a hurry."

"Can't—can't we sleep somewhere else, sir?" faltered Holcroft, hanging back.

"I'd be willing to sleep on the couch in the dining-room, sir," said Carfax.

"Or even in the stable, sir," said Rutherford. "We should be quite comfortable there."

"Don't be ridiculous!" snapped Mr. Walker, who was worried out of his life. "Come, now. You're keeping me waiting. In you go, and go straight to bed."

There was no help for it. Like four condemned criminals marching to the scaffold, Holcroft and his chums filed into the dormitory. Mr. Walker waited until they had taken off their boots and socks and had got into bed, then he switched off the light, shut the door, and took his departure.

Gripping his hair-brush, Tubb waited until the sound of Mr. Walker's footsteps had died away in the distance; then, without a sound, he crept out of bed and groped his way to the electric switch.

"Now!" he yelled, suddenly pressing the switch and flooding the dormitory with light.

Quick as his twelve followers leaped out of bed, Holcroft and his comrades were even quicker. As they sprang out of bed, Holcroft snatched up one of the bolsters and Carfax the other, while Rutherford and Pettigrew armed themselves with the pillows. Then, planting themselves with their backs to the wall, the four boys awaited the onslaught of their foes.

They had not long to wait. Led by Tubb, the Walkrites swooped down on their victims, but the latter made such vigorous play with the pillows and bolsters that again and again their assailants were beaten back.

"Not quite such a soft job as you expected—eh?" said Holcroft tauntingly. "But you're only three to one, you see! Why not go down to Dormitory C and fetch up some of the seniors to help you?"

Tubb's reply was to hurl his brush at Holcroft's head. Holcroft, however, easily dodged the missile; and when Tubb followed up his shot by rushing at Holcroft and trying to close with him, he received a smashing blow in the face with the end of the bolster that sent him reeling halfway across the room.

It was Rigden—whose father, it will be remembered, was a general in the Army—who conceived the brilliant idea which led to the undoing of the dauntless four.

"I have it!" he cried. "An infantry charge under cover of artillery fire!"

"Come off!" growled Tubb. "What are you gassin' about?"

When Rigden had explained his plan, Tubb and six others stationed themselves in a line in front of Holcroft and his comrades, each of them adopting a crouching attitude, ready to spring forward at the proper moment. Behind them, in another line, stood Rigden and the others, each of them armed with a couple of pillows.

"At the word 'Fire!' we'll chuck these pillows at them," said Rigden. "While the pillows are rainin' down

on 'em, you chaps in front will charge, and we'll follow up behind you. Ready? Fire!"

A dozen pillows hurtled through the air and crashed into the faces of Holcroft and his chums. Under cover of this smothering avalanche, Tubb and his allies dashed forward and leaped on their foes. Rigden and the others followed up, and in little more time than it takes to tell, Holcroft and his comrades were kicking and struggling on the floor with thirteen boys on the top of them!

To give them their due, they fought gamely to the bitter end. But the result was never in doubt. One by one they were overpowered, their arms pinioned with the straps, and their ankles lashed together with handkerchiefs.

"I wonder," said Tubb, as he gloatingly surveyed his bound and helpless captives—"I wonder if this is what Sopworth meant when he said he looked to us to give them a warm welcome!"

Skittles and Football.

"WELL, what's the first item on the programme?"

asked Card. "They riddled you with peas this afternoon. Shall we stick 'em up against the wall and give 'em a dose of the same physic?"

"And then toss 'em in a blanket, like they tossed you?" suggested Rigden.

Tubb shook his head.

"I don't like copyin' other people's notions," he said. "I prefer to be original. We'll start the entertainment with a game of skittles. Stand 'em up—there—in the middle of the floor. Holcroft in front, Carfax and Rutherford two yards behind him and two yards apart. Pettigrew at the back, two yards behind Carfax and Rutherford, and in a line with Holcroft. That's the way! Now for the ball!"

He dragged his box from under the bed, and drew out a brand-new football and a piece of chalk.

"We'll have one shy apiece," he said, "and the one who knocks most skittles down shall name the next item on the programme."

He chalked a line on the floor about twelve yards in front of the human skittles, who were standing in the positions shown in the following diagram:

P
C H
R

(H represents Holcroft, C Carfax, R Rutherford, and P Pettigrew.)

"Everybody must toe this line," said Tubb, "and the ball must strike the skittles before it bounces. If it bounces before it hits a skittle, there's no score. I'll go first."

"That isn't fair," grumbled Card. "We ought to take turns in alphabetical order."

"All right," said Tubb. "I'm willing."

Atkin, accordingly, took first shy. Having toed the line, he grasped the football with both hands, raised it above his head, and hurled it at Holcroft.

The ball struck Holcroft on the chest, and as Holcroft's ankles were tied together and his arms were bound to his sides, he went down with a crash that jarred every bone in his body. As he fell, he just grazed Carfax with his head, and it looked for a moment as if Carfax would go down, too. With a superhuman effort, however, Carfax managed to preserve his balance, so that only one "skittle" went down as the result of Atkin's shot.

When Holcroft had been stuck up again, Card took the ball and toed the line. He was more successful than Atkin had been, for the ball, after striking Holcroft on the left shoulder, and bowling him over, rebounded into Rutherford's face and sent him sprawling on his back!

The next three competitors failed to better this, and it was left for Hepworth to set up a new record. His shot, like Card's, struck Holcroft on the left shoulder and rebounded on to Rutherford. Both these boys went down, and as Holcroft went down he fell against Carfax and knocked him over, too.

"Three!" cried the triumphant Hepworth. "That'll take some beating!"

As a matter of fact it remained unbeaten until it came to the turn of Tubb, the last man on the list.

"Now I'll show you how to play skittles!" said Tubb, as he picked up the ball and toed the line.

And he did! Using only one hand, his left, he flung the ball with a

round-arm swing which caused it to strike Holcroft on the left cheek. As in the case of Hepworth's shot, Holcroft not only went down himself, but he also upset Carfax; while the ball, glancing off Holcroft's cheek, sprang on to Rutherford and knocked him down, and then twisted on to Pettigrew and toppled him off his feet.

Loud cheers and louder laughter greeted Tubb's success. Needless to say, the "skittles" did not join in either the laughter or the applause. They had been ready enough to indulge in both earlier in the day, when they had been peppering Tubb with their pea-shooters as he dangled from the tree, or when they had been tossing him in the sheet. Now they could only groan, and lament the spiteful fate that had consigned them to the clutches of their rivals.

"Well, you've won, old man," said Card to Tubb. "It's for you to nominate the next item on the programme. What's it to be?"

Tubb pondered for a moment; then his eye fell on the football.

"A game of footer!" he exclaimed. "We'll stick two of these bounders up at one end of the room and two at the other. They shall be the goals. We'll divide ourselves into sides, six on one side and seven on the other. A goal is scored whenever the ball hits one of these Johnnies in the face!"

"I don't quite catch on," said Card. "You'll catch on fast enough when we get started," said Tubb. "Let's pick sides. I'll captain one team, and you shall captain the other. We'll play ten minutes each way, and the side that scores most goals shall decide the next item on the programme."

Sides were quickly picked, Tubb taking five boys and Card taking six. Holcroft and Carfax, still bound, were made to stand, side by side, at one end of the room and Rutherford and Pettigrew at the other, near the door.

Then, when the two teams had lined up—one back, two half-backs, and three forwards on one side, and one back, two half-backs, and four forwards on the other—the ball was placed in the middle of the room, and Tubb kicked off towards what he called "the Holcroft-Carfax goal."

Just at first, till the boys had caught on to Tubb's idea, the play was rather spiritless. But when Tubb, at the end of a pretty dribble, banged the ball into Holcroft's face with a force that knocked him head-over-heels and produced a yell that made the rafters ring—when Tubb did this, there was no further lack of spirit in the game!

"First goal to us!" said Tubb. "Now, do you twig the idea?"

There was a chorus of assenting cries; then, after Holcroft had been set upon his feet again, the ball was replaced in the centre, and Card kicked off.

It was a fast and furious game which now ensued—the Cardites striving with might and main to equalise, and the Tubbites fighting with equal vigour to increase their lead.

There was a good deal of wild kicking, but that mattered nothing, for there were no touch-lines—only the four walls of the room—so that the ball was never out of play, not even when it went under one of the beds!

Not the least enjoyable part of the game—from the players' point of view—was the look of abject terror which came into the faces of the "goals" whenever the ball progressed in their direction and a score seemed likely to be made. Bound as they were, they could not get out of the way, but they could duck their heads, and in this way many a promising shot, which would otherwise have counted a goal, merely struck the wall at the end of the room, and rebounded into play.

At last, just before the "interval," Rigden, who was playing left half-back for Card's side, shouldered Atkin off the ball, dribbled it past Hepworth, and drove in a terrific slanting shot which first nearly knocked the nose off Rutherford's face, and then rattled Pettigrew on the chin.

"Goal! Goal!" yelled the Cardites.

"Two goals!" shouted Rigden.

"Not much!" said Tubb. "You can't score two goals with one shot!"

"But I hit 'em both!" protested Rigden.

"One goal!" said Tubb decisively.

"Half time!"

The second half opened—and closed—in sensational fashion. The Tubbites, of course, were now playing towards the goal near the door, and as soon as Card had restarted the game Atkin collared the ball and dashed off in the direction of Rutherford and Pettigrew.

Being tackled by Rigden, he tried to pass to Hepworth, but the ball flew

over Hepworth's head and struck the side-wall.

Rebounding into play, it dropped in front of Tubb, who was standing unmarked. With a yell of triumph Tubb trapped the ball, and just as he sent it flying towards the "goal," the door opened and Mr. Drummond, the science-master, strode in!

"What in the name of—!" he began.

That was all he had time to say, for even as he spoke Rutherford ducked his head, and the ball, continuing its flight, crashed into Mr. Drummond's face and sent him reeling back into the corridor.

In the scared silence that fell on the dormitory, the proverbial pin might have been heard to drop. When Mr. Drummond, recovering his balance, strode into the room every boy was standing as if he had been turned to stone, and all of them were gazing at the door in open-mouthed dismay.

There was something irresistibly comic in the spectacle, and Mr. Drummond had a keen sense of humour. And those who remember his dealings with Philip will not need to be told that there was nothing mean or revengeful in his nature.

For a moment he glared at the speechless boys, his anger struggling against his inclination to laugh. Then his mouth began to quiver, and eventually, to the intense relief of Tubb and his chums, he burst out laughing.

"You—you diabolical young imps!" he exclaimed. "What do you think you deserve for assaulting a master in this outrageous way? Expulsion, eh?"

"I apologise, sir," said Tubb. "It was an accident. It wasn't meant for you—it was meant for Rutherford."

Mr. Drummond glanced at Rutherford and Pettigrew, and then at Holcroft and Carfax. He knew, of course, of the intense rivalry between the two factions, and he took in the situation at a glance.

"Walker ought to have had more wit than to send four Paulites into a Walkrite dormitory," he muttered to himself. "It was putting temptation into the youngsters' way which they would have been more than human if they had resisted."

"Well, now," he said aloud, "as we are so near to the end of the term, I don't want to be too hard on you. If I consent to say no more about this—er—accident, will you give me your parole that you won't molest your visitors any more?"

"Do you mean never, or only to-night, sir?" asked Tubb.

Mr. Drummond laughed.

"I mean to-night," he said. "I don't want to put too big a strain on you!"

Needless to say, Tubb and his chums were only too delighted to get off so cheaply. They gladly gave the required promise, and after Mr. Drummond had seen the prisoners unbound, and had waited until all the boys were in bed, he switched off the light and returned to his own room.

And so for the remainder of that eventful night the lions lay down with the lambs, and Holcroft and his three companions—protected by the word of honour which might not be broken—were suffered to sleep in peace.

(Another splendid instalment next Tuesday.)

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THE 1st CHAPTER. Crowded Cheapside.

"MIND, sir! Look out, or you will be run over!" Cheapside was at its busiest, the roadway dense with taxicabs, motor-omnibuses, and other vehicles, while the pavement was thronged, for it was the luncheon-hour.

The boy who shouted out the warning thought that the stout, red-faced, elderly man in the white spats had taken leave of his senses, for, as if in defiance of the angry and pointed comments of sundry cabmen, he stood stock-still in the very middle of the thoroughfare.

The boy dashed out into the stream of traffic, and seizing the man by the arm, pulled him to one side.

"That was as near as a toucher, sir!" he said breathlessly, as he landed the stout individual on the pavement.

"Eh? Dear me! Yes, to be sure!" The fat man took out a handkerchief, which was red, like his face, and, taking off his silk hat, mopped his forehead.

"Whew!" he said. "Thank you, boy! I don't know what came over me. I suppose it was catching sight of that scoundrel Carr. Thought he was dead!" He stopped himself, as if he feared he had been letting out secrets. "I am much obliged, my boy," he went on. "If it hadn't been for you I really think I should have been killed. The London streets are awful!"

"Yes, if you go dreaming in them, they are, sir," said the boy quietly. The other laughed.

"I rather like you," he said. "You are so agreeably cheeky. Dreaming! I! Of all the impudence! There, I beg your pardon, boy! At any rate, you were not dreaming."

"No," said the boy, "I am not dreaming."

"Oh! So you are not, are you? Then what are you doing? Going back to work?"

"I haven't any work to go back to, sir," said the boy. "I was looking for some."

"Oh, indeed! But, you know, it is not the way to find work to go mooning about the City."

The boy laughed.

"How dare you laugh at me!" said the old gentleman.

"Well, it wasn't I who was mooning."

"Pon my soul, you are quite refreshing! So you want a job. What can you do?"

"Anything, sir."

"Anything means nothing." The speaker looked hard at the boy, and seemed pleased with his scrutiny.

Then he fished out a pocket-book, and extracted a card with some difficulty. "Look here," he went on.

"I don't know whether you would be any use to me, but come along to that office to-morrow. Come at eleven. I'll see what I can do for you. There, good-day, rescuer! I am much obliged to you for what you did—very much obliged!"

He turned and walked—or, rather, waddled—towards the big clock, and the boy glanced at the card. He had just read the name, "Mr. Samuel Goldstein," when the big man came back.

"I never asked you what your name was," he said. "Confound you! What is it?"

"Richard Bolt," said the boy.

"That's all right!" And once more the man ambled off, and was soon lost in the crowd.

The boy turned off into Aldersgate Street, examining the card as he went.

The address in the left-hand corner was 100A, Hatton Garden.

"Offered me a job, he did. Was there ever such luck?" he said to himself. "Just because I pulled the old chap out of the way of that cab."

Dick Bolt went back home to his frugal supper in that state of mind when people are commonly supposed to walk on air. He could not rest until he had told a fellow-lodger, one Grainger Kingston, all about it. Kingston lived in the same block of flats, as the barrack-like mass of cheap apartments was

courteously styled. Bolt went round to him, and found him playing the fiddle, which was the other's hobby. "Glad, old fellow? I should think I am!" said Kingston. "But don't count the downy roosters ere they are out of their coverings. Still, I hope it will be all right. You deserve to get a berth. You have been trying hard enough."

The next morning Bolt was punctual to the time appointed. The offices had a solid appearance, and as he pushed the smutty-looking glass doors and walked in, he noticed a man writing at a table. The man had his back to Bolt, and he did not look round, so that the boy did not see his face.

A clerk of about Bolt's own age asked him what he wanted, and then looked at the visitor rather superciliously.

"I'll take your name in," he said, in a condescending tone; and he slid off his stool and went and tapped at an inner door.

"You can go in," he said, returning to Dick Bolt.

The door was marked "Private," and as the boy entered it closed behind him with a click.

He found himself in a well-furnished room, facing the red-faced man, whose thin black hair was carefully tended, while he wore a gold-rimmed pince-nez on the tip of his nose. He was seated at a roll-top desk, and was busy writing. It was a full minute before he looked up at Dick, and then the eyes behind the glasses seemed to pierce the boy through.

Then he gave a grunt as he ran out a curious little leaf in the desk, and rested his elbow upon it. He grunted again. The boy stood the searching look pretty well.

"So you are Richard Bolt?"

The words were snapped out as if they had just escaped from a rat-trap.

"Yes, sir!"

"Look here!" he said sharply.

"I want a clerk, but the ordinary sort is no use to me. Can you write?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tchah! I mean a good hand. There are precious few who can! Sit down there and write something. Say you require work—anything."

He pointed to a small table near the window.

The boy obeyed, and then brought the result over to the head of the firm, who glanced at the paper and laid it down.

"Yes, that's all right," he said. "I liked your way yesterday. No nonsense about it. Now, I want someone who knows his way about in other places than Cheapside. I want tact. Nobody is any use in this world who has not got t-a-c-t. That's what I require. If people had tact they would not be wanting jobs."

"I think you could trust me, sir," he said.

Mr. Goldstein shook his head.

"You have not had much experience," he said.

There was a pause, for Dick felt that it was not for him to speak. He knew only too well that he had not had much experience. He was longing for the opportunity to obtain it.

He had gained all he could down in smoky Chorley, but the post he had held there was very small, and when his father had died, he had made up his mind to try his luck with the few pounds he had saved. He had been encouraged in this resolution by the uncle who had stepped in and done what he could for Dick's mother and the family of young children who had been left badly provided for.

The silence was broken by Mr. Goldstein.

"Well, maybe I will give you a trial," he said. "Ever been out of England?"

"No, sir."

"Would you be afraid to travel?"

"Afraid! No, sir!"

"Yes, I think you will do. Sit down." Bolt plumped down in the first seat he saw. "Not there. Sit in that chair."

There was another pause.

"Mind you, I want a still tongue. A chatterer is no good to me. It is like this. The work I will give you is very important. It will take all your attention. If you fail—"

"I shall not fail, sir!"

"Right! I hope not!" He jerked out a drawer in the lower regions of the desk. "I want you to go to San Francisco."

Dick Bolt successfully repressed a start of surprise.

"Well?"

"You said you wanted me to go to San Francisco, sir. When would you like me to start?"

"Now."

"Certainly, sir!" And there was no trace of astonishment in the boy's tone. He remained waiting for further instructions, as if it were the most matter-of-fact thing in the world.

The big man rose, crossed the room heavily, and came back again, to stand facing the boy.

"Yes," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "I think I can trust you. It is a private matter. It means a great deal to me, and it may mean something to you. You will take a message out there. We are now at May the thirty-first. The message you will have to hand in at the house of Mr. Joseph Vambart in San Francisco must be delivered on the morning of June the eleventh. The post would not get it there in time."

It was not necessary for the boy to do more than nod, for the other went on:

"Get back to your home now, and return with your bag. The Laurania sails to-night. I will give you full instructions and the message. You must have a letter of credit, too, on New York." He pulled out some silver and gave it to the boy.

"Here is cash for a cab both ways. There is not a minute to waste."

THE 2nd CHAPTER. Bolt's Fellow-traveller.

REPARATIONS did not take the boy long. The portman-teau which had carried his limited wardrobe up from the old home at Chorley was hurriedly packed, and then the boy dashed off a

few lines to his mother, telling her of his good fortune, and expressing the belief that his chance had come at last.

His friend Kingston was away at his work, of course, but he left a message for him with the woman who looked after the flats.

"Tell Mr. Kingston that I am going away for some time, and that I will write to him—will you?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Bolt!" said the woman. "But you will come back some time?"

The boy hastened out into the street, hailed the driver of a hansom, and was soon being driven back to Hatton Garden. He was entering the office again after only half an hour's absence. Mr. Goldstein gave him an approving nod.

"Now, see here," he said. "This is the letter which I wish you to take, also this little packet of schedules, of value only to the man you are taking them to. They must be kept dry under any and all circumstances. Here is money for the journey. I have wired for a berth for you on the Laurania. Luckily they had got one. This is the letter of credit on the United Bank in New York. I think that is all."

He stopped a moment and thought.

"If you fail to get there by the eleventh prox. it will be very serious. If you succeed I don't think you will stand in want of work for the future. There, that is all. You have just time to get your train." He extended his hand.

Bolt shook hands, and turned to the door promptly.

Once in the street he hailed the first cab, and was being driven to Euston almost before he could realise the whole situation. There was a rush at the last minute for the Liverpool express. Bolt secured a corner seat in a comfortable third-class compartment.

He had bought a paper to read, but the action of a man who got in almost at the last minute was so curious that he forgot to look at the periodical. The man wore a long ulster, a tweed golfing-cap, and glasses. He had remained outside the carriage up to the very last, until an inspector came down the train.

"If you are going on, sir, you had better get in," said the official.

The other reluctantly complied, but even then he stood at the window, looking anxiously up and down the train as if he were expecting to see somebody, but oddly enough he was evidently highly gratified at not seeing the person whom he was on the look-out for. Such, at least, was what Bolt made out. Anyway, when the stranger came and sat down immediately opposite the boy, there was a cheerful, relieved look about him.

"It's a rum go," he said, addressing himself directly to Bolt.

"Ah," said the boy, not knowing what to say, for he had seen no go, rum or otherwise. In fact, he began to think that his fellow-passenger had something out of gear in his thinking.

"Yes," said the man, with a sigh of relief, as though he had been running a stiffish race and had been awarded the cup. "It is a rum go. But it is all right. I am certain that they had a whiff of my starting, and had put some of the gang on to my tracks. It is as plain as palm-trees. But I was a bit too smart for them. They don't catch me asleep. I've been at the game too long to be caught in that way."

The boy nodded. He was certain now that the man in front of him was as mad as a hatter. But the owner of the glasses, the golfing-cap, and the ulster seemed quite oblivious of the impression he had created as to the correctness of his mental powers, and settled himself comfortably for the two hundred miles' run.

"Do you know Liverpool?" he said.

"Never been there," was the reply.

"Oh, it's a fine city! I'm often up and down. That's how it is I get a bit too well known. It is awkward sometimes."

Bolt wondered why it was awkward for his talkative companion to be known. The other went on to say:

"Ah, I have had some near touches in my time! It is a ticklish trade. One has to be pretty cute. Are you going far?"

"Fairish," said Bolt reticently.

But the other did not appear to notice that all the information was coming from his side. He was talking at Willesden. As they swept disdainfully through Rugby he was still chatting, and Crewe found him in the same happy, expansive vein.

Bolt lost sight of him as they got out at Lime Street. It was a bit singular, he thought, that with all the



The inspector dashed to the window and threw it up. The coach was illuminated by the fire. The boy clambered out, gripping the window frame. "Come along," he said to his companion.

FREE COUPONS TO THE PICTURE THEATRES!

(See "Your Editor's Den" in This Number.)

other's inquiries he had never tried to find out where he—Bolt—was going. But he was evidently one of those men who are only interested in their own movements. The boy just caught sight of his acquaintance diving into a motor-car, in which he was whirled away, while Bolt made all the haste he could. The group of passengers was rapidly disappearing.

He hurried to a cab, and told the man to drive to the landing-stage. Another cab was rattling after him.

The drive did not take long, but to the boy's consternation he found on arrival there that the Laurania was already under way.

"Well, she's not exactly under way, but she will take no more passengers," said an official at the quay.

"What's that?" said a sharp voice behind Bolt.

The boy turned quickly. A quiet, keen-looking man was standing there bag in hand. He spoke in an authoritative way.

"Are you going by the Laurania?"

"Yes," said Bolt. "That is, if I can."

He turned excitedly to the man who had come up, and caught him by the arm.

"I must go by it," he cried—"I must! What's to be done?"

"But she's gone," put in the official.

"Gone be hanged!" said the man, who had ceased to speak quietly. "She can't go without me. I thought I was the only one left behind, but here are two of us." He turned to the official again, and said something to him in a low tone. The other's manner changed in a moment.

"You may do it, sir," he said. "We'll signal her, and I will send you out in the harbour-tug."

"Good!" said the man. "It is imperative to me and to my young friend here. Is it not so?"

Bolt nodded. He followed his new-found friend and the official down the quay and into an office, where the last-named, who wore a nice thing in gold lace caps, seized the telephone-receiver and began to talk most forcibly through it. Presently he turned to the two would-be passengers.

"The tug's coming along," he said, "and we've signalled the Laurania. It ought to be all right."

He darted out of the little office, and Bolt and his friend followed him like shadows. He led the way through another office, across a paved courtyard, and on to another part of the quay, where a fussy-looking little tug was awaiting them. Bolt dashed forward, and his companion smiled.

"All in good time," he said.

Bolt wished afterwards that he had been calmer, but the notion of being left behind was too much for him. The tug was to be his salvation, and he made a run to get on board. The tug appeared to see him coming, and as if out of sheer love of a joke, shifted its position from the pier.

Bolt heard a cry of warning, and he felt the grip of the man behind, but it was too late.

Splash! He was down in the waters of the Mersey estuary, which are not strained, but, in fact, are muddy of hue and very doubtful in taste. Bolt had several mouthfuls before he came spluttering to the surface, trying to strike out. His hand hit the granite wall of the quay. It was very dark down there between the side of the tug and the pier wall.

Far above him he heard shouts. Then plomp he was going down again.

"Quick!" was roared out.

As he came up once more a lifebelt hit him, and he grasped hold of it despairingly. There was an encouraging shout from up above. He got one arm through the belt, and clung on for dear life. Then his head went bump against something precious hard, and for a minute all was a blur. The next thing he remembered was that someone was trying to pull one of his arms out by the socket.

"Well? Better?"

He was lying on the deck of the tug. He started up, and began to feel himself.

"Oh, I've got your things all right!" said the man, who was looking down at him. "What made you go and jump like that?"

"I don't know."

His clothes were sticking to him, and he tried to shake them off.

"What have you lost?"

Bolt gave a cry of relief as he put his hand in an inner damp pocket.

"Nothing," he said. "It's all right."

The other gave him a curious look.

The cheery little tug, which seemed all fuss and pant, was doing its duty

right manfully. It went in and out among the shipping, and in a very short space of time they were alongside the liner, and got on board. Bolt presented a pitiful sight all but his face, which betokened complete satisfaction. He was shown to the berth taken for him by Mr. Goldstein, and there he made a complete change. When he went back on deck the quiet-looking man gave him a friendly nod.

It was a marvellous scene that met his gaze. The big liner was sweeping majestically on through the evening light. As the boy leaned over the rail he could not help feeling what a tremendous change a few short hours had wrought in his life. England was already becoming lost amidst the clouds which were rolling up darkly.

He noted several well-dressed people standing near a railing, and saw that they were tossing coins down to other passengers who were in a lower part of the ship. One of the officers came up and ordered them to desist.

"It is an abuse," Bolt heard him say sharply. "The poor things in the steerage fight for the money."

It was rather bewildering; and everything was new to the lad. The place was a huge floating hotel, and in one of the rooms he saw an open fire burning, and noted that the place was not furnished like a cabin, but was fitted with ordinary chairs and tables.

He saw nobody to speak to till dinner-time came. Then the man with whom he had come on board passed up the saloon, and took a seat at the captain's table, but he gave Bolt a friendly nod as he passed where he was sitting. Afterwards the boy felt so tired that he was glad to get to bed. He went below, found his cabin, and turned in. He was awakened by a sound of loud talking, and looked round sleepily.

"No, I specially bargained for a cabin to myself," said a voice. "I cannot have this?"

"Very sorry, sir," was the reply. "I had nothing to do with it. But I don't think that you will be incommoded. You see, he is only a boy."

"I don't care whether he is a boy or what he is. I don't want him here. I ought to have had a cabin alone."

Bolt still felt sleepy, but his curiosity was too great to allow him to go off again into the land of dreams, for the voice was that of the grating individual with whom he had travelled from Euston to Liverpool. He sat up in bed just as the steward walked out of the cabin, shutting the door after him.

Standing by the other bunk in the bright light of the big electric lamp, and looking at some papers, was his friend of the train.

"Hallo!" he said, taking stock of the pompous-speaking individual. "Is this your cabin? I thought it was mine!"

The other started as though he had been shot.

"You!" he cried. "You! The boy of the train!" He came right up to Bolt's bunk and looked down at him. "Oh, that makes all the difference in the world! I don't mind having you here!"

"Thank you!" said the boy. "Thank you kindly! I am not going to be turned out by anybody. I can tell you! This place was taken for me, and here I stay!"

The other laughed. "Oh, come," he said, "you needn't cut up rough! I rather like you! Don't take any notice of what I say. Of course, I don't mind you being here."

"Thank you!" said Bolt. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said the other.

In a half-unconscious, dreamy way, Dick saw his fellow-traveller undress and get into his bunk. Then came a blank. Everything was mixed up in a curious way. The light from the lamp still glowed down on the red carpet and on the satinwood fittings. All was wonderfully still in the cabin now.

But there came from far away the thud, thud of the engines, sounding like the heart-beat of the ship.

Yes, it was the liner's heart going throb, throb, throb with marvellous regularity. The sound was rather restful than otherwise. Then Bolt had a terrible dream.

He was in trouble because he had not reached San Francisco in time, and there before him he saw Mr. Goldstein in a rage.

No, he was wrong. That red object was not the face of Mr. Goldstein, but merely the cabin-lamp. Then he was talking to someone, and the other was making weak puns of the silliest description.

Thud, thud, thud! The sound was like an accompaniment to his dreams. What would they say in Chorley when

his mother received that letter? He had not told her of all his bad luck. He had been hoping every day for weeks that soon he would be able to send her good news.

Suddenly he realised that he was not dreaming. He moved quickly, for something was wrong.

He felt for the little wallet which contained the papers he was taking out, and they were all right.

Now he was wide awake and saw what had happened. Someone had entered the cabin—the little brass bolt had not been slipped—and was bending over the other berth. The boy raised himself quietly on his elbow and watched the nocturnal visitor. He was an absolute stranger. He was standing there looking down intently at the sleeping man in the bunk, and from the bed there came a loud, curious snore.

Then the stranger turned and stooped over the bag which lay open on the floor. Another second and he was back at the bed, busy doing something.

Bolt was out of his bed in a flash, and had caught the visitor by the arm.

"What's this mean?" he cried. "Here, wake up you!"

The man threw the boy off and glared at him.

"What are you doing here in this cabin?" said Bolt sharply. "You have no business here! You know that!"

"What do you mean?" said the other, trying to assume an injured, innocent air. "I am not doing any harm! Thought that this was my cabin, that's all!"

"Oh, I see!" said Bolt, eyeing him and disbelieving every word. The stranger was a thick-set, clean-shaven man, with a nasty-looking eye.

The boy looked at him, and then at the occupant of the berth. The latter was not asleep—not properly asleep. That much Bolt could see with half an eye.

"Yes, that's all, squire," said the stranger. "It's all right, you can take my word for it. You just hop back into your bunk." He stooped over the unconscious man's effects.

"I won't trouble you. You get to sleep again." He began to turn over some papers which he had extracted from the bag on the floor.

"What are you doing?" said Bolt sharply, as he caught the other by the arm.

"Doing? Nothing! Leave me alone! I happened to drop something as I came in just now."

"I don't believe you!" cried the boy. "Get out of this cabin! You are just a thief—that's what you are!"

The man was taken aback, and as he threw off Bolt's arm the boy sprang at him and sent him reeling against the porthole.

"Confound you, you varmint!" he cried. "Can't you believe an honest man? I could do for you in half a shake!" His hand went to his hip, and Bolt saw the flash of a revolver. "See that little thing? Well, it is to teach brats of boys their business! Get back into your bunk!"

Still the man in the berth lay there motionless.

Bolt dashed at the marauder and tried to wrest the pistol from his grasp. The man seized him by the shoulder and shook him as if he had been a rat. Still the boy held on. The man was a powerful fellow, and the boy felt his strength going.

They swayed this way and that, and then there was a sudden explosion, the cabin was filled with smoke, and the man gave a cry as he at last succeeded in freeing himself from Bolt's grip. The boy was slung backwards against the edge of the berth, and the stranger dashed for the door and was gone.

Bolt pulled himself up, aching all over, and went to the opposite berth. Only an uncomfortable snore. Then the door of the cabin was burst open, and two officers of the ship rushed in. "Here, youngster, what's all this mean?" cried one.

THE 3rd CHAPTER. A Narrow Escape.

Bolt stared at them.

"He's gone!" he gasped out. "Who?"

"The man who was here. I tried to stop him. I am sure he was a thief. Look at the fellow there. I believe he's dying."

One of the officers went to the bunk, while the other turned to the boy, and was about to question him further, when suddenly the occupant of the berth began to wave his arms about and to shout out something.

"They don't get it!" he kept on saying. "They don't get it!"

"Hurry off and get the doctor!" said one of the officers to his colleague.

Bolt stood for a minute in the middle of the cabin feeling half-dazed. Then his eye caught sight of something lying on the floor—a white rag. He stooped and picked it up. A strong odour issued from it which made him feel ill.

The officer took the rag from him and sniffed it.

"There's been foul play!" he said. "This is chloroform! What sort of a chap was this man?"

"A big, loud-talking American," was the answer. "Ah, here they are!"

The boy began to slip on a few things.

The doctor came in, followed by the other officer, who went on explaining what had happened while the medical man made a quick examination of the sleeper. Then Bolt gave a start, for standing there in the doorway was the quiet-looking individual with whom he had come alongside in the tug, and who seemed to be busy making mental notes of everything.

The doctor made a movement with his shoulders.

"Yes, he's been drugged, sure enough," he said briefly. "Lucky for your friend here you woke up when you did, young man, or matters might have been very different. He might have been saved the trouble of waking up at all. There! He will be all right now. He can be left to sleep it off."

The doctor also wanted a description of the criminal, and while Bolt gave as clear an account as he could, the quiet man listened intently.

"Is he your game?" asked the doctor, as he looked quickly round the cabin.

"Yes," was the laconic reply. Then the party turned to go. The quiet personage laid his hand on Bolt's shoulder.

"Look here, my lad," he said, "we must have a talk in the morning. I've got to find out the man who fired that shot."

When the others had gone, Bolt slipped the catch of the door before getting back into bed. But he could not sleep. He began to muse over the events of the night, and suddenly found himself staring at the little swivel mirror which was flashing in the bright light of the sunshine which came through the porthole. There was a groan from the opposite berth. His fellow-traveller was complaining bitterly.

"Oh, what a head I've got!"

"No wonder!" said Bolt.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the other feebly.

"Only that you were ill." The boy related all that had passed.

The man seemed to forget that he had a bad head, and rose quickly to examine his clothes and his effects, afterwards giving vent to a grunt of satisfaction.

"Been too much for me. But there! Thanks to you, there is no harm done. And I don't even know your name."

The boy hesitated.

"What is your name?" said the man. "I have a lot to thank you for."

"Oh, that's all right! My name is Bolt. What is yours?"

"Smithson."

The boy nodded.

"So you actually downed him? You are a good one! Whew! It was a squeak! If you hadn't woke up—well, it would have been all over with yours truly!"

"But I did wake up, so it doesn't matter."

"Square, bullet-headed chap?"

"Yes. They will arrest him today."

"Who said so?"

"That gentleman who came in last night."

"Arrest Dave Carr? Pooh, they can't! Why, the police have been after him for years! They can't get him! He's as slippery as an eel!"

Bolt dressed and went on deck. It was a brilliant morning.

"Ah, there you are! I have been waiting for you," said a voice. "It was that of his quiet friend. 'Just come over here and tell me if you recognise this.' As he spoke he drew out a pocket-book, from which he took a photograph. 'Ever seen anybody like that?'"

Bolt started.

"Why—why," he cried, "it's the man!"

"What man?"

"The man who came into our cabin last night."

"Thank you, youngster. I am after him. I have been on the lookout for him long enough. He does not know me—that's why I was told

off for the job. Dave Carr has outed so many of our fellows. He is the head of a gang of very expert thieves, who have given no end of trouble. He does the big jobs—diamond robberies, and all that kind of thing."

"But—but who are you?"

"I! Oh, I am Chief Inspector Spence, of Scotland Yard! But you needn't call me that—call me Mr. Brown if you want to call me anything." He lit a cigarette, throwing the match over the side and watching it as it was swept away. "Where are you going?"

Bolt hesitated a moment, but he was conquered by the other's manner. "San Francisco," he said.

"Oh! You ought to have a nice journey. It is a fine trip!"

"But," said Bolt, "that photograph? You are looking for the man?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"Then if he's on the ship it ought to be easy to find him."

"Look here, young man, it is not quite as easy as you imagine. A big ship like this is a small world, and Mr. David Carr was not born yesterday, or the day before for that matter. He knows his way about. Now that he has been seen he will be very careful about showing his handsome face. When he does it will have altered its appearance, or I am much mistaken. Hallo! What's that old chap doing? Oh, revolver practice! I don't think it ought to be allowed on this deck. There is one thing, it is early in the morning."

Bolt turned and gazed at the "old chap," a man with white hair and a decided stoop, who was throwing a bottle as far out from the ship's side as he could, and then taking aim with his revolver. He was too immersed in his occupation to notice Spence and the boy as they strolled up to where he was standing.

"His hand's pretty steady," whispered Bolt.

"Like a rock," said the inspector. The marksman sent another bottle in smithereens to the bed of old ocean, and then turned his head.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said quietly, "splendid practice this!"

He threw another bottle, and then took aim almost as it touched the water. The watchers saw it fly to pieces.

"You are an expert, sir," said the detective.

"Thank you. I don't often miss. There! I had better touch wood after that remark."

He took another bottle from his bulging side-pocket, and repeated the performance.

"It keeps one's hand in."

"So I should say," said the detective.

THE 4th CHAPTER. What Bolt Overheard.

DURING the next three days Bolt found his fellow-passenger of the cabin less communicative. He seemed to have grown more anxious, and to be disposed to wrap himself up in himself.

"I have taken one precaution, though, youngster," he said on one occasion. And as the boy looked at him inquiringly, he went on: "Yes, it was too dangerous. I must sleep sometimes, and I have placed what I am taking over in the strong-room."

When they were in mid-Atlantic the weather turned rough, and Bolt felt that a voyage was not all bliss. He was very glad to lie up for a day, and for the space of twenty-four hours he felt as though life was hardly worth the living. Sea-sickness does have that effect. But the boy escaped very lightly, and was soon able to respond once more to the summons to meals.

They passed Sandy Hook on the fifth of June, and that same evening Bolt's first sea-voyage came to an end.

The view of the Empire City was curious—a mass of huge buildings shooting skywards. Each building seemed to be vying with its neighbour to get a little nearer to the clouds.

Bolt stood among a group of passengers, and he heard people describing the different buildings—the skyscrapers. All along the sky-line were mammoth structures—the Flat-iron, the World Building, and the various offices of the insurance companies. The towers stood out clearly to the view.

Bolt found himself in the midst of a crowd of excited people. Nobody said "sir" any more, and the Customs official who examined his bag called him by his name at once, saying: "Waal, can I do anything more for you, Mr. Bolt?"

Then there was a long form to fill up, and in this the boy had to give all particulars about himself—why he was coming to the States, how long he

meant to stop there; also the age of his mother, where she was married, and when, with a myriad more details. This all took up a great deal of time, but at length all these formalities were over, and he was at liberty to depart.

He did not see many poor in the city, and the street vendors of chewing gum seemed a prosperous class. Everything was costly. The taxi he took to the bank on which his letter of credit was drawn started with its fare at one shilling and eightpence. The men at the quay who helped him with his bag would not look at anything less than a "quarter." (1s.)

To his chagrin, he found that he was too late at the bank. The place was closed for the day.

He turned away, feeling a good deal bothered, for he would have to draw more money before going on west, and, consequently, the train, which he learned left for Chicago the same evening, would not take him.

He booked a room at the Seville Hotel, and asked the clerk about the next train.

"There will be nothing going for you, Mr. Bolt, until the midday train," said the official.

Well, it could not be helped. By the train which left the next day, he found that he could reach San Francisco according to scheduled time on the evening of the tenth.

He had some dinner at the hotel, which was situated in the good quarter where the best apartment houses are to be found. Afterwards, he sat down in the lounge and picked up a paper.

There was a hum of talk behind a screen of palms. Everybody seemed to be using the place. Strangers strolled in and wrote letters, for the American hotel is a general rendezvous.

Suddenly, he was not merely mildly interested at something he heard, but keenly on the alert.

The voice was that of his fellow-passenger talking eagerly. The words came in a low murmur to where the boy was sitting completely hidden behind the palms.

Peering through the leafage, Bolt immediately recognised the man against whom he had run so often.

But the other to whom he was talking? It was—no, not the man who had entered their cabin that night, though his voice was the same. It was the old fellow, he felt certain now, who had shot at the bottles. It is not good to be an eavesdropper, but he could not help it. He listened.

"What about that boy?" said the old man.

"What boy? Oh, I know! There is nothing there."

"Well, at any rate, he was talking to Spence, who thinks himself so clever, although he is only a fool. Rather a strange thing, isn't it, to send a boy like that out to the States? But no matter. I will look into that myself. Now, as for you. Let me tell you that you are making the mistake of your life in not falling in with our ideas. Here are you slaving away for a mere pittance, tasting none of the joys of life, when you might have the world at your feet.

"Those gems, which that old shark Samuel Goldstein has sold for a fancy price to Vambart, who wants his daughter to wear them at her wedding, are worth a king's ransom. You have them in your possession. Now, I am ready to meet you halfway. You will not get to Frisco with them, anyhow. I shall take good care of that. But I have something else on the way, and I am prepared to come to terms. Share with us. We should have them, in any case, but there, I am agreeable that you should stand in. You will be able to cut a figure in the world then. What's the use of hanging back? It's foolishness. You are safe here in the land of the free, far away from all the sleuthhounds of the London police, who think themselves so precious clever, instead of being merely thick-headed idiots. It will make you right at a bound. You see, I know all the facts. You are carrying these gems, and you have to be at San Francisco on a certain date. Well, you don't get there. What's the odds? Goldstein loses, we gain. But nobody will be a penny the worse except him. Why not? Here's your chance!"

There was a growl.

"You want me to play into your hands and become one of you?"

"Yes, and it would be worth it to you. We are disposed to be generous. We offer you pretty well everything. Your life is not too safe, you know, while you are carrying those things. There are others after you and them. But we want to meet you fairly. You are worth your salt—worth more than being handed over to one of our

fellows to be knifed. I don't want the toughs to get you. I have learned to respect you."

"But—"

"There! I see that you are going to be sensible. Why hesitate? We will treat you very justly."

"I cannot."

"Come, come. Here, waiter!" He gave an order. "Now, listen to me. I have a friend here who is an expert. He will price the stones. You can't sell them. He can. You have been Goldstein's underling too long for a man of your parts."

"But what do you suppose these stones are worth?"

"A hundred and fifty thousand pounds—three quarters of a million dollars."

The boy gave a start, and the palm quivered, but the men did not notice anything.

"Halves!" said a voice.

"I cannot!"

"Well, you are throwing yourself away. I wanted to play the game."

"It is impossible."

"We shall have them anyway, remember that."

Another pause.

"Yes. It is too much. If—"

"You shall be paid three hundred and fifty thousand dollars on the New York Bank to-morrow."

Bolt trembled with excitement. So that man was Goldstein's messenger? But, then, why did he send two couriers? His brain began speculating. A crowd of possibilities presented themselves to his mind. What should he do? Give warning? But to whom?

The talking went on excitedly for another minute. Now and then the voices dropped to whispers. Bolt strained to catch every word.

Then the two walked away. The boy crept out of his hiding-place and went to bed. But he could not sleep. It was too much—too much to think about. What did it mean? Mr. Goldstein had never told him that he was sending somebody else out. But then, why should he? The boy began to think that he was only trying him. He stood at the window, and looked out at the gleaming lights of the vast city far below. The roar of traffic came up, blended with a curious hum. They had mentioned him. He started, for he thought he heard a stir in the hotel. Someone was creeping along the thickly carpeted corridor towards his room. No. It was absurd. The footsteps died away.

He lay down on the bed dressed, as he was intending to keep awake all night. Yes, he would have to take care. Mr. Goldstein had— He woke up with a start, to find that it was broad daylight. The sunshine was streaming in. He performed a hasty toilet, and went downstairs to enter the deserted coffee-room. A sleepy waiter brought him breakfast, and he paid his bill, and went out into the city, which was only just beginning to resume work. He killed time by making a short journey on the Subway, and visiting Central Park. It was fresh, clean, and beautiful that morning. Two hours yet before the bank on Broadway opened. He spent the time in looking at the people and the shops, and the two hours soon glided away.

A bank official received him politely, and he drew the needful cash. Then he made his way out of the bank building, and secured a cab, telling the man to drive to the Central Station.

A friendly official found him a seat in a splendidly equipped car, and the boy found that all the rest was plain sailing.

"Guess you will be having lunch?" said the man. "When you feel that way just ring that bell."

People were rushing about on the platform, boys were shouting the news sheets—Bolt bought a "Herald," which cost him five cents—and then, just as he was looking out of the far window at the maze of tracks, row after row of gleaming metals, the train began to glide out of the vast terminus en route for the west.

A boy came along and threw a book in Bolt's seat. It was to buy or not, as he chose. The train rolled over bridges with a reverberating roar, and Bolt looked down from a great height on wide arms of rivers and tracts of country.

The vastness of the scenery was amazing, the enormous size of everything, the big townships they tore through, places full of lofty buildings, and with others in course of construction higher still.

Bolt had imagined that directly New York lay behind the prairie would begin. Instead, there were stretches of park-like scenery, and then more towns—towns with con-

gested business districts, and houses fifteen stories high.

Bolt felt so keenly interested in all he saw that he left his seat after the train had been running for a couple of hours, and found his way to the observation car. It was fascinating to see the endless ribbon of the track left behind as they raced on. The obliging official roused him from his reverie.

"Don't you require lunch?" he said.

"Oh, yes!" said the boy. "I had forgotten."

He accompanied the man to the dining-car, and there made a good meal. There were things on the bill of fare which were entirely strange, but he was so hungry by that time that he passed nothing.

As he was going back to his seat somebody touched him on the arm.

"So we meet again?" said a quiet voice.

Spence, of Scotland Yard, was standing in the gangway looking at him with a curious smile on his bronzed face.

"Well, I am glad," said the boy, taking the hand which the other held out.

"So am I," was the rejoinder.

"Going to San Francisco?"

"Yes," said the boy.

Spence nodded in a pleased way, as though he appreciated monosyllables above everything.

he won't be really safe until I have arrested Carr and Smithson."

The two stood at the window of the corridor, and gazed at the flying landscape. Spence began to speak of the various points of interest en route.

It seemed to Bolt to be a land of all the wonders of the world, a land now of vast rolling plains and immense cornfields, which stretched as far as the eye could reach. The engine gave vent every now and again to a shriek as if it were in pain, but it was only a warning note ere they dashed through some—relatively speaking—unimportant town, too small to be noticed by the west-bound express.

"Not seen your friend of the cabin, I suppose?" said Spence.

"No," said Bolt.

"Nevertheless, he is on this train."

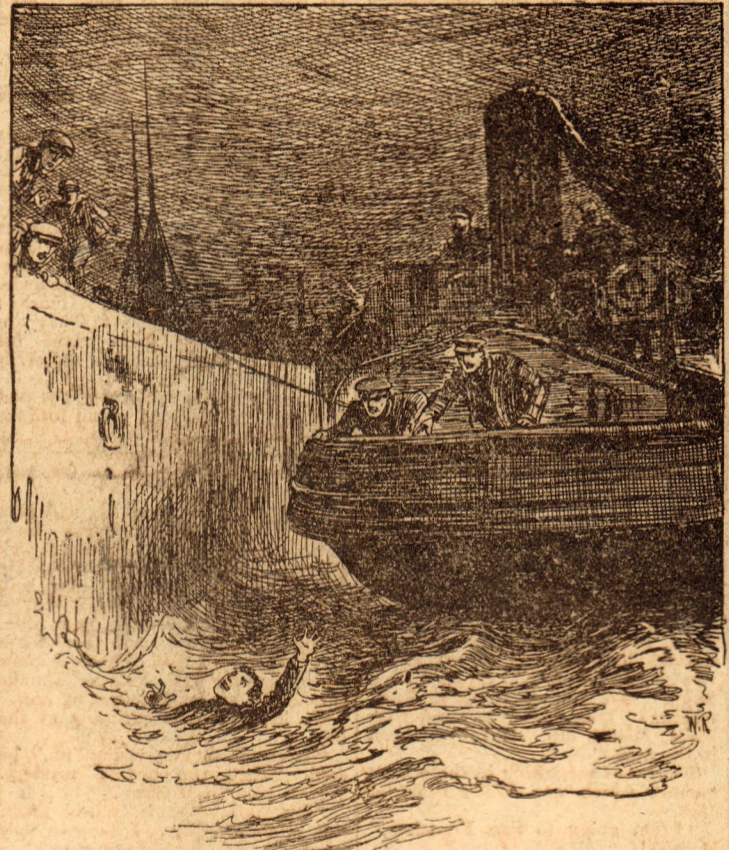
Bolt turned and gazed at the speaker, feeling horrified at what he had just heard.

THE 5th CHAPTER.

The Power of Scotland Yard.

SPENCE seemed as though he had not noticed the boy's discomfiture. He gave Bolt a short nod, and walked off down the corridor, lighting a cigar as he went. Bolt remained where he was, trying to think the matter out.

He knew his danger now, and yet he could do nothing—only lie low and wait. He followed the inspector with



Bolt made a rush to get on board. The tugmen appeared to see him coming, and shifted their position from the pier. A moment later he was struggling in the waters of the Mersey.

"I am going there," he said slowly. "What time do you expect to get in? Or, rather, what day?"

"Twelve o'clock on the 11th," said Bolt quickly.

"Oh!" Bolt felt the detective scrutinising him. But he did not have to answer any more questions. He gave his travelling-companion a look now and then, but Spence might have been the sphinx of old Egypt for all the information a study of his countenance afforded. Spence, however, had a mental way of setting up an imaginary person opposite to him and talking to him. In this way he often came upon the truth of a matter. So it was here.

"This boy," he said to himself, "is taking something to San Francisco. What is it? He does not know it, but he is carrying something specially valuable. Of course, he does not. Now I begin to understand what my wily old friend Goldstein meant when he said he was glad to hear I was going west. He even got to know my train. So that is what it means. Using me behind my back to look after this boy. He had his doubts of Smithson, too. That is quite clear."

"Artful old fox. Smithson carrying a faked parcel, and the boy the real article. Yes; but the boy does not know it, and I am not going to enlighten him. It won't make his job any easier. But he is in danger. Yet he may get through just because he is small and insignificant, though

his eyes, noting his strong-looking features outlined against the window, for he had stopped again near the connecting door.

The boy turned away a second, and when he looked again, he saw that somebody else had just come through the door near the inspector.

He was all attention now, for he saw Spence having a fierce altercation with the new-comer. And now Bolt caught sight of the stranger. It was the old man who had dealt such destruction to the bottles.

Bolt went quickly down the corridor, and saw Spence clap his hand on the other's arm.

"I arrest you, David Carr," he said.

"You are mistaken," was the calm reply. "I know no one of that name. In any case, you would be exceeding your duty, for your warrant could have no effect here. We are in the States."

Spence smiled.

"Oh, I have seen to all that!" he said.

The other's hand went to his pocket, but Spence was too quick for him, and he whipped out a pair of handcuffs, and seized the man by the wrists with a grip of iron. There was a second's fierce struggle which was over ere Bolt could render help. To the boy's amazement, he saw the old man's hair come off in a lump, and fall on the floor. Then, just as several passengers came up, the old

man drove the inspector back, and dashed away down the corridor of the train. The door through which he had fled was banged and locked.

Spence gave an angry exclamation. "Done me!" he said. "But it is only postponed. I will have him yet. Hallo! Slowing up?" He pressed his finger on the electric bell, and a conductor came hurrying in. "Send the head conductor. What are we stopping for?"

"Water, sir."

In a minute the chief official of the train approached.

"I require your help," said Spence. "There is a man on this train who is wanted by the New York police."

But though the train was searched from end to end, there was no sign of the "wanted" man.

The train thundered on across the prairie with its cargo of passengers bound for Omaha, Cheyenne, Sacramento, and the Far West. There was a change of trains at Chicago, which is the key of the railroad system of the States. Then on once more.

The Inter-Continental express was the acme of comfort, and, obeying Mr. Goldstein's orders, Bolt availed himself of all the luxuries of the service. Spence knew the route well, and at his own suggestion had his sleeping-berth fitted up close to that of Bolt.

The boy thought that the place was, if anything, too well heated, but the nights were very cold. He slept soundly; the few days on the train seemed to him like weeks, so thoroughly had he settled down to the new existence.

It was on the second night, as he was preparing to turn in that he heard a familiar voice in the gangway.

"Yes, there is the lad," Smithson was saying. "You had better search him. He has stolen a packet from me."

He was speaking to the head conductor of the train.

"Are you sure, sir?"

"Quite sure. He has in his possession a wallet containing certain valuable gems."

The conductor came up to Bolt, who pretended to be asleep.

"Here, my lad," he said, "wake up!"

"What's wrong?" cried the boy sleepily.

"Are you carrying diamonds?"

"No."

"But I tell you that he is," said Smithson angrily. "He has the stones in his possession."

"And what if he has?" said another voice.

"Who are you?" asked Smithson sharply.

"Oh, I—I am Chief Inspector Spence, of Scotland Yard, and don't you forget it, my fine fellow! I would be very careful what I did if I were you, Mr. Smithson. Oh, yes, I know your name. We pick up a lot—quite a lot—although your friend, Mr. David Carr, thinks the London police are a set of ignorant fools. That was, I believe, from information received, his way of putting it. I have heard one or two things about you. There, conductor, it is all right. This gentleman is mistaken. You need not trouble the boy."

There was something so final and authoritative in the tone that the official began to apologise. The inspector handed him his card with its autograph authorisation from the chief of the New York police.

"Thank you," said Bolt, a few minutes later, when they were alone, for Mr. Smithson had to beat a retreat.

"All right, but you are not out of the wood yet. It was very cute of Mr. Goldstein. I suppose he thought that no one would give a thought to a boy. But it will be dangerous work for a youngster like you. Lucky I was on this way. I shall not go back empty-handed. But—Hallo, what's that?"

The express was flying on past red discs and weird, tortuous shapes in the darkness. Strange fantastic forms came up to the carriage windows and fled away again. Then something extraordinary happened. Bolt started to his feet to be thrown heavily back again. Then of a sudden there was a crash followed by another and another.

The scene in the carriage was indescribable. A man who was passing along the gangway was pitched headlong on to the boy and Spence, and a big portmanteau was slung from a rack right on to the detective's head. By swiftly ducking, Spence was able to avoid some part of the impact.

"Bad smash," he jerked out as the light faded.

There was another light without—a reddish, lurid light. Then crash again, and a shower of glass fell at the feet of Bolt, who felt dazed. A hiss. A sullen roar. A wave of silence. Another angry roar. The light was absolutely dead now, but in an instant the whole flank of the train was lit up by dancing flames which were caught up by the night wind off the immense prairie. An official with a scared look came down the corridor at a run. He shook off restraining hands.

"Yes," he said hoarsely. "Signals wrong; we've run into the Inter-Union."

The man had gone on. Suddenly in the bright red glow which illumined the windows Bolt saw a man come towards him with a run; the boy drew away just as the whole coach gave a convulsive movement. There was a roar as of artillery, then a chorus of frantic, panic-stricken cries.

Another blinding flash, and Bolt, who in a confused way realised that the man who had come for him a second before was the evil genius of his journey—the fellow whom Spence called David Carr—now was conscious of the fact that the man had been hurled backwards among the debris which was choking up the corridor without.

THE 6th CHAPTER.

The Terror of the Night.

THE next few minutes were awful. Spence seized the boy by the arm, and dragged him back.

"Look out!" he cried. "Keep steady! It is terrible, but don't forget! There are enemies about! Ah, you are hurt!"

"Nothing much," Bolt put his hand to his face, and drew it away, sticky with blood. "When I was nearly thrown down, some of the glass cut me. How awful!"

Agonising cries reached them from the further part of the train.

"We must go and help," said Bolt.

"No, no. You can do nothing. Here, we must get out of this."

There was a momentary cessation of the cries. The coach where they stood was illumined by the fire, which was evidently raging higher up. The inspector gripped the boy's arm.

"You are only a boy," he said. "You can go. I will stop and work for both. It is your duty. In this confusion I could not protect you any more. You must go on. They would stop at nothing now. Understand?"

"Yes."

Together they went to the gangway, but they were driven back by a dense volume of smoke which had begun to pour along the passages. The inspector turned sharply.

"Well, we must go by the window," he said. He dashed to it, throwing it up. "Out with you!"

Bolt clambered up and thrust out his head and shoulders, gripping the upper part of the carriage, and then getting one leg out. He drew out the other, and waited.

"Come along," he said.

Spence followed him.

"Now jump," said the officer, and he set the example.

They landed on some rough ground and began to hurry up the length of the train where already the work of rescue was proceeding. Somebody shouted to them as they passed, and they stopped to drag from under some crushed woodwork a man who was pinned down helplessly. A dense volume of smoke shut out the fire just then, and they were in semi-darkness. Bolt did not see the truth for a minute. Somebody rushed up at them. There was a hoarse cry. The lunge which the new-comer made at the lad was deftly turned aside by Spence, who closed with the man, and drove him backwards. The inspector stood over him, rubbing an injured arm.

"Confound him! He's stabbed me!" he growled. "But I think he's safe enough."

Bolt glanced down at the man; he thought that he stirred.

"Now, boy, you have your duty to do," said the other. "You must not stay here. I know the road well." He went on speaking excitedly in a whisper. "We are two miles from Saleford Junction. You must get there and go on. Otherwise, I will not answer for it. Go. Good luck to you. In this confusion you may be able to throw the scamps off the scent. Take this. I hope you may not want it, but you may do." He thrust a small revolver into Bolt's hand.

"Remember that the truth is out now, and they will do anything to down you! Go!"

The boy obeyed. He felt that his friend was right. His aid—well, it

was not required there. He plunged forward into the gloom away from the burning wreck of the train. The darkness was intense by contrast. He stumbled on along a rough track. There was a dim, vague shouting behind. The night seemed wild, confused, and full of trouble. Then a vast grey silence. He pushed on, hardly knowing what he was doing. The wound on his face caused him acute pain. He left the track of the railroad where it descended into a deep gulch, and found himself, so far as he could make out, on a rough road. Against the torn sky he could see the telegraph-lines reaching on, ever on.

Two miles his friend the inspector had said. It seemed more like six, or had he missed his way? And the silence now was eerie. On, on, on! He tapped his inner pocket, where he carried what he now knew to be a treasure—something for which some men would commit the basest crimes, but it did not strike him in any other light than as a sacred charge, something which he had to deliver on a certain date. That was all.

On, on, on! The junction. Well, he must have missed it. He tramped for many miles. He was doubtful now. Yes, he must have missed the way. He felt terribly fatigued, but absolutely wideawake mentally. All that had been before assumed the guise of some curious nightmare. He ceased to realise that he had been a participant in all that wild scene—the burning train, the wreckage, the inspector's words. No; they were clear. He had said "Go!"

Well, he was going on.

On, on, on! Then, long afterwards, a faint greyish light. So that was the east. The light was behind.

The rough track led on across a wide, rolling, grassy plain. The track went on ahead of him, on as if for ever to the furthest ends of the world. A light breeze sprang up. He trudged on in a mechanical way. The light got broader; there came a long lapse. He was still stumbling on as in a dream.

Then he was hailed; there was a cheery "Hallo!" followed by a loud blare as of a trumpet. He turned, and saw a big motor-car racing up behind him. Again came that trumpeting sound of warning, which was inspiring in the early morning air. The car slowed up as it got nearer. It had only one occupant—a young fellow in a tweed cap turned the wrong way about, like the fashion is among coalheavers. He wore a pair of dust-encrusted goggles pushed up on his forehead.

"Whither away, my blithe young son of the morning?" he sang out, as the car glided up to where Bolt stood, and came to a halt with its engines humming. "Where might you be for? Have you dropped from Mars? Are you en route to Kam-schatka? Your face is covered with blood, luckily dry. Have you been in the wars?"

There was something in the other's manner which won Bolt's heart at once.

"I am going to San Francisco," he said.

"San Francisco! Well, I'm blowed! You are not going to walk there, are you?"

"No, no," said the boy. "But there has been an accident, and I tried to reach Saleford Junction."

"You have come miles out of your way," said the motorist. He thought hard a moment. "Look here," he said, "I am just out for a spin. Jump in, my hearty! I can't drive you to 'Frisco, but I tell you what I can do. I can take you as far as Landver, and that's well on the road. What do you say?"

Bolt looked at the speaker, feeling doubtful about availing himself of an offer from an entire stranger. This man might be one of those who wished to prevent him fulfilling his mission.

Then he felt that the man was all right. He had a pleasant, frank face.

"Well?" said the motorist.

"I should be very grateful to you," he said.

"Then, my bold buccaneer, get into the kerridge."

A minute later Bolt had sat down by the side of the driver, who leaned forward over the driving-wheel, and they were off, the fresh, crisp morning air seeming to blow away the horrors of the night. They were racing on even faster. The country changed its character. The car simply flew.

"Fine, isn't it?"

Bolt nodded. It is difficult to speak when you are travelling at forty miles an hour in an open car.

"Hallo! What's that?"

Bolt shook his head, not understanding.

"Look round! There's someone after us!"

The boy turned, and looked. Sure enough, there was another car swooping along in their wake. A cloud of dust, and then a glimpse of a powerful motor which was in hot pursuit. Bolt gave a groan.

"Not running away, are you, my lord?"

"No."

"Do you think they are after you?"

"I—I don't know."

"Well, it looks uncommonly like it. Yes"—he shot a glance back—"they are after us, right as rain. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Bolt.

"Not the Sultan of Turkey escaping from Saloniki? No. Who are you? A prince who is in trouble, or have you been robbing a bank? No; it is all right, and I am not going to be beaten by that rotten car."

As he spoke he stooped, and changed the speed. The car simply flew. It was travelling now at a prodigious rate. A low-built farmstead came into their view, and flashed by.

"Well, she can't go any faster, can she? Ah, your noble friends behind seem to be in dead earnest!" he went on, as a shot was fired and a bullet came swinging over their heads.

"They mean it, and no mistake." He darted a look at Bolt. "Who would have thought that I should pick up anybody like you?"

There was another shot, another, and another.

"Keep low down. They can't do us any harm."

For a space it actually seemed as though the car behind was gaining. The whir it made came to their ears. Shot after shot was fired, and the upper part of the big hood was riddled. Then there was another report which sounded louder. This time, however, no bullet came whizzing by. Bolt's friend gave a chuckle.

"Clever ones!" he cried. "Hooray! They've bust themselves! They are done, and serve them right for shooting at two peaceable motorists like us."

He reduced the speed slightly, and Bolt screwed his head round to have a look.

"What are they doing?"

"I can't see—only dust. Oh, yes; they've stopped!"

"And they will stop. It will take them a long time to mend. Bless their little hearts! All right, my hearty; victory is with us." He leaned over to adjust a lever, and they were once more flying as though the car were endowed with life.

"They will have to stop there for a long time, as I said. Wish I knew what their car was. You see, I make cars, and I am out tyre testing now."

He looked again curiously at the boy.

"It seems to me, young 'un," he said, "that you are a mystery. What's your little game?"

"It's not a game," said Bolt. "It is simply duty. I suppose they wanted to prevent me going on?"

"That you can bet your last brace-button they did, and it is a bit uncommon, as you will admit. However, I am not going to pry into what is not my business."

They stopped, at the motorist's suggestion, and had a substantial meal at a little township. Later on in the evening they tore into Landver. It was the night of the ninth of June.

THE 7th CHAPTER.

Going West on a Freight Train—The Final Stage.

BOLT thanked his friend for all he had done, but the other merely laughed.

"That's all right," he said. "Any time you want a spin, you look up Peter Morris, of Rolder City. That will find me. Good-bye!"

"I would like to tell you all about it," he said. "My name's Bolt, and I have an important message for San Francisco."

"Good luck to you!"

They parted with a grip of the hands. Bolt made his way to the railroad offices.

"No train to-night," said the agent. "Nothing west till to-morrow midday."

What was to be done? To wait till the following day seemed asking for failure. He remained near the offices of the railroad, thinking over matters. The shining metals reached out in front, but there was no train in sight. Then came a whistle. He turned to see a heavy freight train come gliding in from the east.

Where he stood, close to the track, he could have shaken hands with the engine-driver. The man looked down at the boy, and smiled.

"Are you going to San Francisco?" said Bolt.

There was a broad smile on the man's face.

"I am, youngster," he said. "I am that—leastways, this train is."

"Take me with you?"

There was a pleading tone in the boy's voice.

"Take you with me! But this 'ere's a freight train. We don't take passengers."

"Never mind about that. Take me."

"Well, I never did! The express will be in to-morrow, and you can go by that."

"It will be too late."

"Oh, will it? You seem to be in a hurry."

"It couldn't do you any harm," said Bolt persuasively. "I will ride anywhere."

"It won't do me no harm," said the man, "but what about you?"

"I shall be very grateful to you."

The man hesitated.

"What about the fare?"

"I have my ticket through," said the boy quickly. "Here it is."

The driver gazed at it thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, coming to a sudden resolution, "I don't mind. You can try; only don't go and blame me if you get shaken all to bits. At any rate, you will be in 'Frisco early to-morrow morning, long before the other train. Jump on!"

He gave an order to his stoker, and then came out on the footplate, and held out his hand to help the boy up on to the tender.

"You will have to ride here. All the trucks are full. You could not get on to one of them."

He started the engine, and it began to slip through the township. It was another race.

"You see, my lad," said the big driver, "I've lost a lot of time. The road by Philipville was blocked on account of the smash. Oh, you were in it, were you? Ah, it was a bad business! I have had to come round by Brockton. Make yourself comfortable, my lad—leastways, as comfortable as you can. You had better have a wink of sleep. Don't you fret. I will wake you up in time. You won't be in 'Frisco for many an hour yet."

The boy gratefully obeyed. He felt better for the chat of the big engine-driver, for he had that quiet, consoling manner of the man who is always as it were in touch with space and the silent, peaceful solitudes of heaven.

Bolt was shaken out of a dream by the driver, who had laid his hand on the boy's arm.

"Here you are, youngster!" he said.

The man just nodded his head; it was his farewell. Bolt clambered out of the tender, and hurried forward through a bewildering maze of sheds. He was in the city at last.

He found himself in a wide thoroughfare, which he learnt was Sacramento Street. There was a glimpse of wharves and shipping far away.

He wanted to get a cab, but for the moment did not see one. He passed Sutter and Washington Streets, and entered the tumultuous Market Street quarter. He looked round, flurried and anxious.

Then he trembled, for as he dashed on through the central part of the city the clock on a church showed the time as ten minutes to twelve. Was he to be too late after all?

He saw a cab as he gained the residential quarter and Cliff House and Park.

"Drive me to the Vambart mansion," he said. "Do you know it?"

"Rather!" was the answer. "There's a big wedding on there to-day."

Just as he was getting into the vehicle, a motor-car glided up, and two men jumped out. Bolt gave a cry, for he recognised them—Smithson and David Carr. He turned to run, but was grabbed by the collar of his coat.

"Now, you young ruffian," said a hoarse voice, "you had better hand over those gems!"

He struggled violently. The man threw him backwards into the dust of the road, and he felt half stunned. Then Carr began to search him, but he jumped up. It was only to be seized again.

Then the trumpet call of a motor-car. A crowd had begun to gather, and several police came up. Bolt turned to them for protection, but it seemed hopeless; the police did not

listen to him. For one thing, he was dizzy and weak with the blow he had had when he was driven to the ground. A big policeman laid his hand heavily on his arm, and was listening respectfully to what Carr was saying.

A second car glided up into the centre of the throng.

Bolt turned and gave a wild look. Then his heart gave a leap, for he saw Chief Inspector Spence jump out of the second car and hurry towards the group. The man from Scotland Yard turned sharply to the police.

"Arrest those two men!" he shouted. "Orders from New York!"

Again that manner of his told. The police swung round and seized Smithson and Carr. The latter whipped out revolvers, and there was a quick, short tussle. A shot rang out. Bolt saw his two enemies thrown heavily to the ground. Then Spence had him by the arm.

"Now, boy. Twelve o'clock is your time. You've got five minutes. Jump into that car." He roared an order to the chauffeur, and the Mercedes was off like a flash through the crowded streets. The Vambart mansion at last! Bolt sprang out and flew up the steps past a footman in brilliant livery. Boom went the big clock on the town hall. Boom, boom, boom! The sound seemed to chase him down the hall of the house.

"Mr. Vambart!" he said to another footman who came hurrying forward.

The valet stared at the wild-eyed apparition who dashed past him on to the entrance of a vast salon from which the strains of music were to be heard.

Boom went the clock again. He felt that he would hear it for ever.

It was twelve—midday, American time—the eleventh of the month of June!

At the door a black footman in sky-blue was in attendance. Bolt went by him as if he had been shot.

"Mr. Vambart!" he cried.

The music filled the air. He found himself in the midst of a brilliant concourse of people. An elderly man came forward, and a girl gave a cry. She was like a vision from another world.

The elderly man was looking at him.

"Well, boy," he said, "what is it?"

"I—I—I have brought them, sir!" He held out the wallet which he had guarded for six thousand miles. The elderly man took it, and gave an exclamation of pleasure.

Bolt heard a girl give a little shriek of delight.

"My diamonds!" she cried.

Then the room seemed to swing round. He would have fallen, but friendly hands held him up, and he was set down on a sofa.

"Is it all right, sir?" he asked faintly. "They tried to get them!"

The girl was looking down at him, and Vambart had gripped his hand.

"Good lad!" said the elderly man—"good lad! Between Goldstein and myself you ought to be all right. I suppose you are in his confidence, and I must say he has chosen well. I will put you up for a day or two. You must need a rest."

Vambart heard all about the plot that same evening, and he congratulated Bolt still more. Three days later the boy boarded an east-bound train, and before he left Mr. Vambart took him on one side and gave him an envelope.

"That is a draft on London for two hundred pounds," he said. "You are one of the longheaded sort," he went on. "You won't waste it. Put it in the bank and keep it for a rainy day. Good-bye, and good luck!"

Spence, too, wished him luck. The famous detective was remaining on in San Francisco for some time longer to see certain matters through.

Bolt journeyed back to London, and one day at the end of June entered Mr. Goldstein's office.

Mr. Goldstein turned round in his swivel chair and actually smiled.

"Glad to see you, my lad!" he said. "I learnt by cable that you did all right. Now, what do you say to coming to me for good? I will give you three pounds a week to start."

"I am very grateful," said the boy.

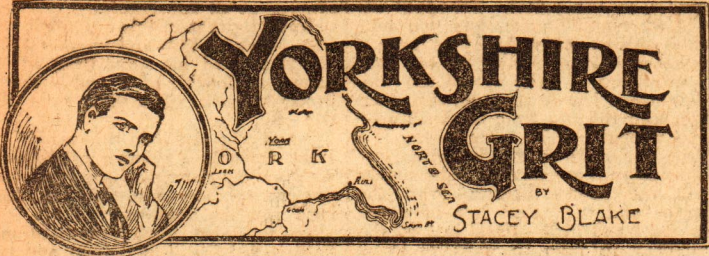
So it was settled, and Dick Bolt set out on the road which, with constant application, leads to fortune.

How much his rise in the world meant to the little home in far away Chorley need not be related here.

THE END.

SUPERB NEW SERIAL

START TO-DAY,



New Readers Start Here.

Mr. Trimble is the owner of a great cotton mill in Vulcan Street, Bradford, where all the employees are on strike. At Trimble's mills new machinery is being fitted up which will when completed turn out work with wonderful rapidity. The workers fail to see what advantage it will be to them, and they are under the impression that this machinery will cause the discharge of many hands.

Dick Allen, a plucky and determined thirteen-year-old Yorkshire lad, is left to fight the great battle of life parentless and almost penniless. He resolves to get on in the world, to cheer up his young sister Jessie, and to provide for her. He will live a life of poverty no longer.

In defiance of the strikers,

this plucky little fellow succeeds in getting employment to help fit up the machinery in Trimble's mills.

The strikers become furious, and in their rage they attempt to force a way into the mill and break up the machinery. In the fight between mill-owner and idle employees, Dick Allen saves the life of Mr. Trimble, and in recognition of this brave deed he is given a written document showing that he will be entitled to a one-fourth share in the mill when he attains the age of twenty-one.

Dick meets a great enemy when he is introduced to James Ackroyd, the unscrupulous nephew of Mr. Trimble. Ackroyd has a power in the management of the mill, and does all he can to get Dick from his uncle's favour.

Ackroyd owes a certain money-lender a large sum of money, and in order to clear this debt he forges a cheque for £150. Later, Mr. Trimble discovers this deliberate alteration, and so overwhelmed is he at finding his nephew to be a rogue and thief that he is suddenly taken ill with grief.

Thinking of what will be left him at his uncle's death, James Ackroyd withholds Mr. Trimble's medicine, and so the great mill-owner passes away, death being caused by his nephew.

Dick is told to mount a wall and knock away the bricks ready for the reconstruction of a part of the building. The foundation of the wall is weak, and with Dick on top it suddenly began to fall.

A telephone wire, supported by a cable, stretches across to the building opposite, and seeing the chance of a possible escape, Dick makes the effort. He leaps from the falling wall into space, and clutches the wire and cable.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

'Twixt Life and Death.

THE telephone wires stretched and shivered. Dick thought they were going to break, and the fear of that drove away the pain in his hands that were being almost cut in two by the sharp wire.

The wire seemed to stretch more, but it did not break. He got an elbow over it, then a leg, and there he hung, scarcely daring to move lest any greater strain on the wire would break it. Frantic cries of advice were hurled at him from a dozen quarters. For himself, as he hung there between life and death, he hardly knew what to do.

The only way seemed to be to crawl delicately along the wire to the other side where it passed, he could see, near a window, which he might reach. He commenced the terrible journey. Every wriggle he made might just create the breaking strain. He accomplished a foot, then inch by inch another one. He could not hope, he dare not hope to reach safety, for the chances against him were so many. It seemed impossible that the slender wire could bear his weight. Yet it did. He wriggled on foot by foot.

Then he saw something that made his heart stand still and his eyes dilate with horror.

Out of that window which he was making for protruded a hand grasping a big knife. And it was hacking at the wire which supported him.

Dick could hardly believe his eyes. It seemed too impossible—too horrible. And yet, there it was. A hand, owned by some unseen body, was actually labouring and struggling to cut with a knife the slender wire that kept him from death.

For a moment he experienced a paralysis of horror. He expected a sudden parting of the wire to which he hung, the swift uprising of the stone-paved yard below, for him a sudden, dreadful shock, and a swift ending of everything.

He suffered in a swift moment of agony all the dread of death, all the horror of a swift crushing out of life. He saw, too, that from the shape of the building that the murderous hand could not be seen from the yard below, so that the hidden ruffian was immune from witnesses of his crime.

Dick yelled out—partly in hope of succour, partly to frighten off the intended murderer:

"There's someone trying to cut the wire. There's a hand sticking out of a window gashing at the wire. I shall fall in a minute!"

There came a confused noise of voices from below. He did not know whether he was heard or no. He had an impression that someone answered him, though he was not sure, and he had some sort of a notion that a loaded dray was being backed across the yard amid some excitement, though it did not occur to him that this incident had anything to do with his own position. All the same, he was conscious of it, even as the mind in most tragic moments will engage itself with trivial matters, and he saw that the figure struggling at the horse's head was the rotund one of Bulgy Fry.

All this was but an instant's impression—a flash of thought. Even then he was working his way along the wire. It was a race between him and the murderous knife held in the unknown hand. While he struggled along the frail thread of metal he watched with fascinated eyes the knife sawing at it. He could feel the twang of it as the wire vibrated in his hands.

The wire was evidently resisting. It was tougher than the owner of the knife anticipated. And Dick saw, with a glimmer of hope coming into his breast, that the hand was hacking blindly, because its owner's eyes were hidden behind the filtered opaque glass of the window, so that many of the blows on the wire failed.

Dick hardly dared to hope. But there was just the faintest chance. He swarmed along the wire, throwing caution to the winds. Was it possible? Could he reach the safety of the opposite wall before the knife had accomplished its fell purpose? A dozen times in the merest fraction of a second his mind swung between hope and despair.

Then of a sudden the end came for him. A dreadful twang, like the parting of a great banjo-string, sounded in his ears. He saw, for just an instant, the far end of the wire snaking towards him as the strain ceased, and he felt himself falling. Death was leaping up. He felt that this was the end; that there could

be no hope. His death-frightened eyes swung below for a moment. And then was conveyed to his brain the meaning of the backing horse and the loaded dray. Right under him was the dray. It was piled high with sacks of cotton-waste.

The next he knew he was bouncing into the soft embrace of the waste. The dusty smell of the cotton, and the dusty, jutey odour of the sacking hit on his senses like an exquisite perfume. His brain reeled so that the world seemed to go round, his heart went like a hammer against his breast, his breath panted out from the sheer mental agony he had suffered, but through all was the delicious thought that he lived.

He heard Fry's voice, and the next moment the fat boy was clambering up beside him, full of questions touching his welfare.

"I'm all right," answered Dick. "You've saved my life, Bulgy!"

It was a mere statement of fact. One cannot give thanks for having one's life saved, because thanks are so inadequate.

"It's nowt," returned the half-timer, understanding all Dick would like to say. "Anybody else would have done the same."

"No one would have thought of it so quickly. I seem to have been up there a year, but I suppose it wasn't really many seconds."

"Not many. The wire broke awful quick."

"It didn't break, Bulgy; it was cut. Someone chopped at it with a knife out of a window. You can't see it from here. It's one in that recess."

"By go! Is that what thou wert yelling about? Come on, quick! Let's run up to t' window."

He helped Dick to his feet, and they both scrambled over the bags and down to the ground. They hurried across the yard, and ran up the back flight of stairs that led to the top floor, from which this window looked out, though Dick's speed was not his best, for his limbs felt shaky and his joints weak.

They reached the window. It was at the top of the steps, and did not light any room. But there was no one there, and it was closed down.

"I might have expected it!" Dick cried. "Whoever it was would not linger long."

He flung up the window and looked out. On the sill he saw some cuts manifestly fresh in colour, as though done with a chopper or knife. He pointed them out to Bulgy.

"Whoever it was couldn't see what he was doing, because he had his

head inside the window, d'you see, and in chopping at the wire he's made a miss or two and chopped here."

"By go, yes! I wouldn't have believed it. Sithee! What's that down there on t' floor?"

He stooped down and picked up a button.

"One o' them fancy leather ones!" he exclaimed. "Not the sort working chaps wear. It's been ripped off somebody's coat wi' scraping up and about on this inside window-sill, tha knaws. Is it one o' t' clerks, think ye? Here, take it, and keep your eyes open. Hallo! I can hear t' measter's voice in t' yard—Mr. Ackroyd. He's axin' about what's happened. I'd run down and tell him, and show him yon button as well."

James Ackroyd, with a great assumption of concern and anxiety, was busy gathering details of the accident from a group of workmen when Dick ran out into the yard.

"Why, here's t' lad!" cried somebody, as Dick appeared on the scene. "I never seed a narrower escape. And when you wire broke—"

"It didn't break!" cried out Dick. "It was cut—cut wilfully by someone at a top window where the wire could be reached."

And as he spoke he picked up the end of the wire which lay at their feet, and showed where there were the irregular scratches and incisions made by some cutting tool that had been wielded at random.

"Great Heaven! That's serious!" gasped Ackroyd. "Are you sure about it, boy?"

"I saw the hand stuck through the window between the bottom of the sash and the sill, but I couldn't see the face behind it, because the glass was thick with dirt, sir."

"Abominable! A wicked outrage!" ejaculated Ackroyd, with a look on his face that Dick could not help thinking seemed to express relief.

"Have you no clue to the villain's identity?"

"Yes, sir," said Dick, with his eyes on Ackroyd's jacket, which was trimmed with leather buttons identical with the one he held in his hand, except that one was missing. "I picked up a button on the floor just under the window."

"A button!"

"Yes, sir; a leather one like yours." And, opening his hand, he held it between finger and thumb up against Ackroyd's jacket, just where the button was missing from it.

James Ackroyd's cool answer showed that he was developing, with practice, (Continued on the next page.)

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FREE COUPONS TO THE PICTURE THEATRES! (See "Your Editor's Den" in This Number.)

into a villain of some skill and resource.

"By jingo, I lost that button two days ago! Someone must have picked it up and thrown it away again. That's lucky. I couldn't get any more like them. Well, that doesn't help us much in this matter. But I should like to get to the bottom of it. If you get to know anything, or have any more ideas about it, come to my office, Allen, and let me know. Meanwhile, if you feel shaken and would like a half-holiday, boy, take it."

"No, sir," said Dick grimly. "I think I'll hold on. But I'm going to keep my eyes open," he added, looking Ackroyd full in the face. "If someone has got his knife into me, he's not going to have it all his own way."

"I'm afraid a number seem to have that—I mean a knife into you, so to speak. I'm sorry for it, of course, but the hands are a little difficult to manage when they get their mind made up about anything. I hear you were received with—ah—disfavour this morning in the yard here. Well, perhaps it will wear down. I hope so. And, anyhow, you must be protected from this sort of thing." And he turned away, leaving Dick feeling more than he could express.

A Point in Dick's Favour.

"WELL, what do you think of things?" Bulgy asked, as he and Dick hurried homewards at dinner-time.

"I think I'm up against everything," Dick answered, with a sad little smile. "I don't know what to make of it. That button is what you'd call a clue. But what can I make of it? It looks fishy, but what can I prove? I know in my own mind the boss hates me like poison, although he pretends not to; but if I go and make any sort of complaint no one will believe me, and I shall be in a worse mess than before. As it is, the fellows have got a down on me."

"I dunno. I don't think I should put it quite that way," observed Fry. "Of course, there are no two ways about that rotten Widdop, but he isn't everybody; and when you come to think of it, the chaps who made most o' the row this morning were a few of his own partic'lers, while the others who chimed in were just a few mufin-headed lads and lasses who always side wi' them as shouts t' loudest. That can't last. They'll see as that's a right sort, lad, sooner or later."

Dick sighed. "But what is it that t' measter's got agen thee, lad? Is there owt in it what they're saying—that t' old measter left it in his will that some day thart to have a share in t' business?"

"Yes, it's true; and little luck it's brought me up to now," Dick said. "I reckon that's what he's got against me."

"It's a rare fine thing for thee," said Fry, with unconcealed admiration, "though I reckon you earned it that night when the lads were all mad to gut the inside of the mill, and you as good as saved the old measter's life. Ay, a right fine thing for thee!"

"But it's a good many years to wait—till I'm twenty-one. And anything might happen between now and then. What might have happened to-day?"

"I say," said Fry all at once, "suppose anything happens to you before your claim becomes ripe, so to speak?"

"Suppose I'm not alive then, you mean?"

"That's it. What happens to this share?"

"He has it—I mean Mr. Ackroyd."

"By gosh, is that so? Then he wouldn't weep if there was an inquest on you any time. Good luck and plenty o' brass isn't much good unless thart alive to enjoy it. It's better to be a live millhand than a dead measter."

"You mean you wouldn't swop places with me?"

"I'd have to think a lot before I did. T' old measter's gift to thee doesn't look like bringing thee any joy!"

"But I'm not going to give up!" cried Dick fiercely, clenching one fist inside another. "I'm going to stick at it. I'm not going to be frightened out of what is my own."

That's champion. It's good on thee, lad. And I hope you'll win through. I say, when does the little sister come out o' t' infirmary?"

"In a day or two. But I can't let her come back with the home all

smashed up like it is. I've got to try to mend up some of that furniture."

"That Widdop and his gang smashed up? I'll come along to-night and bring some tools and give you a bit of a help. I've got to go to school this afternoon. The worst of half-timing is that you don't get enough of either. What I learn at t' mill in t' morning I forget at school in t' afternoon, and what I get into me head at school in t' afternoon I forget at t' mill in the morning again. Sithee, but I don't greet! I don't worry! I keep laffin'. Porridge and laffin' keep a chap fit!"

That evening Bulgy Fry came along with some tools, nails, a glue-pot, and some useful pieces of wood, and then together the two boys started in earnest to repair some of the smashed furniture. To one chair they fitted new legs, to another part of a back, and considered how the damaged dresser was to be repaired.

It was during a moment's pause in their labour that they became aware of some evidences of quiet movement in the yard outside. They listened intently. They heard some scuffling of

an exercise in which he often indulged when he was excited.

"Let's drop summat on them," he said—"some soot-and-water, or something of that kind."

"It's time we handed a bit of worry back to them," agreed Dick. "We could get a bucket of soot out of the chimney in no time, only I'd like to give them a bit more than that. Look here, you get on with the dose of soot. Mix it into a nice thin paste so that it will fall well and stick well. Meanwhile, I am going to drop down into the street from Jess's bed-room window."

"Steady, lad! What is ta up to?"

"I've got a bit of rope that I can climb in and out with. You wait till I'm back. They're playing a chestnut on us. We'll hand another out to them."

Dick got safely below into Scotland street, and then he crept round to the archway that gave entrance into Johnson's Fold. This yard had once been blocked by gates. These had been taken away, but the hinge-hooks still remained in the wall on each side near the outer edge of the

"Right-ho! We'll stop now and give them their dose. I'll apply the Christy-minstrel wash, and you take this whistle, which gives as near a police-whistle note as you can get. I want you to hang out of the window where I went through, and when you hear the row from the beauties—and it ought to be a good song if I drop the stuff with good aim—just blow as hard as you can. The copper will then come bolting down the street, and with good luck he ought to meet the little crowd just at the archway in time to want to know things—what they are doing in there, and—"

"And what they're using such awful language for!" grinned Fry.

The four heads were very close together when Dick tilted the bucket over the window-ledge. The contents of it went down in a straight, solid stream. It distributed itself with a swishing sound over heads, faces, shoulders, and necks. It filled eyes and ears, and poured down front and back.

Then broke out a four-voiced startled cry, and then a roar of anger,

stable was not twenty yards away, coming up at the double.

Knowing that in this quarter it was wise to strike first and inquire afterwards, he had his stave loose in his hand. A flourish of it and a threat brought quick submission from the trio.

"And who else is in this yard?" he cried, catching a glimpse of Widdop, who, having got rid of the bucket at the cost of some skin, was shrinking back into the shadows.

The constable started into Johnson's Fold to see for himself, and met the fate of the others in coming violently to the ground over the string. Being only human, and supposing it to be the work of these youths, he sprang to his feet, collared the three of them roughly in a very powerful grasp, and performed the nut-cracking trick upon them—that is, knocked their heads together and flung them into the yard.

"You beggars! I'll teach you to play tricks upon me!" he cried gruffly. "You put that string for me, did you? And you cover yourselves with muck so's I can't handle you!"

"No, sir! Please, sir, it wasn't!" cried Widdop abjectly. "We've been served most shamefully by that little brute—you may have heard of him, the lad who set Trimble's Mill on fire—Dick Allen. He kidded us to come in t' yard. Then he tied that cord across while we weren't looking, and then chucked that muck over us. Sithee, he ought to get a year in quod! He lives at that house there, No. 2!"

"Very well; come here. I'm going to see into this!"

The policeman knocked at No. 2. Dick answered quickly. He turned the latch and dragged at the door.

"It's fast!" he cried. "Someone's done something to the door. Why, it's screwed up! I can see the points of the screws coming through!"

"You young liars!" cried the constable wrathfully. "How can this lad have got outside to put that string across and to have chucked that stuff over you when you've fastened up his door? Why, there's the screw-driver sticking out of your pocket! By gum, you'll go straight to t' town-hall wi' me now, all of you!"

The two boys inside heard the feet tramp away. Dick smiled, but Bulgy Fry did a frisky hornpipe round the kitchen, rubbing his head with his hands at the same time.

"It'll be five bob apiece!" he cried. "They'll be before the beak in t' morning! Ain't that champion? It'll make a hole in their wages. Five bob apiece, I'll bet!"

The forecast was correct. Widdop lost a morning's wages, and that exact sum of money, and his mates likewise. That afternoon he came to work with a very healthy hate for Dick Allen, and his mean mind packed with schemes for possible vengeance.

That afternoon the evil fates gave him the chance he wanted, though even young ruffian that he was, it is doubtful whether he would in cool blood have gone so far as he did; but, just now he saw through a red haze of wrath that distorted his cooler judgment. Moreover, after the police-court proceedings, a sympathiser had plied him with a drink or two, which had made up any lack of evil in his heart.

"You little rotter!" he said thickly in Dick's ears, when he first saw him.

"Don't you think I sha'n't get my own back over this, an' all, because I shall!"

"All right," said Dick. "Thanks for the warning. I'll keep my eye on you. And if I get another one in, don't grumble."

"I'll smash the face for thee!" said Widdop amiably.

"All right, you weigh in! I'm out to keep my end up!" retorted Dick.

Now, Dick's job that afternoon was at the lift on the first floor landing. It was at present Ackroyd's object to keep him running about on odd jobs that would not only be distasteful to him, but from which he would learn nothing, because he understood Dick's ambition was to learn, to get hold of all the processes of the trade, so that he might fit himself to occupy the important position that he some day hoped to occupy.

If petty persecution, for which he saw manifold openings, did not sicken the youngster, then perhaps the refusal to let him learn anything would do it—though, at the same time, James Ackroyd did not want Dick out of his sight and control exactly. By no means that. Because some day a chance might come.

That chance came this afternoon, with Widdop, blundering, coarse ruffian as he was, the instrument.

(Another splendid long instalment next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)



Dick felt himself falling with the wall, and a moment of dreadful terror seized him. Seeing his only chance of escape he leapt into space and clutched the slender telephone wires, which stretched and shivered under his weight.

heavy boots on the flagstones, and a suppressed talking up against the shuttered window.

"Widdop and his own partic'lers, I'll bet," whispered Bulgy. "They're nosing round to see if there's an opening for them. The brutes! I'd like to pay 'em back something in the trouble line. They've been having their own way too much in this game of marbles."

"Let's make sure who it is first of all," answered Dick, in a low voice, as he crept on tiptoe up the stairs.

He went up and hung out softly from the window above. He could see four figures in the gloom below busy in the preparation of something that he could not at first make out. But a minute's watching showed him that they were working, or trying to work, the time-honoured dodge of screwing up the door. He came down and told Bulgy, who rubbed his fair, close-cropped head with great glee,

archway, about a foot from the ground.

From his pocket he took a length of stout string. An end he fastened with a turn or two round one of the hooks, then stretched the cord tightly across to the opposite hook, and there fastened it.

He had a quick scamper up the street as far as the Dusty Miller inn at the corner of Manchester Road to see if the policeman, who generally occupied this spot about this time in the evening, was there. He satisfied himself on that score, and then ran back. He climbed up the rope, and got inside again, and went below to find Bulgy stirring up the soot-and-water with a poker in one hand, and the other hand being occupied in hammering on a piece of wood in such a way as to sound as though he was hammering in nails.

"Just a blind for 'em outside," he said. "If they hear we've stopped work they'll be suspicious."

though one voice was temporarily silenced, for the bucket slipped from Dick's hands, and came down and enclosed the head of Widdop like a big hat. And it jammed down on his head rather painfully, so that he roared lustily, in a bottled-up voice, to be released.

Simultaneously, Fry, hanging out of the window into the street, was blowing the whistle shrilly, and the constable on the beat, who was both active and diligent, was footing it down the street some twenty seconds before the young ruffians in the yard were aware that the signal for help was being given.

"Scoot, lads! T' police-whistle!"

And they ran full-pelt out at the archway, leaving Widdop struggling with the bucket on his head. Then the cord tightly stretched across the footway came into action. The three of them bowled over in a roaring, gasping heap. By the time they were on their feet again the con-