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**EVERY TUESDAY.**



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**ONE PENNY.**

[WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 3RD, 1914.]

# THE MAILED FIST.

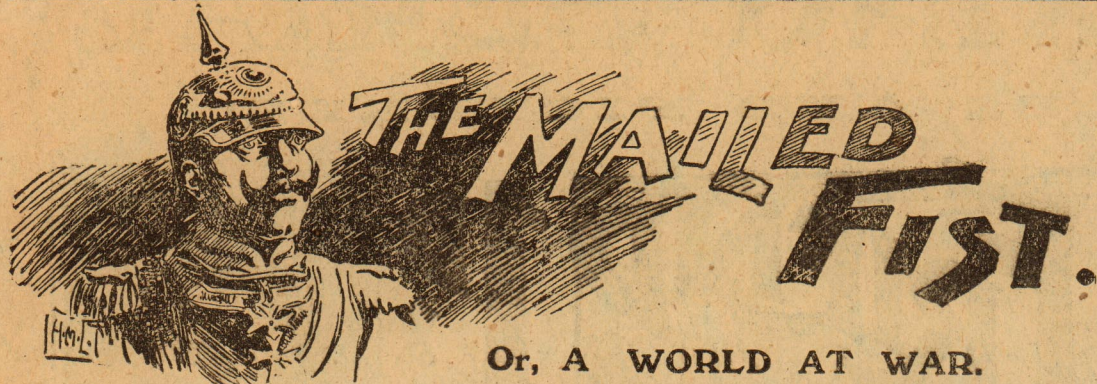
By John Tregellis.



**BRITISH DESTROYERS MEET GERMAN TRANSPORTS!**

A German Raid Upon the British Coast being Intercepted by a British Cruiser Flotilla. (Read the vivid description inside.)





Or, A WORLD AT WAR.

By JOHN TREGELLIS.

### The First Chapters Re-written.

ROY KILDARE, a young Irishman, and HARVEY DUNSTER, a clever airman, are stranded on a small island in the Irish Ocean, owing to the failure of their aeroplane, the White Streak. Harvey's plane is patched up, and he is called for duty with the British Air Squadron. Roy is picked up by the cruiser Hotspur, under the command of

MAX STRONG.

The Hotspur joins in a big engagement with the Germans, but in the thick of the fight she is ordered by the flagship to make a dash through the enemy's lines and steam southward, where German transports are attempting to break through.

(Now read on.)

### Rammed.

Forward the Hotspur rushed, turning at right angles from the foe, hoping to find a gap, her guns flashing as she went. The lone cruiser, a forlorn hope if ever there was one, staggering under the blows she received, steered between the German flagship and the Kaiserin.

"She'll do it! She'll do it!" muttered Carey, his head reeling from the concussion of the shells that burst over the decks. "No, by gad, they're both turning on us!"

Roy fell blindly up against the array of speaking-tubes. He felt as if both ear-drums were split, and he groped for a hold through the reeking yellow smoke. It was a surprise to him to find that all his comrades were not killed. There was a rent gaping through the conning-tower's armour like the crack in an egg-shell.

He saw Strong leaning doubled up across the platform-rail, and caught him under the arm, but Max staggered up and shook him off.

"Carry on!" he croaked hoarsely. "Keep her going! Leave me alone; I'm not hurt!"

Bang! came another big shell on the armour, glancing off with a whirling boom, and the small missiles thudded on the tower with diabolical fury. The petty officer who had stood beside Roy lay on the steel floor with arms outstretched, and Carey was stunned, but the little midshipman who acted as messenger was now at the tubes, shouting the orders down them as Max gasped them out.

"Getting it from both sides!" Max cried. "Only a question of how long. Roy, see if you can pull Carey round. We need him."

"She's passing 'em!" exclaimed the midshipman shrilly. "I bet my patches our hooker shows 'em her stern yet!"

Through the shielded gaps the enemy could be seen as they pounded away at the Hotspur, but their fire was now far wilder, and not another heavy shot came home. The reason was soon seen. Four of the British cruisers were focussing all their fire on the Sachsen and the Kaiserin, between which the Hotspur was passing. They hammered with all their power at the big German ships in order to let their consort through.

The attack was delivered just in time. Under that withering fire the enemy's gunners were dazed. They shot wildly, and the Hotspur, which a minute before had seemed doomed to certain destruction, was at once relieved.

Every moment she was drawing farther away through the line. Her officers and crew saw the two great German vessels staggering and reeling along under a hail of shells that never slackened or faltered. The British admiral had not forgotten the messenger to whom he had given so terrible a task. Both the Kaiserin and the German flagship had to turn their guns from the Hotspur and face their assailants in front as best they could. Away went Strong's ship like a grey streak to the southward at a solid twenty-five knots, still firing from her after batteries at the foe.

The rearmost German cruisers gave her a parting salvo at longer and longer range, but they dared not leave

their places in the line, which every minute the British squadron threatened to break and split up. Onward tore the Hotspur, safer at each cable's length, she went.

"Cease firing!" commanded Max. The order was passed swiftly, and there came a silence so sudden that it was like a blow. The engines alone made the ship tremble now from stem to stern, as she left the battle behind her. Max gave a whoop of triumph.

"Clean through their line, by Jupiter!" he said. "Good old Bobby Broadside, the best cruiser admiral afloat. He gave us all we could chew, but he buttered the bread for us. May he fly his flag till the North Sea dries up! Call up another messenger there. How's Carey?"

"Can do," gasped the young sub-lieutenant, sitting up. Roy had given him a pull at a brandy flask to bring him round. "No, sir, not wounded. Knocked silly by that shell. It burst right on the armour at my back."

"Like me," said Max. "Thought my shoulder-blades were driven in. Lucky it wasn't on the tin patch. Hobson much hurt? Call the stretcher-party, and take him out, poor chap. Send in another P.O. at once."

Hobson, the petty officer, had been laid out by a splinter of steel, but though deathly white and unconscious, he was not dangerously wounded. The surgeon's staff removed him to the wards, and Bennet, one of his messmates, replaced him.

"Relieve the gun crews!" ordered Max. "Fresh men for the next lap. See that the torpedo officer has all ready. He'll have to put in all he knows before we're an hour older. The gunner to report in person at once. What we've had so far is only the giddy overture."

"We're leaving the fight behind," said Roy, almost regretfully.

"Bobby'll attend to that. Leave it to him. He'll wipe the floor with them. As soon expect to see the stars fall than old Broadside hauling down his flag. Where's Dunster and his sky-boat?"

"Sitting on the sea like a gull two miles ahead, sir," reported the midshipman, who saw the White Streak in the distance, riding easily on her floats, and rising and falling with the swells.

"Engine trouble or saving his petrol," said Roy. "He's done the scouting for us, anyway, and bet he'll be aloft again in a brace of shakes. What's the action they're fighting to the southward of us, sir? Can there be another battle besides this blazing one we've just left?"

"It's as clear as mud now. The German cruisers have engaged our squadron with their full power while their flotillas are convoying troopships with an army corps aboard lower down, an' fling 'em on the Suffolk coast. It'll be a torpedo job, this."

"Do they hope to do any good with a cut-off land force like that?" cried Roy. "If they got ashore they'd never get back!"

"Maybe they don't want to," replied Max grimly. "But they'll be within striking distance of London, and play the Uhlans game in our home counties while we've got our hands full elsewhere. Who knows what fiend's work they may do before they're rounded up?"

"Ay, we don't want half the villages in East Anglia blazing," said Carey, scanning the seas eagerly through his glasses, for every moment the sharp, vicious barking of small guns came clearer down the wind. "The White Streak's aloft again, sir!"

"It's up to the honour of the Navy to see none of 'em set foot on British soil," returned Max quietly, "no matter though we leave half our lightships at the bottom. All clear forward!"

The Hotspur closed ever inwards towards the coast, churning along

with every ounce of steam her pounding engines could command, when Roy gave the first warning.

"Yonder they are. Five, eight, ten big black steamers, sir, and heading this way."

"Their convoy's beyond them fighting our chaps off!" exclaimed Carey. "That's the third flotilla from Harwich, sir. The 'L' class destroyers with their leaders. Great Nelson, but they're doubling the Germans up! It's a near thing for those troopers. They're close up to the land."

"And right in our course!" said Strong, with deep satisfaction. "Port again! Cut them off! Ah, they've sighted us! They didn't expect to meet trouble this side."

If the battle left behind had been a struggle of giants this one was more like a fight between swift, venomous snakes. The troopships were masked by sixteen powerful German destroyers, and five of the fastest cruisers in the Kaiser's fleet. A deadly encounter was raging between them and the whole of the Third Flotilla from Harwich—fifteen stripped black hulls of the 'L' class, accompanied by their destroyer-leader, a long, swift cruiser that looked like a gigantic torpedo-boat, with a low after-deck, firing furiously into the enemy with her four-inchers.

"That's the Amphion!" cried Carey. "She's giving 'em Hades! Fox is her skipper. He was my chief in the old Psyche."

"Not the Amphion," said Max, after a keen glance at the distant ship. "Her sister ship the Active, I think."

"But the Amphion is leader to the Third Flotilla, sir."

"Can't help it. That's not her. Wonder why? No time for riddles. Port again, three points. Bid the gunners hold their fire. I'm going to make sure of those troopers, whatever happens!"

The Hotspur turned still farther towards the land, her crew on a knife edge of expectation. They wondered why the order was not given to open fire, but they trusted Strong implicitly. It was hard to keep their guns idle for a minute with that scene before them.

The Active was blazing with all her might at the German destroyers that had dashed out to meet the attack, and three of them were already no more than clots of steam floating above the waves. Two more cruisers backed up the Active, but one of them, torpedoed in two places, was sinking by the head.

The British destroyers, headed by the Landrail, Loyal, and Lance, were surging right through the line at the terrific pace of thirty knots, their funnels blanketing them with smoke and sparks, and their twelve-pounders and torpedo-tubes all in action. Four of the transports were already foundering, another blew up with a devastating explosion that hurled men and horses bodily through the air, and the German destroyers, thrown into confusion by the cool, deadly rage of the British attack, were smitten from the face of the seas one by one under the unceasing fire from the cruisers before they could get within torpedo range.

"Our cruisers are smashing up the German war canoes!" cried Roy eagerly. "See, five more are down, and their destroyer-leader is torpedoed!"

"But the troopships are getting past. They'll be through in spite of it all!" muttered Carey, and he looked with strained anxiety at Strong, hoping for the order to close and fire. But Max was still silent and inscrutable. There was still five of the German transports left, and they seemed only too likely to make the beach.

Their decks could be seen packed and black with riflemen and field-guns. They bristled with spiked helmets as a quick-set hedge does with

thorns. Hundreds of them were using their repeating rifles in long, crashing volleys directed at the British ships. The vessels that bore them were the fastest transports afloat, and were rushing with all possible speed towards the shore. There would be no time for an ordered disembarkation; but once beached they would be able to get their men overboard and on to the sands.

"They'll slip by us!" gasped the midly, under his breath. But at that moment the Hotspur swung to port. "Now!" shouted Max. "Every shot for the troopships! Pour it in! Never mind the enemy's cruisers; let them hammer us as they choose! Give the soldiers their dose, lads!"

The answer was the deep-throated roar of the Hotspur's long gun, and instantly all her quickfiring echoed it as she circled swiftly round the flank of the troopships. The nearest of them, at a bare half-mile range, was burst open like a sandbox when two big shells struck her on the water-line; she staggered out of station, and was nearly cut down by the next astern, which was raked from end to end with a hurricane of small shells.

The two German cruisers, rushing to the rescue, turned their broadsides upon the Hotspur, and hammered her ferociously; but her armoured sides and citadel withstood the attack, and her gunners did not even deign to reply—they continued to blaze into the transports and wipe them out.

"Look out for the flotilla—our own ships!" cried Max, as the British destroyers raced in, lancing the troopships to the quick, like sword-fish among a shoal of whales. The death-dealing attack was short and swift; in three minutes there were but two of the troopers left, and one of them, crippled and broken, had got through already, and piled herself on the beach. The last was trying to pass under the Hotspur's stern.

The German destroyers, with smoke-stacks red-hot, closed in upon Strong's ship, and for the moment she had to turn her guns on them to avoid being torpedoed and letting the last transport through. The German destroyers have standing orders to steam within pistol-shot before letting their torpedoes go. It was a fatal order against such gunnery as the Hotspur's. She blew the engine-room out of one of them with a single swift shot, and left the other crippled and sinking. But a streaking line of bubbles that passed just in front of her own bows showed how narrow her escape had been. Round she came, leaning right over on her side, and headed for the last trooper.

"Got her!" cried Roy through his teeth. "We shall cut her off now!"

A perfect hurricane of bullets reigned all over the Hotspur. The livid, furious faces under the spear-topped helmets on her decks could be plainly seen—the massed soldiers were firing into her with their magazine-rifles, scourging her with lead.

"Hold your course!" cried Max. "Stand by to ram!"

There was no time even to loose the second torpedo, nor need. The transport was but two ships' length away, and the Hotspur headed straight for her huge black side. The German tried to turn, but it was too late. The sudden confusion and panic among the armed men on her decks was fearful.

Crash! The steel bows of the Hotspur struck her just abaft the engine-room, and shored through her like a gigantic chisel slicing through sheet-iron. Ten thousand tons of dead-weight, hurled forward at twenty-five knots, cut the black troopship in half, and with a single blow sent two thousand riflemen to their doom.

### The Striking of the Flag.

In that terrific moment Roy caught at the steel rail beside him, expecting to be flung down by the shock. Yet, absolute though the destruction of the transport was, the Hotspur scarcely seemed to check. The unarmoured German ship was smitten in two, and the immense weight and power of the warship saved her own hull from harm.

Brief though it was, the yelling from two thousand throats, and the noise of the impact, filled sea and sky and seemed to drown the din of the battle. Roy saw the frantic, leaping German infantrymen trying to clutch at the Hotspur's stripped sides as she ground over—some of them even caught hold of the railless deck and hung on. A few moments later the cruiser had left the sinking vessel behind, the two halves of her went down amid clouds of hissing steam, and left a mass of black figures struggling in the whirlpool astern. The Hotspur's lashing propellers cut through them and turned the water

red—and turned Roy's face white. He leaned against the rail, sick and dizzy, scarcely hearing the fierce cheers that arose from the destroyers around. Already he had seen much of war, but not death on such a scale as this. He shut his eyes for once.

"So much for the German raid on Norfolk," said young Carey, without glancing back at the horrors left behind. "We've saved many a peaceful village between the coast and London. Going to pick any of them up, sir?"

"Our own fellows first!" said Max with cool grimness. "Let them wait till there's no Britisher left to save."

"Mr. Hilton reports all clear forward, sir!" announced a midshipman, entering the conning-tower. "Bows not damaged, but the propellers have lost two blades—she can only crawl!"

"Out with the collapsible boats!" ordered Max. "Lines ready there; throw out the rope ladders!"

"Boats?" muttered Roy giddily, pulling himself together. "Is she sinking, Max?"

"No, but others are! Lively there to starboard!"

Roy sprang out through the slide-door of the conning-tower, and for the first time was able to realise fully the scene of destruction all around him.

The remnant of the German convoy were flying with all speed to the eastward—a single cruiser and four destroyers all that remained of those that had guarded the transports. Their last hope was gone, and nothing remained to them but flight. Several vessels of the Third Flotilla were in hot pursuit, overtaking and shooting into them. Already the chased and pursuers were fast disappearing.

Of the German troopships not one remained afloat. Rent to pieces by torpedoes and gun-fire, they had sunk beneath the waves, and by now most of the heavily-weighted Hanovarian soldiers had gone to the bottom. But there were yet bodies of men and horses drifting around, to dot the sea far and wide.

Piled up on the beach in shallow water was a single troopship, lying with a heavy list to one side among the breakers, swarms of riflemen springing over her bows and wading frantically ashore with their rifles held over their heads. One, at least, of the troopships had reached the Norfolk shore; but only as a wreck, and her freight of armed men set foot on British soil to meet their death.

All along the line of the big, yellow sand-hills, rifles were blazing and Maxims rattled wickedly. The Germans, as they waded ashore, fired back; but they were shot down in dozens. The beach was strewn with fallen figures. A faint cheer was borne down on the wind, and company after company of khaki-clad figures were seen charging down the sands, sparkling here and there as the dim sun shone down upon bayonet-blades.

"They've made the land—they're ashore yonder!" cried Roy bitterly.

"Let 'em! The Territorials are giving them their tea!" said Max grimly. "Good chaps; they'll be glad of the job, and they've waited for it long enough. Burying-parties at sunset, an' we don't grudge it them. Get to work, Roy; help haul our lads aboard!"

Roy had not time to take in the scene with more than a glance or two, for within a couple of minutes of her cutting down the transport the Hotspur was among the swimming crews of two of the sunken British destroyers. With engines shut off, she swiftly launched her folding boats and threw out lines, picking up a score of survivors, several more of the vessels assisting skilfully in the work.

"Thanky, sir! That's into German Willy's neck! We've done our whack!" panted a big, dripping torpedo-coxswain, as he was hauled up over the side by willing hands. "Where's our lieutenant? For Heaven's sake, don't say you ain't got 'im!"

"All right, Blake, my lad!" called out a tall young officer in streaming, sooty uniform, picked up by one of the collapsibles, coming hand over hand up the rope-ladder. "The old canoe's gone, but it was your White-head tore the stomach out of that fourth transport. Great scissors, is that you, Strong? Don't lose any of my chaps, there's quite enough gone to the bottom."

The work of rescue went on rapidly, and few of those who were un-wounded and able to swim were missed. Nine handy vessels of the Third Flotilla were still on the spot, and every seaman that had kept afloat soon had a deck under his feet once more. Two of the destroyers even

READERS' LETTERS FROM THE FRONT APPEARING NEXT WEEK.



picked up several of the German seamen and soldiers:

"Got some of the beauties here, too, eh?" said the rescued officer, for eight or nine scared and sullen riflemen, who had managed to leap aboard the Hotspur when she cut their ship down, were standing and staring about them wildly.

"Roy, take those prisoners to the guard-room; I need all my men!" ordered Strong; and Roy, who had learned his way about the ship, disarmed the Hanover soldiers himself, and marched them below, a revolver in his fist. He heard again the sound of heavy firing, and had a glimpse of big vessels approaching from the northward as he shepherded the men down the companion-way.

"Look out there—new attack, Strong!" called out the destroyer lieutenant. "German cruisers running down on us!"

"Attack, be hanged! It's the remnant of the enemy's main squadron in full flight!" cried Max. "Stations there, the gun crews! Let's give them a last double-knock, if we can!"

"By gad, you're right!" the lieutenant exclaimed. "Bobby Broadside's hunting 'em down!"

It was a thrilling sight for the Hotspur's hard-ried crew. The big ships of the German squadron, that they had left behind in the thick of the fight half-an-hour before, were now flying along to the southward, headed by their own flagship, the Blucher. There were but five of them left, and one was already dropping astern and sinking fast. The others were in little better case.

In full chase came eight of the British cruisers, led by their admiral, and all firing hotly with their forward guns. They were strung out in a half-circle, overtaking and enclosing the enemy's ships at every yard they went. The Germans had tried desperately to escape to the eastward, but finding themselves cut off, fled pell-mell along the line of the coast.

Instantly the signals ran out on the British flotilla that had wrecked the transports, and the destroyers launched themselves at the foe, which found itself hemmed between two fires. The battered German ships were already thinning out—two of them were blazing from stem to stern.

One swift, bewildering rush from the thirty-knot destroyers, and the torpedoes did their deadly work upon the stricken enemy. Great pillars of spray mounted into the air alongside the German cruisers as those terrific gun-cotton charges struck home. The Blucher alone, hotly pursued by the British flagship, swerved westwards to avoid the destroyers, but found the lame Hotspur right in her path.

Boom, boom! Crash! roared Strong's guns, catching the Blucher right in her forward turrets and citadel. The German turned to show her broadside; but after one last shot her guns were dumb. Her consorts were crippled or sunk; the defenders of Britain were all round her. The battle was ended.

From the gaff of the enemy's flagship the black-and-white fleet ensign of Germany fluttered slowly and sullenly down.

**The British Troopships.**

"Struck!" cried Carey. "It's the surrender! The King Alfred's boat's away to her—their admiral will give up his sword!"

The roar of cheering from the British line was taken up by the Hotspur's men as they saw the flag dip.

"Enough of that!" said Strong. "The beggars fought well; don't rub it in again. By Christopher! Five of them left out of thirteen, and all their transports at the bottom. Old Bobby's done the trick! Hallo, Roy, you're in time for the finish!"

Roy could not speak—the scene was too much for him. It was enough to know that Britain, for the time, was safe. He saw the British flagship's boat round up smartly alongside the battered Blucher, and the officer in charge received her admiral's surrender. All round the seas, as far as the eye could see, there were but five of the German squadron afloat; two were in tow of British ships, and two others were already receiving aid from their conquerors to put out the fires that blazed aboard them.

"Signal from the flagship, sir—meant for us!"

A string of bunting fluttered from the peak of the King Alfred, and Max's cheeks flushed with sudden

amazement and pleasure, as he read them:

"WELL DONE, HOTSPUR!"

There was another delighted cheer for Max from every man of his crew who saw them.

"You deserve that if ever any man afloat did, Strong!" cried the torpedo-lieutenant.

"Christopher! I thought the old man was pulling our leg," said Max.

"If there are any giddy compliments going my chaps deserve them. I'm more likely to get court-martialled and shot for disobeying orders!"

"Whose orders?"

"The port-admiral's at Rosyth," said Roy, grinning. "Your wireless fellow nearly perished of a fit, Max."

"Port-admiral be sugared!" cried Carey. "Hallo, here's the airman!"

The White Streak came whirring gently down, and lit on the water alongside. They had hardly had time to notice her since the attack on the transports, but she had been seen hovering and darting swiftly over the fight throughout. The Hotspur's signalman still sat aft in her, and Dunster waved his hand to Max.

"Gee! That was some fight!" he called out. "The sausage-mongers are down an' out! We slapped our little pea-shooter into one of them soldier-ships, but mainly we'd nothin' much to do but admire the view."

say," said Max, saluting. "I command at present, as senior. Strong—late of Torpedo boat 999."

"Then, Mr. Strong, I congratulate you on having handled your ship with skill and courage of the first order! You have rendered my squadron signal services, both in the fleet action and the attack on the transports. Your dash through the enemy's fighting-line was most gallantly executed, and I wish to give you my personal thanks!"

Max felt himself grow about three inches taller. It was the proudest moment of his life, yet he showed no pride.

"My men did their duty splendidly, sir, though there was not two hundred of them left."

With a few brief questions, the admiral learned all there was to know of the engagements of No. 999 and the Hotspur.

"A fine piece of work!" he said. "You are a credit to the Navy, Mr. Strong, and I shall recommend you for an important command! Is that white seaplane alongside the one whose services I have heard of on the Irish coast? And Roy Kildare, the Donegal scout? The news of his part in the Zeppelin action has reached me. Bring them both aboard. I can only spare them one minute, but I wish to see them."

Harvey and Roy at once found themselves before the admiral.

soon back aboard the Hotspur. The White Streak was taken in tow, and the cruiser started on her voyage to harbour at the limping pace which was all her lame propellers could give her. She looked like a pile of scrap iron, so terrible were her scars of battle.

"Gee! That was worth while!" said Harvey. "He's no slouch, your admiral; he's right way up! He'd eat six o' the Kaiser's admirals before breakfast, an' ask for more. I wonder at a big bug like that troublin' to thank our little push after such a fight as he's had."

"That's Bobby's way," said Max. "He always finds time to say a word to anyone that's done a job the way he likes it—no matter whether to a post-captain or a stoker. And, by Jupiter, it's something to have been called up first! I'd rather have had that than four medals. Mind you, he's a terror too. He was as likely as not to have me shot for disobeying orders. But we all love Bobby."

"Guess you needn't worry about that," grinned Dunster. "Port-admirals don't count when Sir Robert flies his flag."

"He's a grand fellow," said Roy fervently, "and it's been Britain's biggest day, Max. She's wiped Germany off the sea!"

Max laughed. "No, no," he said. "This was only a cruiser fight. There's nothing

that day had come again when she sighted Harwich. A destroyer escorted her on the way. She slid into the great harbour's mouth, past Landguard Fort and the Bell Buoy, and picked up an Admiralty mooring in the Stour abreast the town.

Early though it was, cheers greeted the crippled Hotspur from the jetty, and the long breakwater as she steamed in, for the news of her doings had gone ahead by wireless. Harwich was cleared for war. All merchant vessels were moored up the rivers out of the way, the place was streaming with torpedo-craft and colliers, and seaplanes were whirring overhead and above the sea outside.

It was a rare relief for Roy and Harvey to feel pavements under their feet again, but they were very soon sick of it. For a while they seemed to have drifted into a dead calm—a lull in the war. The Hotspur was sent on to Chatham for repairs, Max being left behind to await orders from the Admiralty, which he expected every hour.

Roy and Harvey were made guests of the officers' mess at the Naval Flying Corps depot, which was at its busiest, and the flight commander and his experts, who welcomed the young airman with such cordiality as even Dunster had not dreamed of, inspected and overhauled the White Streak with the keenest interest and appreciation.

"She's a wonderful contraption, Dunster," said the flight commander; "quite different to our Service 'planes, but I'm hanged if I don't think she's better in her way."

"The airman-sharp from Lamlash said she's the only monoplane he ever saw that could be converted for sea work, an' could carry a gun," said Harvey proudly. "An' he was no slouch—he fixed her fine with the war gear. I believe there ain't a blamed thing she couldn't do, commander—she'd fly or fight by herself if you asked her. Dandiest 'plane ever designed, an' the only one of her sort that's yet been built."

"Well, you've shown us what she can do," said the commander, laughing. "and I think you're as good as the 'plane. I've your commission here. No time for red-tape now. It confirms your attachment-order made in Ireland, and I am to hand it to you. You are appointed flight-lieutenant in the Special Service Corps, and we shall use you right away."

"Gee! Flight Lieutenant Dunster—it sounds good!" exclaimed Harvey. "While this scrap is on, I'd rather have it than be governor of a State. Thank you, commander!"

"It comes from the authorities—not from me. Mr. Kildare, I have your commission also. You are appointed a full lieutenant in his Majesty's Regular Forces; it is considered that the initiative and resource you have shown in Ireland fully qualify you. General Fitz-Symons mentions you in despatches, and personally recommends you for the post."

"I never dreamed of such luck as this, sir!" gasped out Roy, scarcely able to control his delight. "A lieutenant in the Regulars? Why, I've never been through Sandhurst—"

"Sandhurst be hanged! You've been through hard fighting, and shown you can both obey and command. All the old nonsense is wiped out now—why, were giving commissions to non-coms. and sergeant-majors by the dozen. Few have such good claims as you."

"I shall get a job right away, then, sir."

"A job right at the front, Kildare, with the Expeditionary Force. That will be settled immediately—I think you will be attached to the Corps of Guides. Dangerous service, but it will suit you—your scouting abilities and your knowledge of German point you to it."

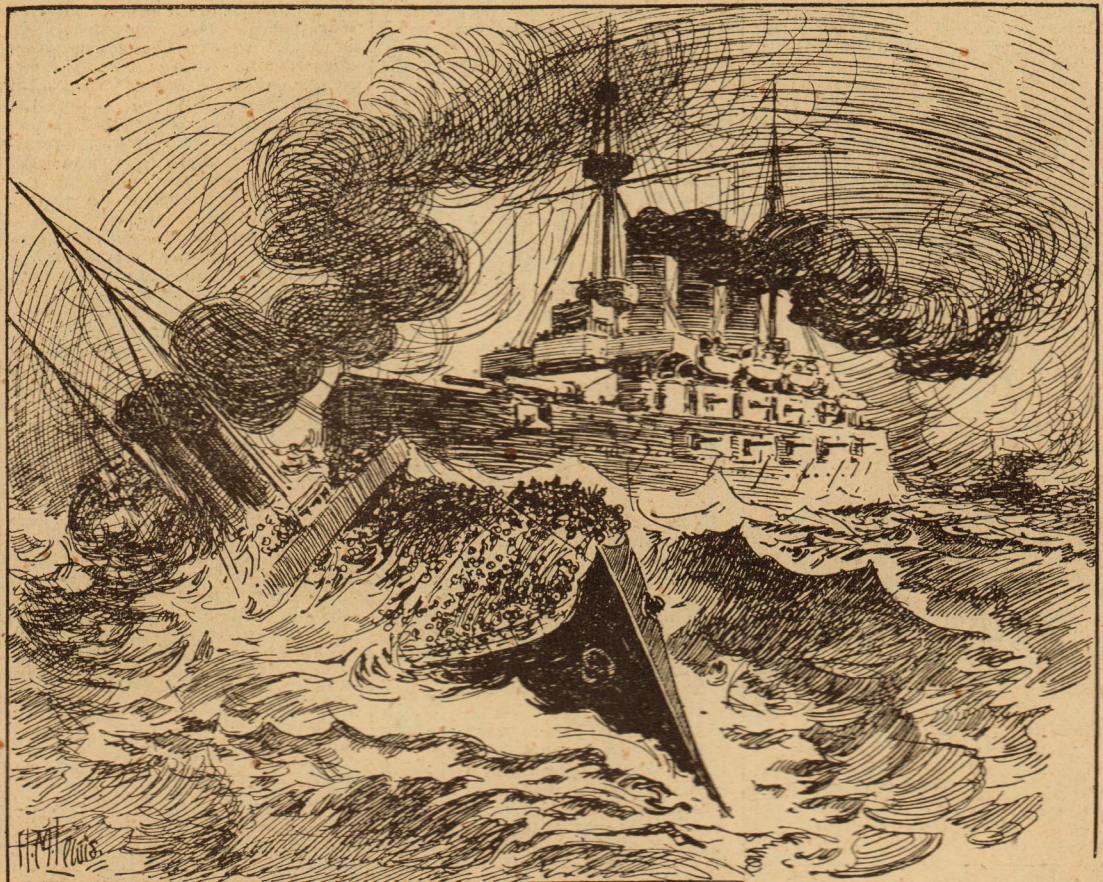
"Is there any chance of my serving with Dunster, on the way, sir?" said Roy eagerly.

"Yes, you are to be given the choice. Your late work on the 'plane has not been overlooked, and the commandant realises that you and your companion here pull well together. That sort of thing counts now. But you have had no airman's training."

"Gee!" said Harvey. "If you'd seen him heave the bombs into that submarine, sir—"

"You'll have your chance, Kildare. There's nothing doing for a while till the Expedition is in the field. If you can qualify yourself in the handling of the 'plane's gun, and the use of the wireless installation in time to start with her, you will be appointed as fighting unit of the White Streak—which will be known officially as Service Monoplane No. 227."

"I'll bet ninety dollars to a cent



Crash! The steel bows of the Hotspur shored through the black troopship like a gigantic chisel slicing through sheet tin.

Say, your admiral's workin' the Punch and Judy show at you."

What he meant was that the semaphore on the flagship was signalling to the Hotspur, and its jerking, black arms delivered the message.

"Hotspur's commander to go aboard!" exclaimed Max. "I'll bet I get eternally hauled over the coals. Here, Harvey, can you run me across? Quicker than a boat, anyhow, and it doesn't do to keep Bobby waiting."

"Sure!" said Dunster, for Roy had already swung down the rope-ladder and boarded him; the signalman got out, Max was in his place in a few moments, and Roy, to his horror, found himself being flown off towards the King Alfred in company with his commander.

"Here, drop me somewhere, for goodness sake!" he said, in a panic.

"Can't," said Max. "Too late. You lie low. It's me Bobby'll flay alive."

The Streak came down lightly within reach of the flagship, and Max boarded her. He was conducted before the admiral, who is known and beloved through all the Fleet as "Bobby Broadside"—a strong, stockily-built man with clear blue eyes, and a red torpedo beard.

"I sent for the officer commanding the Hotspur!" he said sharply.

"Where is Captain Flint?"

"Killed in action, sir, I regret to

"Mr. Dunster, my congratulations on your action in defending the Hotspur against submarine attack, which has been reported to me. A smarter piece of naval airmanship has never been put on record! You have shown yourself worthy of the fighting nation from which you come. Kildare, your name is not only known in Donegal, but throughout the Empire by now, and the part you have played is what we should have expected of you."

He shook hands with the three.

"Return to your posts, gentlemen. Mr. Strong, you will take the Hotspur to Harwich, whence she will proceed to Chatham for repairs. All three of you will soon be in the fighting-line again."

"That's all I ask, admiral!" said Harvey. "I'm attached to the British Service now—the only thing I'm afraid of is they'll shelve me because I ain't British—"

"Have no fear of that! Such services as yours must be retained. You have taken the oath, and will receive your commission at Harwich. Does your ship need a tow, Mr. Strong?"

"We can crawl in on our own steam, sir."

"Good! No man of your company will be forgotten. Good-bye."

The admiral had a dozen urgent affairs on hand, and the three comrades, all glowing warm at the generous praise they had received, were

settled till the great ships of the first line have fought it out. That settles the command of the sea."

"The Dreadnoughts?"

"Yes; the First and Second squadrons of the Home Fleet. Ships that none of these craft could go within six miles of without being blown out of the water. Wait till Jellypot wades into the enemy with the Iron Duke leading the line."

"Who?"

"Sir John Jellicoe, Admiral of the Fleet, my son. The first sailor in the world. I don't care who the next is. I was with him in the manoeuvres last year, when he raided Grimsby and played Old Harry with everybody. Jellypot'll twist Mad William's tail! He'll be coming round from Scapa Flow, blockading the North Sea from Scotland to Norway—waitin' for 'em to show their noses."

"Where's the German battle fleet?" said Harvey.

"Skulking in harbour most likely, with all the sea full of mines for miles round 'em so that nothing can get near. That's the way those no-sailors fight. But they'll have to come out sooner or later, and when they do I only pray I may be there to do my little bit. Bobby's promised me a new command, and he'll keep his word. Turn in, you fellows, there's nothing doing till we reach Harwich."

The dusk was already closing down, but so slow was the Hotspur's pace



he'll be ready even sooner than he's wanted!" said Harvey. "I owe Roy my life—I know him, an' I've served with him."

"I'll do it or burst, sir!" said Roy. "When do the British Forces start for France?"

"Soon—very soon indeed," replied the flight commander quietly; and that was all they could get out of him. "Go right ahead!"

There was certainly no time lost over that part of it. An instructor was sent down, who took his place in the 'plane with Roy, while Harvey flew her.

At first Roy made a hash of the gun practice, but it was astonishing with what speed he picked it up. A natural born shot and first-class with a rifle, he had an aptitude for any work that needed accuracy and a quick eye.

The wireless, which was now installed on the Streak as on nearly all Service 'planes, Roy found simple enough, as indeed modern wireless always is. It can be attached to a motor-bicycle nowadays.

While the practice was going on Harwich was in a state of busy ferment. Flotillas were coming in to coal and rushing to sea again, submarines were active, seaplanes were scouting along the coast, and wounded men and German prisoners brought into the Naval barracks at Shotley.

"Great news for me!" he announced joyously. "I command one of the thumping new destroyers—the Menace. And I lead the line, with the rank of commander."

"Destroyer?" said Roy. "I thought they'd give you a Dreadnought, old chap!"

"Don't be an ass! Jolly glad they didn't, too—the first battle line may see no fighting for months. I shall be kept on the job guarding transports and scouting up to German waters. I've heard of your luck—congratulators; you deserve it! I'll bet my new engines we see more service together; we've a knack of falling in with each other."

The next day, while the Streak was aloft over the Wallet, her crew saw

the newly-arrived Menace steam out on an unknown errand—a great black destroyer looking as big as a cruiser, with eight more of the "M" class in line behind her. Max signalled an adieu from his bridge.

"Lucky beast!" groaned Roy. It made him and Dunster feel almost bitterly envious. They were ready for service—Roy had passed his test officially, and been complimented. The two comrades were growing fretful at being kept back.

Liege was making a gallant defence. The Germans were through, none the less, and sweeping into Belgium. The Russians were attacking Eastern Germany. Two million French soldiers were on the frontier, and there had been fighting all along the southern line.

But not a word of Britain's part! Everybody was anxiously asking the same question. When was England going to help abroad?

Five more days of the same sort went by. The strain grew worse. Everything was kept secret and rightly. The Streak was sent on scouting for days far out to sea. But the seas seemed swept clear of all but British warships. Nothing heard from the battle squadrons. No news even of Max and his new flotilla.

"I'm blamed if you Britishers ain't good at shuttin' down the cackle when it comes to a fight," said Harvey impatiently; "but this thing's sorter getting on my nerves."

"Why don't they let us go? There are plenty of 'planes at Harwich; we aren't wanted here," replied Roy, chafing. "The flight commander promised me. Here he is!"

"Got the 'plane ready?" said the commander, as he came alongside her at moorings in his motor-boat.

"Been ready for days, sir," grunted Roy. "No news still? Is our Army never going to start? Are they afraid to ship it across?"

The flight commander laughed. "Start?" he said. "The British forces are in France now. They've been there over a week—one hundred and sixty thousand of them! Many were there the day you came to Harwich. The news is given out. There are two of our Army Corps at the front in Belgium this minute!"

Roy and Harvey were staggered. Then they gave a cheer. "Weren't they attacked on the way, sir?"

"That we're not told. But they haven't lost a ship or a man on the voyage. The transports are still leaving for France even now with more troops."

"From where? We've seen none here!"

"From Southampton and Portsmouth."

"I believe you knew this all the time, sir," cried Roy.

"Those who knew it held their tongues," said the flight commander quietly. "Have patience, your turn will come. There is no news that the British troops have been engaged yet. I must leave you now. No, I

can't tell you when you will be called for."

He departed, leaving Roy and Harvey in a ferment over the news. They hardly knew whether to be more delighted at getting it, or disgusted at being left stranded, as they thought. It was not for long. Sleeping on the depot ship, near the Streak, they were roused by the flight commander some time after midnight.

"Up and away!" he exclaimed. "You are to make Dover Straits with all speed! Fleet of British transports coming up Channel. You will meet them off the Varne, and do scouting duty for them to the northward. Make your private signals to the destroyer flotillas, and act in concert with them. Here's your signal-paper: Destroy it if you come to grief. Off with you! Good luck!"

"Come on, Harvey!" cried Roy, and in a few minutes they were aboard the White Streak, and whirling away to seaward. The week of galling delay was forgotten in a moment.

"Active service again, thank the powers!" cried Harvey, as the keen air roared past them. "See to your signals, kid. I'll make the engine hum!"

Flying is seldom done at night, but war knows no rules. There was a clear half moon low in the sky, which was powdered with pale stars, and the sea glimmered like silver far below them. Harvey had long ago worked out all his courses, and there was no chance of a mistake. At a steady seventy-mile pace the Streak left the Essex coast behind, and in an hour the North Foreland light was below them, and the English Channel opened up round the corner. It was like flying over a great open chart.

The rays of the light on Cape Grinez on the French coast were visible, whirling through the sky like the sails of a great windmill, and Roy swept the seas below with his night-glasses.

"See them?" cried Dunster.

"Not yet. We're early. There's a destroyer flotilla across the Straits, though. Drop her lower, Harvey."

The black torpedo vessels, the guardians of the narrow waters, could be made out like tiny black lines moving across the moonlit surface of the sea beneath. They had caught the noise of the Streak's engine, though they could not see her against the clear sky, and were on the alert. Roy made his signals with a flash-lamp, and was answered.

"Yonder they come!" cried Roy, and nine big liners were made out, steaming swiftly up Channel in a close string. The Streak was at no great height. The transports were nearly in mid-Channel, and far ahead of them and wide on their flanks was an escort of British destroyers. Roy signalled again, and got a reply at once, but the big troopships themselves made no sign. As the Streak drew nearer Roy could see through his night-glasses, first the lines of horses tethered in the well-decks, and then the throngs of men that packed the ships fore and aft, visible in the

dim moonlight. A faint cheer came up through the air as they turned their faces up to gaze at the 'plane.

"The lads in khaki for the fighting line!" cried Roy cheerily. "They'll show the way to Berlin before they've done. We've got to go right through to port with 'em, Harvey."

"And on beyond," said Dunster. "We may be at the front ourselves by midday to-morrow. I ain't going back unless I'm fairly turned off. Keep a sharp eye to windward, Roy."

"I'll be hanged if that first flotilla we saw out towards the Goodwins was the 'M' class boats. I believe Max is there with the Menace," said Roy. "There were cruisers out beyond, too. We sha'n't see any service this trip, Harvey, and all the better, for it'd be grisly to think of those crammed troopships under fire, like the German ships were. I don't see how any enemy could get through all that guard."

"Think not?"

"Why, the North Sea and Channel are swept clear long ago. And our first Army corps got across without losing a man."

"I know that."

"There wasn't even an attack made on 'em!"

"Oh? How d'you know?"

"The papers didn't say so, anyhow."

"There's a blame lot of things the papers don't say these days, I guess," said Dunster drily. "I'm no War Office sharp, but I believe different. The first batch may have slipped across all right, but they keep going, an' Willy'll have a slap at them sooner or later. I will say the Germans don't stick at risks!"

"I'll bet you six to one against it. Hallo! The leader of the destroyers is speaking us."

Orders were signalled up to the White Streak by flashes. She was not to hover near the transports, but to go right forward and scout across the flanks of the Channel ahead of them.

Harvey executed the order promptly, and flew to the north-east in wide, zigzag lines. Soon four of the troopships astern left the line and steamed south. They went into Boulogne. The remaining four held on along the French coast. Roy received fresh signals. The second four were going on to Dunkirk, and he was to proceed ahead of them all the way.

"Dunkirk. That's the big French harbour near the Belgian frontier," said Harvey. "It means those battalions aboard are wanted quick at the front, I guess."

"Shut up! Message coming through by wireless!" broke in Roy.

The Streak's installation picked the message up, though it seemed intended for the warships rather than for her. Either way, it made him thrill to the marrow when he received it.

"Enemy's torpedo-boats advancing. Ensure they don't get through."

"Go ahead, Harvey—northward!" cried Roy. "They—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Dunster. "Hear that?"

A sharp distant crackling was heard, week, and all found," he said at last. "Then, if you won a fight that I've got in my mind, I might be able to manage a contract at five pounds a week for three years, you to fight anyone I put you up against. Of course, if you lost, you'd have to stick to the thirty bob, and be content to act as a sparring partner to some of the other boys!"

Rob opened his lips to speak, for the offer, small though it really was, appeared a very tempting one to him. He did not trouble to think that so cute a man as Sloman would not have made it without good reason. Then he remembered the twenty pound debt.

"What do you say?" Sloman prompted, trying to speak indifferently.

"It's very good of you, sir," Rob answered slowly; "but won't you—won't you let me have twenty pounds, and take it off my wages? I'd fight straight for you!"

Sloman stared at the lad's eager face, for he had not expected a request like that.

"Don't see how it can be done," he said gruffly, drawing a sheet of paper from his pocket. "There's the rough agreement on the lines that I have told you."

But Rob shook his head. He was far from being a fool, and the fact that Sloman had the agreement and all ready suggested to him that he might be willing to give more than he had said.

"I can't do it, sir," he said. "There is a debt of twenty pounds to

like the popping of pistols a long way off.

"Quick-firers!" cried Roy. "They're in action! Go on! Make her stretch herself, for Heaven's sake!"

The 'plane sped through the air like an arrow. In an incredible short time the scene of the action was reached. There was but a short way to go. Scores of sharp white tongues of fire stabbed the moonlit gloom from the British destroyers and the cruisers. At first it was hard to see what they were shooting at.

Then the enemy's torpedo-boats became visible—black, rushing specks that tore along over the sea, widely scattered, and coming from different directions. How they had eluded the British scouts down the North Sea there was no saying, nor any time to consider. There they were, each bearing a deadly freight.

Few of them came much farther. The searchlights of the British ships spread out like great white fans. The guns were rapping and roaring. First one and then another of the enemy was caught in a typhoon of quick-firer shells, and smashed or sunk.

"Oh, well done!" cried Roy, his teeth clenched with excitement. "They're bowling 'em out. There's not one getting through."

"What's that to the southward?" exclaimed Dunster.

A shock came upon Roy as the Streak turned. A single torpedo-boat had eluded the line, apparently unseen till she had slipped through. A destroyer of the flotilla was chasing her, firing desperately, but at long range. The German vessel took no notice. She did not seem to be hard hit, but tore straight onwards towards the troopships to leeward.

"The gun, Roy! Get her, for Heaven's sake!" shouted Harvey.

The 'plane flew like a flash of light to intercept the attacking vessel. Roy gripped the little downward-pointing gun, his throat dry and choked, his pulses beating. The lives of at least two thousand British soldiers now depended on him alone. If he failed one at least of the troopships was doomed.

The German was racing right at them, almost within range. The men at her torpedo-tube stood ready. The destroyer escort behind would be too late.

Crack, crack, crack! sang the Streak's guns as she caught up. The shells hit their mark, but did not check the enemy's vessel, and she opened fire on the 'plane with her twelve-pounders.

Bang! There was a staggering shock as a shell crashed through the Streak's left wing. But even before she felt it Roy's fourth shot struck home, right upon the war-head of the torpedo ready in the tube.

It was like the bursting of a gasometer. In one terrific blast of white flame the German vessel was riven into a thousand atoms and blotted off the face of the seas.

(Another long instalment of this superb and cleverly written War Serial will appear next Monday. Order your copy to-day.)

THE CHAMPION FROM MILL-LAND.

(Continued from page 297.)

life with a man he felt sure was a scoundrel. Rob went slowly into the little living-room of his home, and his face turned white as he saw the slim form of his mother. She was seated at the table, her arms across it; her face between them, her shoulders shaking with sobs.

"Mother!" the lad said huskily. It was some moments before the woman looked up, and when she did do so Rob drew away from her, for he saw, not only utter despair, but something worse—anger against himself.

"How could you do it?" Mrs. Kell moaned. "We are ruined!"

Rob choked back something that rose in his throat, and he could not speak immediately.

"You know?" he said at last. "Yes," Mrs. Kell answered shrilly. "I heard before—before Amos Pitt came here!"

Rob's body stiffened, and his hands clenched.

"What did he tell you?" he asked harshly, and there was no touch of the boy in his voice or manner. "Everything," the woman answered, between sobs. "He said

that for a long time you have been careless as your work, and that today he had to dismiss you. Then you—you struck him outside the gates of the mill, and forced him to fight!"

"Ay; and I licked him—gave him the thrashing that he deserved!" Rob said angrily. "He lied to you about my work, and I believe he messed my loom up during the dinner-hour. Can't you see why he did it?" The lad's voice was pleading now. "He wanted to be sure that you will have to marry him!"

"Mother"—the lad took a step forward, and put an arm timidly about the woman's shoulders—"can't you see that I was right? Won't you come away from here to some place where I can get work? It won't be long, and I shouldn't want any of the ten shillings a week that Mr. Lanmore allows you!"

Almost angrily Mrs. Kell freed her shoulders from her son's arms. "There won't be any ten shillings," she answered dully. "Amos Pitt says that it is sure to be stopped when Mr. Lanmore hears the truth—"

"He never will hear the truth!" Rob put in bitterly.

"Amos Pitt has told me that the man will take possession here to-morrow, unless I consent to marry him," Mrs. Kell continued sobbingly. Rob nodded, and his face was hard.

"You will do it?"

"What else can I do?" the woman asked defiantly; but before Rob could answer a voice spoke from the doorway.

"Apologise for intruding," it said; "but the door was open, and, as I had knocked once, I stepped in. My name's James Sloman!"

Mrs. Kell looked at the man in the check suit, for it was he, with the terror of one who fears what is going to happen next; but Rob's eyes glistened. He, now knew Sloman to be one of the old champions of the ring, and a promoter of boxing-matches.

"Nothing to be alarmed about, Mrs. Kell," the ex-boxer said quickly, noticing the woman's expression, and guessing the reason for it, for he had not been idle since the fight, and had contrived to learn all about the Kells. "I wanted to see your son—saw him fight to-day, and thought there might be something in him."

"You mean?" Rob asked eagerly. "I mean that, after seeing you fight, I am ready to take you into my training-camp," Sloman answered, and his tone was eager, too. "Of course, you wouldn't get much at first, but you'd have your chance!"

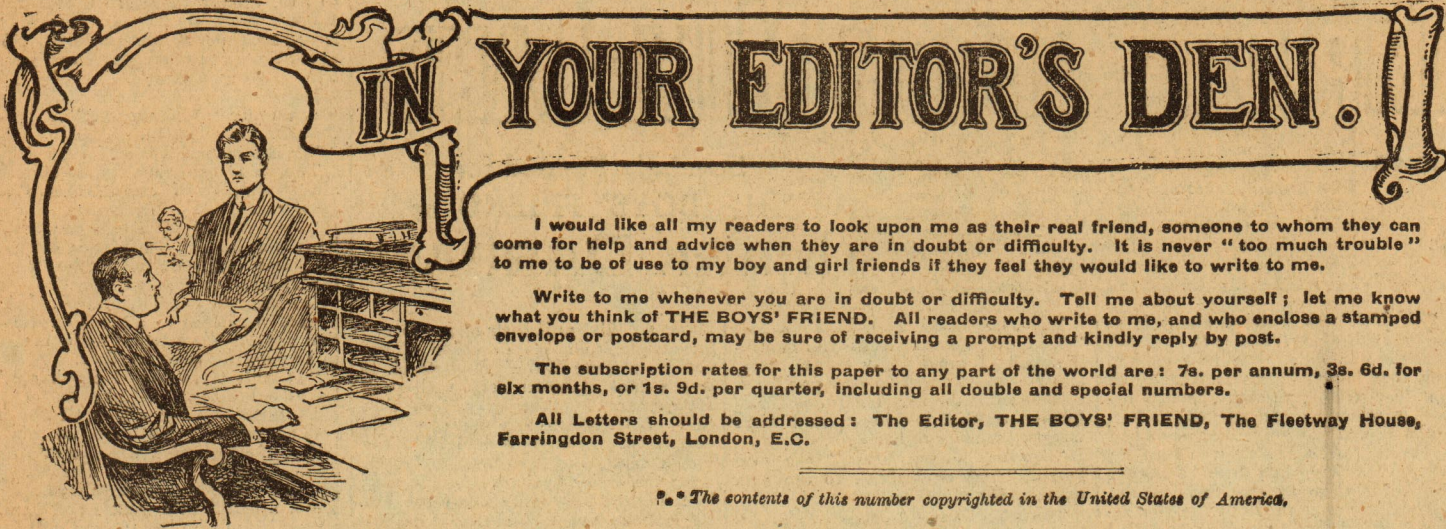
Rob felt that he would like to cry out, and say that he would accept anything, for he had always had a secret desire to go into the ring, but he controlled himself.

"What would you give?" he asked; and even Mrs. Kells looked interested, for, weak woman though she was, she feared what her life would be with Amos Pitt.

James Sloman took a chair, and looked thoughtfully about the meagrely-furnished room.

"I could start you at thirty bob a





I would like all my readers to look upon me as their real friend, someone to whom they can come for help and advice when they are in doubt or difficulty. It is never "too much trouble" to me to be of use to my boy and girl friends if they feel they would like to write to me.

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 readers who write to me, and who enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply by post.

The subscription rates for this paper to any part of the world are: 7s. per annum, 3s. 6d. for six months, or 1s. 9d. per quarter, including all double and special numbers.

All Letters should be addressed: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

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**DO YOUR BEST!**

IN a time of such stress and turmoil it is difficult to do anything normally. Yet those who must remain behind should pursue their occupations with as much vigour and as conscientiously as is humanly possible. This grim, titanic struggle will exercise the endurance of every one of us. It needs no words of mine to enable my readers to realise the noble sacrifices being made by our gallant soldiers and sailors. Some of us cannot carry arms for our country, though I am confident the desire is in the heart of every Britisher. Nevertheless, every perforce stay-at-home can back up the glorious and gallant efforts of our men at the Front.

THOSE OF MY READERS WHO HAVE EMPLOYMENT, let them work their hardest, for their energy will be productive, and in this time of mad and awful destruction the nation that can go on producing despite it all must emerge triumphant in the end.

BOYS AT SCHOOL, do your lessons thoroughly and play your games energetically. This great nation of ours must feel the exhausting effects of this awful turmoil for many years to come. It looks confidently to you, when you have gained your manhood, to exert your knowledge, apply your labour to help restore the damage done.

MY GIRL READERS, go about your duties with calmest and sympathetic cheerfulness. The value of the example the womanhood of this country can set—and is setting!—is immense.

For my own part, I intend carrying out the duties my position has allotted me to the best of my ability. To this end, despite the fact that my staff is greatly depleted, I hope to publish THE BOYS' FRIEND each week with its contents of even better value than usual, and that contents teaching a national lesson. I hope to publish new and

interesting serials at the same intervals as in the past. Already one new serial, "The Champion From Mill-Land," has made its bow, and in a fortnight's time I shall be giving my chums a new Nelson Lec yarn to take the place of "The Film Detective."

I hope my chums are not forgetting that I am publishing photographs of readers, or relatives of readers, who are at the Front. I shall be pleased to receive photographs of them in either uniform or civilian garb.

**PERSONAL APPEARANCE.**

My first letter is from a young London reader, who, leaving school, finds himself on the threshold of his career, is worthy of special mention. He writes:

"I am out for a good job. I want to get into an office where there are chances of promotion. Unfortunately, I am not very rich, and cannot afford to buy new suits very frequently, and am afraid this inevitable laxity in the matter of dress may tell against me."

I think not, my friend. The cut of one's clothes is not a vastly important matter where a comparative youngster is concerned; over-dressing is far more fatal. Rather should the matter of scrupulously clean boots, brushed hair, and clean face, hands, and nails be considered.

If an employer sees that a prospective applicant takes a pride in his own affairs, he will not un-naturally conclude that the same applicant will show a live interest in those tasks which are set him. And, after all, interest in one's work is half the battle.

**TO THE CRICKET-LOVING PUBLIC.**

To the Editor.  
Dear Sir,—We, the undersigned, as cricketers, ask you to accord us the publicity which only your columns can give, in order that we may make a direct appeal to the vast cricket-loving public on behalf of the Prince of Wales's Fund.

This Fund, which has been called into being by his Royal Highness to meet the countless cases of misery and hardship which must inevitably follow on the heels of war, makes an instinctive and instantaneous appeal to the generosity of the public, and we, as cricketers, know that there is no public so sportsmanlike and so generous as the cricketing crowd.

As the Prince has truly said: "This is a time when we all stand by one another." All of us as a nation are members of a national team.

We have before us as we write the vision of many a fair English cricket-ground packed with eager multitudes.

We have pleasant memories of seas of faces which in happier times have watched us play.

If only at this moment of trial we could gather in the sums which have been paid as gate-money at cricket matches, those on whom the war has laid a desolating hand would benefit indeed. The wives and families of our soldiers and sailors would at least be secure from want.

It is this thought which has given rise to this particular appeal. We ask all those who have watched us play, and who have cheerfully paid their half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences as gate-money, to step forward, and contribute over again their half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences to the Prince's Fund, out of gratitude for the enjoyment the cricket-field has given them in the past.

Let everyone who has followed cricket recall to mind the matches he has witnessed and enjoyed, and let each one contribute according to the pleasantness of his memories. Then we shall have for those whom the war has robbed not only of happiness, but even of the means of livelihood, a truly Royal sum.

Without any undue spirit of self-importance, we may, perhaps, say that we have contributed not a little to the interest the public takes in cricket, and, therefore, we make this personal appeal from ourselves to all those who love the game to send whatever they can spare to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, Buckingham Palace, London, S.W.—Yours faithfully,

J. W. H. T. DOUGLAS.  
F. R. FOSTER.  
F. H. GILLINGHAM.  
W. G. GRACE.

HARRIS.  
T. HAYWARD.  
G. HIRST.  
J. B. HOBBS.  
G. L. JESSOP.  
W. RHODES.  
R. H. SPOONER.  
P. F. WARNER.  
F. E. WOOLLEY.

**SEVEN OR EIGHT?**

Again I am asked to give particulars of the seven wonders of the world, the culprit this time being a reader who signs himself "Ene Frae the North." My chum says he thinks there are eight wonders, but, being informed by a friend there are only seven, he wishes me to settle the question for him.

The recognised seven wonders are the Pyramids of Egypt, the Hanging Gardens of Semiramis at Babylon, the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, the Colossus at Rhodes, Phidias's Statue of Jupiter at Athens, the Mausoleum, and the Pharos (lighthouse) of Alexandria.

When I last published this information, I suggested that the number of times I have been asked for these details is worthy to be placed as an eighth wonder of the world. Possibly that is how my chum has made an error as to the correct number. When I asked our office-boy to search up this information, he also brought me a list containing eight wonders. "I thought I'd put the Kaiser first," he remarked. "He's the blessed limit in wonders!" Cheeky young beggar!

**OUR PICTURE COMPETITION.**

The number of entrants for this competition was ample proof of its immense popularity. Sixteen readers were clever enough to send in entirely correct solutions, and the two hundred shillings will be divided equally amongst them. The following are the correct solutions to the picture puzzles, and the names of the sixteen prize winners, who receive 12s. 6d. each:

CORRECT SOLUTIONS WERE:  
(1) SOUTHWELL. (2) MAT-LOCK. (3) FISHGUARD. (4) STAFFORD. (5) NEWCASTLE. (6) WINDYGATES. (7) EXETER. (8) KNUTSFORD. (9) COLD-STREAM.

**PRIZE WINNERS ARE:**

Norman Silby, A. P. Thomson, P. Shepherd, E. P. Evans, C. Wills, H. Delany, F. Buckley-Mellor, Harold Ayney, W. McQuarrie, W. Gibson, H. Cooksey, D. McInnes, B. Sutcliffe, W. Warhurst, E. Wilkinson, F. Wilkinson.

A list of prize-winners in our second competition will appear next week.

**A LETTER FULL OF QUESTIONS.**

One of my friends asks me quite a number of questions, and as most of them are interesting, I propose to deal with them in one or two paragraphs.

First of all, my reader—who is a member of the League of Boy Friends—wishes to know how long a person should stay in the water when having a cold bath every morning, and also by what symptoms he can tell whether the bath is doing him good or not.

There is no need for a lad who indulges in a cold bath every morning to stay in the tub for a longer time than is sufficient to enable him to sponge himself down thoroughly.

The usual plan, of course, is to half fill a bath with cold water, to jump into it, sit down, cover the body with water, then stand up and sponge oneself well down. After that step out, and have a brisk rub with a towel.

If, after emerging from the bath, the body breaks out into a warm glow, the subject can assure himself that the bath is doing him good. If, on the other hand, he feels chilly, after it, he had better leave cold baths alone, and try a tepid one instead.

The next question my young friend asks me is how long should he stay in a swimming-bath? A quarter of an hour or twenty minutes is ample time.

It is this same correspondent who says that he has been disputing with a friend as to what cricket balls are made of.

The cricket ball, as officially sanctioned by the M.C.C., is composed of a leather cover, packed with cork. The ball, according to the rules of cricket, must not weigh less than five and a half nor more than five and three-quarter ounces. It must measure not less than nine inches nor more than nine and a half in circumference. In all matches, it is stipulated that, at the beginning of each innings, either side may demand a new ball.

*Your Editor*

**200 SHILLINGS FOR THE BEST 'WARGRAMS.'**

THE BOYS' FRIEND, in conjunction with "The Pluck Library," "The Boys' Realm," and "The Sports Library," is offering two hundred shillings to readers.

To the reader who sends in the best WARGRAM a prize of one hundred shillings will be awarded. Prizes of fifty shillings will be awarded the two next in merit.

**NO ENTRANCE FEE!**

WARGRAMS is the latest form of wordmaking competition, and is as simple as simplicity itself. Below will be found four couples of words:

- LIEGE FORTS.
- ADMIRAL JELlicOE.
- SUBMARINE MINES.
- RUSSIAN ARMY.

To make a WARGRAM of any of these examples, all you have to do is to take a letter from each word—you may choose any letter—and use them as the initial letters to two other words, these words having some bearing on the original example. For instance:

- LIEGE FORTS—Intimidate Germans.
- ADMIRAL JELlicOE—Dauntless Leader.
- SUBMARINE MINES—Spoil Shipping.
- RUSSIAN ARMY—Settles Austria.

It will readily be seen from these examples what you have to do. WARGRAMS may be either humorous or smart, and the reader sending what the judges consider the best WARGRAM will be awarded one hundred shillings, whilst two other prizes of fifty shillings will be given.

ONLY THE FOUR COUPLES OF THE PRECEDING WORDS MAY BE USED IN CONSTRUCTING YOUR WARGRAMS. THE EXAMPLES GIVEN MUST NOT BE USED.

On this page will be found a coupon, upon which your WARGRAM must be written, together with your name and address, IN INK. WARGRAMS sent in any other fashion but on this coupon will be disqualified.

When you have filled up your coupon, cut it out neatly with a pair of scissors, and send it to "Wargram Competition" (No. 7), Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C., so as to reach that office not later than Monday, October 12th, 1914. You may send as many coupons as you like in one envelope, but coupons must not be sent by halfpenny post.

In all matters relating to this competition the published decision of the judges must be accepted as final.

Get all the members of your family to enter this competition. Each member can get a different one of the four papers, in each of which a WARGRAM coupon will appear. Thus they will have plenty of good reading and four free chances of a prize.

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Next week there will be another competition and 200 more shillings offered.

Each week's competition will be entirely complete in itself.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.—You may send in as many WARGRAM coupons as you like, so long as each is written on one of the coupons attached, duly filled in and signed. If you want to send in two or more attempts, don't get extra copies of THE BOYS' FRIEND for this purpose. Get "The Sports Library," "The Pluck

Library," or "The Boys' Realm," all of which papers contain the same competition, so that if you want to send four attempts you get four splendid papers full of stories you will thoroughly enjoy reading. Get your friends to enter.

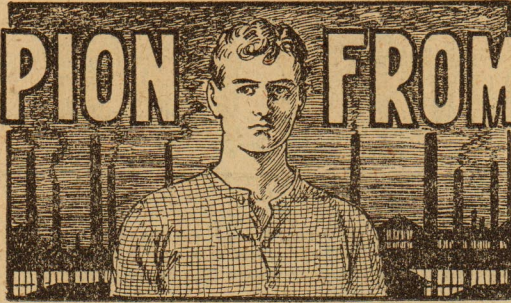
**EXAMPLE**.....  
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Address.....

**SPECIAL BRITISH NUMBER NEXT WEEK.**



# THE CHAMPION FROM MILL-LAND

A Tensely Written Romance  
of The Ring and  
The Worker's Home.



Specially Penned for  
THE BOYS' FRIEND by  
MARK DARRAN

## The 1st Chapter.

Introducing Bob Kell—The Foreman  
Lover—A Dirty Trick and Its  
Sequel.

A few minutes back the whistle of the Lanmore Mills, which stand on the outskirts of Nunchester, a town pretty nearly in the heart of Lancashire, had sounded for the operatives to stop work for the day. Already the whir of the machines, the thud of gas-engines, and the other noises of the cotton mill had ceased, and tired-faced men and women, who walked as if still bent over their work, came filing out of the yard.

In some cases they moved in twos and threes, usually when it was man and wife and children all employed in the same mill; but for the most part the workers appeared to be very solitary beings. All day long the click of the looms had been in their ears, and all that the workers wanted was solitude and rest.

Men and women, boys and girls, who were at present half-timers, one and all seemed to be as dead as the machinery that had stopped working, though, of course, there were exceptions.

One of these was a lad of sixteen, though a first glance at his set and determined face would have suggested that he was older by four or five years. Five feet eight or nine in height, there was already a squareness about his shoulders that indicated more than ordinary strength when he grew to full manhood, while his face, though not exactly handsome, was open in expression, and good to look upon. For the rest, he was dressed like the other workers in the mill.

He walked along with the swinging stride of a lad who was in perfect condition, making for the poorer part of the town where most of the workers in the mill lived, and as he is to be our chief character in a story of real life, it will be as well to say right away who he is.

Rob Kell was the son of a man who had worked for many years in the Lanmore Mills, eventually rising to the position of overlooker. His pay had been good, as big as any man of his class could well expect to earn, but though himself a man of steady habits, there had been one thing to prevent him from saving against a rainy day. When earning good money he had married a girl considerably above him in class, and though he had never said a word about it he had had every reason to regret it.

Mrs. Kell had proved to be vain and extravagant in a helpless kind of way. At first her husband had given in to her because he loved her, hoping that with time she would see the folly of her ways; but that time had never come. Later, when he had found expostulation useless, Kell had submitted, and during the whole of his married life his wages had no more than sufficed to keep his little home going. When Rob had been born it seemed that matters might have been different, but there again the husband was wrong, and the old fight to make ends meet had gone on.

So year by year Kell had struggled to keep things going, until the day of the accident had come, and a dead man had been carried to the little home to wait his journey to the churchyard.

That was twelve months back, when Rob, a lad of fifteen, had already joined the mill, and earned a name for being a steady worker. Mr. Lanmore, the owner of the mills, had, without question, granted the widow a pension of ten shillings a week which, with Bob's earnings, would have been enough for most women in her position to live on, but that was not the case with Mrs. Kell.

Married at seventeen, she was still a young and pretty woman when her husband died, with all the cravings for the pretty things that young people love. In a way she probably mourned the death of the man who had always been good to her, but that did not lessen her suffering at the smallness of the money that she now had to handle.

Rob Kell was worried about it as he hurried along, and not without reason. For some time past he had seen that his mother was more than usually troubled, though she had denied it when he had spoken to her, and that was the only thing that had bothered him. Of late Amos Pitt, his own overlooker, had been a rather frequent visitor to the little home, and, young though Rob was, he resented it. Apart from loyalty to his father, he knew that Amos Pitt had by no means a good reputation, while there were some who said openly that he was a monument of brutality. In age he was still no more than thirty-five, and, in the opinion of many people, a fine man at that.

Rob entered the narrow street in which his home lay, and nearly fell over a gawky youth who, with a dozen others, was playing a rough kind of football.

"Can't you see where you're going?" the youth growled, then snatched up the football, and slung it for all that he was worth. It caught Rob clean on the side of the head, sending him staggering back, for the ball in the absence of a bladder had been stuffed with paper, and weighed some pounds.

Rob was as smooth-tempered as anyone could be, but the ball had stung him considerably, and his eyes flashed as he snatched it up and hurled it at his assailant. Apparently he put no more strength behind it than the other had done, but for all that the latter went down as if he had been poleaxed.

"You've done it now," one of the others said. "Just because you're stronger than 'im—"

Rob did not catch the rest of the words, for he had dropped beside the lad, and was doing all that he could to bring him round. He had had no intention of using his full strength, which was remarkable considering his age, and he was sorry for what he had done.

In five minutes or so, however, the gawky lad was able to rise to his feet, and, with a warning to him not to act the fool again, Rob hurried along the street to the cottage of his mother, just one of a couple of hundred equally plain-faced buildings, made a trifle different here and there by a birdcage hung on the wall or a few pots of plants on the sills. Rob pushed open the door of his home, and stopped as the sound of a man's voice reached him from the little sitting-room. He knew the voice to be that of Amos Pitt, the overlooker at the mill, and his heart gave a sudden jump that drove the blood out of his face.

It was not for long, however, that he hesitated before pushing open the door and entering the room.

His mother sat in a chair by the window, a flush on her cheeks that made her appear younger than she had looked for many a day, and over her bent Amos Pitt, who turned sharply, a scowl on his dark face, as Rob entered.

As for Mrs. Kell the flush in her cheeks grew still more pronounced.

"Tea ready, mother?" Rob asked mechanically, for the cloth was not laid.

"It—it won't be long, Rob," the woman stammered. "Mr. Pitt has been talking to me."

"Ay, and I've got more to say!" the overlooker put in, with a touch of anger in his voice, "more to say that's private—for the present. Here—he thrust his hand into his pocket, and drew out half-a-crown—"get your tea outside, an' there's one more thing that you can do. You'll see a shabby old man outside. Just tell him from me that he needn't trouble until the morning."

The blood rushed up into Rob's face, and his hands clenched as he drew away from the overlooker. He had never liked the man, but to be ordered out of his own home was more than he could bear.

"I'm your man in the mills, to take orders," he said, between his teeth, "but not out of it. I stop here in my home."

"No, no, Rob," Mrs. Kell pleaded. "You don't know what you're saying, lad. I must speak to Mr. Pitt, and you must do as he tells you."

She rose to her feet, one hand pressed against her heart, and there were weak tears in her eyes.

"Do as he tells you," she said again, "and—speak to the man outside, for my sake."

The tone of the woman was pleading in the extreme, and Rob thought that he had never seen his mother look so ill as at that moment. She was like a wounded fighter with his back against the wall, making his last desperate effort to save himself.

"All right, mother," he said slowly, then he struck up that hand that still thrust the half-crown towards him, and went out. He paused at the front door, his heart as heavy as lead, then he remembered the order that he had been given, and as he raised his eyes they fell upon "the shabby old man" outside. That it was the man Amos Pitt had mentioned he had not the slightest doubt.

Shabby was scarcely a strong enough word by which to describe him as he stood with his back against a lamp-post, just as he might have been called very old rather than old. He was small and withered, and the ragged clothes that somehow clung to him gave him the appearance of a scarecrow, until it seemed really brutal not to stick a few straws through his battered hat to make the impression complete. The sleeves of his coat had been turned up to allow the hands to get out of them and obtain a certain amount of freedom, and the trousers had been treated in the same way, leaving in view a very large pair of broken boots, out of the side of one of which stuck the man's toes. But it was his face that really counted in a description.

It was old and dry and withered, giving it the look of being dead, save when the toothless gums moved on the short clay pipe that was between them, or when the dull eyes looked

about quickly, as if their owner feared an attack from one or other of the urchins playing in the grimy street. It was a face stamped deep with year after year of suffering, a face that told of tragedies and mighty little happiness. Perhaps it had been the man's fault, but suffering is made none the easier by that. A man may hurt himself through sheer folly, but he is none the less hurt. It is the virtuous who have seldom had temptations.

Anyway, the old man moved as Rob Kell stepped out of the cottage, peered at him with shortsighted eyes, and came shuffling forward.

"You're young Kell," he wheezed. The lad looked at the old man pityingly, for the moment forgetting his own troubles.

"Yes," he answered. "Amos Pitt told me to speak to you and say that everything was all right until tomorrow."

The old man nodded, nearly shaking the pipe from between his gums as he did so.

"Know what I am?" he asked.

"No," the lad answered slowly.

"Bailiff, broker's man, whichever you like to call it," the old man explained. Then suddenly he took hold of Rob's arm, and led him away from the house. "Got the price of a drink?" he asked tremulously. "I want to tell you something, and I can't talk here."

"I don't drink myself, but you're welcome," Rob answered, and the old man led the way round the corner, and entered a bar that was deserted at that hour.

"Mine's two of gin!" he said, then hesitated; "unless you'd like to make it a quartern!"

After the old man had drunk, he turned to the lad.

"I like you," he said simply, in his mumbling fashion. "and I'm going to give you a word of advice. Amos Pitt is no good to man or woman. I'm a broker's man; that's all, now, and I had to take the job—I've got

to live, though there are times when I don't think that it is worth it. I know that he bought up that debt against your mother, and I can guess why—I've seen her."

Rob Kell was very white, and there was danger in his eyes as he leant towards the old man.

"What do you know?" he asked. The old man looked cautiously about him, as if afraid, before he answered.

"Just what I have told you, lad," he said at last. "I'm just an old fool, who has come down in the world through such a man as he is."

He laughed harshly, and his shaky fingers wandered to a piece of string that served the purpose of a button in keeping his coat together.

"It isn't often that I speak out," he added dully; "I like to forget most times, by the aid of this"—he nodded towards his glass of gin—"that at one time I was Horatio St. John Melville, M.A. of Oxford. I try only to think of myself as what I am, a bailiff at anyone's command, a poor brute who has to see that even poorer brutes lose the few sticks that they have scraped together. It's then that I drink harder—to drown their suffering and mine."

The old man paused, staring across the bar with unseeing eyes, until, by an effort, he roused himself.

"There's no need to speak about that, but somehow your face made me," he said huskily. "I went under—well, there was just such another man as Amos Pitt in it, though he was in a very different circle—and I've never come up since."

With a shaking hand the man raised his glass and finished his drink, and there was something like tears in his dim eyes.

"I'm too old to get back to the decencies of life," he said, almost as if he uttered his thoughts aloud. "The old wreck has got to drift until the tide takes it ashore for good, but"—he rose with an effort to his feet, and laid a hand on the lad's shoulder—"remember what I have told you about Amos Pitt."

Almost as if he had forgotten Rob's presence, Melville moved towards the door; but when the two were in the street, he searched in one of his pockets, and produced a scrap of dirty paper.

"It doesn't run to visiting-cards now, lad," he said drily; "but I've taken a liking to you, and if ever a wreck like myself can help you, come to me!"

With a nod the old man shuffled away, and Rob was left on the kerb, the piece of paper in his hand. For some seconds he stood there before thrusting it into his pocket and starting to walk aimlessly away from his home. The words that the broker's man had uttered had sunk deep into his brain, increasing the aversion that he had always had for Amos Pitt.

One thing was only too plain to the lad, and that was that Amos Pitt was trying to get his mother into his power, and had, in fact, practically succeeded in doing so.

For half-an-hour or more Rob Kell walked the narrow streets, where children played in the gutters, happily unconscious of the life that lay before them, while fagged-out men and women sat on the steps of their doorways and listlessly made the most of the little fresh air that was about now that the sun had sunk. It was all sordid and beastly, but the lad saw nothing of it, and thought nothing of it up to the time when he at last squared his shoulders, and, with an air of resolution, started to walk rapidly in the direction of his home.

Rob entered the little sitting-room, and as he did so his mother looked up from the chair in which she was seated. Her face was pale, and the marks about her eyes showed that she had recently been crying.

"I want to speak to you, mother," the lad said quietly, and the last hour that he had passed through had brought the certainty of manhood into his voice.

The woman nodded, but failed to meet her son's eyes.

"What did Amos Pitt want here?" Rob demanded.

There was a pause before Mrs. Kell found her voice, and even then it obviously cost her an effort to speak.

"He wanted to—marry me," she said, and suddenly Roy's body grew stiff, and his young face set into harsh lines.

"And father has only been dead for a year," he said slowly, then broke out passionately: "You don't know the kind of man Pitt is. They say that he is an utter brute, and I have been warned that—"

"Oh, stop!" the woman pleaded,



With a nod the old man shuffled away, and Rob was left on the kerb, the piece of paper in his hand.

READERS' LETTERS FROM THE FRONT APPEARING NEXT WEEK.



and the tears that had been brimming in her eyes overflowed and found their way down her cheeks. "Think of what Mr. Pitt can do for us. He is already in a good position in the firm, and there is no reason why he should not rise higher; he says that he is marked out for the post of manager. Oh, think what he can do!"

The lad's face softened a little as his mother buried her face in her hands, and his own hand, hardened by work, lay on her shoulder.

"You mean to marry him?" he asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Kell whispered. Rob squared his shoulders, and instinctively his eyes turned to the framed photograph of his father that hung above the mantelshelf.

"You love him?" Mrs. Kell did not answer at once, and when she did at last look up, there was something defiant in the expression of her eyes.

"You have no right to talk in that manner," she said sharply. "Mr. Pitt can give me all that I have been used to, and—"

"And pay off your debt?" Rob put in.

"Of course he would do that!" Mrs. Kell answered. "How could I keep the house going on what I have had?"

Rob opened his lips to reply angrily, but somehow he managed to control himself.

"Mother," he said quietly, "would you think no more about this marriage if I could find the money to pay the debt, and if I could make more so that you could live as you used to do?"

The woman looked up quickly, a gleam of hope in her eyes, but the light as quickly died out of them.

"How can you do it?" she moaned. "I have promised Mr. Pitt his definite answer in a week, and until then he will see that our home is not seized."

Rob squared his shoulders, and turned away from the tea that had been laid for him in his absence.

"I can't stop in," he said shortly. "I must go out and think. There must be some way out of this."

Mrs. Kell protested that he must stop and have his tea, her small mind unable to rid itself of the small things of the day even when big things were at stake, but without another word Rob went out. He realised, even if his mother did not, that all of her future hung in the balance. Of his own he cared nothing, so long as he could prevent this thing that he looked upon as a calamity.

Right up till dark, and beyond, Rob Kell paced the town, and every yard that he covered brought more strongly to him the belief that anything he did could not prevent matters shaping as they were at present. How could he hope to get twenty pounds to pay his mother's debt? How could he possibly make the extra money that she regarded as necessary to her happiness?

It was late at night before the lad turned into the cottage and went straight to his room, the solution of the problem as far as ever from his mind. As far as he could see, there was nothing in front of him but the steady grind, grind, at the mill, and the slow promotion that would one day, with luck, put him in a similar position to the one that his father had held.

But then Rob Kell, like many another lad, and man, so far as that goes, allowed nothing for the working of Providence, or for the cards that Fate sometimes plays in such strange manner.

**The 2nd Chapter.  
Dismissed—The Challenge to Fight  
—The Final Blow.**

All through the day—it was the one following the evening when he had received such a shock with regard to his mother—Rob Kell had worked in the mill, handling a loom in a manner that few of his age could have equalled, at least, that had been the case until he returned to work after the midday rest. Then, within an hour, something had gone wrong with the loom, and it had taken him more than half-an-hour to get it into working order again.

During that period Amos Pitt had watched him from a short distance away, a smile on his lips that was far from pleasant. Others of the workers noticed it, if Rob Kell did not, and inwardly they prophesied a rough time for the lad.

After that matters had gone smoothly for a while, then again there was a stoppage, and the overlooker, who had been hanging about in the vicinity, at once crossed to the loom.

"What does this mean, Kell?" he demanded savagely.

"I don't know," the lad answered, as he bent over the machinery. "I have never had it happen before."

"Wouldn't have happened now if you knew your work!" Amos Pitt snapped, and he had scarcely uttered the words before an exclamation broke from the lad, and he looked up with his eyes flashing.

"It's been tampered with!" he cried, and his fingers drew a small piece of metal from one of the finer parts of the machine.

Other workers looked up as they heard the words, and for once the overlooker did not appear to notice them, though he was usually down on a slacker like a ton of bricks.

"A fine excuse!" he sneered. "I believe you did it to waste time."

Rob Kell's athletic body stiffened, and his face grew set as that of a man. He was still smarting under the shock of the previous evening, with the consequence that his temper was not under as perfect control as usual.

"That's a lie, and you know it!" he burst out. "Whoever did it, it wasn't me!"

He looked round quickly at the faces of the other workers, but he could not imagine one who would have deliberately harmed him. His

The man started up to protest, but before he could say more than a few words the lad had walked away, smarting under the injustice of his dismissal, for unjust it certainly was.

Out in the open air Rob felt cooler, but a terrible feeling of helplessness gripped him as he moved along the street. At that hour when men and women, and almost children, were at work in the mills, the place seemed to be absolutely deserted, bringing the truth even more forcibly home to him—he was out of work!

Mechanically Rob made towards his home, but stopped short as a shuffling figure came towards him. It was Melville, the broker's man, Oxford M.A. and society outcast.

"Hallo! What's this?" the old man asked in his wheezy voice. "You haven't left work, surely?"

"I have left the mill for good—sacked!" the lad answered, with a bitter laugh.

Old Melville wagged his grizzled head, and sucked his lips in between his toothless gums.

"What has Amos Pitt to do with it?" he inquired.

"Everything!" the lad replied angrily. "I'll tell you; I must speak to someone!"

The two moved along slowly, Rob with difficulty slackening his pace to

of his withered hands, and laughed sadly before he looked earnestly at the lad again.

"You can't do it!" he protested once more.

Rob Kell shrugged his shoulders, and his young face was as determined as ever in expression.

"I can try," he answered simply. And his face flushed as the hooter denoting the end of the day's work shrilled out from the mill.

"I am going to wait for him now," he said, and set off at a rapid pace towards the exit from the yard of the Lanmore Mills. Old Melville called after him to stop, but he might as well have pleaded with a brick wall, and all he could do was to shuffle after the lad at the best speed that he could command.

Rob reached the exit of the yard as some of the workers were coming out, and they looked at him curiously. The news of his dismissal had spread rapidly, and there were plenty who would have sided with him had they dared, for Amos Pitt was not a favourite. One or two did whisper words of encouragement to the lad as they passed him before going slackly home to their rest.

There were others, however, chiefly the younger workers, for the rumour that Rob meant to fight Amos Pitt had spread, too, and there were

"Try!" he said steadily. "I wasn't going to hit you at the mill, blackguard though you are!"

There was a quick movement on the part of the lad, and before Amos Pitt could draw back a hand had struck across his face. For a moment the overlooker stood still, then, with a snarl of anger, he leapt forward and let drive at Rob, his fist grazing the latter's shoulder as he ducked.

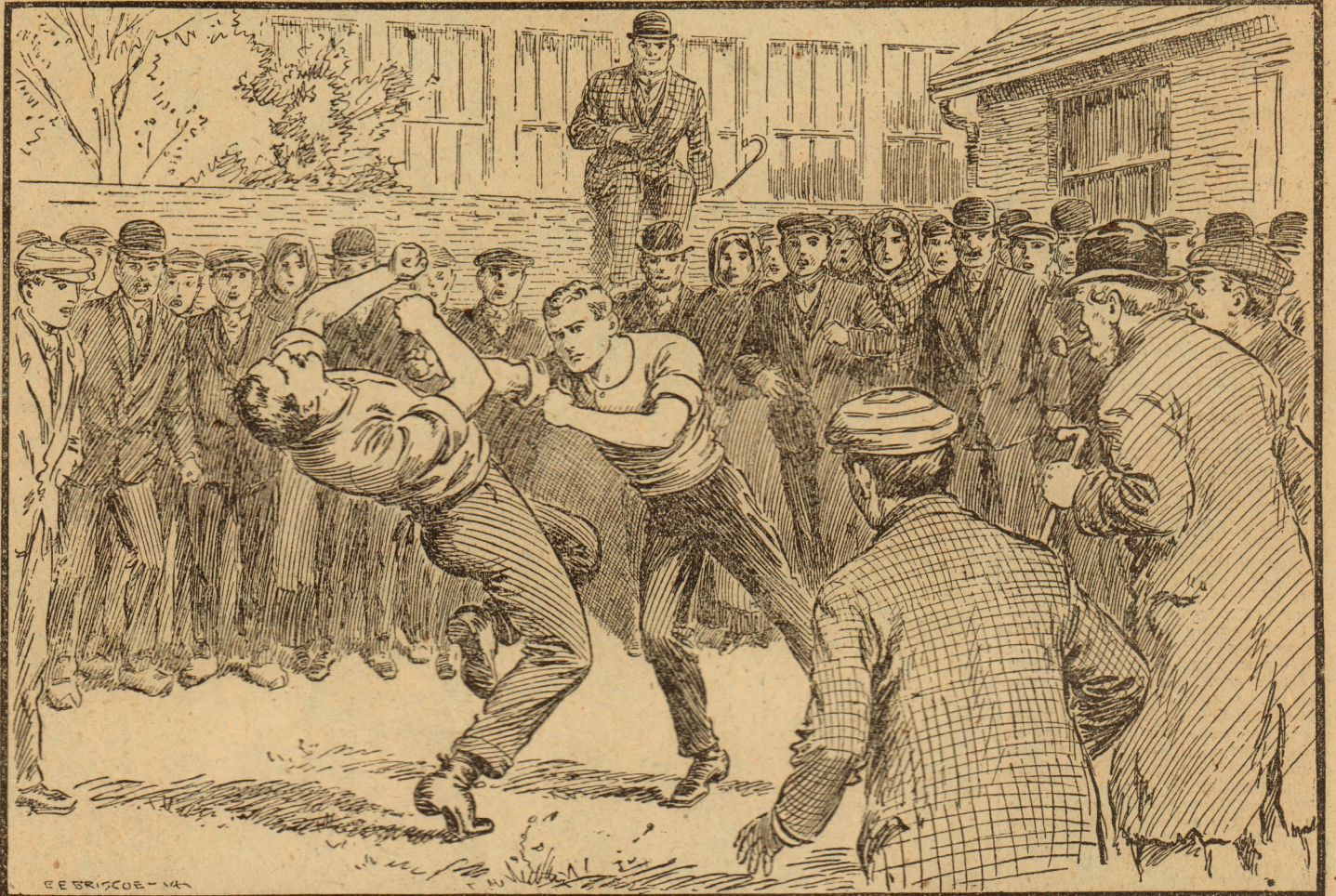
"I'll half kill you!" he cried, recovering his balance; but before he could strike again old Melville thrust himself in between.

"You can't fight here!" he mumbled. "Either of you would get a nasty crack if you came down on the cobbles. There's the waste land at the back of the mill."

A chorus of excited voices agreed to this suggestion, and Amos Pitt glared about him as if anxious to pick out some particular speaker.

"I don't fight boys," he said harshly.

Now it was a sneering laugh that came from the edge of the crowd, and more than one man turned towards an individual who, in the excitement, had escaped notice until then. He was short, and very thick-set, his clothes of a decidedly loud check pattern, and in his right hand



Following up old Melville's instructions, Rob risked everything in a rush. Under his opponent's guard he went, and once more his left found the stomach. With a groan Pitt's head came forward, his hands dropping, and with the quickness of an old professional Rob saw his chance, and took it.

father had been more than popular with his fellow-workers, and he had inherited their friendship. Then he swung back to Amos Pitt, and the grin that he surprised on the man's lips gave him an inkling of the truth.

"I believe that you did it!" he said angrily, quite losing control of himself.

Amos Pitt clenched his fists as if he would strike the lad, but he held himself in check.

"That is enough, Kell," he said harshly. "You can go now. Draw the time owing to you to-morrow. I will tell Mr. Lanmore."

The overlooker turned on his heel and walked away, leaving Bob to stand as if in a dream. He saw nothing of the sympathetic faces of the other men, heard nothing of the disgust that they muttered. All he knew was that he was sacked, and at a time when money meant so much to him and to his mother. Slowly he pulled himself together, and started to walk from the room, but he stopped as a man touched him on the arm. This man had been one of his father's closest friends.

"What are you going to do, lad?" he asked.

"Find fresh work, I suppose," Rob answered mechanically; then his eyes lit up as he added: "but first I am going to thrash Amos Pitt!"

keep with the shuffling steps of the old man. He told his story quickly and plainly, and Melville nodded his head from time to time to show that he understood.

"It means ruin," Rob concluded bitterly. "The pension of ten shillings a week won't keep my mother—"

"And there's the debt," the old man muttered, uttering his thoughts aloud. "It seems that Amos Pitt is a pretty scoundrel."

Rob stopped short, and his eyes were very hard as they fixed themselves on the high chimney of the mill.

"I am going away from this town," he said, between his teeth. "Pitt will take good care that no one employs me, and I can't stand by and see my mother married to him. But before I go there is one thing I can try to do—thrash Amos Pitt."

Old Melville stared at the lad in amazement. He noted the exceptional breadth of the shoulders for one of his age, and the suggestion of strength that was in every limb of him.

"You can't do it!" he protested. "You are only a boy compared with him, and you wouldn't stand a chance. It makes me wish that I was back in my old days, when there wasn't a man in Oxford could stand up against me!" He looked at one

some of the hearers who did not think that the overlooker would have such a very easy task to beat the lad. More than once Rob had demonstrated both in friendly bouts and quarrels that he was more than usually good with his fists; and so those who hoped that the fight would come off remained, especially when they noticed the set of the lad's face, for, after all, pluck will accomplish a good deal.

Rob stiffened suddenly as he caught sight of Amos Pitt, rather more swaggering than usual, coming across the yard, and as he did so, old Melville, panting for breath, came up and touched him on the arm.

"Don't do it, lad," he muttered—"don't do it!"

But Rob took no notice of him, all his attention being taken up by the sight of the man he hated.

Amos Pitt started as he caught sight of Rob and the crowd near to him, hesitated as if inclined to turn back, then came on more swaggeringly than ever.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "I won't have anyone I've sacked talking to the other men. You clear out, or I'll make you!"

Rob drew nearer to the man, and all the colour had left his face, the whiteness of his cheeks showing the anger under which he was suffering.

he swung a heavy stick, that suggested that it might be for use rather than for ornament. Several diamond rings flashed on his fleshy fingers, and a cable-like chain stretched across his waistcoat, which was decidedly of the "fancy" pattern. His clean-shaven face was round and red and coarse, with a grin on the lips that made its owner look good-natured up till the time that you noticed his eyes. They were small, and of a watery-grey colour. For the rest, he was a man of close upon fifty, and his grey hair showed cropped beneath the small bowler hat that appeared to be balanced on the top of his bullet head.

It was this man who had laughed, and he did not seem to be in the least worried as Amos Pitt glared at him.

"What d'you mean?" the latter demanded, thrusting his head forward pugnaciously. "For two pins I'd knock your head off!"

The loudly-dressed man smiled more broadly than ever.

"You'd have your work cut out, sonny," he answered coolly. "It's close on twenty years since I had the gloves on, but there's a bit of the old punch left. That lad's more your mark—unless you're afraid to tackle him."

A chorus of voices urged Amos





FRANK R. GREY

A DETACHMENT OF FRENCH DRAGOONS BRILLIANTLY CHARGING A PATROL OF GERMAN UHLANS.



Pitt on, and he realised that he had got to fight Rob Kell if he was to keep his prestige with his men. He had hesitated not so much because he did not believe that he could beat the lad, but because he was certain that he would have to receive blows before he succeeded in doing so, and that he did not relish.

"All right," he said sullenly; "I'll thrash the young cub. You'll all bear witness that he forced it on me if I hurt him."

Amos Pitt strode away, turned the corner of the wall, and walked quickly to the waste land behind the mill, a group of men, willing enough to toady to an overlooker, going with him.

Rob Kell followed eagerly, his hands already clenched, paying no heed to the advice that was thrown to him. He knew that he was taking on a hard task, but he was real grit right through, and nothing would have made him draw back. The man in the check suit followed, too, whilst last of all came old Melville, a helpless expression on his dried-up face.

"The ground's pretty smooth here," the man in the check suit observed cheerfully, reaching the spot where Amos Pitt had halted and was already removing his coat and waistcoat. "Is this going to be a slogging match, or are there to be rounds? If there are, you can have me as timekeeper. I'm used to the job."

"Rounds?" Amos Pitt answered quickly.

He hoped to finish the fight off quickly, but he also knew that he was in none too good condition, and that he would need a rest badly if he failed in his object.

Rob Kell simply nodded, and began to strip to his trousers and vest. As quickly the crowd formed a ring, and the man and lad who were to fight went to opposite sides, forming a great contrast as they stood facing one another.

Amos Pitt stood just six feet in height, and was a powerfully-built man, while Rob Kell was about five feet eight or nine, and looked to weigh no more than nine stone. His determination was obvious, however, and the crowd behind him was as big as the one behind his opponent.

With surprising agility the man in the check suit clambered to the top of the wall, and drew out his watch.

"Better choose your seconds," he suggested.

This was quickly done, two men stationing themselves behind Amos Pitt, while with Rob were two of his young friends and old Melville, the latter wringing his hands together as if he was trying to pull them off at the wrists.

Everything had been done without the loss of a minute, yet it was strange to see how the crowd had increased before everything was ready. In some mysterious way the news of the coming fight had spread through the town, and men and boys came swarming up at a run.

"Three-minute rounds, one minute interval," the man in the check suit said, in a businesslike tone. "Hitting in clinches and below the belt barred. Ready?"

There was a tense silence as Amos Pitt and Rob Kell took a step forward, the man's face fierce and threatening in expression, the lad looking strangely cool considering the task that he had set himself.

"Time!"

As the word clicked out from the man on the wall Amos Pitt leapt forward with the intention of getting the fight over at once, reckoning to rush the lad by sheer weight and strength. Rob leapt forward, too, and it seemed that he was rushing to his doom. Then Pitt's right swung for the lad's head, which was ducked quickly, and before the man could stop himself Rob's fist swung to the side of his head as he passed, and almost sent him down.

A cheer went up from Rob's supporters, and the man on the wall bent forward eagerly.

Stung with pain, Amos Pitt swung round and rushed into the attack once more, and this time he was too quick for Rob to get away. The lad blocked one savage upper-cut with his elbow, but he could not stop a straight flush to the face that sent him staggering.

Like a wild animal Pitt was after him, but the lad kept his nerve. As if he had been at the game all his life, he side-stepped the attack, and for fully a minute his quickness of feet kept him from receiving serious damage.

Now the crowd was yelling frantically, and now again a voice was raised as a bet was made and taken, for there were quite a number of

men ready to back Rob now that they saw how he was shaping.

As for the man on the wall, the eager expression on his face increased with every moment.

Once more Amos Pitt tried to bring the fight to a finish, hitting furiously, but with a natural skill Rob kept out of the way of most of the swinging blows, though he had no time as yet to do much in return. He could see that Pitt's wind was already suffering, and that his chance was to tire the big man out before going on the aggressive.

"Time!"

With a sullen air Amos Pitt went to his corner, sat on the knee of one of his seconds, and rubbed the spot on his head where he had been struck. His mouth was open, and he was breathing heavily, in great contrast to Rob Kell, who appeared not to have turned a hair as he sat in his corner. His one sign of the fight at present was a red mark between his eyes.

Your mill-hand, like his wealthier brethren, likes a bet at times, and plenty of wagering went on during the minute interval between the rounds.

"Be careful, lad," old Melville whispered in Rob's ear. "You're playing the right game to keep away from him until he's tired. If he gets home on you hard enough you—"

"Time!"

Rob leapt to his feet instantly, the light of battle in his eyes, the grim, cool expression on his face that speaks of the born fighter, but Amos Pitt was not in such a hurry to step out into the dusty clearing that formed the ring. He was still breathing hard, and the first round had warned him that his task was going to be a harder one than he had reckoned.

Not that he was not confident of winning, but it was to be no walk-over.

Amos Pitt advanced cautiously, and once more Rob Kell proved that he had the quicker brain of the two. He knew that Pitt would expect him to keep away as he had in the last round, and so would not be prepared for a sudden attack.

Two steps the lad took towards his opponent, then suddenly he ducked his head and went in like a streak of lightning, getting his left fist home on Pitt's stomach before the latter could guess what was happening.

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A DETACHMENT OF FRENCH DRAGOONS BRILLIANTLY CHARGING A  
(From the reports to date the cavalry of our allies has distinguished itself in



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This blow was followed by one to the jaw that shook him badly, and the supporters of Rob yelled with delight, their joy growing more frantic as Rob stepped clear of a vicious blow, and danced out of reach.

His face white with pain, for the blows that he had received were heavy ones. Pitt lost control of his temper. With a bellow like that of a bull, he rushed in to the attack, and luck helped him. Rob stepped back, but the heel of his right foot struck against a rough piece of the ground, causing him to stumble. Before he could recover Pitt had swung at him

viciously, and he went down under a blow on the neck. Two inches higher and it must have caught him on the jaw and put him out.

Rob lay still, his supporters silent and anxious, while the upholders of Amos Pitt, who was grinning triumphantly cheered themselves hoarse. One of Rob's seconds moved forward, but before he could reach the still form the man on the wall ordered him back.

"One—two," he had counted already, and now he went on: "Three—four—"  
Bob struggled to his knees.

"Five—six—"  
Rob had one knee off the ground, "Seven—eight—"

As the last word left the lips of the man in the check suit Rob gathered all his forces together and rose to his feet. It seemed even then that one blow from Pitt must finish him, but the people who thought that were not counting on the dogged pluck of the boy. Somehow he contrived to draw clear before Pitt could strike him, then he had dodged another blow and clinched. Pitt made a movement as if to strike then, but the stern voice of the timekeeper stopped him.

Rob clung on desperately, but it was for only a few seconds. The blow that had knocked him down had dazed him badly, but he was of the type who quickly recover.

By an effort Amos Pitt thrust the lad away from him, knowing that his great chance was to wade in while the lad was weak, but he was not to succeed as easily as he hoped, his very confidence being his undoing. He went into the attack as if there was no such thing as a guard in the world, and he quickly paid for his temerity. Rob ducked, and his left landed straight on the man's mouth, jerking

his head back and drawing the first blood of the fight; then, for close upon a minute, there was a set-to out of which it seemed impossible for Rob to come.

Blows were exchanged heavily, but though Pitt's were the harder Rob kept hammering away at the body until his opponent was grasping for breath.

"Time!"  
Both of the fighters went wearily to their quarters, where their seconds got to work on them, fanning them with coats, and it was easy to see which was the more tired.

Pitt, his face stained with blood, was literally gasping for breath, and though Rob was breathing hard he was not nearly so distressed.

"You've got one chance now," old Melville whispered excitedly in his ear. "Finish him before he can get his wind back. Bustle him, and I believe you'll win."

The minute must have seemed mighty short to Amos Pitt when the word to take the ring for the next round was given. He rose like a man utterly weary, and Rob was right in the middle of the ring before the man had taken two steps.

Amos Pitt swung savagely as he drew within reach of Rob Kell, the blow grazing the lad's neck, and that was the last one that he was destined to try and get in.

Following old Melville's instructions, Rob risked everything in a rush. Under his opponent's guard he went, and once more his left found the stomach. With a groan Pitt's head came forward, his hands dropping, and, with the quickness of an old professional, Rob saw his chance, and took it. Like a streak of lightning his right fist swung, there was a crash as it struck the man on the jaw, and Pitt was down, lying as still as if he had been poleaxed.

There was no need to count the seconds. Amos Pitt was as well and truly out as a man could be, and his seconds stepped forward and dragged him to his corner. At the same time there was a regular rush for Rob, and before he could protest he was being carried shoulder-high round the ring, even the men who had lost money over his victory cheering him, for there are few Britishers who cannot take a pride in the pluck of one of their own race.

As for the man in the check suit, he slipped down from the wall, and stood with his back against it, a look of excitement in his little eyes, waiting with obvious impatience until Rob was lowered to the ground to put his clothes on. Then he stepped towards him, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Well done!" he said. "I'd like to have your name and address. I may be able to do something for you."

Rob gave it mechanically, for his head buzzed with the effects of the fight, and the man in the check suit took it down carefully in a book before moving away, the expression of excitement still on his face.

In the meantime, Amos Pitt had been brought round by an effort, and there was an ugly expression on his face as he looked across at the lad who had beaten him.

"You'll pay for it," he said, between his teeth—"pay for it soon!"

A regular crowd escorted Rob Kell from the scene of the battle; but he managed to shake it off before he reached his humble home, turned down a narrow lane, and made his way towards the dingy waste-lands at the back of the town.

The 3rd Chapter.

A Mother's Anguish—James Slo-man's Offer—A Future Champion.

It was dark when Rob Kell passed into his home. For more than two hours he had wandered about the outskirts of the town, and the seriousness of the thing that he had done, justified though he had been, had come home plainly to him.

It had been bad enough to be sacked from the mill, though that would not have troubled him so much had he have had only himself to think of; but there was his mother. Amos Pitt could turn her out of house and home if she refused to marry him, and he was not likely to stay his hand now.

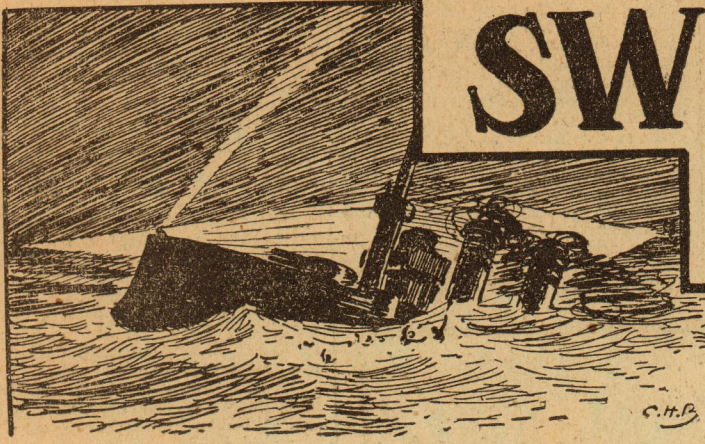
The longer Rob thought, the more he wished that he had taken his dismissal without protest, though he could not hide from himself the fact that that would have done little good. The debt for twenty pounds would still have been hanging over the head of Mrs. Kell, and he would have had no better chance of paying it off and saving his mother from an unhappy

(Continued on page 292.)



CHARGES BRILLIANTLY CHARGING A PATROL OF GERMAN UHLANS.  
(The allies has distinguished itself in many an engagement with Uhlans patrols.)





# SWEEPING THE SEA

A Dramatic, Complete Tale of Grim Naval Warfare, introducing Lieutenant Fearless.

## The 1st Chapter.

### The Quest of the Unknown Dread.

Here was the great war come at last, and Lieutenant James Fearless was out in the unbroken darkness of the lonely North Sea, alone with his black little ship of war in the inky night and the silent waters.

For not a light was burning. Every lightship's lamp and every lighthouse lantern along the coast was extinguished. For at last Britain and Germany, the two great naval powers of the world, were at war!

Somewhere off Fearless's port quarter lay the dear old homeland coast of England. But it might as well have been away in the solitudes of the South Pole. The lights of Harwich were still burning, but they were too low down in the water, where Fearless stood on his little bridge, to be seen.

Nearer inshore were other torpedo-boat destroyers, creeping along like Fearless's own boat through the night water. Not one of them showed a light. They were grimly keeping watch and ward while England slept, and their only glimmer of light on board was in their binnacles.

But if an eye could have seen them in the night they would have been found almost in a straight line, at regular intervals apart. Such is the wonderful and perfect precision of the British Navy.

It would have been a marvellous German torpedo boat that could have slipped through them in the darkness. "Carry on!" Fearless said, in the calm, naval way, when his second in command—Second Lieutenant Oakley—came up on the bridge to relieve him.

Then he went below, shut himself in his little state-room, and closely studied his chart, especially that part of it lying between his own position at that moment and the Dutch coast.

Nobody knew better than himself that at any moment he might be "blown to kingdom come," as his chief petty officer pleasantly put it, by one of the deadly mines sown by the enemy in the waters of the North Sea. Yet he shut his door as coolly as if the destroyer had been a house on shore.

"Seventy miles," he said quietly to himself, as he made various measurements on the face of his chart. "I wonder whether it can be done? Hang it!" He broke off sharply with himself. "I ought not to ask that question. Everything can be done if you say it shall be. 'Impossible' is only for fools and infants."

Where his forefinger was tapping on the chart at that moment the trade route between the Hook of Holland and Harwich was marked. Nothing could have looked more innocent.

But Fearless was thinking of things that might soon turn that track of the wide North Sea into a watery graveyard.

In Berlin five years before, in an hotel where his British presence was not suspected, he had heard two Germans talking over their cigars. A seaman himself, he had known one of them instantly to be an officer in the German navy. And it was the conversation that he had overheard then that he was thinking of now.

"Ja!" the German had said. "The day is sure to come, and then you will see. When we break England it will be between the Hook and the Wash. Mein himmel! You'll see something there that will make the world stare. Ja! It will alter the map at one blow! In one night it will make Germany master of the world and mistress of the seas! I happen to know that the secret of it has been planned by the general staff for the past two years." There was no keener brain in all the

Royal Fleet than the one in Fearless's head. But although he had puzzled over the German's words often he had never been able to grip the deep German scheme. He had thought of many possible things that it might be, but he had never been able to choose one as the most likely, and to reject all the rest.

"By the living James," he decided, his knuckles rapping on the table, "we'll try it! If we get blown out of the water or sent to the bottom, all the better. That will prove what the German game is. And the fleet will get its warning. It's up to you, Fearless, to keep a large part of the earth still coloured red on the map. By James, you've got to spoil German general staffs, and to prove that Nelson isn't dead yet."

With these words he went to his state-room door, opened it, and spoke to the seaman on duty in the gangway.

"Pass the word for Bo'sun Raker to come to me!" he directed briefly.

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the man, his hand instantly up to his cap in salute.

It was strange how muffled the seaman's voice sounded out there in the North Sea night. It was as if every-one spoke in an undertone.

"Great Davy!" Fearless said again to himself, as he reclosed his door. "It takes a lot to get on the nerves of the main Fleet, but if it goes on like this the strain will be enough to send every man-jack's nerves into tatters, from the youngest ship's boy to the admiral himself. A fortnight since war was declared. I don't like the look of it. What are the German swabs skulking for? Why are they waiting? Why in thunder don't they come out and fight—Come in!"

Hearing Fearless's last two words in answer to his knock, Boatswain Raker opened the door, and stepped into the state-room, his hand on his left flashing his cap down to the side of his leg, and his right hand flying up to his forehead in salute. Before

anybody could say "Knife" his hand was down from his forehead to the seam of his right trousers-leg, and he stood at attention, as rigid as the sternpost of an old frigate in the days when Britain's ships were truly made of hearts of oak.

"Shut the door, bo'sun!" directed Fearless, brief and quiet.

"Ay, ay, sir! Beg pardon, sir!" Before the words were finished the door was closed.

That was the kind of man Boatswain Raker was. Any one of Nelson's captains would have called him a perfect gem. He was a born seadog. His lower jaw stuck out aggressively, as if he had struck it against the breach of a battleship gun within half an hour of his birth, and had never been able to get it back into its original inoffensive position. Merely the sight of it should have been sufficient to make the Kaiser's fleet strike its colours.

"Would you like to have a special go at the Germans, Raker?" Fearless asked, in his quietest tones.

"Would I!" Raker echoed, with amiable fierceness. "Lor' love a duck in a thunderstorm— Beg pardon, sir!" he broke off quickly, pulling himself up. "O' course I'd like to have a go at the ugly swabs. The more extra-special it is the better I'd like it."

"Very well," Fearless continued, his quiet, prompt tones more decisive still. "We shall put about off the Wash. I shall then have relieved Lieutenant Oakley, and shall be on the bridge again. You will be in charge of the watch. Have you a particularly good, obliging, and trustworthy friend among the engine-room artificers who will be on duty in that watch?"

"There's Jim Hanky or Ned Clicker," Raker replied, in a queer, knowing, and old-fashioned way.

"Well, get him to put the searchlight temporarily out of action," Fearless ordered, as a matter of course.

Raker grinned respectfully.

"Ay, ay, sir!" he chuckled promptly.

"Mind," Fearless went on methodically, "I don't know that there is anything in all this. It is pure speculation. There may be nothing in it. On the other hand, you may be going to certain death."

"I can say my prayers on the way, sir," Raker laughed, politely cheerful.

"Very well, then," Fearless concluded, more impressive still. "About a quarter of an hour after she has put about report a boat off the port bow. Let her look like a torpedo-boat if you like. All the other men of the watch must be 'blind Isaacs' if they cannot make her out, understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" Raker grinned afresh.

"Good!" Fearless wound up. "When I order the searchlight to be turned on her something must be out of order with it. After that you can pray for the cause of King George, hope you are doing something to save the Fleet, and leave the rest to me. That will do, bo'sun."

Without another word Raker's hand was at his forehead. The next moment he was again in the gangway, with the door of Fearless's state-room closed behind him.

"By the everlasting knock-out," he murmured admiringly, as he hitched up his slacks, "Drake ought to be included in his name as well as Fearless. Wouldn't he have shivered a few timbers with Drake against the Spanish Armada? If he isn't admiral of the Fleet before he's done I don't know the dome of St. Paul's from a mouldy orange!"

It was pretty clear that when it came to fighting Raker would follow Fearless to "blue blazes" if the ship's compass pointed that way.

Of one thing he had not the least doubt. He was quite sure that Fearless was up to some dashing and daring trick. It might not be quite in accordance with Navy regulations.

None of Fearless's exploits ever were that way inclined. But Raker remembered the historic occasion when Nelson was blind in one eye, solely because the flagship flew a signal that he didn't want to see.

"Vast and belay there!" he grunted to himself, with satisfaction. "If Nelson, why not Fearless? He's built o' the same sort o' stuff, only not quite so old yet. Here goes!"

Quite contented with himself, he tumbled down below, and presently collided with his own particular splice, Ned Clicker, the electrician.

"Could you do with a bit o' prize money, my old cockchafer?" he hailed quietly in Ned's ear, by way of a "feeler."

"What d'you take me for—a lunatic asylum with the roof off?" Ned warmed up. "You bet, if there are any prizes about, I've got all me blessed deck cleared for action!"

"Let fly, then!" Raker piped cheerfully. "Ram the searchlight in its vitals—upset its breadbasket—or something o' that kind. It's the Old Man's orders!" he added, alluding to Fearless, as skipper of the ship. "And mum's the word!"

"Great snakes! It's like that, is it?" Ned roused up afresh.

"Them's the sailing orders, me hearty!" Raker grinned in answer. "And if Fearless hasn't got a German dodge in one eye and a short cut for stopping it in the other, my name ain't So-and-so Raker! We'll be smelling the smoke of the barbettes guns before we're two hours older, I reckon."

"But I wonder what the racket is?" Ned considered, as full of gravity as an admiral.

"Plain enough," Raker replied once more, referring to the searchlight. "He doesn't want the glim to show when he gives the order for it. Twigg, me old sea-serpent? We're goin' to skip away after something, entirely on our own. If the glim showed, the other boats inshore would see it, wouldn't they? So that means it's risky. The Old Man doesn't want to risk them, so we're goin' to drop 'em astern, and do the job alone."

Clicker blew a long, low whistle. He also scratched his head. Likewise he rubbed his chin and scrubbed his nose.

For he certainly did "twigg." As the Old Man Fearless's game was now quite plain to see.

## The 2nd Chapter.

### "Into the Jaws of Death."

Off the Wash the flotilla of destroyers reached the limit of the Harwich patrol.

Suddenly, a sharp, white gleam shot across the dark waters, showing them still heaving in everlasting black restlessness.

Then, as suddenly, all was dark again.

It was the signal of the commander's boat, in the middle of the line, for the flotilla to put about.

Slowly Fearless's waspish little craft ported helm. Like clockwork every other boat did the same, and turned at the same moment on their keels, for the stealthy creep back to their base at Harwich.

Fearless was once more at his post on the bridge, stock-still, watchful, and silent.

Presently, a quarter of an hour had passed since the flotilla had gone about off the Wash. In his quarters below Lieutenant Oakley had dropped off to sleep in his clothes, in the ready way seamen have who sail under the Union Jack. A gun might have awakened him, nothing less.

Suddenly a voice rang out, short and sharp in the night.

"Boat off the port bow, sir!" Raker had opened the ball; he was playing his part, and playing it well.

"Where away?" Fearless's voice rang out, in its turn, from the bridge.

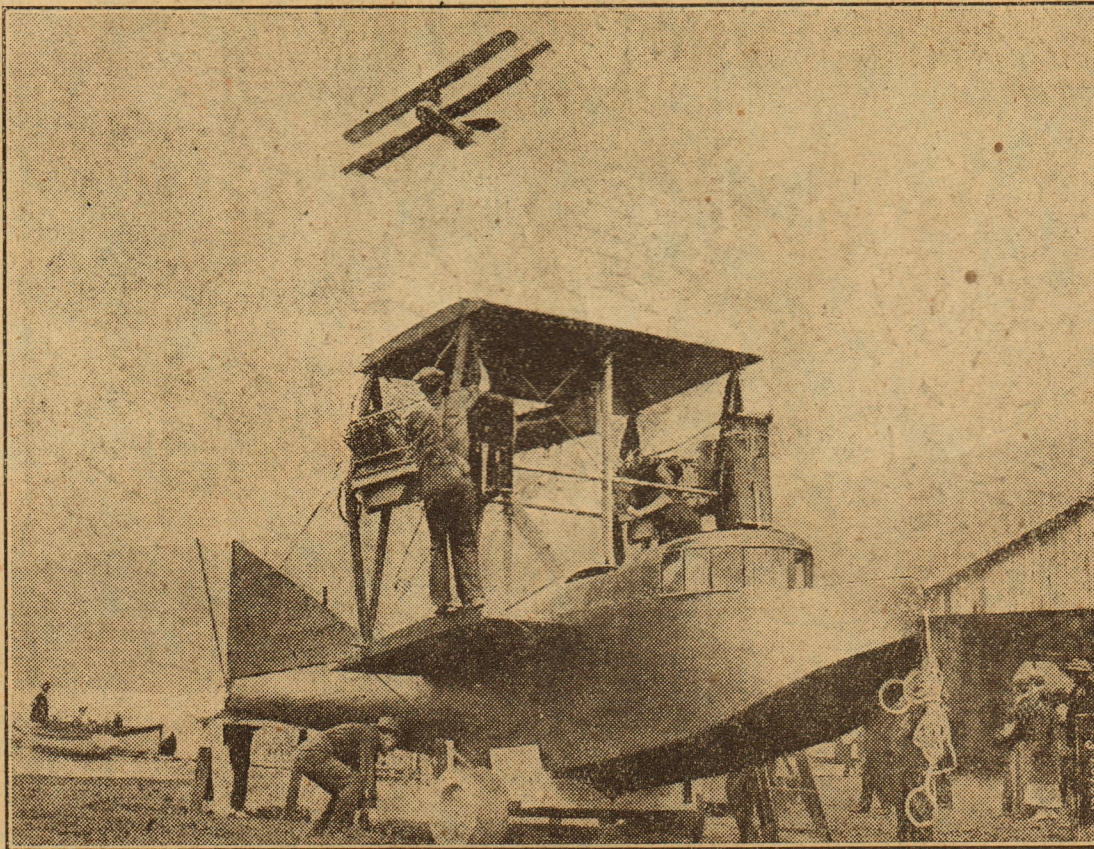
"About a couple of cables, sir, as near as no matter!" Raker answered, as keen and lively as if the very dickens itself was out there on the black waters. "Can't you make her out, men?" he went on, singing out to the look-out men in the bows and alongside the port-rails. "There she goes, in line with the for'ard guns!"

Through his night-glass, Fearless was scanning the heavy sea, where the imaginary craft was supposed to be. In another moment he seemed to see her as she came up on the swell of a North Sea roller.

"Hard-a-starboard!" he rapped out, in short, sharp command. "Get the light on her!"

In the same moment the engine-room telegraph rang below under his hand—"Full steam ahead!"

Almost while the bell still rang in,



MAMMOTH BRITISH WATERPLANE.

This unique photograph shows a waterplane being overhauled by mechanics, whilst a biplane hovers overhead. The curious "whale" body is a special feature of this plane.

READERS' LETTERS FROM THE FRONT APPEARING NEXT WEEK.



the-depths of the ship, his megaphone was up at his mouth, and he was hailing the apparently now running enemy.

"Heave to, there!" he ordered peremptorily. "Heave to, or I sink you! Gun crews to quarters!" he added, in quick command to his own men. "Step lively!"

Already the destroyer had answered to her helm, and was heading out to sea.

"Searchlight astern, sir!" sang out a fresh voice, from the starboard counter. "There she goes again!"

Instantly Fearless faced about on the bridge. Sure enough, a long, cold, white shaft of light cut across the inky water, as it rose and sank on the waves in the distance.

Boom! The dull thud of a gun came beating across the dark billows.

"By the living James—"

That was all that Fearless exclaimed for a moment. He tossed a look back at the black sea at which he had just been shouting through his megaphone. Not often was he torn between doubts of what he should do. But he was now. Fate might be hanging on what he did in that one brief instant that he had for making his choice. If never before, he was now a Fearless utterly confounded.

For, although the destroyer's crew did not know it, the boat that began by being only imaginary, became solidly real. A low, black, creeping craft was actually there! Fearless made her out to be a motor-boat, hove-to in silence to let the British vessel pass her unobserved.

"By the living James!" he exclaimed to himself, once more. "They've found—Keep her as she goes!" he added sharply aloud, his decision formed. "All hands on deck, boys!"

And while Raker piped the ship's crew to quarters, the destroyer, with her helm kept hard-a-starboard, swept a circuit of the sea, until she was heading straight for the flashing lights and the firing inshore.

Never had Fearless felt more raw. He was letting a prize go free; a prize perhaps that might hold secrets, small as it was, that would alter the whole fortune of war—secrets of life or death for the Empire.

But by the sound of the guns, he knew that the flotilla had found something bigger than his own discovery; something that might need every boat of the line to capture or to sink it. He had no need to scan the distant water with his night-glass. He knew by the weight of the gun-sound that the destroyers had found a battle-cruiser.

And now he was rushing to the attack. The cutwater of his grim, sleek ship, was curling up great sheets of water into foam, as it sliced the waves at utmost speed.

Presently he was close in sight of the deadly battle. Suddenly the German warship heaved on the sea, with the British spitfires darting fiercely around her, like English-bred hounds swarming around a giant stag at bay.

"At last, by the living James!" Fearless breathed to himself once more through his teeth. "At last!"

Not a scrap of interpretation did his words need. Any British man-of-war's man, hearing him speak, would have known exactly what he meant.

Gone, long ago, were Britain's old wooden walls. Never, till now, had Britain's iron warships been put to actual battle test. At last the time had come for proving the skill and seamanship of the sons of Drake and Nelson against the upstart challenge and pride of German power. That was what Fearless meant, and all the veins in him were now filled with the hot lust for fight.

"Great George, Oakley," he rapped out to his second, who was now with him on the bridge; "she's a plum to take into Harwich under her own steam, or at the end of her own hawsers! But she'll get away, by Davy! We must sink or take her!"

"She's the Prinz Heinrich!" Oakley burst out, as the destroyer heaved up on a heavy swell, and he got a long view of the German ship. "I was over her at Kiel just before the last manoeuvres, so I ought to know her. But what in thunder is she doing here? She's all alone. There's some deep game, you can bet your—"

"Never mind that, man!" Fearless rapped in. "What's her armour? And where's her weakest spot, if you know it? She's an old boat if she's the Prinz Heinrich. All the same, she'll get away; and the dickens only knows what she knows. Ready, bar-bette guns!" he wound up, hailing the deck below, with sharp command. "About sixteen feet below water-line," Oakley replied, alluding to the

cruiser's weakest spot fore and aft amidships. "But, dash it all, we can't reach her there!"

"Can't we, by the living James!" Fearless snapped, with tight-fighting lip. "We'll see!"

What Fearless said was quite true. Unless heavier British craft came up from the Humber, or from Harwich, there was every good chance of the German ship getting back to the company of her squadron, if it was near at hand.

Splendidly the British destroyers were worrying her, swarming around her like a little nest of stinging hornets. Great gaping holes showed, ripped and black, in the long, steep wall of her hull.

But not one of them above her water-line was ever likely to sink her. She was safe, unless some chance shot set her on fire, or crippled her engines. The British guns were not heavy enough mortally to damage her.

There was only one possible thing to do, and Fearless was going to do it. He might sink himself, his ship, and all his crew, but that was a part of the grim business of war; and the voice of Mother England was calling across the dark waters to him, and to all her ocean braves, to prove themselves her sons in this fateful hour.

"We're going to sink that boat, Oakley," he announced grimly.

"Take the deck, will you, to let every man see we are ready to share the 'sink or swim' with them. And

shots struck the black, swallowing waves. The night was filled with the rattle of the quickfiring and the crash and din of the heavier guns.

"Now for it!" Fearless said to himself with all fervour, once more setting his teeth. "If you come through this safe and sound, Mr. Fearless, you'll owe a thank-offering to your parish church when you get home."

Splendidly he was now handling his ship. He was running fast for the German's stern, every man of his crew standing ready at his fighting station.

But suddenly his hand was on the engine-room telegraph again.

"Half steam astern!"

Deep in the bowels of the destroyer, where the gallant engineers and stokers did not know whether they would be dead or alive in the next minute, the signal rang its fateful command.

"Ah!"

It was Fearless's own exclamation. At last the Germans' searchlight had found him, and in the same instant, a hail of shot swept his deck from stem to stern.

Two men dropped, never to speak again. Two others fell, badly wounded.

Yet there stood Fearless still, high, alone, and untouched, on his ship's bridge. His face was grim, his teeth hard set.

Close under the cruiser's stern he was running now. The great German vessel had the weather on her star-

great ship a vital blow. She was doomed.

Already she was sluggish, growing heavy, and listing fatefully to starboard. Fearless's quick, practised ear had caught the sound of a dull thud within her. There had been one explosion, at least, to break her; and even if she did not burst into flames, Fearless knew that she would soon be making her dying plunge beneath the night waters of the North Sea.

Yet gamely she fought on, crippled and maimed. She did not strike her colours, for nothing could save her.

Presently a strange, awed silence spread over the restless inky sea, where, a few minutes ago, the air was savagely rent with the crash and din of battle.

For the Prinz Heinrich was settling down by her stern. Men could be seen leaping from her into the waiting sea. Then suddenly all was dark over her. The rushing water had reached her dynamos.

Instantly the British searchlights flashed out, lighting up the sinking ship. Then, some minutes later, every officer on every British boat lifted his hand in silent salute as the great foe went down.

Hardly was the solemn moment over before the victors were steaming into the treacherous surge of the vortex made by the doomed ship. Wherever there was an enemy still afloat, he was caught and snatched from a watery grave.

Presently, Fearless again gave Oakley charge of the bridge. And in

they give him their smart salute, nor answer him with their cheery, "Ay, ay, sir!"

Deep down in him Fearless was touched, and touched badly. But, for all that, the thing that claimed his mind most was his startling recognition of the Berlin German out there on his own deck, in the silence and the darkness of the fateful North Sea.

That this enemy, of all others, should have been saved by his own men from the very ship that he himself had just sank seemed to be more than marvellous. Fearless believed in the kindness of Heaven, and it almost seemed as if the guiding hand of Providence was in it all.

Unbuckling his sword, he hung it upon a peg in his state-room. Somehow he felt relieved of the strain with the unfastening of it. His revolver, too, he slipped back into its pouch on his sword-belt. Then he lit a cigarette, and blew a long, free breath.

"By James!" he reflected to himself gravely. "It's like changing from brimstone into Heaven when it's all over. And this is only the beginning."

Glad of the rest, he blew out another cloud of smoke. Then a knock sounded on the door, and Raker entered with the enemy, attended by a blue-jacket, armed with a naked sword-bayonet held at the "carry," for the German was now a prisoner of war.

Now that he had recovered consciousness, the Teuton proved to be a full-bodied, deep-chested specimen of his race, really more of a soldier than a sailor. He was unarmed, for he had freed himself of his sword as he sank with his ship. But he stood erect in a mixed British rig, the generous sailors having given him odds and ends of dry clothes to replace his drenched uniform. Fearless rose from his chair and saluted him as he entered.

"Lieutenant Oakley reports, sir, the commander has just signalled, 'Well done,' Raker announced, with his hand to his cap. "Mr. Oakley, sir, has replied, 'Thanks.'"

"Very well," Fearless replied briefly. "Trim ship, and carry on!" Then, as the boatstain saluted again, and retired, he turned afresh to his prisoner. "I am sorry we don't meet under better auspices," he commented; "but here we are, and we must make the best of it."

"Himmel!" repulsed the German roughly. "I want none of your regrets, Nein! I want none of your German, either!" he rejected, spurning Fearless's friendly compliment in speaking to him in his own language. "Good German on English tongues? Mein Himmel, nein! It would only pollute it—ja!"

"Um! I am sorry, commander," Fearless countered coolly, speaking now in English, and giving the German the naval rank which his uniform had indicated him to hold. "I was going to ask your name, and I thought you would be more proud to present it in our own tongue. But now, as it happens, I fancy I haven't the need. I think I remember it. I have seen you before."

If a thunderbolt had struck him amidships, as Raker would have said, the German could not have stared harder.

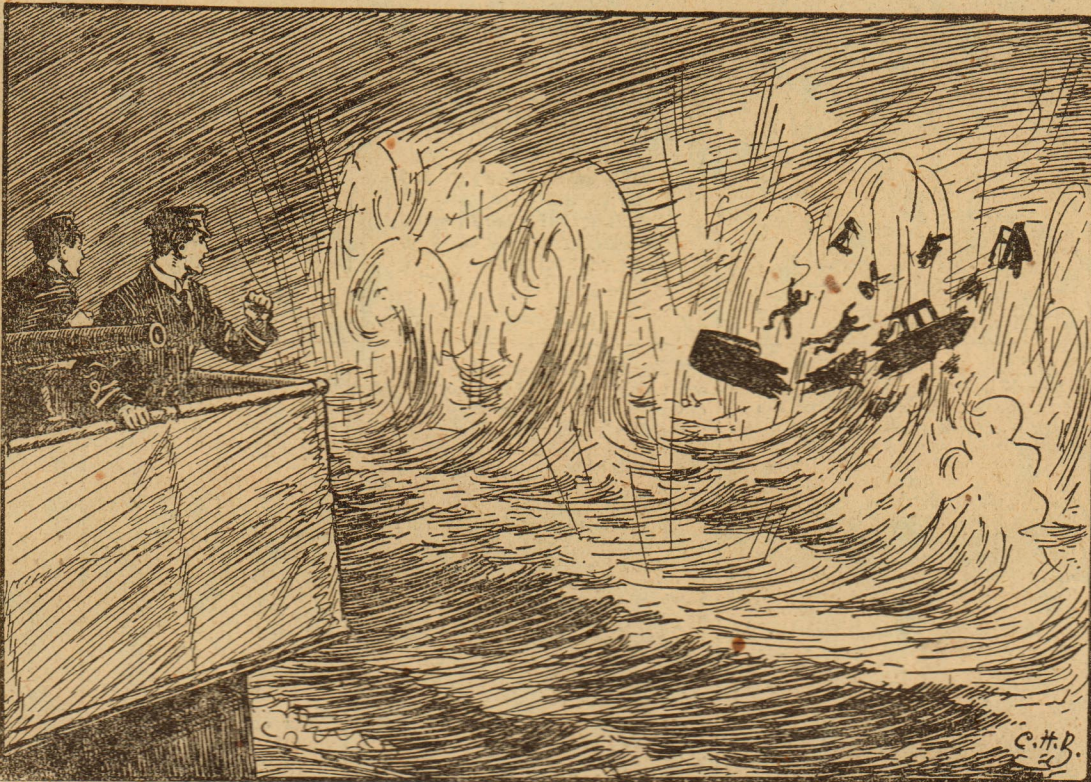
"Donner und blitz!" he burst out, spluttering fiercely. "Who are you, then?"

"I have the honour to be Lieutenant Fearless, of his Britannic Majesty's Navy, at your service!" Fearless answered quietly.

"Ja!" The German almost jumped. "I remember—I remember! I was told after you were gone. You were the biggest daredevil in the British Navy, some fool said! Ja! He came in just as you left the room. If I had been talking too loud I was the biggest fool in all the Fatherland!" he said. "I had not seen you hidden in your easy-chair. Nein! But now," he concluded, scoffing harshly, "Himmel, you can only die once! We meet at last. I have always suspected that I may owe you a score. Well, here we are, and I can 'pick a bone' with you. That's what you call it—eh?"

Quite perfect was the German's English, leaving Fearless in no doubt of his meaning.

"A dozen bones, if you like, Commander von Ruhe—or Commander Schneider von Ruhe, perhaps, I should say." Fearless answered, totally unruffled. "You see, I learnt your name before I left the hotel. But before we begin picking the bones, I think I will spend a minute in looking at your papers. That's why I had you brought here. As you are an officer and a gentleman, I proposed to spare



Suddenly all the inky sea leapt into a shattering, blinding blaze. The motor-boat had struck a murder-mine!

give the gunners a helping eye. We can't deflect our muzzles enough to reach her sixteen feet below water at gun range. But, by the living James, we'll have a good go at it another way. I'm going to butt right in, Oakley. So, if you like, say your prayers. If we live to get close enough under her weather quarter, with the first swell that careens us at the right angle, let fly. And if that don't heel her over for good and all—well, good-bye!"

It was a desperate hazard, but the die was cast.

Only the cruiser's own searchlights now swept around the long swells of the North Sea waters. There had been the one British flash of signal and warning, but nothing more.

But as yet no German gleam had cut like a knife of steely light across Fearless's track. He was still unbetrayed in darkness.

Raker would have called the destroyer's escape from detection "Fearless's own luck," but Fearless himself knew that the blaze of the enemy would find him before many more moments were past.

And he knew that he was going into the very "jaws of death." In all his hairbreadth adventures and escapes, he had never looked upon anything like this first glimpse of actual war.

It was fearful, magnificent, and terrible. Where the cruiser's searchlights flashed, the dark, heaving sea was lit up with deathly light. All around, great columns of water spouted, ghostly white, where the

board beam. Her torpedo nets were swung out, and she was forging her way through the water, with Fearless on the same course behind her.

In mere speed she could never have been a match for him. And now he had little to fear from her big guns; they could not be deflected low enough to blow him out of the water.

But, for all that, he was now in the "jaws of death." With her lighter fore and aft guns, the big German could rake and riddle, and perhaps sink him.

And he knew that, even with the right wave to help him, he could not hope to send a shell into her sixteen feet under water. To plug holes in her below her water-line was his great end to hope for.

But there he was, and he could only leave it all to Fate.

Shot was pouring around him. It was inferno let loose. The roar and the rattle of death was in his ears.

At last the moment had come. He was now under the giant cruiser's counter, running for 'midships. And in that very instant, as if the fortune of war had been kept for him, a North Sea roller swung him aslant on its swell.

"Fire!"

Out blazed the heavy guns. There was a fearful shock of crash and roar, and instantly Fearless gave the order to port helm, and signalled below: "Full steam ahead!"

Then, with shot flying around him, he solemnly lifted his hand to his cap in salute.

For he knew that he had struck the

light of a lantern, as he reached the deck, he stood looking at a rescued German for a moment in almost speechless surprise.

For there, in officer's uniform, was the man of the Berlin hotel five years ago—the man whose words only that night had he been repeating.

Remembering that the sunken Prinz Heinrich was an old cruiser, and knowing the German method of war to be to throw men away if necessary for the gaining of an object, Fearless now felt sure of the existence of some dark scheme of mischief between the Hook of Holland and the Wash at home.

"Let this officer be brought to my quarters," he directed briefly.

And his lips closed at once with a snap.

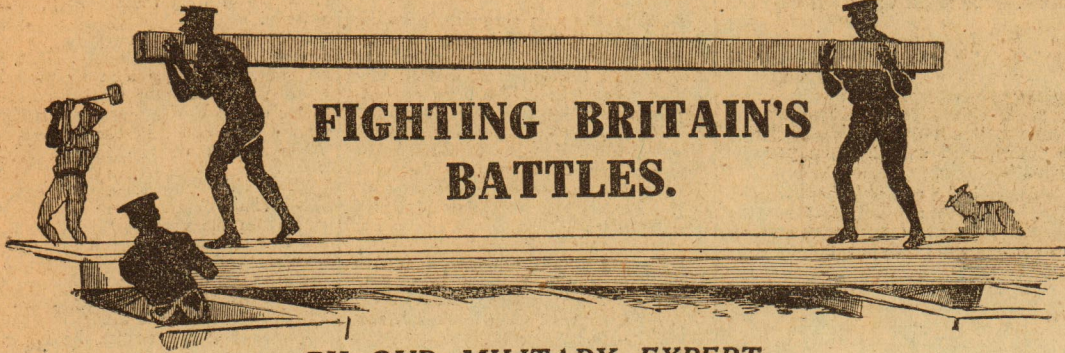
### The 3rd Chapter.

#### Exploding the Explosive Sea.

Fearless might have had many things to make him grave, if he had not been Fearless. He had had his first taste of the blood and fire of war, and the horrors of that alone might have made a solemn man of him at that moment.

In an indescribable way, he was solemn. His ship was badly battered, and she might even have been called a hearse of the sea, for she was taking home, under a pall of their own Union Jack, half a dozen men who would never look upon their beloved Britain again. Never again would





# FIGHTING BRITAIN'S BATTLES.

BY OUR MILITARY EXPERT.

### The Work of the Royal Engineers.

Whilst in the thrilling battle scenes of the great war much has been written about the brilliant charges of the cavalry, the irresistible dashes of the infantry, and the marvellous shooting of the infantry, little has been said about the work of the Royal Engineers.

And when all is said and done, it is really the efforts of these gallant fellows who have made victory possible.

Before ever an army is assembled in force, before the great guns belch out fire and death, the Engineers have made all things ready.

They it is who have erected the bridges over rivers, cut passes through mountain ranges, made roads, railway tracks, erected telegraphs, and prepared camps.

It is the Engineers, again, who see to the digging of trenches, the throwing up of earthworks and batteries, the erection of field shelters, the laying of military mines, and, in an advance movement, the blowing up or the repair of bridges and railway lines.

If siege guns are required to attack a fortress, none but the Engineers

make the concrete bed on which these terrible engines of warfare must of necessity rest.

As regards trench-digging, the present war has seen a new development. On the Belgian and Alsace frontiers, the German Engineers have used motor-ploughs to cut the shelters for their infantry.

### The British Army Forces.

There is no more skilled or superior branch of any army than the Engineers. Those in the British Forces must, on entering, be skilled artisans with special knowledge in some branch of engineering. The officers are the scientists of the Army.

Each section of men and officers have a special task allotted to them, and in this, while they are not confined to it alone, they become experts.

Thus one section devote their time almost exclusively to the working of railways, another to the erection of bridges, from the comparatively simple pontoon bridge, which can be flung across a river in a few minutes, to the wonderful trestle bridge, erected after long hours of labour,

and built of such strength that an army corps, with heavy guns and horses, can pass safely across it.

The British Royal Engineers, despite the stupendous tasks set before them, are a comparatively small force. In all they number little more than 1,200 officers and 8,000 non-commissioned officers and men.

### The Railway Section.

Though the gauge is different to that in use on British railways, the section of the Royal Engineers who see to railway work erect a system

## PAPERS FOR OUR TOMMIES.

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that is as almost complete in its running and details as on any line to be found in England.

The railway laid down constitutes a miniature main line system, consisting of locomotives, permanent way, and traffic departments. Signals and telegraph lines are erected simultaneously as the platelayer goes forward with the line laying.

This work is carried on chiefly in wars abroad in inaccessible parts. When it is understood that the lines must be so constructed to carry heavy guns, pontoon trains, as well as men, horses, and stores up hill and down dale, sometimes over yawning chasms and wide rivers, it will be realised what a difficult work it often is.

There has been little need for the railway builder in the present great war. Not so, however, with the bridge builders.

### The Bridging Battalion.

If the Germans have shown any ability at all in the war it has been in their engineering work. The manner in which they crossed the Meuse for the invasion of Belgium was beyond reproach from a military point of view. Under the awful fire from the Allies' forts, their men continued to erect bridges, thus enabling the mighty army corps, with their guns, horses, and waggons, to safely cross to the Belgian territory.

One troop of bridge builders is appointed to each army corps. Sixteen pontoons and waggons, and four waggons packed with materials for trestle building, are carried with them wherever they go.

Bridges are erected in marvellously quick time with the use of pontoons. These are flat-bottomed punts, lightly constructed of wood and canvas, and covered in on the top. Planks and beams are then placed on the pontoons, and secured to them to form a floating bridge.

Such a pontoon bridge has been erected across the Thames in half an hour. Napoleon by their aid crossed the Danube in twenty minutes.

To cover the actual crossing, and

to prevent the enemy from breaking up the pontoon bridges, the Engineers first gain a footing on the opposite shore. This is generally effected by ferrying across a small force of boats or rafts made with spare pontoons.

This force seizes a position, and in trenches holds it until the bridges are built, and the army and waggons are safely across.

The erection of trestle bridges for crossing very wide and inaccessible rivers, is a much more difficult affair. For these it is usually necessary to cut down trees and to hoist them into position by derricks.

### The Telegraph Section.

Almost as important is the work of telegraph constructors. Were it not possible on the battle-field to use the "wire" for ordering up stores, waggons, and men, there would be hopeless confusion, whilst hundreds of men who might otherwise be usefully engaged, would, for the time being, be turned into messengers.

Every telegraph section carry in their waggons complete apparatus for erecting telegraphs over a length of from five to ten miles. Besides the telegraph poles, axes, jumping bars, leaping hooks, lifting jacks, drums of wire, ladders, picketing ropes mile, of insulated wire, and scores of tool are carried in the waggons.

The telegraph wires are laid in the roads, and either buried at cross road or carried over telescopic poles so that horsemen and carriages can pass beneath.

One camp can be connected with another at the rate of three miles an hour, so swiftly do the telegraph constructors work.

Other field companies of the Engineers about which little is known are the printing, photograph, and lithography sections. There is also a mounted section, who always accompany the cavalry in advance movements, and carry tools and explosives for destroying railways, bridges, and telegraphs.

(Our military expert will contribute another of these elucidating articles next Monday.)

## SWEEPING THE SEA.

(Continued from the previous page.)

you the indignity of search before the crew.

"Ach, mein Himmel!" Von Ruhe exploded furiously. "Show my papers to you? I'll break your neck first!"

"I did not expect my men to behave so handsomely to you at such short notice," Fearless went on, as if the German had not spoken. "But I have no doubt you have transferred your papers from your own sock to British dry warmth. Let me see them, please—snug in a tin case, I have no doubt. I've no wish to put you in irons for the rest of the course to Harwich!"

"You order me?" Von Ruhe ground out. "You English worm! Hoch, der Kaiser!"

"Your papers!" Fearless cut him short, with rapping command. In a bound, before Fearless could check the sudden spring, Von Ruhe was at the swordbelt, swaying from its peg against the state-room wall. But the German did not grasp the sword; instead, he whipped the ready revolver from its pouch.

And there Fearless stood, facing death in his own ship, with his own revolver levelled at his own head!

"How now?" Von Ruhe challenged savagely, for Fearless was going to die.

All is fair in love and war. The German fired. But the revolver was unfamiliar to his hand, and it fired high, missing Fearless's head by an ace.

Before he could recover himself, the German was stretched full length on the state-room floor, with Fearless's naked sword at his throat.

Had Fearless been a boy again, he would have been sucking his knuckles with mighty diligence at that moment, for they were feeling very much like sore jelly from the smash of his British knock-out blow.

If any man on the face of the earth at that moment wore a look of surprise, he was Schneider von Ruhe. His very revolver had flown out of reach of his fingers. Fearless held him at his mercy—all with a blow of the naked fist.

"Over here, commander," Fearless said coolly, "we say, he laughs best who laughs last. Now, your papers!"

And before the German quite knew what he was doing Fearless wrenched open the prisoner's British coat, and whipped a thin tin case from its inner breast-pocket.

"Irons and guard here!" he called to the sentry on the gangway, as he calmly picked up the revolver and opened the state-room door. "I am sorry, commander," he added to the beaten Teuton. "I should like to have treated you as a gentleman; but as you won't be—um!—well, it doesn't matter!"

Raker entered, and, much to his relish, marched the prisoner off.

For some moments then there was silence in the state-room, while Fearless studied Von Ruhe's papers. Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"By the living James!" he burst out, almost livid. "The infamous savages! That's it, then, at last!"

What Fearless had spread open before him was a chart, showing the wide sweep of the North Sea between the Wash and the Hook of Holland. All the area nearest to the British coast was traced over with a net-like design. It seemed to be spread out for miles, and to be drawn, like a drift-net, by three steaming vessels, two placed like the shaft horses of a van, though far apart, and one placed like a leader horse in front of them.

"Thank your stars that you came on the extreme right of the line tonight, Oakley!" Fearless roused his second grimly, as he resumed command on the bridge a few moments later.

"Why, what's up?" Oakley asked, wondering.

"Only the Second Battle Fleet," Fearless explained, as tight-lipped as before. "That German swab has a chart on him, netted with explosives, enough to send the whole fleet to kingdom-come! Put her helm to starboard!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Oakley. "What barbarians at war!"

"It's the fiend's own device," Fearless agreed, in an ominous mood. "Now we know why your Prinz Heinrich was here. She was the decoy—or one of them. All that net of explosives is afloat, and is being towed by three old craft that don't count for tuppence. Somehow, they've got to know that the fleet is steaming north to-night!"

Once more the destroyer was answering her helm, and was heading out to mid-sea. Fearless had seen his opportunity clear, and again he was adroitly dropping away from the company of his flotilla.

There was a splendid fleet to save, and a rare handful of smart destroyers to be kept free from jeopardy.

Fearless now had no doubt that the motor-boat he had seen was a scout. If he found her again, well and good. He was going to drive her into the meshes of the snare. One floating bomb exploded would explode all the rest.

If he did not find her—well, he and Oakley, the German, and all the gallant crew were going to death. He was going to take the destroyer into the deadly trail, and explode it himself.

"England expects that every man this day will do his duty."

As Fearless thought of the words they were like a prayer on his lips. There was one comfort he had, too. He would not know when the blow was coming. It was not to be seen floating in the darkness.

"Boat ahead, sir!" called a cautious voice from the deck below.

Quietly the word had been passed from the look-out men in the bows.

Again Fearless scanned the inky sea with his night-glass. And there, once more, was a motor-boat! She might have been trying to follow the trail of the British destroyers. Instantly Fearless hailed her as she crossed his bows.

"Head off, or I sink you!" he threatened grimly. "You're no British craft, that's plain, by the way of you! Head off! Keep your course straight over to the Hook, or by the living James I'll— Give her a rifle-shot!" he broke off sharply, as he saw the boat try to dodge past without changing her course.

Short and sharp the shot rang out in the night. Fearless had no wish to raise the sound of heavier guns.

Instantly he had his answer. Two shots hissed over his head.

But now he had the dark boat before him, like a shepherd's dog drives a sheep the way it has to go. Desperately the enemy tried to dodge aside, and slip away. But always, at Fearless's command, the speedy destroyer quickly answered to her helm.

On and on went the chase, out into the broad deeps of the North Sea. Madly and still more madly the motor-boat wriggled. Once she almost slipped aside. But Fearless was now far enough away from the flotilla to give her a volley.

Again she answered, and again he was almost a dead man.

"I wonder what the Old Man's game is?" Raker mumbled to himself, alluding once more to Fearless, as he watched the strange, mad wriggling, twisting, and swerving of the dark boat ahead. "The blessed craft's bewitched!"

Hardly had he finished the mumble before a wild, startled yell burst from him. He was almost flat on his back, staring from the destroyer's deck.

"By the living James

For once Fearless was almost wild in his wits. His hand leapt forward, and the engine-room telegraph rang the signals below: "Stop her!" "Reverse engines!" "Full steam astern!"

There was a little wonder at it. Suddenly all the inky sea leapt into a shattering, blinding blaze. In an instant the motor-boat, with its crew was gone. It had struck the deadly snare, seeming to spread as far and wide in the tossing, boiling sea as the eye could scan. The thunder of the blast seemed to shake all the deep with awe.

"Great Jupiter!" breathed Fearless, when the shock was past. "What new explosive is that? They could have been only small floating shells. For a big blast in a small compass it's an earth-shaker!"

"Heaven knows!" Oakley replied, as he mopped the sweat from his forehead. "But you have saved the fleet!"

Oakley never spoke a truer word. But Fearless thought no more of it, not even when he again saw Harwich, Dovercourt, and Felixstowe waking from sleep, and warming softly in the early-morning sun. Britain was at war. Risk was his duty.

THE END.



## DAISY AIR RIFLE.

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## or, the Mystery of the Manor House.

By the Author of "TINKER'S SCHOOLDAYS."

### THE OPENING CHAPTERS RE-WRITTEN FOR NEW READERS.

COLONEL MARSTON, a retired Army man, lives at the Manor House with.

DICK MARSTON, his son, and a few servants. His one hobby is a unique wireless receiver which he has invented, by which it is possible to receive wireless messages without the use of overhead apparatus. Many messages from the Admiralty the colonel decodes, and keeps a copy of on a file, only to find these messages find their way to the outer world in some mysterious fashion.

WILLIAMS, the gardener, is suspected of being the cause of this leakage. Early one morning Dick enters his father's room, to find the colonel lying on the floor unconscious, with a revolver in his hand, and beside him the dead body of Mr. Anstruther, a friend who had called earlier in the evening.

Although the crime cannot be fixed upon Colonel Marston, he is sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

Dick is sent to Naylor's School, seven miles away, but his school-fellows "send him to Coventry," because he is the son of a convict. One fellow, Poole, nicknamed "Polly," ignores the ban, and chums up with Dick. One afternoon the two youngsters are invited to luncheon with Lady Angela Greeting. She shows them a secret underground passage in her old country house, and the boys set out to explore it. By another secret entrance the passage leads to a cave in the cliff, and here they find evidence the place has been used for sending messages out to sea. As an experiment, Dick flashes a mirror to some trawlers out at sea, and is much surprised to receive an answering flash from one of the boats.

(Another fine instalment appears below.)

#### The Signal.

The mysterious flash might have been a man using an unnaturally clean tin saucepan or kettle, or it might have been intentional—anyhow, it raised the boys' hopes.

"Now watch carefully," said Dick. "I'm going to send 'em a real message. If they answer again we shall know it's a dead cert."

Very slowly he spelt out the words: "Important news midnight."

Instantly there came back another answering flash repeated twice. The mainsail was lowered again, and the trawler veered off on another course and lounged lazily away on her lawful business, lowering her trawl once more as she went.

There was a distinguishing number and initial on her mainsail, but she was too far off, and the sail had been lowered too quickly for them to be able to spot it.

"Got 'em!" said Dick, panting with excitement. "I knew I was right! They're a lot of dirty spies, neither more nor less! It's a dead cert and absolute snip!"

"It's great, old man!" said Polly. "But what are we goin' to do about it?"

"Tell Lady Angela first. Her head's screwed on all right, and she'll know. The sooner we tell her the better. Come on!"

They picked up their varied armament. Dick pocketed the mirror, and they raced back, only stopping long enough to grab the lantern from its resting-place.

"Here's the knob," said Polly, as they arrived at the back of the sliding panel. "You press this, and—My hat, the thing's jammed and won't move! We're locked in!"

They struggled with the sliding-panel for all they were worth in the dim light.

Dick held the lantern, whilst Polly pressed this way and that.

"I know the trick of it quite well," he said over and over again. "A kid could open it with one finger; you just press here. It's as easy as winking, and the bally thing goes—

Here, what's the matter with that rotten lamp? I can't see!"

Dick turned it up, and held it closer but the light died down again immediately, till only a dull red, smoky glimmer was left. He shook it, and gave a low whistle of dismay.

"Great Scott," he said, "there isn't a drop of oil left! It won't last another couple of minutes. The wick's charring already, and if they've boxed us in, we're done; and what's more, we shall—" He broke off short. "The stone!" he cried. "You blithering ass, don't you remember you told me that the thing had been wedged with a stone? Where did you put it? Quick, before the light goes out altogether!"

"Oh, take me round the corner and kick me!" said Polly. "I'd clean forgotten the beastly thing!" And he groped feverishly for the stone. "It's at this side here, somewhere," he said, "and it's jolly firmly jabbed in. Give me that lump of chalk, will you? I shall want it to loosen the thing!"

Dick passed it over, and at last Polly found what he was looking for. It was a wedge-shaped splinter of flinty chalk, hard as iron, and it proved a good deal more difficult to get out than it had been to drive in.

The lantern was at its last gasp by the time they had freed it; but then things worked smoothly enough. The button yielded to pressure, the panel slid up, and they were through it, and out of the cupboard-door before you could say "Jack Robinson!"

Then they pulled up short, for in the room, seated at the far end of the table, sat Aunt Angela.

A modern lamp, quite different from the antiquated old thing they carried, stood on the table, and she had a very serviceable Webley automatic in

her hand, her elbow resting on the table-edge.

They saw the whole way down the barrel of that automatic long before they saw her.

She was looking very grim and stern, and if an unwelcome intruder had appeared, he would have had a very nasty time of it in the face of her uncanny knack of quick-shooting.

"Oh! It's you, is it?" she said grimly. "And pray, where have you been, you young ruffians?"

She laid the pistol down, and her eyes softened.

"Thank Heaven you're safe, anyhow. I was afraid you'd got into trouble; and when I heard a knocking noise just now, I was sure of it, for there is trouble of some kind about, and you are just the kind of young idiots who would go and tumble into it."

She put up her eyeglass, and stared at them, and then burst into a hearty peal of laughter.

"Well, of a couple of scarecrows or imitation pirates you certainly take the cake!"

They looked at her, and then at one another, and burst out laughing too.

They were covered from head to foot with chalk and dust and oil-stains. Their faces were smeared with oily black from wrestling with the smoky lantern, and their paws were worse. Polly carried in one hand the old-fashioned pistol nearly two feet long. Dick had a cut-and-thrust rapier, with an engraved blade, and the old copper lantern.

"Bless my soul," said Lady Angela, "you ought to be on the highway shouting: 'Your money or your life!' I believe you'd make a bit that way; meanwhile, considering this happens to be my property, where have you been, and why were you hiding in that cupboard there?"

For goodness' sake, don't shout at me, and don't both speak at once. You, Polly, shut up, and you, Dick Marston, tell me what you've been up to, and tell it quick; do you hear?"

Dick stammered out his story, and she listened attentively, frowning as though to concentrate her thoughts, her strongly-cut features showing up clearly in the lamplight. When he had finished, she slipped her pistol into the pocket of her shooting-jacket, and stood up.

"Good lads!" she said. "You've behaved jolly well. Most boys are fools, and I've got a beast of a temper. I felt like cuffing your heads when you first turned up. Now show me—show me everything. This is serious!"

They showed her the trick of the cupboard shelf, the passage, the cave, and all they had found there. The trawler they could not show her, for she had disappeared. Only two genuine fishing-boats were left in sight, and they had sailed further eastwards.

She examined the sodden fragments of paper on the fish-hook, the mirror, the dark cloth—everything, in fact, with a thoroughness belonging to a person who has lived in the wilds, and knows the possible vital importance of the most trivial detail. She went down on her hands and knees, and scrutinised the floor, took the rag end of the candle-stump, and placed it in her pocket, and made Dick repeat his flash signals, which she could have read off far quicker than he could send them.

Then she put a hand on each of their shoulders, and looked at them gravely.

"Boys, there must be no talk about this except amongst ourselves. Not a whisper even. The thing is too serious; quite how serious I can't tell yet. I asked you over to-day to have a good time, but I never expected you two youngsters would do such good work, and I'm proud of you. There's my hand on it!"

She shook hands with each with a grip that made their fingers tingle, and then turned abruptly away.

"Come along; we must discuss this," she said briefly, "and there's no better place than the secret chamber, as it is called. If anyone can overhear us there, they're cuter than I am, and that's saying something!"

Dick led the way with the light. Lady Angela followed, and soon they were all seated round the table once more.

Polly was going to shut the further door, but she ordered him sharply to leave it open.

"When you're as old as I am," she said, "you'll know that behind a closed door there is always room for a spy; with an open one, he can't get close enough to do much harm without being either seen or heard."

"I can see down that passage for thirty feet, and I've got ears as sharp as a lynx's. No one on my grounds, or in my house has any right to be near here, and if they are, they'll get a surprise. Move that lamp a little,

Polly. That's better! Dick, you move your chair nearer mine. Now I've got a clear field.

"Now then, I'll tell you what I've found and you've missed, though you did jolly well. The man who has been here, and who, in some way I don't understand yet, discovered the secret of the place is, first of all, a man who knows something about boats, or, at any rate, he has done some amateur yachting."

The boys stared. "But how do you know that, please?" asked Dick.

Lady Angela smiled.

"That fishing-line was made fast with a double hitch, a join-knot no landsman would be likely to use or even know of. Here's another point. I haven't had years of experience in doing my own tracking and spoor-reading for nothing. The man—for it is a man—is tallish, six foot, or thereabouts. He has rather small, slender feet, well-shaped, and whilst in the cave and the passage he wore socks and no shoes; but on passing through into here, at some point quite close to the sliding panel, he slipped on shoes of either felt or rubber—probably the former."

Again the boys stared in open-mouthed amazement.

"We're awful fools, of course!" said Dick. "But I don't catch on—understand, I mean."

"Look at your boots, or mine, or Polly's. Can't you see they're all caked up with clayey chalk? Now look at the floor by the cupboard. There are our footprints everywhere plain for anybody to read. You'll have to clean all that up later, by the way, or that mess will give us away. But of the man with the stockinged feet there is no trace at all. He realised the danger of his secret being discovered, and so kept a pair of shoes or slippers handy to put on as soon as he had passed through the panel. I say shoes or slippers of some soft material, because they would enable him to move noiselessly and quickly, and, being clean, would leave no trace on the stone floor as he passed to and fro. Without them his stockings or socks, covered with chalk, would have betrayed him. He is a man, I should judge, of quick intelligence, and full of resource, fairly decently bred, for you don't find feet of his shape amongst common people, nor do they know how to work a signalling code unless they have been trained for the army."

"Yes," said Dick; "I can see all that now you explain it, but why should he come here? What's more, how did he get here? If it was just a matter of signalling his message he could have done it from any old place along the cliffs round about."

Lady Angela nodded.

"You've hit it, my lad. Why and how? I haven't been idle whilst I was away and left you two. I have interviewed my housekeeper, the groom of the chambers, and my fool of a butler. Of course, I didn't let them know what I was after, but I questioned them very sharply and closely on one pretext and another, and I'll swear there isn't a servant in the house that knows anything about this affair. I've no doubt they all rob me in one way or another, and most servants are born liars, but I haven't handled headsmen of foreign tribes for nothing. If you want to see whether a man is telling the truth or not don't watch his eyes, watch his mouth and his hands. I've seen the perspiration break out on the back of a yellow-skinned native's paws, and his fingers and lips twitch, whilst his eyes were as innocent as if he had been a two-year-old. Yet he was lying like a Trojan all the time. There's not a man or woman in the place who knows a thing you can lay to that. What do you make of it?"

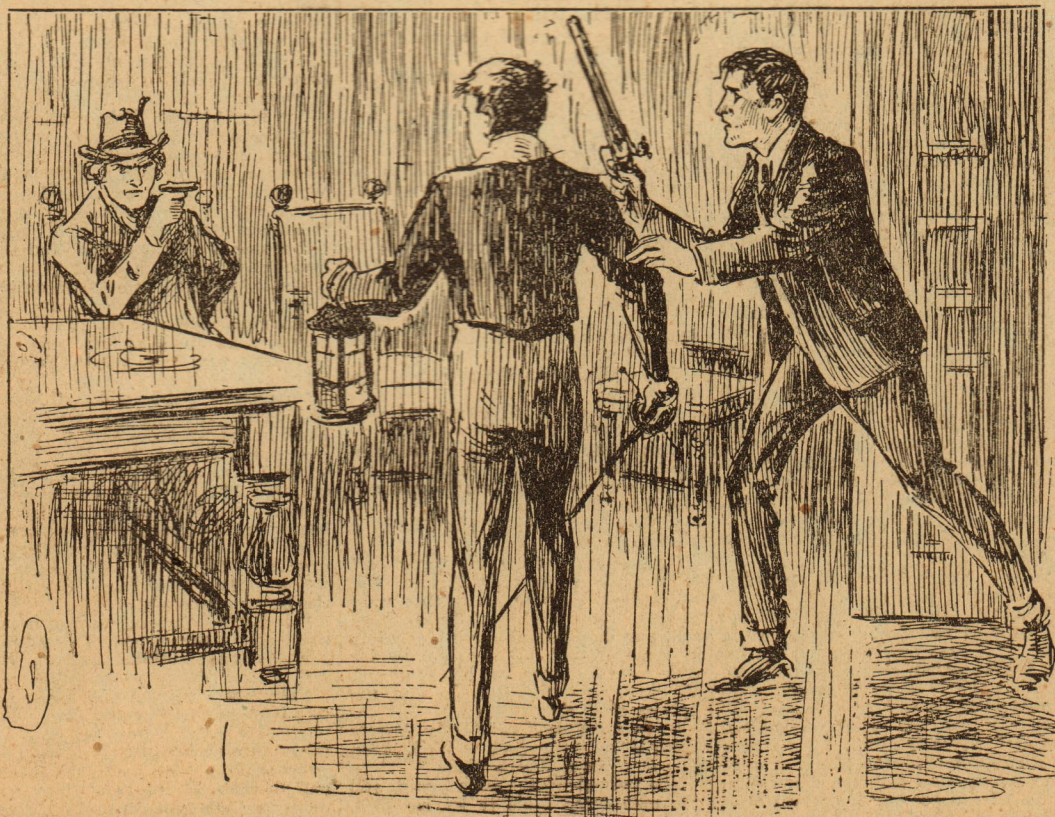
Dick looked up. "Do you really want me to say what I think?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well then, Lady Angela, I think that you're wrong. There must be somebody about the place who has had the chance and time to find out the secret of the cupboard up above, which you thought that no one knew but yourself. The only way to get to the cave is through here. No one would get up from the sea. There's a hundred feet of overhanging cliff. I know that because the fishing line with the weight on it which I showed you is measured off in fathoms by knots. So it's certain that the man who used that line and the mirror comes through here. That means that he can get across to it—the Hall, I mean—pretty well whenever he likes."

"There might be some other way in," suggested Polly.

Lady Angela pulled a cigarette out of her case, lit it at the lamp, and



The two boys pulled up short, for seated at the table, a very serviceable Webley automatic in her hand, was Aunt Angela.

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stared thoughtfully at the pair of them, whilst she puffed out such clouds of tobacco smoke that Polly started coughing.

"What you say sounds logical enough, my lad," she said, at last; "but I'd bet five pounds to a pin's head that it is no one inside the house, and as to any other way, if it exists, I don't know it. Wait a bit. I've got an idea. Bring that lamp along, and come with me."

Polly picked up the lamp obediently, and they made their way back into the hall. She closed the cupboard carefully behind them.

"Watch carefully how it works," she cautioned. "You two youngsters have got to help me in this. I know I can trust your honour not to give my secrets away, and it may be necessary for one or other of you to use this door in case of an emergency. Look, all you have to do is this. Slide away this bit of carving and the rest is simple."

She showed them the working of the panel.

"Now, I'm going to show you something else which none knows of, and that is an old book containing the original plans of the Abbey, and a description of them which is written in extremely bad, old-fashioned French. The ancestor of mine who had those secret passages built wouldn't trust local workmen in case they should talk, so he brought over skilled men from Brittany or Normandy, who couldn't give the show away if they tried."

She went to a big oak chest and pulled out a musty old vellum-covered novel as big as a large atlas. This she tucked under her arm, regardless of the dust, and carried to a table beneath a window.

It was full of maps and plans, dating from goodness knows when, and covered with weird lettering.

The boys stared at it with eager attention as she turned over the leaves, and then, all of a sudden, she came to a dead stop, and brought her fist down with a bang on the table, which made it quiver and jump.

"This book has been tampered with," she cried angrily. "It isn't a week ago since I had a look at it out of mere curiosity, and now, see for yourselves, there have been whole pages ripped out with a sharp knife."

There was no doubt about it. Eight of the pages had been cut out neatly, and the edges of the cuts were still fresh, cleanly done as by a machine, though in one place the knife had slipped a little, and gone through to the page beneath. A casual observer would have scarcely noticed that the book had been mutilated at all so cleverly had the work been done.

Lady Angela turned over a few more leaves of crabbled writing in old French, pausing to read a sentence here and there, and then she banged the table again.

"Look! Here's another page missing!" she said. "The man was systematic, anyhow. It was the page dealing with the secret passage."

She threw away her cigarette impatiently, and sat with her chin on her hands for several minutes.

"Come out, you two!" she ordered. "I want to get out into the open and think. It's easier in the fresh air. We'll go for a stroll in the park and pick up a rabbit or two and some wood pigeons."

They went out meekly after her, watched her pick up her small repeating-rifle, and tucked it under her arm, and away they went. She didn't speak a word to either of them for some time, and the fact that she never even noticed a rabbit twenty yards away showed that she was lost in her own thoughts.

They went down a long ride between two covers, and Dick noticed a telegraph wire running through the trees in a straight line, and wondered what it was for. He nudged Polly, and pointed to it silently, but neither of them dared ask any questions just then.

Another rabbit scuttled away into safety, and then two more, and half a dozen farther ahead.

Boy fashion, the pair of them momentarily forgot everything else, and were dying to be allowed to have a shot. So they began talking in excited whispers behind the broad tweed clad back of their hosts. But her ears, as she had said, must have been very keen, for suddenly she rounded on them though they were a good ten paces behind.

"Shut up, you two!" she said. "This isn't the time to go muttering about rabbits. We can get plenty of them later. What I'm after is the two-legged fox that has been monkeying round my property, and broken

into my house somehow, and I can't do that till I find the reason."

"If he'd been a common burglar animal he might possibly have stolen things, and, having learnt the secret of the passage, got 'em away by lowering 'em into a boat out of the cave mouth. That would be simple enough, I suppose. But that wasn't his game. There's nothing missing, except those pages from the book, and he's been—Hallo! What's this?"

Her quick eyes had detected a little trampled path through the bracken. It was only visible by reason of a few broken or bent frouds, and probably both the boys would have missed it.

She looked at one snapped stem and then another, and examined a bent branch carefully.

"Someone has been through here in the last twenty-four hours," she said. "See, there is still sap in these broken pieces, and they haven't turned brown yet. Keep back, boys, and don't spoil the trail. I want to follow it up."

She moved forward a few yards, and came to a place where the bracken had been trampled down in a little circle. There was a distinct imprint of where a man had sat or lain down for a considerable period of time.

The place was perfectly sheltered from observation from all points. Neither the Abbey itself nor any of the roads round the park overlooked it. A man might have lain hidden there for a week without even one of the keepers discovering him, except by chance. Here again they came across tell-tale traces of cigarette ends—the same gold-tipped brand—and a greasy bit of paper which had once contained sandwiches. It was Dick who pointed this last out, and Lady Angela pounced on it quickly. As before, luck stood by them. There was a reference to a date in the torn scrap, and that date was of the day before. It was a mere paragraph referring to a local motor accident.

"On September 17th," it ran, "a car belonging to a visitor in the neighbourhood—"

The trail led no farther than the trampled circle. Whoever had rested there had gone no further. He had simply had something to eat, a smoke, and possibly a sleep, and returned by the same way by which he came; but the ground was not of such a nature as to leave any footprints.

"What do you make of this, you two?" demanded Lady Angela, after nosing round. "I could understand a casual tramp evading my keepers and coming here for a nap—I've slept in many a worse place myself—but tramps don't smoke expensive cigarettes or read newspapers—at least, I've never met one that did."

Dick and Polly looked grave; and Dick, without saying anything, picked up a piece of dark-green stuff he saw lying between two broken fern-stems.

It was a piece of insulated wire, frayed and haggled at the ends, covered in green silk, and showing red gold terminals of copper wire, which had recently been scraped with a knife, for the marks of scraping were still bright.

It was only a few inches long, and had evidently been thrown carelessly aside.

He looked at it in a puzzled sort of way. Why such a thing should be found here, in the midst of a clump of bracken, was more than he could understand.

And then, in a flash, he remembered the overhead telegraph wire he had seen, and he glanced upward. Sure enough, the wire ran directly across the trampled patch of bracken, scarcely twelve feet above his head.

He knew very little about either telegraphs or telephones, but he did know that it was possible to tap either with a portable receiver. His father had once shown him one in the course of a country walk. An official of the company, with a small square box beside him, and a length of wire slung up overhead, was trying to find a fault in the line, by the roadside.

Colonel Marston had explained the thing to him, and he had retained a sort of confused memory of the idea.

"Lady Angela," he said excitedly, "what's that wire up there?"

"That?" she said, in surprise.

"That's my private telegraph wire to town. It was originally put up for my brother when he was in office, so that he could keep in touch with things when he was down here. He used to get all sorts of official despatches sent to him. I use it now to communicate with a friend of mine who is connected with the War Office, so that I can get any important news through quickly."

"Ah," said Dick, "that's it! That's why the man has taken such pains to get here, and to find out the secrets of the place. Look at this bit of wire I've found. He's been tapping your line, and—"

Lady Angela gripped him by the shoulder, and snatched the wire away. "Good heavens! What an idiot I've been!" she cried, and some of the colour went out of her face. "I never thought of that before! That explains it! Every evening at nine I use that wire for half an hour, and get a long reply from the friend I told you of, giving me the really important news—news which you never see in the papers."

"You see, although I don't look it, Fate has made me rather an important person, and I am told things about the war and other secrets, and I get news about our fleet which very few people outside the Services are allowed to know—on the condition that I burn every message as soon as I have read it, and that I use my influence as required."

"But," said Dick hesitatingly, "what about the johnnie—er—person. I mean, who sends and receives the messages?"

"That johnnie—er—person happens to be myself," retorted Lady Angela. "I'm an expert telegraphist. I used to be my brother's confidential secretary. I send, receive, and decode everything myself, and my office is in a small ante-room opening off my boudoir. The entrance to it is covered by a big, life-sized portrait, which masks the door. You see, I'm trusting you, because you are on your honour, and as I know both your fathers, I know I can trust to that. Even if the man has tapped my line, he couldn't decode the messages without the key to the cipher, and that is in my office under lock and key!"

"He jolly well got at the plans of the Abbey, though," chipped in Polly, "and all the bits about the secret passage!"

Lady Angela bit her lip, and her eyes grew fierce and hard.

She strode off at a brisk pace, with the boys beside her.

A rabbit crossed the path just before they came to the gardens, and automatically she flung up her rifle and fired. The hammer fell with a harmless click, the rabbit bolted, and Lady Angela exclaimed with disgust.

They came into the gardens proper from the far side. An undergardener was clipping the edges of the turf by the side of the path a few yards away.

The fellow was dressed in the usual fashion of his tribe, only rather more neatly, and his coat lay on the grass a few feet away from him.

Suddenly he heard the sound of their footsteps on the gravel, and stood up. At the sight of Lady Angela he touched his hat respectfully. Dick caught sight of his face as he did so, and nudged Polly into the shelter of a laurel-bush.

"Keep quiet," he whispered. "The man had not seen them—or, at least, he had taken no notice. His eyes were fixed on Lady Angela, and hers on him."

"Well, my man, who are you?" she asked. "Your face is strange to me, yet I make a point of knowing all the people on my estate."

"Beg your ladyship's pardon, but Mr. Jennings, the head-gardener, gave me the place. One of the under-gardeners was taken ill, so he took me on to do the rougher work in his stead."

"Humph! What's your name?"

"Simmons, m'lady—James Simmons. I know my work, and Mr. Jennings says he's satisfied with it, your ladyship!"

"Is he? You don't seem to have done much of it by the look of your hands!"

Dick called from the shelter of the shrubbery:

"Lady Angela, do come and look at what we've found!"

Something in the tone of his voice must have aroused her suspicion, for with a curt nod to the man she turned and strolled back.

"Well, what is it?" she asked, in a natural voice.

"Ask him whether his name isn't Williams," whispered Dick, "and watch his face when he catches sight of us. He's Williams, the man we told you of. He's changed the colour of his hair, but I know him by his eyes and the scar on his forehead. I'll bet anything that he's at the bottom of all this!"

"It's a beauty," said Lady Angela aloud—"quite a find. We'll keep this one, boys. Come along!"

She turned up the path again, and the man stood aside to let her pass, Dick and Polly keeping out of view

as much as possible behind her ample form.

"You can report yourself to me tomorrow at ten," she said to him. "I want to see your character from your last place, Williams."

"Simmons, m'lady; and I can—"

He stopped suddenly, his jaw dropped, and his face went a livid grey, as Dick and Polly suddenly confronted him.

His hand flew to the hip-pocket of his trousers, but Lady Angela was the quicker and cooler of the two.

"Up!" she said sharply; and the muzzle of her rifle touched the man's bare throat. "Sharp, or I'll shoot you, you cur!"

There was nothing for it but to obey, and slowly and reluctantly the man raised his hands above his head.

"That's better," said Lady Angela placidly. "Now, Williams, alias Simmons, turn round slowly till your back is towards me, and, if you value your life, keep those hands of yours above your head!"

He obeyed; and he had no sooner turned than Lady Angela slipped her hand into his hip-pocket, snatched out a Webley automatic, and flung it on the ground behind her.

"Pick that up, boys," she said, without turning, "and search his coat thoroughly. Keep quite quiet, Williams, or this will go off!"

Dick and Polly pounced on the man's coat. In the pocket they found a powerful electric torch, a piece of red fabric of the sort used in photographic dark rooms, apparently to cover the torchlight in case of need and signal danger, a flat tin of gold-tipped cigarettes of the same brand as the others they had found, and in it also was a scrap of paper, on which was written "Midnight till two, as before."

Between the coat and the lining was something which rustled, so Polly picked it up together with the other finds, and Dick grabbed the Webley.

"Ready?" asked Lady Angela.

It was a strange little procession which went through the garden in the gathering dusk.

First Williams with his hands up, then Lady Angela with her rifle, and last the two boys.

They came to a little used corner of the Abbey unobserved, and close to the old turf-grown moat turned to the right, and reached a little door half overgrown with ivy.

"Undo that, Dick!" she ordered. "It's only latched."

She drove the prisoner through it and down the passage. Halfway down on the left was a doorway which led into a windowless cellar-like room, with a ponderous lock on the door and a key in it, about the size of a coke-hammer. This also Dick was ordered to undo. The prisoner was driven in, and Lady Angela locked the door with her own hands, and put the key into one of her capacious pockets.

"He'll cool off there a bit," she said. "It was an old powder-store in days gone by, and the passage has been built up at the far end and leads nowhere."

She slammed the outer door behind her, and then chuckled.

"Well, boys, I think that was a pretty good bluff. What do you think of your aunt now?"

"A bluff?" said Dick, puzzled.

"Of course, you ninny. There wasn't a single cartridge in the magazine, and he had a fully loaded Webley. It was as much as I could do not to laugh in his face. I thought you knew. Don't you remember when I potted at that rabbit and the hammer just gave a click?"

She led them up some steps on to a broad terrace, and so into her boudoir; the door of this was locked behind them then, and she sat down and surveyed the various articles taken.

"Humph!" she said. "Not a bad haul, all things considered. Don't stand up there like stuck-pigs—you fidget me! Sit down somewhere. The floor is all right; you can't fall off that. 'Twelve midnight to two.' That means that the fishing-boat you saw will stand by during those hours to receive messages, I suppose."

She rubbed her hand down the the lining of the coat.

"See what that is rustling in the coat—here's the opening. Look how clumsily it has been stitched up. Rip it!"

Polly got a grip on the lining and tore it clean away on one side. Dick plunged his hand into the gap and drew out a packet of banknotes. They were small notes—five pounds each, and there were twenty of them—evidently an emergency supply in case anything went wrong.

Lady Angela looked at them, took a pair of tongs from the fireplace, and dropped the whole lot into the wood fire on the hearth.

"So much for spy money," she said, as they shrivelled up. "Now we'll see if my office has been tampered with." She walked up to a magnificent Gainsborough portrait—a canvas seven feet high, which came down to the wainscoting, pressed a spring which they didn't see, and the canvas, frame and all, swung outwards noiselessly.

She reached out, touched an electric switch, and the space beyond was flooded with light. It was a small box of a room, ten feet square, furnished simply with a desk, a telegraph apparatus, a chair, and a telephone. The walls were absolutely bare, and a scribbling-pad and a pencil lay on the desk.

"All serene!" she said, after a careful look round. "No one has been here. By the way, that reminds me. You two boys have got to stop on here to identify the man. I'd better ring up your master."

She glanced at a card on the wall containing a list of names and numbers, and rang up the school.

"That you, Mr. Naylor?" she said. "I just wanted to tell you that Marston and Poole will be sleeping here to-night. What's that—against the school rules? Hang the school rules! I tell you they are going to stop here, and they are, till I've done with them. My good man, it's no good arguing, my mind's made up. It may be made up quickly, too, about those extra fields of mine you want, and in a way you won't fancy. Oh! What? No, of course, I'm not offended. I've not got time for that sort of nonsense, and I shouldn't keep the boys unless it was urgent. Good-bye!"

And she banged down the receiver.

"Old Naylor got it in the neck that time!" whispered Polly, grinning.

She whisked round in a flash.

"Don't you talk rubbish, you two! I believe in discipline, and I hope Naylor will soon give the pair of you a good hiding; but just now I happen to need you. That's all!"

She shoved them out and closed the picture panel behind her.

"Now, suppose we sit down again and talk sense," she said as they returned to the sitting-room. "The man has tampered with nothing there, of that I'm sure; he doesn't even know of its existence. Look here, boys, let's be sensible, as I said before. He may have got certain messages in cipher by tapping my private line, but I'd defy him to decode them without the key. It's a private one, and only three people know the secret of it. No ordinary cipher expert could puzzle it out under a couple of months' work, and I doubt if he could do it even then. Look!"

She produced three cardboard sheets from a locked drawer in her writing-desk, and held them up.

"Those three cards give the key to the cipher; but I'm not going to show the whole of them, even to you."

All they saw was a list of figures and letters in large black type, intermingled. The other half was hidden from them; but Dick's sight was particularly keen.

"Do you ever pin those to a wall?" he asked. "Or to the desk where the telegraph-machine is?"

"No, of course I don't. I keep them here. As the news come in I just jot it down on the writing-pad I showed you, and then use my key to decipher it—these cards."

Dick stared and scratched his head; then he rose slowly from his seat and peered at the card which Lady Angela was holding up still half covered.

"Then what is the point of those pin marks in the corners," he said.

"Someone has been photographing them!"

Lady Angela looked at the cards, and pushed them back into the drawer, with a grim, set expression on her face.

"Dick Marston," said she, "I don't think I've called you a fool more than twice, and I take it back. Now, both of you follow me; I'm going to have this thing settled, it's more serious than you can even guess at."

They went to the room where their prisoner was kept, and Lady Angela pulled the big key from her pocket.

"Unlock the door," she said, handing it to Dick.

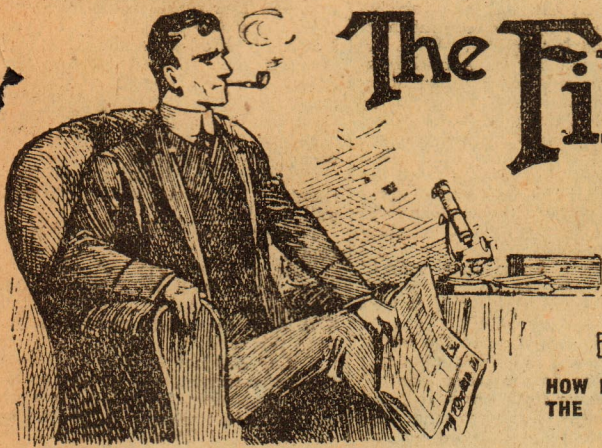
"Dick flung open the door, and Polly switched on the electric torch, and all three of them gave a cry of amazement. The room was empty.

(To be continued in next Monday's long and dramatic instalment. Are you sending your spare copies to our Tommies and Terriers?)



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STANLEY FOSTER is the leading actor in the stock company of the British Animated Pictures Syndicate, and is much attached to

ENID BERESFORD, the principal lady actress. Their friendship arouses the jealousy of

VADILLO, a hot-headed Mexican, who manages the wild animals in connection with the film work. The Mexican contrives an "accident" in which Foster is nearly killed, and he is dismissed from the film company. After this incident an attempt is made to kidnap Foster, and, suspecting there is some deep mystery behind this and Vadillo's action, the film producer asks NELSON LEE and NIPPER to try to solve it.

Vadillo is killed in an accident, and, from inquiries which Nelson Lee makes, the detective gets on the track of one of the Mexican's accomplices, named Holstein.

Whilst acting for the films at Westminster Bridge, Nelson Lee sees Holstein, with two others dash under the bridge in a steam launch. In a few seconds the detective has commandeered another launch, and set out in hot pursuit of them.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

## Baffled Again.

By this time Holstein's launch was nearing the Charing Cross railway bridge, and from the rate at which she was moving through the water, it was plain to be seen that she would not be easily overtaken.

The pursuers' launch, however, was quite as fast, if not a trifle faster, and as soon as her engine had got into its stride she began to creep up to her rival.

"We're gaining on them, don't you think?" said Stuart, as Holstein's launch shot under Waterloo Bridge.

"Yes, we're undoubtedly gaining a little," said Nelson Lee; "but not enough, I'm afraid."

"So long as we're gaining at all, that's all that matters," said Nipper. "Even if we only gain one yard in fifty, we're bound to collar 'em in the end."

The detective shook his head. "That isn't so," he said. "Unless we gain faster than this, they'll escape!"

"How do you make that out?" demanded Nipper.

The detective pointed down the river. As already mentioned, a haze hung over the river below London Bridge, and the outlines of the buildings were blurred and indistinct.

"A mist or a fog is drifting up the river," said Nelson Lee. "It has already reached London Bridge. Lower down, in all probability, the river is enshrouded in thick mist or fog. Unless we can overtake them before they reach that part of the river, the fog will hide them from our view, and they'll easily give us the slip."

As he finished speaking, the launch in front dashed under Blackfriars Bridge. Early as was the hour, there were scores of people on the bridge, and dozens on the Embankment; but none of them realised that an exciting man-hunt was in progress, and none of them—not even those who observed the two launches—displayed the slightest interest in the proceedings. Nipper yelled to some of them; but for any notice they took, he might as well have yelled to Cleopatra's Needle!

Between Blackfriars Bridge and Southwark Bridge a couple of watermen, who were ferrying across the river in a heavy, clumsy boat, suddenly woke up to the fact that the launch which was racing down towards them was fleeing from the launch behind.

In a laudible but reckless attempt to bar the fugitives' progress, they drew their boat across the stream, right in the path of the leading launch.

For a moment a collision seemed

inevitable, with disaster to all concerned. At the last second of the last moment, however, Holstein steered the launch a little to the right; and the quivering craft, after grazing the stern of the boat, continued its course towards London Bridge, raising waves on each side of its bows, and leaving a swirling foam behind it.

When at last it shot through London Bridge the pursuing launch was less than a hundred yards behind it; but now, as Nelson Lee had feared, the mist came into play.

There was only a slight haze at London Bridge, but by the time the two launches entered Limehouse Reach the haze had developed into a mist.

Off the entrance to Millwall Dock the distance between the two boats had been reduced to sixty yards; but, even at that short distance—so thick was the mist—it was no longer possible for Nelson Lee and his companions to distinguish the figures in the boat ahead.

By the time they turned into Blackwall Reach the mist had become a blanket fog. The detective's launch was still gaining, and now no more than thirty yards divided the hunted from the hunters. Every moment, however, it became more difficult to keep the fugitives' launch in sight. All that could be seen of it as it rounded Blackwall Point was a dull blur on the surface of the fog-enshrouded river.

Gradually, as the fog increased in density, this blur became fainter and more indistinct, until at last off Woolwich it faded out altogether.

"So they've escaped us again!" said Nelson Lee, with a gesture of despair. "We've no luck. Even the weather fights against us!"

He turned to the engineer.

"There's no use in going on," he said. "Slow down, turn round, and take us back to Westminster Bridge!"

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Nipper, "you're not going to chuck up the sponge, are you? They can't be more than twenty yards ahead of us!"

"They may not be ahead of us at all," said Nelson Lee. "They may have steered to one side, and stopped, and we may have shot past them, or they may be making for one of the banks. It's no use trying to pick them up again in a fog like this. It would be worse than hunting for a needle in a haystack. We might pass within half a dozen yards of them and never see them!"

Stuart agreed with Nelson Lee, and the launch accordingly put about, and returned to Westminster Bridge, which, by the time they arrived, was enveloped in a hazy mist.

Foster, who had meanwhile changed his clothes at St. Thomas's Hospital, was waiting for them on the pier. With him were the two operators, an inspector of police, and the driver of Stuart's car.

"I felt sure you'd come back here sooner or later," said Foster, as the detective and his companions stepped ashore. "There's no need to ask if you caught the beggars. They escaped in the fog, I suppose?"

"They did," said Nelson Lee; and he briefly related what had happened.

"It's very disappointing to have lost them," he said, in conclusion; "but, all the same, I'm not without hope that the affair may be made to yield us a valuable clue."

"How?" asked Foster.

"There were three men in the launch," said Nelson Lee. "Two of them, of course, were Warren and Tetley. Who was the third man?"

"Probably he was the man—in a fresh disguise—who tried to poison me with drugged brandy. The man we saw at Lingdale Road, and who

afterwards assisted Tetley to escape from the cottage hospital!"

"I agree with you," said Nelson Lee. "You know what my opinion is concerning that man?"

"Yes. You believe that he's the ringleader of the plot against me, and that he is the man who is really at the bottom of all the attempts which have been made on my life?"

"I do. Consequently, if we can find out who the man is, and where he lives, we shall have taken a long step towards clearing up the whole mystery!"

"Of course. But how are you going to find out who he is, and where he lives?"

Instead of replying to this question, the detective turned to one of the operators.

"You're the man who was stationed on the pier at the beginning of the rehearsal, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the operator.

"Your orders were to start turning the handle of your camera at the moment when Mr. Foster dived off the bridge. Did you do so?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long did you continue to turn it?"

"Until one of the men in the launch picked up a boathook, and struck Mr. Foster with it. That so upset me that I forgot all about my camera!"

"Anyhow, you secured photographs of the launch coming through the bridge, and of Mr. Foster swimming up to it and placing his hands on the gunwale?"

"Yes, sir."

"And those photographs are now in that camera?"

"Yes, sir. But they aren't developed yet, of course."

The detective turned to Dudley Stuart.

"In addition to your establishment at Rockford," he said, "you have, I believe, a factory in London where you develop and print some of your films?"

"Yes," said Stuart.

"If that camera is conveyed at once to the factory, how long will it take to develop and print the film which it contains?"

"Five or six hours. At a pinch it could be done in four."

The detective glanced at Foster.

"Now do you see what I'm driving at?" he asked.

"I'll be hanged if I do!" said Foster, shaking his head.

"On the film in that camera," said Nelson Lee, "there are dozens—possibly hundreds—of photographs of the launch and its three occupants."

"Well?"

"Well, what I propose should be done is this. We'll develop some of those photographs, and print copies of them—positives, of course—on sheets of sensitised paper. We'll give these copies to the police, and we'll ask them to show them and make inquiries at every wharf and landing-stage above and below this bridge. Sooner or later somebody is sure to recognise the launch, and will be able to tell the police the name and address of the owner."

"But the man was probably disguised."

"The launch wasn't disguised. They may not recognise the man, but somebody is sure to recognise the launch. If that plan fails, we'll distribute copies of the film to every picture-theatre in London and the suburbs. At each hall we'll ask the manager to show the film on the screen, and to invite any member of the audience who recognises the launch, or the men, to come forward, and tell what he knows!"

"Splendid!" said Stuart. "I should never have thought of that! How do you think of such things?"

"It's my trade!" said Nelson Lee

with a smile. "Meanwhile, I'm very wet; so the sooner we get a move on, the better. We'll first drive to my rooms in Gray's Inn Road, and after I've changed my things we'll drive on to the factory."

This programme was duly carried out. On arriving at the factory the camera was unloaded in the semi-darkness of the developing-room, and the precious film was wound on a revolving wooden frame. It was then immersed in various tanks, containing different solutions, and as soon as the resultant negatives had been fixed and washed, the film was wound on a circular drum, given an alcoholic bath—to hasten the drying process—and removed to the drying-room.

The next process, when the film was thoroughly dry, was to run it through a printing-machine, by means of which, with the aid of a powerful electric light, a second set of photographs was printed on another film. This second set consisted, of course, of positives; and when they had all been printed, the second film was carried off to the developing-room, and the whole process of developing, fixing, washing, and drying was gone through again.

Finally, the second film was run through a projector in the testing-room; and the whole scene, from the moment when Foster dived into the river to the moment when Warren struck him with a boathook, was reproduced upon the screen.

The second part of Nelson Lee's scheme was next put into operation. After a careful examination of the negative film, one or two typical photographs were selected; and, by means of a special apparatus, enlarged copies of these photographs were printed on sheets of paper.

When these had been toned and fixed, they were handed over to the police, who forthwith started making inquiries at all the principal wharves and boat-building establishments on the banks of the Thames.

It was a clever scheme, but although it succeeded to a certain extent, it failed to achieve any definite result.

It was at Bristow's Wharf that the police first struck the scent. The proprietor, on being shown one of the photographs, immediately recognised the launch, and informed the police that it belonged to "Mr. Thompson, of Crow Tree House, Putney."

"That's Mr. Thompson," he said, pointing to one of the figures in the launch. "He doesn't often use the boat, and when he isn't using it, he keeps it here. He has kept it here on and off for three or four years."

"When did you last see him?" asked the inspector.

"Last Wednesday afternoon. He arrived here with those other two gentlemen, who are shown in the photograph. He said they were friends of his, and they were all going up to Putney in the launch."

"And you haven't seen him or heard of him since?"

"No; but I have just heard that the launch has been found empty and deserted, floating down the river near Woolwich."

"Can you tell me anything about Mr. Thompson—what his business is, for instance?"

"I can't. All I know about him is that his name is Thompson, and he lives at Crow Tree House, Putney."

The police communicated with Nelson Lee, and he and they at once proceeded to Putney. Meanwhile, however, Holstein had wired to the caretaker to clear out without a moment's delay; so that when the detective and the police reached Crow Tree House, they found the place locked up and deserted.

They forced an entrance and searched the house from attics to basement, but found absolutely nothing to afford them the slightest clue to the identity of "Mr. Thompson." Subsequently they made inquiries in the neighbourhood, but with no better result.

"So the cunning scoundrel has not only given us the slip again," said Nelson Lee, "but he has covered up his tracks so cleverly that all trace of him is lost."

## The Key of the Mystery.

The next fortnight was comparatively uneventful. The brig in Rockford Bay was raised, and the rescue of Miss Beresford from the wreck was again rehearsed and finally filmed. The scene on Westminster Bridge was also completed, and Foster was duly "captured by the police."

A corner of the studio at Rockford House was next fitted up as a court of justice, and a scene was filmed in which Foster, the much-maligned hero, was tried, found guilty, and

sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. Preparations were then in hand for one of the most striking and original scenes in the play—the rescue of Foster from the grounds of the convict prison by means of a small dirigible balloon.

During all this time nothing more was seen or heard of Holstein and his confederates. Small wonder, then, that Foster began to believe that the conspiracy against him had been abandoned.

He expressed this view one night to Nelson Lee and Nipper, who had called to see him at his flat in Tudor Square.

"I was right, you see," he said. "All those attempts which were made on my life were merely the outcome of Vadillo's hatred and jealousy."

"I don't believe it for a moment," said Nelson Lee. "I have always been convinced—and I'm still convinced—that Vadillo was only a tool in the hands of somebody else. In my opinion, the man who engineered the plots against you was the man we saw in the launch with Warren and Tetley a fortnight ago."

Foster shook his head. "I'm sure you're wrong," he said. "Anyhow, you must admit it's a significant fact that as soon as Vadillo died, the attacks ceased. If Vadillo was only a tool, and if the other fellow is really the man who wants to snuff me out, why has he left me in peace ever since Vadillo's death?"

"I can't say," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps he's growing timid, or may be he's only waiting for a favourable opportunity. Whatever the explanation may be, I'm sure my theory is the correct one."

"But look here," persisted Foster. "I can understand Vadillo hating me. It was his successful rival for Miss Beresford's hand, and it was through me, indirectly, that he was dismissed from his employment. But the other man—why on earth should he desire my death? Even now I don't know his name, and I never either saw him or heard of him until a month ago. Then what possible reason could he have for wishing to injure me?"

Before Nelson Lee could reply, Foster's man tapped at the door, and entered the room with a telegram. He handed it to Foster, who tore it open and read the following message:

"Can you come to my house as soon as possible to-night? At last I have news of Russell. Do not trouble to wire unless you cannot come—KENNEDY."

"No answer," said Foster to his man. Then he turned to Nelson Lee. "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to excuse me now," he said. "I must go to Hampstead. Read that."

He passed the telegram to Nelson Lee, who read it and shook his head. "This conveys nothing to me," he said, as he handed the telegram to Nipper. "Who's Kennedy?"

"He's a solicitor," said Foster. "Head of the firm of Kennedy & Martin, of Chancery Lane. He lives in Saltburn Road, Hampstead."

"And who's Russell?"

"A man I knew in Canada," said Foster. "It's rather a romantic story. I can spare five minutes, if you'd care to hear it."

"Romantic stories are always interesting," said Nelson Lee. "Fire away!"

"As you know," began Foster, "I spent three years in Canada before I became a cinema actor. While I was in Canada my two greatest chums were Charles Warren—whom you've already met—and an awfully decent young fellow named Gordon Russell. We three worked together on various farms, and eventually we went north and tried our luck at the Yukon goldfields. It wasn't a success, however, and ultimately, about eighteen months ago, I returned to England, leaving Warren and Russell at a place called Fort Reliance."

"About three months ago," he continued, "I saw an advertisement in one of the London papers asking anybody who could give any information concerning Gordon Russell's whereabouts to communicate with Messrs. Kennedy & Martin, Solicitors, Chancery Lane. I went there and introduced myself to Mr. Kennedy, who told me the following story."

"Russell, it appears, was distantly connected with a very wealthy family in Hampshire. At the time when he emigrated to Canada—ten or fifteen years ago—there seemed not the slightest prospect of his ever succeeding to the estates, which are strictly entailed. In the meantime, however, owing to a number of unexpected deaths, he has become the next in the line of succession; and there's a fortune of nearly fifty thousand a



waiting for him to claim it. Fortunately, said Mr. Kennedy, all of them had been lost; and although they had advertised in all the colonial papers, no news of him had been received, so that they didn't even know if he was still alive.

"I told Mr. Kennedy all I knew," continued Foster. "That is to say, I told him I had lived and worked with Russell for three years in Canada, and that at the date when I left Canada he was still alive, and very well, and living at Fort Reliance. I also told him that I had written to Russell, and also to Warren, soon after my return to England, but that both my letters had been returned marked 'Gone away. No address.'"

"Mr. Kennedy thanked me for my information, and said he would cause inquiries to be made at Fort Reliance. Later, he wrote to me to say that he had done so, but with no result. Several times since then I have seen him, either here or at his office, or at his house, but always until to-night his report has been 'No news yet.' Now at last, as you see by that wire, he has got some news of Russell, and he wants me to go to his house as quickly as possible."

"What for?" asked Nelson Lee. "To tell me his news, I suppose. You see, if Russell is alive and coming to England, I shall be needed to identify him. It seems that I'm the only person in England who can identify him, as all those who knew him before he went to Canada are either dead or scattered abroad."

"Is that quite correct? You say you're the only person in England who can identify Russell. Aren't you forgetting Warren?"

"Ah, yes, of course. Warren could identify him just as well as I could, but, seeing that Warren is hiding from the police, he's hardly likely to come forward!"

"By the way, you remember that afternoon when Warren turned up at Rockford House and tried to lure you into a trap?"

"Yes."

"Was anything said about Russell on that occasion?"

"Yes. I told Warren about Mr. Kennedy's advertisement and he said he hadn't seen it."

"Did he give you any further news of Russell?"

"Not much. He said that he and Russell parted company shortly after I left them, and he had never seen or heard from him since. I advised him to go and see Mr. Kennedy, and tell him this. He said he would, but, of course, he never did."

The detective thoughtfully rubbed his chin.

"I wish you had told me this before," he said.

"About Russell?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because," said Nelson Lee, "I've a sort of notion that what you have just told me supplies us with the key to the mystery we've been trying to solve for the last few weeks."

Foster stared at him in undisguised bewilderment.

"You speak in riddles," he said.

"What possible connection can there be between Gordon Russell and the various attempts that have been made on my life?"

"I may be wrong," said Nelson Lee evasively. "At any rate, I'd rather not commit myself to any theory until I know what news Mr. Kennedy has received."

"Then you'd better come with me to his house, and hear the news for yourself," said Foster.

"Just what I was going to suggest," said Nelson Lee. "Do you think he'd mind if you brought me with you?"

"I'm sure he wouldn't," said Foster, rising to his feet. "He'll be delighted to see you, and Nipper, too. Come along. We can get a taxi at the corner of the road."

### "Up a Tree!"

Only those whose pockets were well-lined—stockbrokers, prosperous city merchants, eminent lawyers, and the like—could afford to live in Saltburn Road.

Every house in the road was correctly described as "large and commodious," and each of them stood in its own private grounds. No vulgar motor-buses ever profaned its aristocratic quietude, and even taxicabs were seldom seen there, as most of the residents travelled to and from the City in their well-appointed cars. To live in Saltburn Road was the water-mark of unimpeachable respectability.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Nelson Lee and his two companions reached the southern end of this

delectable thoroughfare. Somewhat to their surprise their taxi stopped, and the driver got down and opened the door.

"All change here!" he remarked facetiously.

"Why?" asked Foster.

"Road's up," said the driver briefly.

They alighted, and saw that he was right. The road was being repaired, and across the end stretched a wooden barricade. A red light gleamed in the centre of the barrier, and near-by a watchman dozed in his sentry-box.

"What a beastly nuisance!" growled Foster. "We'll have to walk the rest of the way!"

"It won't kill us!" said Nelson Lee, with a smile. "How far along the road is Mr. Kennedy's house?"

"Almost at the other end," said Foster.

"Almost at the other end, is it?" said the driver. "Well, look here, sir, if you like to get in again I'll drive you round to the other end by way of Boulyby Crescent."

"Thanks, but it isn't worth while getting in again," said Foster.

"Besides, the other end will probably be barricaded, too. We'll walk to the house."

"Very good, sir!" said the driver. "Shall I wait for you, or have you finished with me now?"

"You needn't wait for us," said Foster. "I don't know how long we shall be. What's your fare?"

He paid the fare, and the cab turned round and rattled off. Foster then walked round the end of the barricade, and led the way up the silent road.

Except for themselves and the watchman, the road appeared to be deserted. It was also very dark, for trees were planted at intervals on each side of the road, and the branches of these trees obscured the light of the lamps.

The road, however, was not so deserted as they thought at first. Presently, by the light of one of the street lamps, they perceived three men standing outside the garden-gate of one of the houses. They were gazing down the road in the direction of Nelson Lee and his companions, and appeared to be waiting for somebody.

"Is that Mr. Kennedy's house where those three men are standing?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Oh, no!" said Foster. "Mr. Kennedy's house is much farther up the road."

As he spoke the three men turned in at the gate and disappeared from view.

"I made sure that was Mr. Kennedy's house," said Nelson Lee, who was walking in the centre of the footpath, with Nipper on the inside and Foster on the kerb. "I thought he was growing impatient, and had come to the gate to look out for you."

"So did I," said Nipper. "I would have bet my boots that one of the men was Mr. Kennedy and another was Gordon Russell."

A moment later they reached the gate where the three men had been standing. Suddenly, as they were walking past the gate, the crack of a revolver was heard, and a bullet, after whizzing over Nipper's head and narrowly missing Nelson Lee, drilled a hole through Foster's hat, and sent it flying into the road.

Started by this unexpected turn of events, the detective and his companions were so taken aback that just for a moment they stood staring at each other in petrified amazement.

At the same instant another shot rang out, and Foster clapped his hand to his cheek with a cry of pain. Then a savage oath was heard inside

the gate, followed by the sound of running footsteps.

In the twinkling of an eye the detective grasped the truth. The supposed telegram from Mr. Kennedy was a bogus message, sent by Foster's enemies to lure him into another trap.

Knowing that the road was up, and that they would have to walk to the lawyer's house, they had lain in wait for him. They had expected, no doubt, that he would come alone, and they had counted on being able to surprise him and overpower him by sheer weight of numbers. Probably they had never intended to use their revolvers; but, on seeing that Nelson Lee and Nipper were with him, and that their original plan was impossible, they had fired a couple of shots and had then taken to their heels.

All this flashed into the detective's mind in a thousandth part of the time it has taken to record it. Before the echoes of the second shot had died away he turned hastily to Foster.

"Much hurt?" he asked hurriedly.

"No," said Foster, withdrawing his hand, which was smeared with blood. "More frightened than hurt,

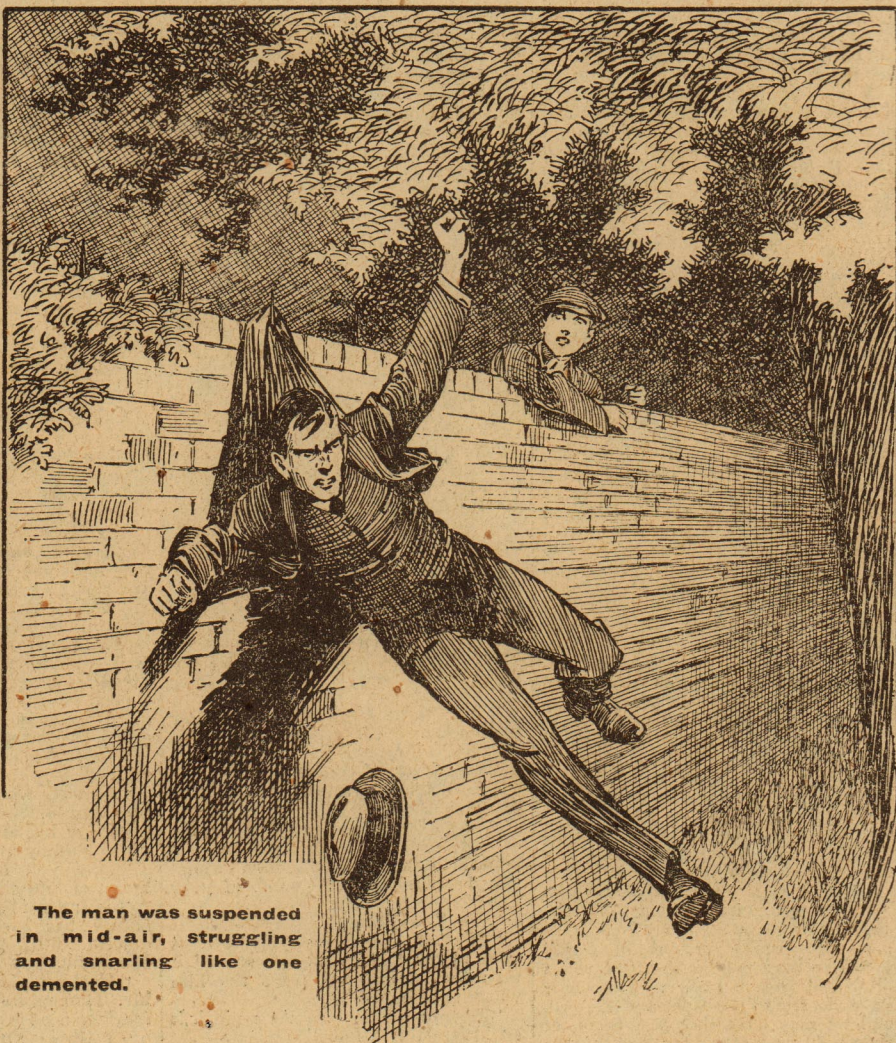
on the top by a row of iron spikes. On the other side were several large trees.

On reaching the wall the fugitive took a flying leap and caught hold of two of the iron spikes. With the agility of a monkey he hauled himself on to the top and jumped down on the other side—at least, he tried to jump down, but one of the spikes harpooned the seat of his trousers and the tail of his coat, and when Nipper dashed up to the wall he discovered that the man was hanging down on the other side, suspended in mid-air, and struggling and snarling like one demented.

"Metinks I know that voice!" chuckled Nipper, as he took a running jump at the wall. "If it isn't Tetley, I'll eat my hat!"

He hauled himself on to the top of the wall, but just as he was preparing to jump down on the other side the sound of tearing cloth was heard, and the man dropped to the ground. He was on his feet again in an instant, but even as he turned to run Nipper threw himself forward off the wall, and literally leaped on the fellow's back.

Down crashed the man on his face, with Nipper sprawling on top of him.



The man was suspended in mid-air, struggling and snarling like one demented.

I think. The bullet grazed my cheek, but it only ripped off a bit of skin."

"Game to go after them?"

"Rather!"

"Come on, then! Ten to one we shall find they are Warren, Tetley, and that other chap. They've got the start of us, but if we waste no further time we may nab them even yet. Come on!"

With Nipper and Foster at his heels, the detective darted through the gate, and found himself in the spacious grounds of a big house, which afterwards proved to be empty and to let. A gravelled drive led from the gate towards the house, and by the dim light of the stars a man could be seen running up this drive as hard as he could pelt. A second man was sprinting across the lawn on the right of the drive, while the third had turned off to the left, and was evidently making for the wall which divided the grounds from the garden of the house next door.

"They have separated, and we must do the same," said Nelson Lee, as he tore up the drive. "I'll go after this fellow in front; you, Foster, take the man on the right, and you, Nipper, follow the man on the left."

Nipper needed no second bidding, but, pressing his elbows to his sides, raced after the man who was making for the wall. Although he gained ground at every stride, the man was the first to reach the wall. It was a fairly high wall, and was surmounted

Both were winded by the shock, but Nipper was the first to recover. Rolling his prisoner over on his back, he knelt on his chest and pinned him down with one hand, while with the other he fished out his electric-torch and flashed its light into the fugitive's face.

"Tetley!" he exclaimed. "I guessed as much!"

Then he lifted up his voice in a lusty shout.

"Guv'nor! Mr. Foster!" he yelled. "I've got one of them!"

But he boasted too soon, for the words had scarcely crossed his lips ere Tetley, with a sudden herculean effort, hurled him aside and leaped to his feet.

"If you attempt—" he began, whipping out a revolver.

He had no time to finish the threat, for even as he spoke, and before he had even time to level his weapon, Nipper leaped at him like an arrow from a bow, and seized his wrist.

A ding-dong struggle now ensued, in which blows were freely given and taken. Tetley, who had not yet recovered from his fall, was the first to tire, and presently Nipper succeeded in wrenching the revolver from his grasp.

No sooner had he done so, however, than Tetley clenched his fist and crashed it into Nipper's face. As Nipper staggered back Tetley darted at him, and snatched the revolver from his hand. Then, hold-

ing the weapon by the barrel, he dealt his youthful opponent a savage blow between the eyes which dropped him senseless at his feet.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee and Foster—both of whom had lost sight of their men in the darkness—had heard Nipper's shout; and at the same instant as Nipper dropped unconscious to the ground Tetley heard the two men running towards the other side of the wall.

"Nipper!" he heard the detective shout. "Where are you? Have you still got him?"

Needless to say, there was no reply.

"He was making for this wall when last I saw him," said Foster. "He's probably in the next garden. The shout seemed to come from just over this wall."

Tetley did not hear the whole of this conversation, but heard the two men preparing to climb over the wall. As just mentioned, he had not yet recovered from the shock of his fall, while his subsequent struggles with Nipper had winded him and reduced him to the verge of exhaustion.

To run any distance at any speed was at present a physical impossibility. A few minutes' rest would doubtless put him right, but in the meantime his pursuers were already beginning to climb over the wall.

"I couldn't hit a haystack on twenty yards!" he groaned. "My only chance is to hide and trust to the darkness that they won't discover me. But where can I hide?"

Suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to him. Nipper was lying at the foot of one of the large trees already mentioned, and in less time almost than it takes to tell, Tetley thrust his revolver into his pocket and started to swarm up into this tree.

He was only just in time, for scarcely had he seated himself astride one of the lower branches when first Nelson Lee and then Stanley Foster climbed over the top of the wall, and dropped to the ground.

"Nipper!" called out the detective again. "Where are you?"

There was no reply, but as they strode forward through the darkness, peering to right and left, Foster's foot struck something on the ground. He stooped and picked it up, and found it was an electric-torch.

He pressed the button of the torch, and no sooner had he done so than he saw Nipper's senseless form lying in the centre of a circle of light at the foot of one of the trees.

Fearing the worst, he ran to where Nipper lay, and rapidly examined him.

"Thank Heaven, he's only stunned!" he said, with a sob of relief. "The man he captured must have turned on him and struck him between the eyes, and then made his escape. Luckily no great harm has been done, and he'll probably be all right in an hour or two. We must carry him—Listen! Who's that?"

Footsteps were heard, and a moment later two men in evening dress were seen approaching through the darkness.

"Who's there?" called out one of the men. "Answer quickly! And don't move, for I've got a revolver, and I sha'n't hesitate to shoot!"

"It's all right," answered Foster. "We aren't burglars or anything of that kind. This is Mr. Lee, the detective."

The two men hurried forward. At the sight of Nipper's unconscious form, they uttered exclamations of dismay.

"What has happened?" they cried.

"First tell me who you are?" said Nelson Lee.

"My name is Marchmont," said the man with the revolver. "I'm the owner of the house to which this garden is attached. This is my son. We were smoking in the billiard-room when we heard a couple of shots. We came out to see what had happened, and found you here. What has happened?"

Briefly the detective told him. Before Mr. Marchmont could reply a muffled sneeze was heard immediately above their heads. Quick as thought the detective flashed the light of the torch into the branches of the tree, and no sooner had he done so than he saw Tetley sitting astride one of the lower branches with his revolver in his hand.

"There's the man!" he cried. "And it's Vivian Tetley!"

The words had scarcely crossed his lips ere Tetley fired, smashing the electric-torch into a thousand fragments and plunging the scene into inky darkness.

(Is Nelson Lee any nearer to the heart of the mystery surrounding the cinema actor? Don't miss next Monday's grand instalment.)