

THE BRITISH BOYS' OWN PAPER!

The BOYS' FRIEND

TWELVE PAGES! TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending December 4th, 1920

START THIS WONDERFUL TALE HERE AND NOW!

THE LEAGUE OF THE STAR & CRESCENT! Magnificent New Adventure Story

By JOHN S. MARGERISON.

The Price of Freedom!

The next day, watched by hundreds of curious eyes, and—though they did not know it—covered always by the muzzles of guns and rifles, the Fire-crews made their way out to the vicinity of the schooner, and boarded the three lighters which had been brought during the night. One of these, which they christened the salvage tug, was fitted with any number of electric leads brought from the shore to work the various appliances they required to use.

During the days that followed they toiled hard, believing that when the Maria Dolorosa was once more afloat, it had been unavailingly searched by the Moors, they would be allowed to take her to sea, and make their way back to their familiar surroundings as best they could. So, under the direction of Dick Murray and Potty-officer Casey, the men worked at high pressure, and when night came were far too tired to trouble about papers, or anything else. Indeed, they were far too worn out to notice that their clothing was systematically gone through by the attendants each night, eager fingers searching for the papers the day's work might have brought into their possession.

On the third day, Casey and Moore—two of the divers—commenced to rivet the copper on Maria's bow, and presently eased her from stem to midship gangway in the dully-gleaming stuff. Then, scrambling over her decks—she had, you will remember, filled, and sunk on an even keel—they built up a strong bulkhead of oak-baulks to reinforce the forward bulkhead, which had carried away. And when that was finished, they closed and battened down every hatchway on her upper-deck, and inserted the big submersible electric pump into her interior.

By the time this was done ten full days had elapsed, and still the old C.O. had not sought to molest them further—still he had not, as far as they knew, gained possession of the papers.

Dick turned the itch of the pump, and beamed with delight when he saw the ten-inch stream of salt-water flung up into the air, to all back into the sea once more, and inch by inch the schooner's masts rose from the surface as the water within the ship was cleared out and compressed air took its place. Inch by inch stout wire hawsers were slung from the lighters on each side, held the ship as in a cat's cradle, and pulled taut, that, in any mishap, she should not strain to the waste of much time and labour.

It was all very interesting to the boys, for whatever happened to be their daily avocations, they were posted on the cliffs and beach in this strange happening. The rising from the dead, they thought. These must be devils, they said, especially those who held the huge boards and stayed beneath the water. The two Moors, too, crept close, to work, but, though they were allowed to enter into conversation, their crews always declared they knew no English, for they had never seen Ben Adem on these things.

At last the old Moor turned up again—turned up in time to see the Maria Dolorosa break through the surf of the water, and, as the two boats, appearing as wood-hung, and disreputable, and Ben Adem held up a finger, and one of the launches slid astore, and took him aboard.

He boarded Maria Dolorosa, his nostrils sniffing daintily and his skirts held clear of the slime and mud on her deck. With an armed man ahead and another astern of him, he descended into the main-cabin, and



A FIGHT TO THE FINISH! "This is our answer!" shouted Casey, rushing on the young Moor with his improvised weapon. Taking this as a sign for attack, the Britishers immediately fell upon the League's soldiers, and soon there was a tremendous pitched battle in progress.

manipulated the secret spring which slid back the panel covering the whole of the deck beam. And he inserted his hand, and his fingers encountered nothing!

When he returned on deck there was a grim and determined look in his cunning, brown eyes.

"The work has been done well, O Midshipman Effendi," he said to Dick, "but the papers for which I crave are not to be found!"

"Well," answered Dick, "you promised us our freedom when we saved the old Maria Dolorosa, and we have fulfilled our part of the bargain, so I suppose you will let us go now?"

"Nay," returned the old chief, "for the price of your ransom is none other than the papers which are in your possession, and which are so eagerly sought for by no League of the Star and Crescent!"

Dick and his companions started back in surprise at the unexpectedness of the Cadi's demands. That he still believed the papers to be in their possession, or hidden in some place of which they knew, they were well aware, but they had half-expected him to be satisfied with the search to which he had already subjected both themselves and the wrecked schooner. Furthermore, his attitude during the last few days had been more than amiable, and from his offer to fit out the Maria Dolorosa, and let them depart, they had thought he was really willing for them to leave. But had they realised the depth of cunning in the Cadi's heart, and the importance of Elcasar's whereabouts remaining undiscovered by the world at large, they would have altered their opinions, and the Cadi's demand would not have surprised them in the least.

"Papers!" echoed Dick, finding his tongue with an effort. "Come, now, Ahmed Ben Adeem, you've harped on those papers till you've got 'em on the brain. You charged us at first with having them, and you've pretty well rummaged through our things—as well as the ship—to find them. We've played the game with you, and kept our side of the bargain by raising the wreck from the bottom of the harbour, now it's up to you to keep your word and let us go."

"I will let you go," replied the Moor. "But in my own time and at my price. That price is the papers, as I have already said. Deliver them to me, and ye shall depart without further let or hindrance. Nay, I will myself accompany ye part of the way the further to render ye honour. Keep them, and the secret of the place where ye have hidden them, and ye shall depart without ears, without tongues to tell of the things that have been done to ye, or eyes to gaze upon your fellow-men! Hadji, obey my commands!"

He clapped his hands, and at the signal the forty Moorish warriors sprang forward, two of them grasping each Britisher. Dick found himself in the grip of the captain and his subordinate officer, and, while he struggled and kicked and writhed to get free, he noticed that the remainder of his men were putting up as good a fight as was possible under the circumstances. Casey, in particular, was enjoying himself.

"Glory be!" yelled the giant Irishman. "Tis to bang a couple of yer heads together I've been longing these many days past! And now ye give me the chance yourselves. Ouch! ye omadhaun, and how was that after striking ye? Do ye want two eyes to see out of—eh? Then that's agin yer wishes, Mister Blackamoor, with a straight left to the right eye! Hadji, me darlint, it's not a fighting man ye are at all, at all; it's president of a mothers' meeting ye should be, be rights. Howly nurther, I'm kilt—I'm p—"

Casey suddenly found more use for breath than talking; for, having stunned two or three of the others with the shafts of their spears and the flats of their scimitars, the enemy attacked in force, and just saved Hadji, the captain, from the burly Irishman.

The Moors scrambled all over Casey, and by sheer weight pulled him to the floor, where, while a warrior sat on each of his arms and legs to prevent him doing further damage, others trussed him up like a chicken. And when the crowd cleared away, Casey, looking round, could see his master tied up as well, with the remainder of the crew lying bound hand and foot, on the tessellated pavement.

"So," chuckled the Cadi, "ye see what happens when rebellion sets her foot in this land. Nay, Midshipman Effendi, grind not thy teeth, nor flash thy eyes at me. Thy anger is as a thing of naught. Forgive me that I must thus seem ill-mannered

to thee and thy men, as my guests for awhile, but there are things that must be found. Therefore, I crave thy pardon in advance for the indignity thou art about to suffer. Believe me, were it possible to attain my objects otherwise, my men should not soil their hands by touching such infidels as thou and thy men. Hadji, my friend, search me these men, starting with the midshipman Effendi and the giant with the badly-hung tongue. Let not one particle of their clothing or their persons go unsearched, lest thou overlook the writings for which my soul yearns with desire, or thou shalt feel the whip searching thine own skin, laid on by one of thine own slaves."

Hadji bowed low, and then, approaching Dick, hauled the lad to his feet, and commenced to feel in every pocket, to unfasten every garment that might conceal a paper. But his search was fruitless; and, though Casey taunted the captain and the Cadi mercilessly while he was being searched, and though every single man in the company underwent the same close scrutiny, not a sign of the secret papers could the Cadi's guards discover.

"There is nothing, O Cadi," proclaimed Hadji. "Not a thing have they about their persons save these trifles."

Here he indicated a miscellaneous heap of objects which had been pulled from the men's pockets—knives, matchboxes, cigarette-cases, old letters, pipes, and baccy-pouches, for the most part. The Cadi stroked his beard meditatively, and there was death in his eyes as he gazed reflectively on the young midshipman and his bluejackets.

"So ye spake truth when ye said ye had not the papers," he remarked, at length; "or maybe but half the truth. So sure as Allah is the true god, and Mahommed is his prophet, so sure am I that ye had those papers when ye came to Elcasar. Ye have not destroyed them secretly, for I cannot believe but that ye knew their purport and value, and ye do not carry them about with ye. Therefore, they must be in the house wherein ye are lodged. Hadji, take half of thy men, and let the search thou hast made of these infidels' persons be as a mere glance compared with that to which thou wilt submit the house which has sheltered them. And haste thee, that my desire to see these writings be swiftly assuaged, and lest to remain in bonds should cause thee, my guests, to feel quite comfortable."

Another bow, a rattle of arms, and the opening of a door, and the guards departed on their errands, leaving Dick and Casey exchanging apprehensive glances. The Irishman longed to tell his young master to have no fear, since only one who knew could discover the cobbles under which the papers were hidden—two cobbles so alike to the thousand and one that formed the floor of the dwelling. But the Cadi was watching and listening with all his ears, and the Irishman and Dick as well—felt that the old scoundrel was perfectly capable of ripping up the whole flooring if he thought he might thereby discover the treasure-charts and cyphers for the League.

So, passing the time by baiting the serene and ever-smiling Moor, and alternately chatting among themselves in his hearing as to the varieties of punishment they would specially invent for him in the hereafter, the men lay and sat on the palace floor, waiting till Hadji and his men should return.

Presently there was a faint murmur in the outer hall and a clash of arms. At the Cadi's command the big door was thrown open, and Hadji strode in. And Dick felt his heart miss a beat, and a look of dismay overcast his features, as he saw that clasped in Hadji's right hand was a long, official-looking envelope, of the type he had used to place the charts and cyphers in.

"Thy report, Hadji!" snapped the Cadi, his eyes twinkling with excitement.

The captain of the guard threw a glance of triumph at the bound midshipman, and then, prostrating himself before Ahmed Ben Adeem, extended the envelope to the Cadi.

"Lo, this I have found, O Cadi!" he said softly. "Underneath the bed whereupon sleeps the midshipman Effendi, hidden under the cobbles of the flooring in a secret niche it was; but my keen eye and ready brain soon discovered it, and here it is!"

"Thou hast done well, Hadji," was the Cadi's reply, and he could scarcely forbear casting aside his deliberate dignity and whooping like a schoolboy with joy. "Thy rewards

shall be great—so great that thou wilt require a bodyguard of thine own, lest thy friends envy thee too much and too vigorously."

He tore open the envelope, after scrutinising the name and address on the outside. As he read, with a queer pucker on his brow, Casey nudged Dick with his elbow, and bestowed a most prodigious wink on the midshipman. When Dick looked, he shook his head, and Murray felt his heart lighten.

"What is this?" The old Moor's affability had melted like snow in the desert, and he rose to his feet as he thrust out the contents of the envelope. "What is this thou hast brought to me, O Hadji? Is this some ill-timed pleasantry of thine own, to anger and annoy me?"

Hadji, the gleam of exultation gone from his eyes, dropped to his knees before the throne.

"Nay, O Cadi!" he wailed. "It is no joke, but the papers I found hidden in the infidel's house. Do they not please thee?"

"Papers, thou son of sloth and stupidity!" snarled the Cadi. "These are not the writings for which I long. Listen, then, and I will read them to thee, oh, child of moonshine and little intelligence! Listen carefully!"

He held the papers before him, and, in perfect English, read their contents. The first was addressed to Casey, and was a demand for immediate payment, under pain of being summoned, for a pair of boots. The next was an impassioned letter from one of the Irishman's many sweethearts, and the third was nothing more nor less than a summons to appear before the Plymouth bench of magistrates for being intoxicated and disorderly in a public place, "to wit, John Street, Plymouth."

And when the stately Moor, bubbling over with wrath and anger, had read to the end, the bluejackets, the petty officer, and the midshipman were rolling still bound, helplessly on the floor, and laughing till their ribs ached. The joke was too rich. Was it to secure these that the old Moor had sent his men, had spent so much time and trouble?

"Tis myself should be mad with the old spalpeen for reading me love-letters aloud in public!" gasped Casey. "But with that angry light in his eyes I cannot find it in me heart to grieve him. Let be, sor, 'tis the Cadi will be vexed soon; but how them papers got into yer secret hiding-places is a mystery to me. I did think I had them in me pocket, and I must have left them at home and ye got back them."

"Silence, thou of the loose tongue and the ready wit!" snarled the Moor, in a rage. "Are these thy writings?"

"Is it me ye're addressing, Father Christmas?" demanded Casey, in return, choking down his merriment with an effort. "'Cos if so, ye'll plaze use me proper name as mentioned in the ship's books. Them writings is mine, and just ye drop 'em, quick!"

"Thine, are they?" shrieked the sheik. "Then thou shalt eat them—eat them whole! But why hidest thou rubbish of this kind? Thinkest thou to hoodwink me with such a childish trick?"

"Trick be hanged!" retorted Casey. "Them's my private property, ye ould robber, and ye'd better lave 'em be afore ye get yerself into trouble. Just let me get me hands loose, and I'll pull yer whiskers for touching 'em, and Hadji's as well!"

The Cadi glared ferociously at the Irishman for a moment, and then, once more caressing his beard, sank back, deep in thought, into the chair of state. For five full minutes he regarded Casey and Dick and the innocent papers and then, quite suddenly, he cast them aside.

"Listen, thou warrior of a few summers, thou of the ill-governed lips, and ye wanderers upon the face of the sea!" he said, at length. "It is not well that ye should die for the sake of a few writings, or because ye are stiff-necked and stubborn. Because I am certain that ye have the papers, or know where the secret writings are hidden, and because I desire those writings with a longing

that is as fierce as the sun in the desert, will I have mercy upon ye. Go ye now to your lodging, alone and unarmed, and meditate upon my clemency. Talk about this thing among yourselves and arrange for the papers to come into my possession, for if I have them not when the sun shines on the morrow, so surely shall ye die, one by one, by fire from the feet upwards. Hadji, release them and let them go, and see that no man harms them."

He cut short any retort that might have been made by suddenly rising from the chair and disappearing through the door, and Dick, in turn, frustrated with a word the Irishman's obvious intention to kick up a shindy in the palace. And, fearing the ears of spies, Dick refused to allow his men to discuss the matter till they arrived at the house.

Here, having swiftly searched the rooms to make sure that none lurked within, Dick called a council of war of all hands, and discussed the papers with them. But at the end of two hours' talk they had arrived at no satisfactory conclusion.

"You'd better let me give up the papers, men," he said at last, "or you'll all lose your lives, and the treasure isn't worth it."

"What's the odds, sir?" asked Martin impassively. "If we give them to the Cadi he'll chop off our heads; if we keep 'em he'll burn off our feet, so it means death both ways. And I'm not talking through the back of my neck when I say—and I think as I'm saying what we all think—that if we give our lives to keep this treasure out of the League's hands, we shall be dying in the defence of our country, the same as thousands of others have done before us. Keep the papers, or, rather, destroy 'em, and tell old Whiskers to do his darndest, and be hanged to him!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the others in chorus.

"That's the idea, sor," interpolated Casey. "That's how we all feel in the matter. Sooner than let the ould Cadi have the charts and the epher messages, I'd eat 'em, same as he said I should eat my love-letters, which, by the way, the ould thief has kept. But why not think this over? Suppose you and me set to work and, while the others keep guard at the doors and windows and see that we aren't surprised, learn the papers and their contents off by heart? Then we could see if we couldn't make some faked ones, and hand 'em over to the Cadi in the morning, after we'd made him swear by the whiskers of this prophet he's so keen on that he'd let us go in safety and peace. Then, while he was working on a false scent, we could beat it to Gib, hand the pukka charts and things over to the admiral, and get the treasure for our own country. How's that for an idea, anyway?"

There were shouts of "Jolly good!" "Bully for you, Mike!" "Let's do that!" And when Dick put the question to the council, the show of hands proved how heartily everybody fell in with the Irishman's suggestion.

"Right-ho!" said Dick. "I'll get the papers straightaway. Though the captain of the guard might have been pretty cunning, he couldn't have found the hiding-hole I made, seeing that he only managed to fish out Casey's private documents."

He joined in the laugh that went up at the Irishman's expense, and slipped away to his own room. Quickly he pulled away the bed, and as swiftly took up the two cobbles. Then he knelt down in the semi-darkness and thrust his hand into the hole. There were no papers there.

"Strange!" he said. "They were here when we left for the palace. Could Hadji have found them, after all, and have hidden them for his own private use?"

He felt again, but with no better result. It was with a very white face and somewhat frightened eyes that he rejoined the laughing, chatting expectant crowd out in the living-room.

"Casey, your plan is good, but it's no use," he said, trying to break it

gently. "We can't learn the papers, or make dummies."

"Why, sor?" asked Casey, guessing instinctively. "Don't say that—'It's true," said Dick simply. "The papers are gone; they've been taken away while we've been absent."

For a moment a gasp of astonishment was the only sound in that room; then Knight's bull voice roared out.

"The dirty thieves, and the dirty murderers as well!" he bawled. "Are we going to sit here and let these blackfaced Moors put it across us like that, lads?" he queried. "What about raising a shindy and killing a few of 'em off before they start murdering us?"

"Yes, why not?" The question was a fierce yell, as, all their mirth gone, these brawny sons of the sea took fire with wrath at the men who had tricked them. They sprang to their feet, and immediately commenced to make a ruin of the room in their search for weapons. They smashed off the legs of chairs, and hefted joyously the improvised clubs they thus made; they tore bars of iron out of their bedsteads, and one armed himself, in addition, with the earthenware water-bottle from which they drew their supplies.

"Ready, lads!" yelled Knight, who, despite Dick's being an officer, had now assumed the leadership. "Ready? Then forward, and hit every blinking black face you see!"

The crowd surged towards the door, but before they could commence to batter it down—it was usually secured from the outside—it was thrown back, and in the aperture there suddenly appeared the armed and robed figure of Hadji, the captain of the guard, and his two-score well-armed soldiers. At the apparition the sailormen fell back a couple of paces, and then, as Knight let out a bellow, they started to run forward in a mad charge.

"Back, dogs!" cried Hadji, and his men dropped their spears till their points formed a solid hedge of steel between him and the infuriated sailormen.

"Back, lads!" cried Dick, again assuming his leadership. "Hold on a minute while we see what this fellow wants!"

The bluejackets, still hefting their improvised weapons, stood still, and Dick worked his way to the front of the press. He confronted the grinning Hadji resolutely, and struck aside that dusky gentleman's sword contemptuously.

"Well, and what do you want here?" asked Dick. "You ill-mannered hound! Please remember that this is our house, not yours, and that people of your colour usually knock on the door and wait to be called before entering. If you've got a message for me, out with it, and then take your ugly face away before you get hurt."

The midshipman was more than angry; his feelings had been brought to boiling-point by the discovery of his loss, and the enthusiasm with which his men had set themselves to avenge the slight put upon them. And now this visit crowned all: it would go ill with Hadji if he were not, at the least, civil.

But Hadji didn't appear inclined to be civil. He looked the unarmed midshipman up and down, and then transferred his gaze to Casey.

"They knock and wait, do they?" he rasped back. "Well, were you the top dogs, Effendi, I, too, should knock and wait. As ye are my prisoners, I come and go, when I choose, and ye shall not say me nay. But I have a message for thee—a message from my chief, the Cadi. Here it is. He has changed his mind about leaving you alive till sunrise; the papers must be given to me here, and now, or I and my soldiers will immediately fall upon ye and slay ye! That is the message. What is thy answer, O babe that dares to talk to men?"

"This!" It was Casey that answered. "This!" he roared; and, with chair-leg upflung, he leapt the five yards between himself and the captain of the guard, and before that worthy was really aware of his danger, the Irishman had brought his weapon down with full force upon his turbaned skull.

Hadji's sword clattered to the ground at Dick's feet, and the midshipman bent and picked it up just as, with a wild, infuriated cry, the soldiers of the guard drew back their spears and charged.

Of what avail, against steel spearheads and swords, are broken chair-legs and pieces of iron? One could have forgiven the bluejackets if they had turned and ran. But they did not. Instead, they leapt forward to

THE THREADS OF THE STORY.

DICK MURRAY, a midshipman on board H.M.S. Firecat, has orders to bring a derelict yawl safely to Gibraltar. With his second, an Irishman of the name of CASEY and a crew of some eighteen British sailors, he mans the salvaged vessel, the Maria Dolorosa. They find some plans to a secret hoard of money, deposited by the Kaiser in the late war, which documents are eagerly sought after by a secret society whose sign is the Star and Crescent. As the crew of the Maria Dolorosa are bidding farewell to some visitors in a submarine, a cruiser in the pay of the League of the

THE THREADS OF THE STORY.

Star and Crescent opens fire on them. The crew of the Maria Dolorosa manage to escape, and land on the coast of Africa, where they discover is situated the headquarters of the league they are trying to avoid. The chief makes a point of showing them how impossible it is for them to escape alive, and declares that with their help he hopes to find the secret papers for which the league waits so impatiently. Dick and his men then prepare to save the wrecked schooner, having been promised their freedom if they are successful.

meet the charge, and two of them went down under the impact, pierced by the spearheads. But now Dick was laying about him with Hadji's sword, and Casey was playing quarter-staff right thoroughly with his chair-leg, and not a few of the Moors were slinking back out of harm's way.

Casey suddenly found himself with a clear space, and, stooping, he picked up the senseless Hadji and flung him into the midst of his followers, who, not being accustomed to fight without a leader, and being dismayed at

the fierceness of the British resistance, had momentarily fallen back.

"At 'em, lads!" yelled Casey; and, with Dick and Knight at his heels, he leapt upon the warriors.

The scene had the makings of a most promising fight, and I venture to think that Hadji's followers would swiftly have learned to respect the fighting prowess of the British Navy, even ashore, had not the interruption come just when it did.

As Dick and a tall warrior closed, each swinging a heavy scimitar about, the hanging oil-lamp that illumined

the interior of the house was suddenly extinguished, falling from the ceiling to the floor with a crash that made all hands look to see what had happened.

Dick, in the darkness, found himself suddenly pulled backwards; and then, as he turned to remonstrate, as he thought, with one of his own men, something cold to the touch was thrust into his hand.

"Loaded!" said a voice in his ear, in perfect English. "Mind what you do with it, and don't shoot yourself."

Dick lifted the cold thing, and found it to be an automatic pistol. A

moment later Casey found a similar weapon thrust into his own hand.

The Irishman asked no questions, but raised the weapon and emptied it among the astounded soldiery.

"Allah il Allah!" cried one, in sheer terror. And almost immediately there followed a clash of steel as the cowed and utterly surprised guard threw their weapons to the floor in token of surrender. These were indeed foreign devils that could conjure up firearms from nowhere, for had not their persons and their house been most thoroughly searched

a few hours back, when no weapons of any kind, save a few blunt jack-knives, had been discovered? What would happen next the guard did not attempt to guess. They were perfectly content to surrender and wait for what came.

"Round to the door, Casey," said Dick, "and guard it. We can't let these fellows go yet, or they'll raise the garrison, and we'll all have our throats cut in less than no time."

(Another long instalment of this grand yarn in next Monday's Boys' Friend.)

THE ADVENTURES OF GRANT, CHAUFFEUR DETECTIVE

By EDMUND BURTON

"THE AFFAIR OF THE RAY!"

The 1st Chapter.

Grant's Mysterious Fares!

Tom Grant was returning towards the Crane Street rank and a well-earned rest, when a sudden hail from the crowded pavement drew a half-stifled sigh from his lips. He sighed not because another fare was wholly unwelcome, but because he had had an extra tiring day of it and, having just pulled through a severe attack of influenza, was not by any means up to his usual form.

He drew in towards the kerb where two men—one of florid complexion, the other rather sallow—were standing, still waving impatiently, as though the hiring of a taxi was a matter of life or death.

"Chelsea Bridge, as hard as she can lick!" commanded the sallow man swiftly. The other did not speak.

They got in, and Grant opening the throttle the cab shot off. It was a goodish spin to Chelsea, and, though he would make well over it, he inwardly resented the fact that there was such a place on the map.

Every bone in his body was aching, and he felt quite done up, proving that another day in bed would have been wiser than returning to work so soon.

A confused murmur of conversation came through the speaking-tube close to his ear, but he paid no heed to it for a time, all his attention being taken up with the tricky steering of his cab through the maze of congested traffic; but presently, when the road became clearer, he found himself subconsciously catching an odd word here and there.

The man who had given him his instructions was doing most of the talking, for his voice scarcely ceased for an instant. When it did it was only to allow of a brief answer from his companion—an answer which generally took the form of a guttural monosyllable.

Now, considering that the Empire had comparatively recently passed through four years of the bitterest warfare ever known with a nation whose people spoke like that, and that there had been far too much of the guttural dialect heard in Britain before hostilities at length broke out, such a language left rather a bitter taste in British mouths, and Grant's was no exception.

He had spent over six months in a German prison camp, and detested the sound of that tongue even now, when the world—or, at least, his part of it—was supposed to be at peace. Somehow he had, like many another, come to couple a German with trouble, and believe firmly that the two went about hand-in-hand.

He pricked up his ears, but, strain them to their utmost though he did, all he could catch with any degree of certainty were the words "Ray," "Twenty-fifth," and "Martin," and the sentence "Sandringham to the Palace."

At Chelsea Bridge the two men sprang out, walking quickly away. Then, as Grant was in the act of closing the door, his eyes rested on a small sheaf of papers, held together by a rubber band, which were lying on the seat.

He picked them up and glanced through them like lightning; but most of whatever they referred to was written in cypher, and he could make nothing of it. Almost half-way through the bundle, however, he saw something in English: "Mr. John Martin, 42B, St. Elmo Road, Chelsea."

More than this he had no time to examine, for the sight of the sallow

man sprinting back along the pavement told him that his fare had discovered his loss.

Grant hurried to meet him, holding out the packet, which the other took with a muttered word of thanks, accompanied with a swift, half-puzzled frown. But the taxi-driver's face was as innocent as a babe's, and betrayed nothing of what might have been passing in his mind.

Yet "Martin, St. Elmo Road," had struck a vague chord in his memory, though he could not for the moment remember where he had heard it before. Then all at once a scene seemed to spring before his eyes—a dark, slopky road, and a young man trying to repair the broken-down engine of a small two-seater by the light of a headlamp.

Grant had come upon him whilst returning from an outlying district, and, having vainly endeavoured to help him mend the damage, had finally taken the little car in tow, thus earning the undying gratitude of its owner.

During the journey Grant had learnt in the course of casual conversation that the young fellow's name was Martin, that he lived in St. Elmo Road, Chelsea, and that he was a bit of an inventor—a rather disappointed one so far, it was true, but possessing plenty of ambition and the energy to realise it.

"Don't like it at all, though there may be nothing very much in it," mused the taxi-driver, as he climbed back into his driving-seat, with his pet "detective-demon" prodding at him inwardly. "But nowadays one never knows what may be in the wind, and that bloke was a Hun, or I'll eat my hat! Anyway, I might as well look up Mr. Martin as I'm here. He seemed a decent chap."

The 2nd Chapter.

Jack Martin, Inventor—The Ray—Just in Time!

The lamps in St. Elmo Road were just being lit as Grant's taxi drew up outside No. 42B, and his knock was answered by a young fellow of about eight-and-twenty, whom he instantly recognised as the same individual to whom he had once rendered assistance.

"Mr. Martin, I think?" he said interrogatively.

"Y-yes," was the slow reply, as the other's eyes ran rapidly over Grant's attire. "What is it, please?"

"Can I have a few words with you, sir? It may be important, or it may not—you will probably be the best judge of that."

Martin hesitated for a moment, then opened the door wider.

"Come in," he said, and then added, as the light of the hall-lamp fell upon Grant's face: "Why, I—I seem to have met you somewhere before. Have I?"

For reply, Grant mentioned the incident of the damaged two-seater, and Martin broke into a smile as he held out his hand.

"Why, of course! I oughtn't to have forgotten my good Samaritan. But excuse my apparent uncertainty. I have to be thundering careful! Come along now; I'm all alone here."

As Grant followed the other into the cosy-furnished sitting-room, he could not help wondering what could be the import of it all. Why had Martin to be so "thundering careful," as he put it?

"Now, what's the racket?" asked the latter, dropping into an armchair. "That you didn't come here for a trifle I can see by that expression of suppressed excitement."

Briefly Grant gave an account of what had occurred, and Martin listened attentively, his face growing more and more puzzled as the taxi-driver proceeded. Finally the inventor gave a sudden startled gasp, and sprang from his chair.

"Ray," you said! Are you quite sure that 'Ray' was the word you overheard?" he cried, seizing Grant's wrist like a vice.

"Yes—or, at least, I'm practically certain. What does—"

"Great heaven!"

Martin rushed from the room and down the stairs, closely followed by the amazed Grant, who thought he had suddenly lost his reason. Out through a door, and across a yard to a small, glass-roofed out-building dashed the inventor, emerging next instant with a small box-like object, about two feet by one, in his arms.

"Worth all the money in the world!" he panted. "If—"

"Look, man—look! What's that?" gasped Grant, his quick eyes spotting something small and black against the lighter sky beyond, as it soared in a graceful curve over the yard wall and crashed through the glass roof of the out-building.

There was a burst of blue-white flame, an appalling roar, and, as

the sphere to float upwards until it bobbed against the ceiling.

"Lower the lamp now, and watch!"

Grant did so, and next instant the darkness was riven by a pencil of violet light, which shot upwards and travelled slowly across the ceiling until it rested on the balloon, which suddenly became limp and fluttered downwards towards the floor.

"What is it?" gasped Grant, in amazement, as Martin turned up the lamp again.

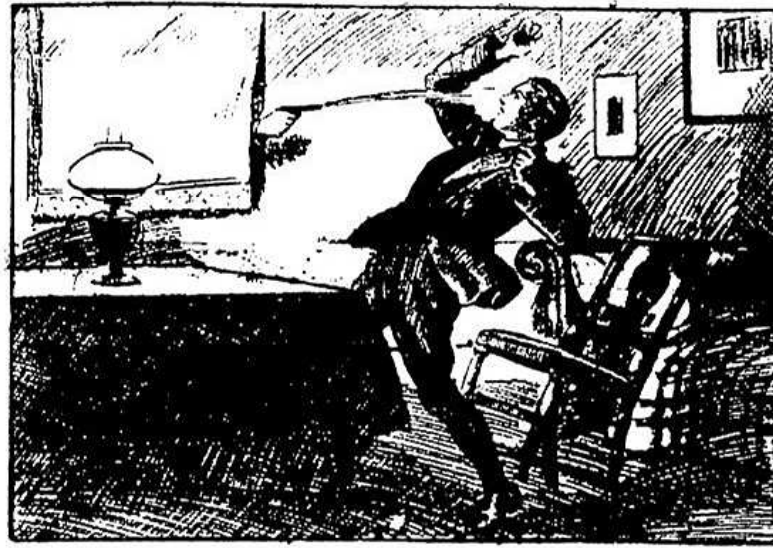
"The Ray!" was the quiet rejoinder. "The most reliable defence against airship attack ever produced!"

"But surely—surely little thing—"

"That little thing, my dear sir, has most deadly power even at a two-mile range, impossible though it may seem to you. Exhaustive tests have proved so successful that even the Government has been convinced and has agreed to purchase it."

Grant was silent, amazed at the almost supernatural ingenuity of the apparatus.

"These buttons," continued Martin, running his fingers along the side, "focus the Ray for use at different distances, and for different



BY WHOSE HAND? Grant staggered back, half-senseless, as the overpowering stream of vapour assailed his nostrils.

though struck by a furnace blast, both men were flung violently to the ground. Martin still hugging his precious box tightly.

When they had sufficiently recovered to sit up, nothing remained of the outbuilding save a shapeless mass of smouldering debris, whilst even the windows of Martin's own house were shattered into a thousand fragments.

"Just in time!" croaked the inventor, trembling in every limb. "Another two seconds, and my life's work would have gone for naught! Thanks, old man!"

The 3rd Chapter.

Jack Martin Demonstrates!

As they re-entered the sitting-room, Jack Martin laid the box carefully on the table. Grant looked at it curiously, but could make nothing of it, except that it seemed like a very large magazine-camera, possessing, as it did, a lens in front, and seven or eight press-buttons at the side.

"You're interested?" said Martin, brushing the dust from his clothes.

He had quite recovered his nerve now, and seemed burning to hold forth on his beloved invention.

"Yee," admitted Grant. "It's an innocent-looking object to create such a fuss over. I suppose that is what the bomb was really intended to destroy?"

"Undoubtedly. But it's not quite so innocent as it appears, as I'll presently show you. Only for that little—er—accident, I could demonstrate better; but this'll probably do."

From beneath the table he drew a small inflated balloon, heavily weighted with lead to keep it down. Knocking off the weights, he allowed

sized targets, much after the manner of a hand-camera's magnifiers; and this device here is the range-finder. What the exact ingredients of the Ray itself are, I am not, of course, going to say; but they are such that when they come into contact with hydrogen or any other gas, the latter immediately dissolves, as it were, leaving a vacuum. The pressure of the outer air does the rest, as was the case with this toy balloon. In other words, whatever contained the gas is crushed as flat as a pancake. See?"

Grant nodded. "Something on the lines of plunging a sealed tin can half-full of steam into cold water?" he suggested.

"Exactly."

The taxi-driver sighed. "What a pity," he said, "that you hadn't perfected this thing a few years ago. I guess the Zepps would have had a different tale to tell."

"Quite so," nodded Martin. "But I was—er—elsewhere during the war. I had begun experiments on the Ray long before; and, though I had progressed sufficiently to make me hope for the best, such a thing takes a power of research. Then came the trouble, and I had to submit to the 'powers that be,' like the rest of us. As you say, it was a pity."

"But," persisted the other, even now not quite convinced, "supposing we were back a couple of years or so, and the air-raids were again once nightly, as they were then, do you think your invention would have proved to be all you claim for it? It's very well to destroy one single small gas-bag, like that balloon there, but, from what I've read, the latest Zeppelin envelopes were composed of some seventeen balloons. Surely the

Ray could not have affected a sufficient number of those to bring the airship down, even disregarding the aluminium casing with which I understand they were covered?"

"It could!" Martin's face was flushed, and his eyes were shining. "Even if they were protected by a foot thick of steel, it would have proved of no avail. No substance can stop the Ray, and a fraction of a second's contact is sufficient. I could destroy a fleet of Zeppelins, or any other gas-containing airships, in ten minutes—provided, of course, that they came close enough. Now, are you satisfied?"

Grant had to give in. He could find no words to reply to this young genius, who, though still on the sunny side of thirty, was proving himself even greater than Marconi, Edison, or Maxim. He knew from what he had read that an Italian inventor had made some fairly successful experiments with a ray for firing explosives at a distance, but this was an infinitely more wonderful achievement.

"You mentioned having overheard one of the fellows speak of the 25th, and also of Sandringham and the palace," said Martin, breaking the silence at last. "Have you any idea of— Great heavens, man! What's the matter?"

For at that moment Grant's eyes had rested upon a newspaper lying on the table; and, giving a half-stifled gasp, he pushed the sheet over.

"Can that be the answer?" he said hoarsely. "It was only a couple of lines, yet it might have been a volume in its implied significance—that is, coupled with the startling events which had just taken place."

"Their Majesties will (D.V.) leave Sandringham for Buckingham Palace on the morning of the 25th inst."

They stood staring blankly at each other as the same thought began to form in both their brains. Then Martin was the first to speak.

"If this had happened two or three years ago," he said, "I'd have no doubt as to what was in the wind—a big raid, timed to take place when their Majesties were resident in the metropolis. But now—"

"And why not now?" cut in Grant excitedly. "Eh? Why not? I know the war's over, and such things are supposed to be finished with, but remember the kind of people we are up against."

"But—"

"Look here!" snapped the other. "Germany was supposed to possess a huge fleet of Zeppelins and other aircraft. Many were destroyed, I know, and some handed over, but where are the rest? Were they ever accounted for? She surrendered her sea fleet at the end of the war, and a lot of her artillery and munitions, but who got the remnants of her air units? We didn't, I'll swear—"

"Good heavens! You mean—"

"I mean that, though the Huns were beaten, and their Kaiser exiled to Holland, there is still—and probably always will be—a strong Imperial party in Germany, who will never accept a lasting peace with Britain and the Allies. From certain things which have occurred since, it is easy to see the hidden hand's manoeuvring. Look at Russia, for instance, and look at the general mess-up all over Europe at the present day. What, then, is more likely than a last effort on the part of this crowd to deal a big blow at the cause of their downfall when its coming is least expected or prepared for? If such a thing was not contemplated, why such frantic efforts to destroy the Ray, the only thing which could utterly defeat such a project?"

Martin's lips turned white as he listened. Of course, it was feasible—more than feasible, as Grant explained. London was not now so well defended against raids as during the war, and if a sudden swoop were made in large numbers, it would likely mean chaos, from its very unexpectedness.

"Well, we'll soon know definitely," he remarked, in a hushed voice. "If

you are right, old man, please Heaven, you shall witness the Ray's power to far better advantage than what you saw just now. To-morrow will be the 25th!"

The 4th Chapter.

Another Attempt on the Ray!

All the next day, and half the following one, Jack Martin never left his beloved invention unguarded for a moment. Grant paid several flying visits to St. Elmo Road, and relieved him whilst he snatched an odd half-hour's sleep; for, though the bomb-throwers probably felt quite certain that their attempt had been completely successful, it was quite on the cards that they would seek to make assurance doubly sure, and the issues at stake seemed too vital to leave even the smallest chance unconsidered. How, the existence of the German Secret Service, in all probability, could explain.

The authorities were, of course, put in possession of the full facts, and, though certain preparations were made, the general reception Martin's warning got was one of scepticism. The armistice had now been concluded over two years—in fact, peace had actually been signed—and no further attempt at actual hostilities had since been attempted. London had almost forgotten the raids, which were once almost nightly occurrences, and had more or less resumed her customary atmosphere of business bustle and contentment. The war was over, and that was all that seemed to matter.

But it was ever thus with Governments. Even in 1914 they had been unprepared, and it was only when the trouble actually came that they started to arm themselves for it. And this suggestion of Martin's—though he was well-known and respected by the powers that be—seemed a wee bit far-fetched. Consequently, the preparations were only half-hearted, and not by any means adequate should his warning turn out to be well-founded. He, therefore, realised with a sinking heart that he and Grant would have to play a lone hand if their suspicions developed into facts.

About four o'clock on the afternoon of the twenty-fourth the taxi-driver arrived, and a little over an hour later a messenger raced up on a bicycle, bearing an official-looking envelope in his hand. Martin took it, and glanced rapidly over the contents.

"This is from Whitehall!" he said joyfully, reaching for his hat. "They want me without a second's delay, so perhaps they're waking up. For Heaven's sake, Grant, keep your eyes and ears open till I return! If those blackguards succeed in—"

"They won't!" replied his companion confidently. "I'll shoot at sight, and consider myself quite justified in doing so!"

"Right! Then here are my keys, in case anyone should try to pick my pocket on the way!"

Grant heard the front door click to as he lay back in his chair and fixed his eyes on the small safe built into the wall, which might hold all that stood between the safety or destruction of the metropolis.

Yet, although he knew that the safe was pronounced burglar-proof, and that the Ray apparatus, in turn, was contained in a steel-bound, double-locked box, Grant could not shake off a strange sense of impending danger which persistently forced itself upon him.

Finally, the sensation became so acute that he sprang from his chair, and, drawing Martin's keys from his pocket, crossed towards the safe door.

"Got to do something, or I'll go dotty!" he murmured, as he heard the bolts shoot back. "I've noticed that feeling before, and it usually spells trouble!"

Unlocking the steel box, he carefully drew out the precious apparatus, replacing it with some heavily-bound volumes from a bookshelf. Then he relocked the casket and safe in turn. The Ray itself he wrapped in a travelling-rug, and laid it carelessly on the sofa.

"That's better!" he muttered, resuming his seat. "Secure as the Bank of England! I guess nobody suspects that rug when there's a safe in the room!"

It seemed, however, as though his fears were not to be realised, for nearly an hour passed uneventfully, and he never felt fitter nor more alert in his life.

He drew his chair closer to the table, and picked up a magazine. Soon becoming interested in the contents, in spite of himself, he did not notice that the window-blind, which was almost directly opposite, fluttered slightly, although the night was quite

sultry and windless for the time of the year. Nor did he see the pair of gleaming eyes which peered through the lacework at the bottom and took swift stock of everything in the room, finally resting upon the safe with an exultant glitter.

In fact, Grant noticed nothing at all until a stream of some powerful-smelling liquid shot from the window and struck him full between the eyes; then the hand containing the water-pistol was withdrawn like lightning.

Half-blinded and gasping for breath, the chauffeur sprang from his chair, took a couple of wavering strides forward, and crashed to the floor in a huddled heap.

Then the window-sash was softly raised, and a figure climbed swiftly over the sill.

When Grant recovered consciousness it was to find Martin bending over him, bathing his temples in cold water as he stared down with an expression of stupefied horror on his face.

The safe door stood open, its burglar-proof (?) lock having been cleverly picked, and the steel-bound casket had vanished.

"Look!" breathed Martin, hardly able to frame the word. "They've been one too many for us! I've been knocking for Heaven knows how long, and—and then I found the window open—"

"The call to Whitehall was a blind, then?"

"The inventor's teeth came together with a snap."

"Yes!"

"I thought there might be a possibility of it," said Grant calmly, glancing towards the sofa. "But unwrap that rug there, and I think you'll find that our side wins the odd trick!"

And so they did. The simple ruse had succeeded perfectly.

The 5th Chapter.

Anxious Moments—The Coming of the Air-Raiders.

London was pursuing its usual daily round. Taxis, buses, and tram-cars moved along the broad thoroughfares; business-men, shoppers, and idlers crowded the pavements; big emporiums were doing their customary big trade, and everything tended to give the great city a bright atmosphere, in which the brilliant sunshine played no small part. Certainly there was no suggestion of uneasiness, much less actual panic, as there might have been not so many years ago when one never knew the moment a bomb would tear a pit in those fine roadways or demolish some magnificent building, and leave it a mass of smoking ruins.

The morning and afternoon of the twenty-fifth dragged through without incident; then, as evening closed in, came the first shock to the all-too-confident officials at Whitehall. A hurried message flashed across space from the East Coast, saying that a large fleet of planes and dirigibles had passed overhead from the sea, heading inland and flying very high. Did headquarters know anything about them?

But headquarters didn't—that is, they knew nothing except what had been contained in Martin's warning—and they felt as though the ground were about to open beneath their feet. Frantically they summoned the man whose words they had recently received so sceptically, and when Martin learned the fateful tidings Grant's taxi had just pulled up outside the door. No time was lost in transferring the Ray from the house to the cab, and the inventor sprang in.

"Make for somewhere near the Palace!" he said, in hoarse tones. "That will likely be the centre of the attack! I'm not going to waste time at Whitehall!"

Grant threw in the clutch, and the taxi tore away on its errand. Speed-limits became obsolete, so far as he was concerned, yet more than half a dozen times he was obliged to slow down in order to avoid dashing into the huge, excited crowds which thronged the streets. The secret had leaked out, as secrets are wont to do, and all London seemed astir, scanning the heavens with anxious eyes, set in white, upturned faces.

Whether these delays had taken up more time than either Grant or Martin had guessed, or whether the air-fleet had been assisted by a strong following breeze which could not be felt below, will never be known; but, whatever the cause, the few sweeping searchlights found the vanguard of the Zeppelins before the taxi had covered three-quarters of the distance to the Royal residence.

Something struck the roadway fifty yards in front of the cab, and burst with an appalling roar, tearing a deep pit in the earth. Grant clapped on the brakes, and steered the taxi down a side street.

The unexpected had happened. London was once more the target of the "baby-killers"!

The 6th Chapter.

The Triumph of the Ray—Conclusion.

"Get me an open space!" cried Martin, leaning out of the cab window. "The houses are too tall here! Quick, man—quick, before half the city's destroyed!"

All around the air was quivering with the explosion of bursting bombs. One great gasbag—that of an improved "Lanz" type of airship—was struck by a lucky shell from one of the few anti-aircraft guns which were being manned, and torn to shreds. It fluttered down and rested on the roof of a big hotel, covering it like a pall.

The Nelson Column, in Trafalgar Square, was grazed and badly chipped, one of the great lions at the base disappearing into a cloud of gritty dust-particles.

The docks suffered very heavily, and the Tower Bridge was partially destroyed; but the greatest loss of life, it was afterwards ascertained, occurred in the neighbourhood of Westminster Abbey. Two of the raiders had apparently singled out that historic pile as their particular target, and subjected it to a pitiless bombardment.

One of the beautiful towers was riven in twain, the nave destroyed, and hundreds of innocent souls in the huge throng congregated round about were buried in an avalanche of falling masonry and debris.

The underground refuges were not so numerous or accommodating as those in use during the war, and when at length the reality of the situation was forced upon the populace, cellars and vaults were soon packed tight; thus, a great many were forced to remain in the open, or run the risk of being crushed to death whilst seeking safety beneath the street-level.

St. Paul's also, and many other sacred edifices seemed to have the same attraction for the miscreants as had those in Belgium and Northern France during the enemy occupation before November, 1918, for each came in for its share, though, with the single exception of the Abbey, scarcely any damage was done or lives lost.

As Martin had predicted, however, the main fleet seemed to hover in the vicinity of Buckingham Palace, for the great building was bearing the brunt of a furious bombardment as the taxi shot into an open square, which was quite deserted and commanded an uninterrupted view. Fortunately, though, the royal party had been prevailed upon, when the first definite news of the coming attack was received, to leave the danger zone, and speedy motor-cars were now rushing them to a place of safety.

The taxi slid to a standstill, and Martin sprang out, hugging his precious apparatus tightly. His eyes burned with a strange light, his hands were trembling with excitement, and he seemed to see nothing of Grant or the couple of stray witnesses who had chanced to arrive on the scene, and had halted, their own personal danger overcome by curiosity at the antics of the strange man—a daring Press photographer evidently, with some new-fangled camera for night work.

Grant held his breath, afraid to utter a syllable. Martin, by a supreme effort, had recovered his self-control, and his hands were as steady as rocks as he rested the Ray on the bonnet of the taxi, and stared into the range-finder.

"Half—no—nearly three-quarters of a mile!" he muttered, pressing two of the buttons simultaneously. The pencil of violet light shot upwards from the lens, darting towards the clouds at an angle of forty-five degrees.

Three huge Zeppelins in line were hovering above the Palace, still raining down destruction, when the Ray found the first one, and Grant gave a violent shudder, closing his eyes in spite of himself.

Swift as light, the violet shaft swept the great gasbag from stem to stern, the hydrogen in each of its several compartments dissolving instantly, and the aluminium casing collapsing inwards like a crushed egg-shell. Robbed of all support, the Zeppelin crashed to earth, and, amid a fearful pandemonium of wondering voices and bursting cargoes of explosives, which wrecked scores of houses; the other two followed suit in a like manner.

"Grant! Grant! You see? You believe?"



(If you are in need of any advice concerning health and general fitness write to "The Health Editor," The BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. All queries will be personally answered by Mr. Longhurst. Seize this opportunity of securing first-rate information and advice FREE!)

Flat Foot.

I'm told—thank goodness, I've never had the trouble myself!—that the pain and feeling of awful weariness which are the results of what is called "Flat Foot" are about as distressing a misfortune as anyone can have. Anyone is liable to it, though girls are the worse sufferers—because they're so fond of wearing boots and shoes with high heels. Policemen, too, are often the victims, on account of the lot of standing about they have to do. Anyway, I should be sorry for any of the readers of these notes to get it, so I'm going to tell you the way to avoid it.

Exercise, a great deal of walking, doesn't cause flat foot, although there are some persons who get hold of the idea that the reverse is the fact. Walking a great deal can't produce flat foot, because walking gives plenty of exercise to the muscles of the legs, and flat foot to a very large extent is due to the want of development of certain of the leg muscles, caused by want of exercise. These muscles, being undeveloped, can't hold up the bones of the instep, the falling of which is flat foot; and when that has happened it takes a long time and a lot of trouble to effect a cure. Standing gives no exercise to the muscles, which explains why policemen and shop assistants are so often the victims. Postmen don't get it.

Walk a lot; run a lot; exercise the leg muscles by lifting the body on the toes, and flat foot isn't likely to come your way.

If the trouble does develop, don't wait a few years before trying to cure it. By that time the mischief will have been done. When it does come you'll know all about it. The foot is painful all over, there are pains about the ankles, and the victim "feels ready to drop"—as if standing up were an impossibility.

When it comes, don't spend money on buying metal foot-supports. These

can't cure the trouble. They simply take the place of and do the work of the undeveloped muscles. The result is the complaint gets worse than ever, though they do provide relief from the pain. But it is a cure that is wanted. Exercise gives that cure.

I have said, "Lift the body on the toes." It is fine exercise for the legs. Do it fifty times night and morning; but if you have flat foot, do a little more. With hands on hips, rise on the toes, lifting heels as high as possible. Lower the heels and then try to lift the toes upwards as far as they will go. The combination of these two exercises produces a kind of rocking movement, and it should be continued until the muscles fairly tire.

Cumberland and Westmoreland Wrestling.

Of the various throws the back heel is the easiest. You simply place your left heel behind your opponent's right heel, low down, hold him as tightly as possible, and try to throw him over backwards.

The same move, made use of immediately your opponent tries to lift you bodily in his arms, is called an outside click, and it is astonishing how easy it is to throw a chap this way.

With the inside click, instead of placing your left leg behind your opponent's right leg, you thrust it inside, twisting your limbs well round his, hooking his leg, and rushing him over backwards.

For the cross-buttock you get your arms up high, turn in your left arm up high, turn in your left arm across your opponent's ship, and cut his legs from under him at the same moment as you give his head and shoulders a sharp twist around to your right.

(Another splendid Health and Exercise article in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

Martin's eyes were shining like stars as he turned for a moment, pointing upwards with a quivering forefinger. But Grant could not answer; he could only stare as one who has just awakened from some extraordinary dream.

There was a lull in the bombardment, though the sky-guns still barked away intermittently. Evidently the raiders had suddenly realised how ignominiously their agents had failed, and that the Ray was still intact.

Martin swept the apparatus round, altered the range a trifle, and focused it on another Zeppelin away towards the west. Down she came, like a huge phoasant that had fallen to some giant sporting-rifle, a reverberating roar from behind the tall houses announcing her collision with the earth. Suddenly Grant started, and uttered a warning cry.

"Look! Look to your right!"

A big plane—something like a Fokker, but rather larger—against which the Ray would be absolutely useless, was sweeping straight towards them, its pilot evidently having located their position. Martin's face blanched for an instant, then it cleared as he noticed something else.

The plane had been seen by a British aviator, who was dashing for it at an angle, swift as lightning. The two machines met with an appalling crash, and fell less than twenty yards away—a ghastly mass of splintered wreckage.

Grant possessed a remarkably good set of nerves, but this was too much. He covered his face with his hands and shuddered. London was realising with a vengeance what "Peace" meant, that memorable night of the twenty-fifth!

But the tide of battle had turned. Leaving the airships to the tender mercies of the Ray, British flying-men had engaged the enemy planes, and the air was filled with the faint crackle of machine-gun fire as they circled round and round each other at a high altitude, like boxers sparring for an opening. The remnants of the Zeppelin fleet, some half a dozen in all, were turning tail for home—routed and demoralised.

But Martin's work was not finished yet. Round swung the Ray, and another great gasbag collapsed, to be followed a few moments later by a

second. A third was immediately over the Houses of Parliament when the shaft found it; and the big crowd thronging Westminster Bridge beheld a sight that would live in memory for all time.

The huge mass descended straight upon the famous clock-tower, blotting out Big Ben from sight, whilst the curs, breaking away from their supports, fortunately missed the Terrace by a narrow margin, and plunged into the Thames with a terrific splash.

The Ray pursued the other, but with scarcely any success. They were almost out of range by now, only a portion of the hindmost feeling the influence. About a fourth of her balloonettes succumbed, but it was not quite enough; she still continued her journey, wobbling like a wounded bird, until she was lost in the gloom.

So ended Germany's last great raid—a raid which would certainly have proved completely successful but for the Martin Ray. As it was, the damage done would take many months to repair—some of it, indeed, could never be—but infinitely more terrible were the scores of innocent lives which had been sacrificed in that final mad attempt at revenge.

No feeling of jealousy troubled Grant when he took up his newspaper a few mornings later and learned that Jack Martin had been honoured by the King; for, though Grant himself had not received a knighthood—he wouldn't have known what to do with it!—the great part he had played in the affair had not been overlooked, and—well, he was not likely to die in poverty.

"There's only one thing I'm sorry about," he said, when he chanced to meet his old friend and colleague, Detective-Inspector North, of the C.I.D., a few weeks later, "and that is, you hadn't a look in this time!"

"Don't worry!" North replied, with a laugh. "Too many cooks, you know! Besides, perhaps I had a little finger in the pie, too. Your bomb-throwing gentlemen will be up for trial on Tuesday. No, I can't spare the time to explain now. Some other day, old chap!"

THE END.

(Make a point of reading "The Affair of the Poisoned Camp" in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

A SPLENDID TALE OF JIMMY SILVER, KIT ERROLL, AND THE "KID."



MORNINGTON'S ATONEMENT

A GRAND YARN OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL,
By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter. Parted Chums!

"The Head looks downhearted, doesn't he, Morny?" Jimmy Silver made that remark. He was standing at the window in the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood, looking out into the quadrangle. Mornington was lounging idly in the window-seat, his hands in his pockets, and a frown on his brow. Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, had just come into sight in the quad, crossing from the school gates. Jimmy's cheery face clouded slightly as he glanced down at him. There was no doubt that the Head looked "downhearted," as the captain of the Fourth expressed it. His brow was wrinkled, his proud old head drooped a little—a strange contrast to Dr. Chisholm's usual stately looks.

"That affair worrying him no end, I believe, went on Jimmy Silver. "It's rotten!" "Eh?" Mornington glanced up. "What affair?" "I think he's been over to Rookham this morning," said Jimmy. "You know that young nipper they call the Kid is charged with the robbery at Rookwood last week—"

"He's guilty!" snapped Mornington. "I know. But after the way he gave himself up, to get Erroll out of an awful scrape, a chap can't help feeling sorry for him," said Jimmy. "The Head doesn't like appearing against him, that's pretty plain. I believe he was up before the Rookham magistrate this morning." Morny made an impatient gesture. "I don't see why the Head should worry!" he said. "Not that I care a rap! Bother the Head!" Jimmy stared at him. "Look here, Morny—"

"Oh, rot!" growled Mornington moodily. He rose from the window-seat, and strode away up the Fourth Form passage. Jimmy Silver cast an expressive glance after him, but made no rejoinder.

Mornington stopped at the door and lifted his hand to the handle, and then paused.

Within the study there was audible the sound of footsteps. Kit Erroll, his study-mate, was there, and the regular, ceaseless footfalls showed that Erroll was pacing the study. For some minutes Valentine Mornington hesitated outside.

Then, with a sudden resolution, he threw open the door, and entered the study.

Erroll's pacing to and fro stopped. He stood by the table, and his eyes fixed upon Mornington, but he did not speak.

Morny closed the door. "Well?" he said. "Well," answered Erroll coldly. "Are you keeping it up?" "Keeping what up?"

Mornington gave an angry shrug of the shoulders. Erroll turned quietly to the window.

"Look here, Erroll," said Mornington, in a low voice. "I've admitted that I was in the wrong. I'm sorry I gave you away to the Head—about that miserable little wretch, the Kid—I'm sorry for what's happened. You know that. Can't you—can't you get over it?"

There was a pause before Erroll answered. "I don't bear you any malice, Morny. You know that. But—" "But what?"

"But I can't forget the harm you've

done," said Erroll quietly. "You can't expect me to forget that. You know that that little wretch the Kid is in a prison-cell at Rookham now—"

"He's a thief!" said Mornington sullenly. "I know. But—" "He robbed the school—cracked the Head's safe, just like any other cracksmen. Inspector Sharpe arrested him. What else was he to do?"

"The inspector did only his duty. I don't blame him. But I had told you about the Kid. You knew that he was right. You know that I was trying to make him understand better things—that I was trying to save him, because he saved my life and—" "I never believed—"

"You never believed there was any good in the poor kid," said Erroll. "You knew he risked his life to save mine—a stranger's—I had told you. But you wouldn't believe there was any good in him. I had succeeded

It's not easy to do it now. I've asked yours, Erroll."

Erroll made a weary gesture. "I've told you I don't bear any malice, Morny. I'm trying to feel the same as before—"

"But you don't?" "Another pause."

"I can't!" said Erroll at last, moodily. "Later on, perhaps—I—I hope we shall always be friends, Morny. I never want anything different. But—but while that kid is in prison, I can't help thinking of the harm you've done. I tell you I'd made him see something better—I'd made him understand that he could lead a new life. And now everything is ruined. He's in prison; he won't see freedom again for years, and by that time what will he be? He might have been saved, and made into an honest man. Now he's ruined for life. And it's your doing—your doing! You couldn't keep your temper in control, and that poor kid's got to pay for it with a ruined life. That's what



A CRACKSMAN AT ROOKWOOD! Erroll was upon the man with one bound, and the moustache came away in his grasp, showing the startled face of Baldwin Sleath, the man wanted by the police of many countries!

with him. I'd made him see that I was right, I'd made him agree to give up his wretched ways, and keep clear of Baldwin Sleath and his gang. He handed me the stolen property to bring back to the school—and then—then—" Erroll's voice trembled. "Oh, Morny!"

"I thought you were getting yourself into trouble for a young rascal. I—" muttered Mornington.

"No doubt! You couldn't take my word. You couldn't make any allowance for a little kid who had had everything against him. Then Mr. Sharpe found me with the loot in my hands, and I should have been in custody instead of the Kid at this moment, but for his generosity. He came here and gave himself up to save me. Would he have done that if he hadn't been good and honourable at heart?"

"I'm sorry!" muttered Morny. "How was I to know? I—I was bitter. I was in a rotten temper. I admit it! I—I dare say the Kid is a decent little chap in his way, though he's been brought up a thief. After he gave himself up, I'd have done anything to—undo what I'd done. You know I'm sorry?"

"Yes, I know." "Well, then, can't you get over it?" said Mornington. "I'm not a chap to humble himself easily. I've never asked pardon before of anybody.

it comes to. You can't expect me to forget that all at once."

"Then we're not friends any longer?" said Mornington, in a low voice.

"We're friends," said Erroll wearily; "but—" "I understand."

Mornington left the study without another word.

Erroll looked after him. As the door closed he made a step, and his lips parted, as if to call back his wayward chum. But he checked himself. Many a time the Rookwood fellows had wondered how Erroll could tolerate Morny's uncertain temper and his wayward wilfulness. But Erroll's loyal friendship had never wavered. But now—The strain had reached breaking-point at last.

For Erroll could not help thinking of the hapless wretch, forlorn and desolate, in a prison-cell at Rookham—the wretch he had sought to save from crime and prison—whom he had saved and brought to better ways, when the iron grasp of the law descended suddenly upon him. It was Morny's doing—his passionate, wayward temper had undone all that Erroll had striven so hard to accomplish.

And there was a bar now between the chums. It could not be helped. Kit Erroll could forgive, but he could not forget!

The 2nd Chapter.

The Cracksmen's Vengeance!

Tap! "Come in!" said Dr. Chisholm wearily.

It was growing dusky in the Head's study—the sun was setting behind the old Rookwood beeches, and some of the windows of the School House were already gleaming with lights. But in the Head's study it was dusky. Dr. Chisholm sat there in deep and painful thought, while the shadows fell, till he was roused by the tap at his door.

It was Tupper, the page, who presented himself in the doorway.

"Gentleman to see you, sir," said Tupper. "Mr. Smith, sir!"

The Head made a gesture. "I can see no one now, Tupper, I—"

"Gentleman says it's important, sir; he's come about the prison charged with the burglary at Rookham, sir," said Tupper.

Dr. Chisholm started.

"Oh! In that case you may admit him."

"Yes, sir!"

Tupper retired, and the Head touched the switch of the electric-light. The study was brightly lighted when Mr. Smith was shown in, and Tupper backed out and closed the door after him.

Dr. Chisholm bowed courteously to his visitor, his glance lingering on the man's heavily bearded face.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Smith! You have—"

"We meet again, Dr. Chisholm!"

The Head started violently.

"Good heavens! Baldwin Sleath!" he exclaimed.

He started to his feet.

His hand groped for the bell, but at the same moment a revolver glittered in the electric-light.

"Let that bell alone, Dr. Chisholm!" said Baldwin Sleath in a cold, quiet voice.

"Villain! You—"

Why did you tell me that wicked falsehood?"

Baldwin Sleath grinned again. "You know now that it was false?" he said.

"I know."

"I had a purpose," said the cracksmen coolly. "For the wrong you did me in the old days—"

I did you no wrong, said the Head steadily. "I gave up to justice a thief and villain, who was seeking to fasten his own guilt upon an innocent man. Much as I have suffered from your revenge, I would not hesitate to do the same again!"

Sleath shrugged his shoulders. "You have suffered," he said, "but the end is not yet. Your son was trained to follow in my footsteps. I told you that, and it was true. But that was not all. I told you he was in Borstal, arrested and condemned. That was false. It was told you to blind you to the truth—till it was too late—"

"I do not understand."

"Last week the school was robbed."

"Well?"

"It was robbed by the Kid—my pupil!" The cracksmen grinned.

"An apt pupil. I had taught him well, and he was a credit to my teaching. I brought him here. I planned the robbery, and he carried it out with—"

"You will pay for your villainy."

"After the robbery I was to meet him in his hiding place in the wood, and take charge of the loot. I did not meet him!"

"I know that you deserted him. The plunder has been recovered," said the Head coldly. "That, at least, you have lost."

"That was my intention," smiled the cracksmen. "I left him with the loot—unfriended—not knowing what to do or which way to turn. He could only wait and wait, till at last the police found him—"

"They did not find him. He gave himself up to save a noble boy who had befriended him, and who was suspected of being his accomplice in consequence—"

Baldwin Sleath shrugged his shoulders.

"The more fool he!" he answered. "But he would have been taken, for if the police had failed to track him out, I should have contrived to convey the necessary information to them in some way—"

"But why? Why should even so abandoned a villain as you betray your own tool and confederate and lose your plunder?" exclaimed the Head.

"You cannot guess?"

"No."

"Ah! You are losing your keenness, my dear Chisholm," smiled the cracksmen. "Think of it! I told you that your son was a prisoner in Borstal; it was to keep your mind from chancing on the truth. But for that, you might have suspected who the Kid was—"

The Head started.

"Who he was?" he repeated slowly.

"Can you guess now? A boy, the age that your son would be by this time, and a pupil of Baldwin Sleath!" said the cracksmen mockingly. "Ah! You are dull!"

"My son?" panted the Head.

"Your son!" Baldwin Sleath smiled again, and showed his teeth through the thick beard. "Your son! That was my revenge. Your son has robbed you, and you have sent him to prison! I have blinded you till it was too late. You cannot save him now. He lies in a prison-cell—and it is you who have sent him there! This day you have given evidence as to the robbery, at his examination before the Rookham magistrates. You understand now?"

The Head did not speak.

He sat like one turned to stone, staring at the wretch before him with wild eyes.

He did not doubt.

He knew it was the truth. He knew that the wretched, the wretched wretch whom Erroll had sought to save, was his son. He knew it now. Why had he not known him when the unhappy boy stood in his presence, with the inspector's hand on his shoulder, the handcuffs on his wrists? The voice of Nature had been silent. He had felt pity, compassion; but he had not known—

How could he have known? Ten years had passed. The child that had been stolen had changed so much; the little, lisping child had become the sturdy boy—and in his tattered clothes, his face grimed, how could his father have known him? He could not—and yet now he knew it was true—it was his son who had stood in his presence with the handcuffs clinking on his wrists. His son, whom he would have died to save, and whom now he had sent to a felon's cell!

"I have come to have a few words with you, my dear Chisholm." The cracksmen grinned over the thick false beard that disguised him. "You did not expect another call from me."

Dr. Chisholm sank back into his chair.

His eyes were fixed on the cracksmen's mocking, sardonic face.

Now that he examined him closely in the light he could recognise the man in spite of the disguise of beard and moustache and false eyebrows.

"You may put down your revolver," said the Head coldly. "I do not fear it, Baldwin Sleath!"

"Keep your hand from that bell," said the cracksmen. "I had a narrow escape when I came a week ago. This time I do not intend to fly for my safety. I am master of the situation now!"

"Why have you come?" The Head's voice was cold and contemptuous. "You have gained admission by a lie," he went on. "When you came here before you lied—lied like the villain you are. You told me that my son, the child you stole from me and trained to your own wicked ways, was in Borstal Prison under a false name. You told me that to torture me. You lied—you lied! Every inquiry has been made, and there is no boy in that prison who answers in the least description of my Cyril—no one who could possibly be my lost son."

Baldwin Sleath watched him. He had expected an outburst of passionate grief and anger; but the unhappy man was beyond that.

He sat in silence, only the working of his kind old face telling of the bitter misery within.

It was the cracksmen who broke the silence. "You believe me?" "I believe you!" said the Head dully.

"You know it is too late to save your son!" "I know."

"And you have nothing to say?" The Head's lips trembled. "Heaven forgive you for what you have done!" he said in a faltering voice.

"Go! Go from my sight! Go!" Baldwin Sleath thrust the revolver into his pocket. He did not need it now.

The ruffian turned to the door. Dr. Chisholm sat still, like a man of stone, his head sinking upon his trembling hands.

"My son! My boy!" he whispered. The door closed.

And then suddenly there came a rush of feet in the corridor, a cry, a sound of struggling, a ringing shot.

The 3rd Chapter. Mornington's Chance! "By gad, the Kid!" Mornington breathed the words.

It was deep dusk in Coombe Lane. The gates of Rookwood had been closed for the night; but Valentine Mornington was still out of gates.

The dandy of the Fourth was not thinking of call-over or lock-up. He was tramping slowly along the dusky lane, his hands driven deep into his pockets, his eyes troubled under his bent brows.

His break with Erroll troubled him miserably. True, Erroll was still his friend. His generous heart could forgive an injury—even the injury that Morny's wayward, jealous temper had wrought.

It was not resentment Erroll felt, but grief, and that was the bitterest of all to Mornington. Angry resentment he could have faced; he could have repaid it with anger and mockery.

But it was not that. His chum was trying to feel the same as of old, and he could not.

Mornington repented, but his repentance came too late. He was thinking—thinking miserably—trying to think of some way in which he could repair his fault; but he could think of nothing.

The hapless victim of his hasty resentment was behind prison walls. He could not help him there.

What could he do? How could he win again the friendship he had sacrificed?

A rustle in the thicket by the lane caused him to look up, and he started violently as a dusky face looked out at him for a moment.

Mornington's eyes almost started from his head. It was the Kid!

The hapless wail whom he had supposed in a cell in Rookham Prison—against whom the Head had been called upon to give evidence only that morning—was before him!

Mornington wondered for a moment whether he was dreaming.

The face vanished at once. There was a hurried step in the thickets. Morny ran to the roadside, and called: "Kid! Stop! Stop, for Heaven's sake! Stop!"

The rustle ceased. Mornington plunged into the thicket.

His heart was beating. The Kid was there—the wail who had given himself up to justice, to save Erroll from suspicion—he was there, free! It was clear that he must have escaped, and, like a flash, there came into Mornington's mind the thought that this was his chance—his chance that he had longed for, to repair the wrong he had done to his chum.

He ran breathlessly into the thickets, calling: "Come back! Come back! I know you—I'm your friend—Erroll's friend! Come back! I will help you!"

"You're a pal of the gov'nor's?" "Erroll, do you mean? Yes."

"I've seen you together," said the Kid, still watching distrustfully. "But you ain't no friend of mine! You know what I am."

"I know. But—" "You ain't goin' to give me away, then?" whispered the Kid.

"They're after me!" He shivered, and bent his head to listen. "I dodged them on the Latcham road. I borrowed a bike that was outside a fence—"

He broke off sharply. "I ain't stole it—I swear I ain't! I loft it on the road where it could be found, after I got clear—"

"You—you've escaped—"

The Kid grinned faintly in the gloom. "I reckon so," he answered. "I've been in the hands of cops afore, and I got away! This time I managed it. You should 'ave seen me scuttling down the pipe from the window! But they spotted me and got after me. I had a run for it!"

"Do they know you've come this way?" "I reckon not. I got the bike, and I left it on the Latcham road. I reckon they'll think I skulked into Latcham after dark. I cut across country this way, through the woods!"

The Kid breathed hard; he was evidently exhausted. "I reckoned p'raps I'd get into touch with the gov'nor agin. It was to save him that I give myself up, and I know he'd lend me a hand if he could. I—I thought it might be him when you came along. I've been watching the lane."

"I understand," Mornington breathed hard; his eyes were shining. "Thank Heaven I've met you!"

The Kid watched him curiously. "I ain't here to do the young gentleman any harm," he said. "I don't want him to take risks for me. But—but I know he'd give me some food, and I could hide in the wood till it was safe to clear."

"He would help you, if he knew," said Mornington quietly. "And I'm going to help you, Kid."

"You?" "Yes. I'm Erroll's chum. He's told me about you." Mornington did not add that, in his unreasoning jealousy of Erroll's new friend, he had betrayed the secret.

There was no need to tell that. "I'm going to help you, Kid. You can trust me!" "It's risky, sir!" muttered the Kid. "I know the gov'nor would take the risk. You see, I got him out of the river, and one good turn deserves another. But you—I ain't done nothing for you!"

"Never mind that! I've got to save you—I've got to! You're not a bad sort, I know that. Only a decent fellow would have done what you did, when you came and gave yourself up for Erroll's sake. And—and Erroll says you've changed."

"Selp me!" whispered the Kid earnestly. "I never had a chance, sir, not till the gov'nor—Master Erroll—took me in hand. Nobody ever talked to me like that afore. I never had a friend to help me, except Sleath and his gang. I never had a chance! But—but since the gov'nor's done what he did for me, it's different. I tell you, I'm hungry now—I'm hungry! But there was farms on my way here, and I could have stole, but I ain't touched anything! I'll die first!"

Mornington felt a pang at his heart. The wretched wail was a fugitive from justice. It was a serious matter to help him in his flight. But surely it could not be so very wrong to help a repentant sinner. And the unhappy boy had been more sinned against than sinning.

Mornington did not hesitate. Right or wrong, he would repair the fault he had committed, by saving this boy Erroll had tried to save.

He reflected rapidly. "You've got to hide," he said at last. "You must have food and a change of clothes, but at present you must hide till the hue-and-cry is over. I'm going to hide you. I know a safe place. Come with me!"

"Where?" muttered the Kid. "To the school."

The Kid started back. "The school?" "Yes," whispered Mornington. "That's the safest place. They'll never think of looking for you inside the walls of Rookwood School. There's a safe place, in the abbey ruins. You're not afraid to be shut up in a vault?"

The Kid grinned. "I reckon I'd be glad to get into it, sir, jest at present, and the darker and lonelier the better. But—" "Then come with me!"

Mornington seized the Kid's arm, and led him away. The wail submitted without resistance. They did not emerge into the lane. By wood

and field Mornington led him on, in the deepest shadows, till the walls of Rookwood loomed through the gloom in the distance.

"We've got to climb the wall," whispered Mornington, halting. "We shall have to get across the road. I'll go first, and I'll whistle if all's clear. Catch on?"

"Yes, gov'nor!" "Wait here then."

The Kid waited in the deep shadows and Mornington cut across to the school wall, under the trees that overhung from within. He looked up and down the dark, silent road, and then clambered quickly up the wall. Within, all was dark and silent.

Mornington whistled softly. A shadow darted across the road—it was only visible for a moment. Then a hand reached up to Mornington on the wall.

Another moment, and the Kid was on the wall beside him, under the heavy branches. "Come on!" whispered Mornington.

He dropped within the wall, and the Kid followed. Keeping in the deepest shadows, Mornington led the way to the ruined abbey—at a distance from the school buildings.

Ten minutes later, Valentine Mornington presented himself calmly in his Form-master's study, to receive a hundred lines for missing evening call-over. He smiled as he left the study.

The 4th Chapter. By His Own Hand! "Jimmy!"

Kit Erroll opened the door of the end study and looked in. The Fistical Four were all there at prep. But they "chucked" prep as Erroll's pale and excited face appeared in the doorway.

Jimmy Silver jumped up. "Hallo! What's the row?" he asked. Erroll was breathing hard.

"I want your help," he said. "Jimmy! You remember—last week—a man came here—a villain named Baldwin Sleath, to see the Head—and he was chased, and escaped—"

"Yes, yes!" "He's come again!" "My only hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"But, dash it all, he wouldn't have the nerve!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, doubtfully. "The rascal is known here now, Erroll. He would be collared as soon as he put a foot inside the place!"

"I tell you he has come!" "You've seen him?" asked Baby. "Yes!"

"Where?" asked Newcome. "He's in the Head's study now!" "But—" said Jimmy Silver. Erroll interrupted him.

"Listen to me! I tell you I know the man. He is in disguise now. He's got a false beard and eyebrows; but I know him. I know every line of his wicked face—every line!"

"How the thump do you know him so jolly well?" demanded Lovell. "We've only seen him once, and then for a few minutes."

Erroll smiled bitterly. "I knew him long ago," he said. "You fellows know what happened to me before I came to Rookwood. I—I fell among thieves—"

"We know, old fellow," said Jimmy Silver softly. "Baldwin Sleath was one of that gang," said Erroll. "I knew him—knew him only too well. He is in disguise now. Why he has come, I cannot guess, unless he intends harm to the Head. But I tell you I know the man. He came in. He gave his name to Tupper, as Smith. Tupper did not know him again, but the instant my eyes fell upon him, I knew

him, for all his cunning disguise—I knew him well, I tell you!" Jimmy Silver eyed Erroll a little doubtfully.

Erroll was in excited earnest, but the junior read the doubt in the face of the Fourth Form captain. "You don't believe—"

"Well," said Jimmy slowly, "you—you see, we don't want to make any mistake. If he's with the Head—"

"I want you to come with me," said Erroll. "He may do some harm to Dr. Chisholm. Heaven knows what his purpose may be in coming here. But, in any case, I intend to seize him as he comes out of the study."

"But—" "I should go to Bulkeley, but—but he might not believe me," said Erroll quietly. "You can help me or not, as you choose; but my mind's made up!"

He turned and left the end study. "Phew!" murmured Lovell. The Fistical Four looked at one another dubiously.

"I—I suppose Erroll knows!" said Jimmy Silver slowly. "If—if it's the man really, we're bound to lend a hand in collaring him. He came here before—he might come again. And—and it's come out that it was Sleath who had a hand in making that poor little wretch, the Kid, into what he was. The villain ought to be taken and—"

"But—" "Let's go!" said Jimmy resolutely. "Erroll seems to be certain about it, and we're bound to back him up. It's his look-out if he's made a mistake!"

"Right-ho!" Jimmy Silver & Co followed Erroll from the study. Erroll was already going down the staircase. The Fistical Four hurried after him.

"You're backing me up?" asked Erroll. "Yes, you're sure—" "I am quite sure!"

"Then we're game!" said Jimmy Silver. The five juniors hurried on into the corridor that led to Dr. Chisholm's study. They trod lightly along the corridor, their hearts beating. From the study there came a faint murmur of voices as they drew near to the door.

Someone was with the Head—but was it Baldwin Sleath? The cracksmen had come before—had he come again? Erroll's face was grimly set. It was evident that he had no doubts.

The five juniors waited. Bulkeley of the Sixth came along the corridor and stopped and looked at them.

"What are you fags doing here?" he asked. "Erroll thinks—" began Jimmy Silver.

"There's a man with the Head now," said Lovell. "Baldwin Sleath has come here again," said Erroll quietly. "He's with the Head, Bulkeley."

The Rookwood captain started. "Erroll! Are you sure—what—" "He's coming."

The door of the Head's study opened. A heavily-bearded man stepped quickly out into the corridor, closing the door after him. The next moment his eyes fell on the group in the corridor. Before he could make a movement Erroll sprang upon him.

His sudden grasp tore at the beard, and it came off in his hand. The hard, startled face of Baldwin Sleath was revealed.

"It's Sleath!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Collar him!"

The cracksmen sprang back, his eyes glittering savagely, his hand thrusting into his pocket for his weapon. But Bulkeley was upon him the same moment, and the juniors leaped at him like wolves.

With a crash the ruffian came to the floor. "Down him!" "Collar him!"

The cracksmen struggled furiously in the grasp of many hands. He was struggling to drag out his revolver, and had he succeeded, there would have been murder done outside the Head's study at Rookwood. But he did not succeed. And suddenly, as he struggled, there came a deafening report—a fearful cry—and the cracksmen's resistance suddenly ceased.

"Good heavens!" panted Bulkeley. The ruffian's weapon had exploded—half-drawn. And the terrible pallor that spread over his face, the sudden ceasing of his fierce struggles, told that the bullet had lodged in his own body.

The Head's door opened. Dr. Chisholm—pale, worn, strangely old in look—glanced out into the corridor.

He started, as he saw the group of breathless Rookwooders—and the figure that lay on the floor, with a

pool of blood slowly forming by its side, its pallid face upturned.

"Good heavens!" breathed the Head. "What has happened?" "It is Baldwin Sleath, sir," said Bulkeley huskily, "the cracksmen."

"I know! He came here to—to—but what—" The Head broke off. "He tried to draw a pistol, and it must have exploded in his pocket, sir," said Bulkeley. "I—I'm afraid he—"

"It is the judgment of Heaven!" said the Head quietly. He bent over the wretched man.

Baldwin Sleath's eyes turned upon him—wildly, still with hate gleaming in them. "I—I am done!" he muttered hoarsely. "My own fault—but—but my revenge—at least—"

"Go to my telephone, Bulkeley, and summon the doctor at once," said the Head. Bulkeley ran into the study. Jimmy Silver & Co. stood back, looking on with scared faces. The terrible tragedy had utterly unnerved the juniors. The cracksmen had brought his fate upon himself; he had fallen by his own hand; but the knowledge that it was death that was before their eyes chilled the chums of Rookwood to the very heart. In the corridor a crowd was gathering—the report of the pistol had drawn nearly all Rookwood to the spot.

The Rookwooders stared on at the scene, with startled faces, hushed. The Head bent over Baldwin Sleath. A grim, and mocking smile curved the cracksmen's lips.

"I'm going!" he said faintly. "Your doctor will come too late." "I fear so!" said the Head gravely; and indeed it was only too clear. That wild, savage heart was very near its rest.

"You fear so? You lie!" said Sleath huskily. "You rejoice—" He choked into silence.

"As Heaven is my witness, Sleath," said the Head quietly, "I forgive you even the fearful wrong you have done me. I forgive you, even as I hope to be forgiven myself, by the Judge Whom we must all face. Unhappy man, it is not too late to repent. Do not think now of revenge and hatred. Ask pardon, while yet you may, of the Heaven you have offended."

The man's eyes dwelt on him wildly. "Pardon!" he muttered. "It is too late for that. You forgive me, you say." He groaned. "But I do—I do repent. Heaven forgive me for what I have done. I do, I do repent—"

They were the last words of Baldwin Sleath, the cracksmen.

The 5th Chapter. At Last! Valentine Mornington came quietly into Erroll's study. Erroll was seated by the table, his face grave and sombre. The terrible scene in the corridor had left its mark on him. He had not noticed Mornington in the crowd that had gathered there. Morny's face was grave, too; but there was a light in his eyes.

"Erroll!" he said, in a low voice. "You know what's happened, Morny?"

"Yes! He brought it upon himself," said Mornington. "I—I came in a few minutes before—"

"Baldwin Sleath has gone to his account," said Erroll. "He was one of those who darkened my earliest days; he has done much evil; but—but I forgive him now. But the evil he has done remains—his victim is still in a prison-cell—the wail he trained to crime. He repented; but the evil he has done remains."

"I've news for you, Erroll," said Mornington. "Don't turn away, old fellow, I've news you'll be glad to hear. The Kid—"

Erroll's face contracted. "Don't speak of him, Morny. I tell you I'm trying to forget the injury you did him and me—but don't speak of him—"

"He is free!" Erroll sprang to his feet. "Free!"

"He has escaped from Rookham Prison," said Mornington in a whisper. "Hush! And—and he's now in the vaults under the old abbey—"

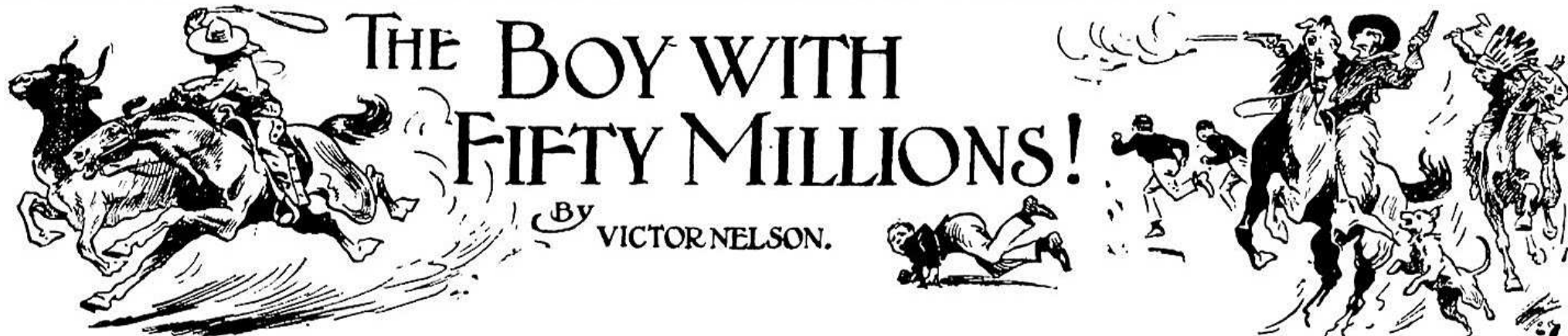
"Morny, you—" breathed Erroll. "We shall save him, between us," whispered Mornington. Erroll held out his hand.

Mornington had atoned for his fault; the last trace of bitterness died in Kit Erroll's breast. They were chums again; now—to carry out, together the task of saving the hunted wail, and setting his feet upon a new path.

THE END. (Mind you read "After Many Days," a splendid yarn of Jimmy Silver & Co., in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

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By VICTOR NELSON.

INTRODUCTION.

DON DARREL, a lad of fifteen, inherits from a stranger, whose life he saves, the stupendous fortune of fifty million pounds. With this he intends to give up his ranch in Mexico, and come to Britain and go to school. The disinherited heir to the fortune, RANDOLPH GURNEY, is plotting to do away with Don, and so secure the money for himself. On arriving in Britain with his faithful half-caste servant CHUTA, and his dog, SNAP, Don learns that at Eaglehurst School they expect him to be quite a Wild West "bad man." Don decides that it would be a pity to disappoint them! Soon after arriving at the school Don buys a circus so that the local crippled children shall have some enjoyment. While riding on an elephant at the head of his menagerie Don is shot at by emissaries of Randolph Gurney, and falls at the head-master's feet, wounded. The culprit gets away. Don carries on with the circus, and "does stunts," much to the amusement of the audience and the horror of the Head. During the evening show another attempt is made on Don's life. While performing with Chuta he turns in his saddle in time to see a huge mau-eating tiger spring at him, let out of his cage by some unknown follower of Gurney. Don sees his peril in time to save himself. The tiger makes for the school, where he confronts Briggs and some of the other servants. Dr. Farmer and the Head, with several boys, hasten to the scene of panic.

(Now read on.)

How the Tiger Went Back to the Show!

"Back for your lives, boys!" the Head shouted, his spectacles falling from his nose, and his mortar-board getting a blow from one of the hands he shot up to try and catch them. "Back, I say—into the class-room!"

"Yes, quickly, lads—into the hall and the Fourth Form class-room! We will follow!" Mr. Farmer repeated, swinging round and pushing the nearer of the boys towards the hall.

Grierson, the bully, caught a touch of panic, and flung down several smaller juniors, as he turned and made a mad rush for safety.

South and Frank Philips had the presence of mind to call to the others that there was no danger, though this could hardly be said to be correct, with a man-eating tiger not twenty yards distant. The two juniors, accompanied by Losely, turned on their heels, and walked quickly but steadily into the hall.

Their example had the desired effect. The score or more other boys went after them, many of them little short of terrified, but determined not to show it by undue haste, and thus any further panic was avoided.

Mr. Farmer, essentially a man of action, caught Briggs by the collar of his jacket, yanked him bodily to his feet, and sent him reeling after the juniors.

Briggs was still quaking with fear, but he found the legs to run upon, and beat a hasty retreat.

The doctor was, without doubt, a bookworm, and one who would have been taken for a scholar, and nothing more. Thus courage was not expected from him, but he showed that he possessed it now.

He cut a most comical figure, with his mortar-board cocked at a rakish angle over his left eye. He had no time to put it straight, however, for he was dragging the hamper from off the heads of the cook and Tommy.

"Cease this senseless noise, my good woman," he pleaded, as the cook continued to weep and laugh by turns. "Bless my soul! Do you not realise that you must get up—and—and fly—that there is very considerable peril?"

"Ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha, h-a—ah!" shrieked the lady, and then burst again into tears.

"Bless my soul!" groaned the Head again. "What ever shall we do, Farmer?"

Mr. Farmer hardly knew. At every moment he expected to find the tiger leaping down the stairs into the midst of them.

The formidable brute still crouched upon the landing, snarling in a deep key, and glaring down at them doubtfully, but menacingly. It did not seem anxious to attack, however, which was a mercy, though had it been forest-bred matters might have been very different and far more grave.

The probable explanation of the beast's hesitancy was in the fact that from its earliest days a human being had pitted his will against its own and slowly but surely crushed out the worst of its savage instincts.

For a time these had been revived and loosed with renewed fury, when it had suddenly found its cage door open, and freedom staring it in the face; but now, the recent sight of so many human beings, and the sound of

If the position had not been so serious, by reason of the tiger being loose about the school, Mr. Farmer would have had to laugh.

The Head's mortar-board was now tilted so sharply that it almost rested upon his nose, and as he gazed from under it, his eyes held a dazed expression. The cook's cap, too, was awry, and her hair was coming down, whilst Mr. Philby seemed to think that there must have been an earthquake, and was groaning and lisping horribly.

"Get up, sir, for Heaven's sake!" Mr. Farmer cried. And as he gave the doctor his hand, the latter pulled himself together and got upon his feet. "Philby, there's the tiger at the top of the stairs somewhere—the one that escaped from the show!"

Farmer urged. "We must lock ourselves in the class-room, and send a message to the animal's trainer. Thank Heaven that so far no serious harm has been done!"

The three masters hastened into the hall, and gained the Fourth Form class-room, where practically the whole school was gathered.

"Has it been caught, sir?" several boys asked, addressing Mr. Farmer, who was always instinctively looked to as the "strong man" in an emergency.

"Not yet, my boys," the master returned. "Lock the door, if the cook and Briggs are here. Ah, they are! Yes, turn the key, Smith. I will climb from the window, and go and report to the people at the circus that the brute is in the building."

"You say, sir, that Caesar—the tiger, you know—is upstairs?" he said to Mr. Farmer.

The latter, who had followed them in through the window, nodded.

"Yes," he answered quietly. "I will show you the way."

"No, no, sir; you stay here, please, in case of accidents!" the trainer advised quickly. "He'll probably cringe and knuckle down to me; but there's no knowing. Tigers are not like lions. They're treacherous brutes, and dangerous, too!"

"As you will," Mr. Farmer returned, wishing the boys would not stare at him in such unbounded admiration, for he himself had seen nothing particularly gallant in his suggestion. He had judged that the sight of its master would cow the tiger.

Colonel Bartlett and his men passed out into the hall, and Grierson locked the class-room door once more with ludicrous haste. The men from the circus almost ran into the tiger, which they found slowly and crouching descending the stairs. It must have grown tired of wandering about the deserted landings and rooms above.

Some three steps from the foot of the staircase it crouched, a snarling roar breaking from its deep throat. With its stout crinkling and its teeth showing wickedly, it snarled, and fixed the wild-animal trainer and his companion with its fierce yellow eyes.

Without the least sign of intimidation Colonel Bartlett strode forward, his whip raised.

"Down, you brute!" he ordered, in a commanding tone. "You hear, Caesar—down, I say!"

The tiger made a half-movement to spring, and drew in a savage, snarling breath. Frightened, the circus hands hung back, but the trainer started forward angrily.

"What! You growl at me!" he cried; and, with no more fear of the brute than if it had been an untidy dog, he struck it full across the snout with his whip. "Take that—to teach you manners!"

In fierce rage and smarting with the pain, the tiger looked for a moment as though it would hurl itself full at him and bear him to the ground. Had it done so, nothing could have saved the intrepid man. But, as he kept his eyes upon it, and it looked back into their cool, commanding depths, the tiger wavered, and was lost.

It remembered that this was the human who had fondled it as a cub, still fondled it when it behaved itself, and yet could be a hard, stern master when it disobeyed; that it was this man, who had struck it now, who had thrashed it until it was racked with the sting of the cuts, when once it had made to strike at him with its powerful paw.

It could not look into those blazing eyes without feeling awe—fear. It was the same now as it was when he faced it in its den. It crouched low, but no longer growled; and, calmly, Colonel Bartlett moved even nearer, stooped over it, and fixed the thick, brass-studded collar about its neck.

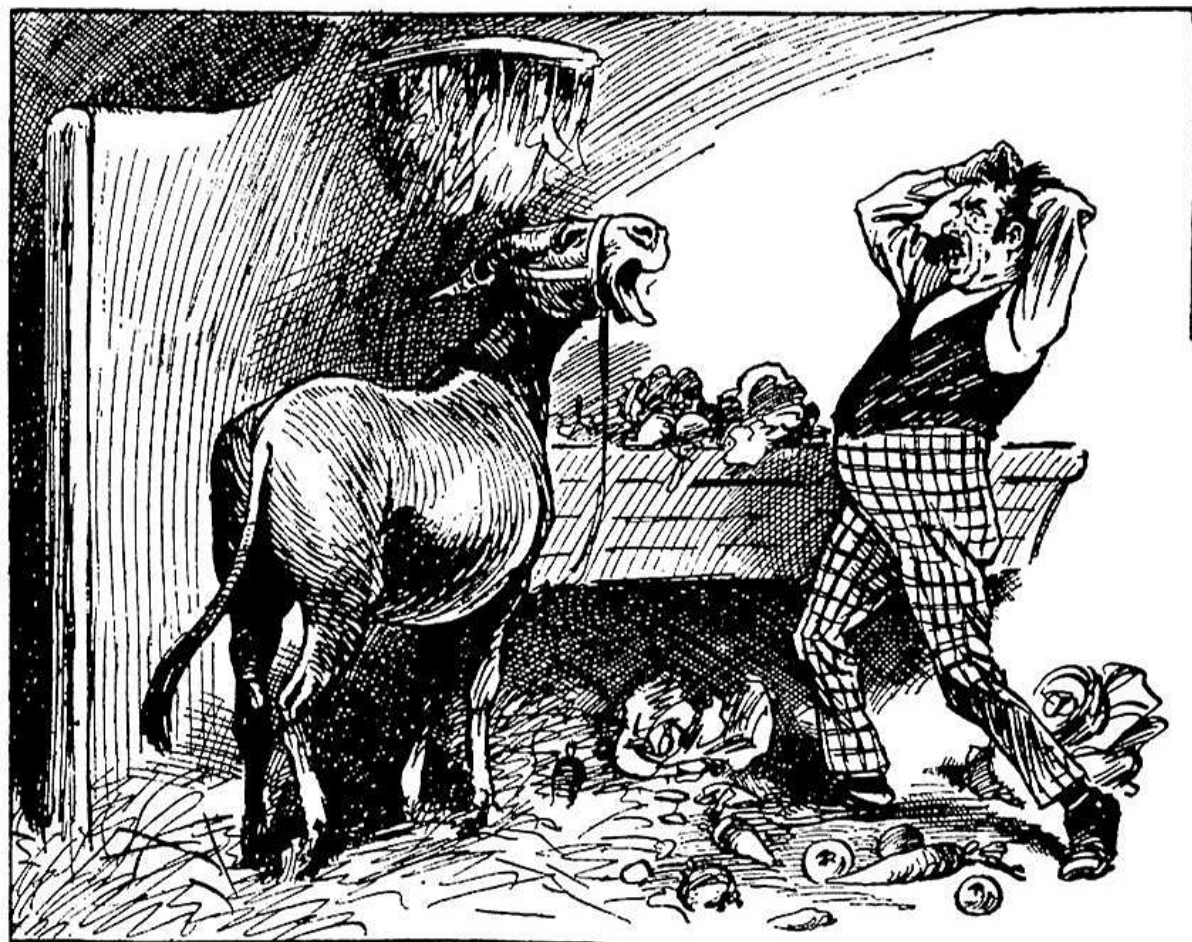
Ashamed of the lack of courage they displayed, the circus hands edged nearer, their bars and various weapons extended, so that the animal was hemmed in.

"Go and bring his cage here as slick as you can, Bill!" Colonel Bartlett ordered one of them. "He's all right now, and will give no more trouble. What is puzzling me is how the thunder of his cage got open!"

Colonel Bartlett pondered deeply for a moment, and shook his head.

"That's a mystery that will want some solving," he said, after a while. The hand who rushed off to the circus speedily drove back with the tiger's den, brought it up the drive, and halted before the school.

With Colonel Bartlett leading it by



MR. WOGGLE'S RACEHORSE! Perseimon, Mr. Woggle's entry for the great donkey race which Don Darrel had organised, turned his head towards the outraged owner and said plaintively: "Hee-haw!" Its eyes were glazed and its stomach bulged—the results of its midnight feed.

so many human voices, had disconcerted it.

To the relief of the Head and Mr. Farmer, it suddenly rose and turned, gliding swiftly away into the gloom at the top of the stairs.

Tommy had picked himself up and bolted; but the cook still sat upon the breathless Mr. Philby, and made weird noises.

To carry her was next to an impossibility; but Mr. Farmer slipped his hands beneath her armpits, and, with a mighty heave, got her to her feet. She promptly flung her arms about the neck of the unfortunate Head, and, still weeping and laughing loudly, clung to him.

They both collapsed; for Dr. Harding's rather frail strength simply could not support some fifteen stone of buxom womanhood.

"Bless my soul!" gasped the doctor, in a far-away voice, as he sat upon the floor and watched the cook, who sat facing him, and gesticulating wildly with her fluttering hands. "I say, bless my soul!"

"Oh, I am injured—fatally injured—theriouthly hurt!" moaned Mr. Philby pautingly, making no effort to rise. "What—what hath happened?"

"Wh—what?" Mr. Philby stammered, sitting up, with an effort, with terror in his near-sighted eyes.

"The tiger—it's in the school! We must get away from here!" Mr. Farmer repeated, tugging at his arm.

Wheezing and gasping for breath, the science-master leapt up. Bravery was no a strong characteristic of Mr. Philby.

"Tiger!" he panted. "Wh—where? What over are we to do?"

"First of all, we must get a pail of cold water and throw it over this woman!" Mr. Farmer told him, in a loud and significant voice.

The cook's hysteria ceased as if by magic.

"You won't do any such thing, sir," she said firmly. "I am better now. I was overcome."

"Get up, then, and come to a place of safety!" Mr. Farmer snapped, with a shrug of impatience. "Do you not hear what we have been saying? A tiger that escaped from the circus is at large in the school, and was a moment ago at the top of the stairs."

The cook stared at him for a moment in incredulous horror; then, with a piercing scream, she bounced up and ran wildly towards the hall. "Come! Let us go, too!" Mr.

They will have means of getting it back into its den, no doubt.

He crossed the spacious room, and raised one of the windows. Throwing a leg across the sill, he agilely swung himself through and dropped lightly to the ground.

The doctor and Mr. Philby, who had moved towards the window with several other of the masters, watched his athletic figure until it disappeared amongst the shadows of the bush-dotted garden.

Only some ten minutes elapsed ere Mr. Farmer was back again, and with him wore Colonel Bartlett, the animal-trainer, and the men of his search-party.

Luck had favoured Mr. Farmer, and he had run into them on his way to the circus. The men climbed in at the class-room window, bringing with them their iron bars and odd assortment of weapons. Their appearance was greeted with a buzz of excitement from the scores of boys.

The trainer, a well-set-up, dark-moustached man, whose eyes seemed to pierce through and through those at whom he looked, was at their head, carrying a massive, studded collar, to which was attached a chain. He held, too, a thick whip.

its chain, much as if it were just a large dog, it passed through the hall and down the steps, and, in another moment, its trainer had urged it to leap into its cage, and the door was slammed and bolted upon it.

"Thank Heaven," Dr. Harding breathed, as he and the other masters watched from the window—"thank Heaven that there has seemingly been no loss of life!"

Don Darrel's Addition to the Sports!

"Good-morning, sir!" Don Darrel, a cheerful smile upon his handsome face, entered Dr. Harding's study, in response to the kindly old Head's "Come in!"

"Good-morning, Darrel!" responded the doctor, glancing at him over his spectacles. "I am rather busy just now, my boy. Did you wish to discuss anything of importance with me?"

"Well, yes, sir, I guess I did," Don stated. "It was about the school sports, which are to take place, I understand, in a fortnight's time."

The lecture Dr. Harding had given Don on the night of the circus had been a severe one; but that was a week ago now, and Don and the doctor were the best of friends.

Indeed, they had never been anything else, as Don had frankly admitted that he had overstepped the mark when he had appeared in the show without first asking permission, and apologised.

He had not thought fit to add that the reason he had omitted to interview the doctor was because he felt sure that, when he heard what he contemplated doing, that permission would not be granted. But that was neither here nor there.

The circus had passed on its travels, with Horatio Swiggers managing it on Don's behalf, and even the incident of the escaped tiger was beginning to be forgotten by all save one—Don Darrel himself.

Colonel Bartlett had declared that the bolt upon the cage had been securely fastened when the brute had been drawn into the tent. He had seen to that particularly, as he always did, and the only way it could have come out of its socket was by someone pulling it out.

He had wanted to report the matter to the police, and make a stir concerning the affair; but Don had forbidden this. The boy began to see that it had been another desperate attempt to end his life, and that he stood in constant danger because, no doubt, of his great wealth. But he did not want Mr. Pensonby, his guardian and trustee, to suspect this, for it would be almost sure to mean that he would be guarded night and day, and lose a great deal of his freedom.

"About the sports, Darrel?" queried the Head, raising his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Yes, sir. I have thought out a mighty fine idea, I guess, sir, and want you to give me permission to carry it out."

The Head's smile died away, and he looked cautious. He had had experience of Don Darrel's ideas before.

"Ahem! What is it you propose, Darrel?" he asked.

"It's this, sir—that I may be allowed to offer a thousand pounds to the winner of a certain race I should like to organise, and add to the sports programme."

"A thousand pounds, Darrel! Dear me, that is a lot of money, my boy!" The Boy with Fifty Millions gave a little shrug of his shoulders.

"If you will pardon me, sir, it is really very little to me," he reminded the doctor. "And the idea would be such a scream—or—I mean it would make Eaglehurst laugh for weeks afterwards!"

"It is good for people to laugh—at the right times," the Head admitted. "What sort of race would it be?"

Don's smile broadened into a grin. "A donkeys' Derby, sir!" he said, very distinctly.

The Head adjusted his spectacles more firmly upon his nose and stared at him.

"A—n— What sort of race, Darrel?" he asked.

"A donkeys' Derby, sir—a race like a horse-race, only with donkeys competing instead of horses," Don explained.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the doctor, still staring at him askance.

"It would be the funniest thing that ever happened, sir!" Don Darrel went on eagerly, pleased that the doctor had not uttered a point blank refusal. "I have noticed that there are scores of donkeys in and around Eaglehurst, and a large field would be certain, as I should make entrance for

the race quite free. Just imagine, sir, all the old countrymen astride donkeys, and tearing like the very dickens—er—at—a—er—fast—rate towards the winning-post—save for those that refused to go, and perhaps sat down in the middle of the course. It would give everyone immense enjoyment, sir, could hurt no one, and the thousand pounds might be the making of whoever wins it!"

"Ahem! I will think about it, Darrel."

But Don hesitated, his face falling.

"If it would be possible to decide now, sir," he murmured coaxingly, "it would give me more time to have some printing done, and to advertise the event."

The Head wavered.

"It might lead to betting, such an event as this," he protested. "We might even find some—er—book-making persons invading the sports ground, and endeavoring to do business!"

"Oh, I guess not, sir! Such people would hardly find their way to a little out-of-the-way spot like this!"

For some moments, which were moments of suspense to the eager Don, Dr. Harding was thoughtful. Then, the sense of humour that would persist at times in peering out from beneath his long-cultivated dignity, was his undoing.

His kindly eyes twinkled.

"I suppose it would indeed be most comical, Darrel," he said. "Yes; you may organise the race, if you wish. I can see no objection."

"Thank you very much, sir!" Don cried jubilantly; and he hurried from the study.

"Dear me, I wonder if I have acted wisely?" murmured Dr. Harding, beginning to regret his permission as soon as Don had gone. "I fear I am a little weak where that boy is concerned—because I have grown to have a warm liking for him, I suppose."

He shook off his misgivings and returned to the lesson he was preparing for the Sixth on the morrow.

"After all, there cannot possibly be any harm in the race taking place," he murmured.

But that was an all too optimistic view to take, as was to be proved.

Don Darrel sought out South, Losely, and Frank Phillips, who had become his especial chums, as soon as morning school was over. He had already signified that his mission to the Head had been successful by giving them vigorous nods when Mr. Farmer was not looking.

"My hat! So you've worked it, Darrel?" Frank Phillips exclaimed, when they met in the quadrangle. "You're a wonder! How did you do it?"

"Just went to the dear old chap openly, and asked, I reckon," Don returned. "But, come along, you guys, there's some work to do, if we are to announce the event in time to get good entries!"

They adjourned to the study shared by Don, Phillips, and Losely, and drafted a poster and handbills, which the faithful Chuta, and possibly Briggs, would see to distributing.

Phillips was given carte blanche by Don as to arranging for the printing to be executed, and tore off to the village on his cycle in between finishing luncheon and afternoon school.

By paying treble rates, Phillips induced the local printer to guarantee delivery of both posters and handbills by the time school was over for the day, and that evening, Chuta and Briggs, the porter, were sent off to deal with them.

Before darkness came, a poster had been pasted upon every available hoarding, and continuously had knots of eager and excited villagers gathered about it. It read:

NOTICE!

Addition to the School Sports arranged for Saturday week at Penn's Meadow.

A DONKEYS' £1,000 DERBY!
(All asses, human and animal, eligible.)

Distance of race 8 furlongs. The owner of the Donkey first past the post to receive £1,000.
Owner of second £50
Owner of third £10

ENTRANCE FREE!!!

The bill went on to say, in somewhat smaller type, that the race had been organised, and the prize-money was guaranteed, by Don Darrel, whom the whole village knew now to be the much-talked-of Boy with Fifty Millions, and that entries were to be sent to him.

Excitement quickly drew near fever-heat. Nothing else was discussed

that night in the tap-room of the Crown and Anchor, Eaglehurst's inn.

Various donkey-owners, who all declared they meant having a shot at winning Don Darrel's thousand pounds, argued over the respective merits of their animals, and Mr. Benjamin Woggle and Mr. Spavis, of the town band, who both had donkeys they meant to enter and ride in the race, almost came to blows in a heated discussion as to which of the two animals was the speediest.

Don Darrel had tipped Briggs a ten-pound note when he had asked him to make a pail of paste, and go with Chuta to attend to the billposting, and Briggs walked fifteen miles into the next village to buy a donkey before news of the race reached there.

He meant to try to win the thousand, and also to make money in another direction. He, it will be remembered, had received twenty pounds from Don on the day of the latter's arrival at the school, and with this, and the balance of the further ten pounds left after the purchase of his donkey, as capital, he determined that he would take as many bets as he could on the result of the event.

All the next day entries poured in to Don Darrel, until he was almost overwhelmed, and was certain that the field would number at least fifty starters.

In the evening, Briggs presented himself at the inn, and signified his readiness to lay odds; and he returned to the school with his pockets simply weighted down with money. For, with the true sporting instinct, every donkey-owner he met seemed ready to back his mount to win.

Dr. Harding knew nothing of this, or he would have made spirited objections. Neither did he know that news of the race had reached London and crept into the pages of the various sporting dailies. It was discussed in a humorous vein, but it was there right enough, and several layers of odds grew interested.

The gambling fever Briggs had started gained daily in strength. People sought him out to support one donkey or another, and he was only prevented from standing up and shouting the odds he was prepared to lay against the various animals in the tap-room of the Crown and Anchor by Policeman Grayson.

The constable knew well enough what Briggs was doing, but as Grayson had himself backed a neighbour's donkey with Briggs, he could not very well arrest him for illegal betting.

Briggs could hardly keep for thinking of his gains.

He had made his book cleverly, and, whichever donkey gained the race, the porter would be a heavy winner. But he was determined to win upon his own animal, if he could, so that he paid out nothing save the one or two saving place wagers that had been made.

Then, however, greed got the better of him, and made him incautious.

Mr. Woggle, who blew the trombone—out of time and out of tune—in the village band, drew him into an argument as to the chances their animals had of beating one another.

Briggs' donkey was a really nice animal, which before he had purchased it, had been used to draw a governess-cart, and kept well groomed and in excellent condition.

The red-haired porter had tried it several times in secret, and found that he could urge a surprising pace out of it; and he grew heated when Mr. Woggle sneered at its chances, and declared that his donkey could give it a hundred yards start and a beating.

The inevitable thing happened. Mr. Woggle, who was well-to-do, and owned a great deal of house-property in and around Eaglehurst, offered to bet Briggs a hundred pounds that his donkey, whose name was Persimmon, beat his, however the race ended.

To book this wager would mean that Briggs was risking all he stood to gain and a sum over; but he was angry, and accepted, and the money was eventually put down by both parties and handed over the counter to the landlady of the Crown and Anchor to hold.

Briggs then received a shock.

On the following morning, he heard from a reliable source that Persimmon, Mr. Woggle's candidate, was in strict training, and going great guns, and that it could move as surely as any other donkey moved before.

The red-haired, red-nosed porter of Eaglehurst School had been admired and called a "good sportsman" by the whole village, when rumours of his odds-laying got about. But this was just what Briggs was not.

He was as happy as a sandboy whilst he had been able to picture certain and heavy gains, but as he heard about Mr. Woggle's donkey's

powers of pace, and saw his profits vanishing in thin air and turning into a loss, he nearly went insane.

Briggs grew very thoughtful, especially after he had lain in a ditch one morning, incidentally covering himself from head to foot in mud, and spied upon Mr. Woggle's donkey at exercise.

That, as far as donkeys went, it was a flyer Briggs saw, and he began to weave dark plots by which he could put it out of the running. And suddenly he seemed inspired. He was in the Crown and Anchor at the time, and annoyed everyone by commencing to laugh and continuing to chuckle throughout the rest of the evening without letting the company into the joke.

"On'y wait! I'll sell that moke a ha'porth!" the porter giggled, as he wended his way homewards that night. "Briggs, you're one of the cleverest blokes unhung—you are straight!"

"Dirty Work at the Cross-roads!"

The moon was hidden by dark, drifting clouds, and no one saw the bulky figure of Briggs, the school-porter, as he stooped over the carrot-bed in Mr. Woggle's kitchen garden.

For one thing, it was close upon midnight; for another, Mr. Woggle's ground was fairly extensive, and the kitchen garden was situated some distance from the house.

By Briggs stood a wheelbarrow, already almost full of Mr. Woggle's carrots, and, having added a few more, Briggs trundled it stealthily and almost silently towards the stable where Persimmon was housed.

Briggs stopped near the stable, halting his load of carrots near where he had previously dumped a pile of apples, cabbages, and a bag of oats. He took a puff at his cigarette—a home-made one, composed of light shag, to which he was very partial—then grinned, and, taking a screw-driver from his pocket, began to unscrew the lock attached to the stable door.

At last it came away in his hands, and Briggs entered, struck a match, and studied the sprightly-looking donkey that stood in a horse-box next to Mr. Woggle's cob.

Throwing down the stump of his cigarette, Briggs slipped out, and quickly carried the carrots, green-stuff, apples, and oats into the stable. He piled the donkey's food-trough with carrots, and it hee-hawed with delight, almost startling Briggs out of his skin.

Mr. Woggle, who was a stout little man, with a black, walrus-like moustache and a squint in his left eye, was about early the next morning, and when he came to the stables and saw the lock lying upon the ground, he uttered a choking cry.

As he flung open the stable door his first sensation was one of relief. He had been fully expecting to find his fancied candidate for the thousand pounds stolen, but the donkey was there right enough. Next moment, however, he tore his scanty hair, and danced with rage.

Half-eaten apples and cabbages lay about the floor, mingling with nibbled carrots and little piles of oats.

All his donkey's sprightly slenderness had gone, and Mr. Woggle knew that it must have been making a glutton of itself all through the night. Its sides bulged, its stomach was like a balloon and its eyes weary and glazed with over-eating.

In other words, it had about as much chance now of being able to win the race as would the average tortoise. It could scarcely move, it was so full of food, and would certainly remain ill and sluggish for days.

The donkey listlessly turned its head and looked at Mr. Woggle; then, to add insult to injury, it said plaintively:

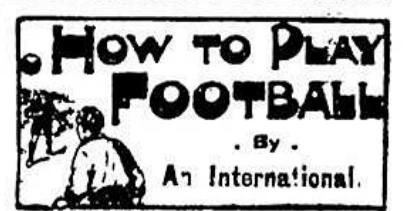
"Hee-haw!"

Mr. Woggle clutched at his temples, and resisted a mad desire to fly at it and strike it. He raved incoherently, his face purple with wrath.

"Hoh, if only I could find out what underhanded vill'in 'oo did it!" he hooted, grinding his teeth and clenching his hands. "If only I could, I'd—"

He stooped and picked up the cigarette-end, and, as he examined it, he saw that it was hand-made and composed of light shag—the tobacco he had seen bought for cigarette-making again and again in the Crown and Anchor, but by only one man—Briggs!

(Another exciting instalment of this splendid tale in next Monday's Boys' FRIEND.)



How to Play Football
By
An International.

Punching Out.
In a recent match I saw a tragedy in this connection. The ball was swung into goal from the right wing in such a way that the goalkeeper could first of all have caught it and kicked it clear. He forgot the safety first rule, though, and instead of handling the shot in this way, he took a terrific lunge at the ball with his fist. Alas! it skimmed off his glove, and went into the net behind him. When the goalkeeper turned round to pick the ball out of the net his face was indeed a picture. And, as a popular English comedian used to say, "I don't suppose he'll do it again for months and months and months!"

Tippling Over the Bar.
There are many other directions, too, in which mistakes are made by young goalkeepers. For instance, it is a very common error for quite good custodians to catch a high shot when they ought to tip it over the bar.

If there are no opponents in the vicinity, it is quite safe for the goalkeeper to catch a high ball, and then to kick it clear; but if opposing forwards are crowding round, then the wise custodian will either fist the ball out, or tip it over the bar for a corner-kick.

Well do I recall an International match which was lost by a goalkeeper being hustled over his goal-line when he was in the act of catching a high ball. This was the game between England and Scotland played at Stamford Bridge in 1913.

The game was going splendidly and evenly, when Simpson—who was playing outside-right for England that day—dropped in a high ball right into goal. Brownlie, the Scottish goalkeeper, was there waiting for it, but just as he caught the ball, up came hustling Harry Hampton, then centre-forward for Aston Villa, and before the goalkeeper realised the danger, both he and the ball had been charged over the line.

(More on "How to Play Football" in next Monday's Boys' FRIEND.)

OUR TELEPHONE COMPETITION.

Number Five.

- "Hallo—Latham, 122—?"
- "Harry, you idiot—"
- "Oh, sir—sorry, I thought—"
- "Oh, if I may, please, sir, you see—"
- "Yes, thank you, sir—"
- "That you, James? Hail, O smiling morn. I just wanted to speak to you about fixing up a—"
- "Well, that depends. How about next Wednesday—?"
- "Well, you mustn't. I know it'll be difficult for such a lot of absolute idiots, but—"
- "All right, uncle, but what was that you were burbling about—your chastise me? Now, look here you silly owl—"
- "Why, you chump; of all the cheek! Why, on Wednesday we'll wipe up the ground with you; we'll—"
- "All right—he mightn't approve of our slugging each other over his phone. I'll buzz off—"
- "Till Wednesday, and then—"
- "Ring off yourself!—Good-bye."

Here is a novel whoeze which will amuse and, we hope, puzzle you. As you see, the above represents one side of a telephone conversation. Can you fill in the other side? If so, write down what you think will be the replies of the man at the other end of the wire. There is no need to cut this out—simply number each "answer" to correspond with the number of the "question."

For the effort which completes the telephone conversation the best and nearest in the opinion of the Editor—whose judgment must be accepted as final—a cash prize of ten shillings will be awarded. All entries are to be sent in not later than Monday, December 6th, and addressed, The Editor, The Boys' Friend, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, and the envelopes marked "Telephone Competition No. 5."

A MAGNIFICENT YARN OF THE CHUMS OF CEDAR CREEK!



THE SCHOOLBOY MAZEPPAS

More of the
Perilous Adventures of
FRANK RICHARDS & Co.
Among the Rustlers.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter.

The Rustler's Victims!

A black vulture circled against the blue, and settled down with a swoop into the thick prairie grass.

The lone horseman riding northward over the prairie started, and his eyes followed the swoop of the obscene bird.

"Carriage there, I reckon!" Handsome Alf, the rustler, pulled in his horse, and shaded his eyes with his hand, staring northward across the plain. The sun was climbing towards the meridian; it was the "fall" of the year, but the weather was fine and clear in the valley of the Fraser River. From the deep blue of the sky came another and another circling vulture, swooping down into the grass.

The ranch raider knitted his brows. He glanced back for a moment at the low range of hills that bounded the plain behind him. Somewhere in the hills were the North West Mounted Police, following on his trail—somewhere there, the last of his gang had fallen in desperate conflict with the pursuers. But the Californian was at least two hours ahead of the trailers, and he had little fear of being run down. He gave his horse a touch with the spur, and rode on again at a gallop.

Ahead of him, vulture after vulture dropped from the sky, disappearing into the grass behind a knoll fringed over with scrubby live-oaks. What hideous repast was drawing the "birds obscene" to the spot?

"Mexican Jo or the prisoners?" Handsome Alf muttered, as he rode on. "Perhaps only a dead moose. But if it's the Mexican—if the prisoners have got away—"

He muttered a curse and whipped on his horse.

The knoll, covered with live-oaks, still hid the scene from his sight. He came round it at a gallop, and a strange scene burst upon his eyes.

Three horses were staked out there. They stood in the grass, resting after cropping their fill. But two of them had riders bound to their backs. The third, a Mexican mustang, was saddled and bridled—but his rider lay in the grass, and it was upon his body that the scavengers of the prairie were settling, attracted from afar by the scent of carrion. A dozen vultures, at least, were disputing there, croaking and shrieking, with heavy movements.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless, the chums of Cedar Creek School, looked up dully as the ranch raider rode up.

They were worn out with fatigue and aching from the long confinement in the ropes that secured them to the horses.

Handsome Alf pulled in his horse, and jumped to the ground.

His eyes glittered at the prisoners. Two were there—but he had sent away three in charge of the Mexican who now lay dead in the grass. Where was Vere Beauclerc, whom he had last seen bound, a prisoner, on his black horse?

He strode towards the two schoolboys.

"What has happened here?" he exclaimed savagely. "Where is the other? Where is Beauclerc?"

Frank Richards and Bob exchanged a quick glance—a glance of relief and thankfulness.

The outlaw's question showed that he had not fallen in with Beauclerc on the prairie; their chum, at least, was safe!

"He's gone," said Bob Lawless.

"And I guess he's clear of you, Handsome Alf—unless you ride back for him, and I guess you don't dare do that, with the Mounted Police behind you!"

"How did he get away?" said the ranch raider, between his teeth.

"That fool, Mexican Jo—"

The Californian was utterly puzzled. Mexican Jo had been sent on ahead to keep the three prisoners secure when the cattle-lifters stopped in the hills to turn on the Mounted Police, and held them at bay.

Handsome Alf had deserted his men in their last fight, and ridden on after the Mexican—but he had not expected to find him so soon, and he had not

"How long since?"

Hours?"

The outlaw gritted his teeth.

"But he was still bound to his horse, then?" he exclaimed. "If he had been free, he would have released you—"

"But he will escape," said Bob Lawless. "Beauclerc is clear of you, at least, you scoundrel! You dare not follow him!"

With a curse the outlaw lashed the rancher's son across the shoulders with his riding-whip.

It was true; he dared not follow the trail of the black horse. The start he had gained upon his pursuers was too short to allow him to waste time.



HANDSOME ALF'S REVENGE! Coolly, methodically, the rustler chief spread-eagled the two unfortunate schoolboys on their mustangs, and turned them adrift over the plains—to die of starvation!

expected to find him thus. It was at the crossing of the Fraser River, many a long mile on, that he had planned to rejoin the Mexican. Vere Beauclerc was gone, yet he had left his comrades bound to their horses—he had been unable to release them. The outlaw was perplexed as well as enraged. He had run fearful risks to capture the chums of Cedar Creek, to wreak his vengeance upon them before he fled from the Thompson Valley for ever; and one of them, at least, had escaped his clutches.

He grasped his riding-whip, and glared threateningly at the two prisoners.

"Tell me what has happened here!" he muttered. "Or—"

Frank Richards' lip curled.

"Look at the Mexican!" he said.

"You can see how he died. Beauclerc's horse killed him!"

"The horse that fiend of a black horse!" muttered Handsome Alf.

"The fool! He should have shot the brute! But his fate matters little! Where is Beauclerc, then?"

"Gone!"

Even where he was, he dared not linger. He clambered up the knoll, and, shading his eyes with his hand, stared back across the plain towards the distant hills.

Like ants in the distance, he could discern moving figures emerging upon the plain.

"The Mounted Police and Rancher Lawless!" He ground his teeth.

"But Rancher Lawless will never save his son or his nephew! The other has escaped, but those two—"

He hurried down again. Without even a look at the Mexican, he loosened the trail-ropes of the tethered horses.

Taking the three ropes in hand, he rode away across the plain to the north, the three led horses galloping after him. Once more Frank Richards and Bob Lawless were on their way to the wilderness of the north-west, in the hands of the rustler. They had wondered to see him alone, but they could guess that his men had been wiped out in conflict with the troopers back in the hills. The Californian was the last survivor of the outlaw gang that had

terrorised the Thompson Valley; the rest had fallen or were taken. And Handsome Alf was riding for his life, to seek safety in the trackless wilderness, with nothing left him but his vengeance on the chums of Cedar Creek.

Behind them, as they dashed on, the vultures settled down in a flock, croaking and contending over their ghastly feast.

It was two hours later that a bunch of horsemen, riding from the south, reached the knoll. A single vulture still lingered there over bones picked clean. Vere Beauclerc drove it away with a slash of a whip.

"It's the Mexican," he said, "what's left of him; but Frank and Bob—"

"Handsome Alf has passed this way, then, and taken them on with him," said Mr. Lawless quietly, though his bronzed face was pale. "His trail led directly here, and he has—"

"We know where they are heading for," said Sergeant Scott. "The Kicking Mule crossing on the Fraser, and the trail's clear enough. Ride on!"

The horsemen swept on again. Through the sunny hours of the day, insensible to fatigue, they pressed on without a halt; the sun was low in the west when they sighted the waters of the northern bend of the Fraser.

They crossed the river under the last glimmer of the sun.

Far ahead of them, somewhere in the dark wilderness, was the escaping Californian and his prisoners!

But where?

The 2nd Chapter. A Fearful Doom!

Darkness lay on the hills and valleys of British Columbia.

Through long hours, after the sun had set, Handsome Alf had pushed on, with the led horses following his galloping steed.

Frank's horse had fallen lame, and was hobbling painfully.

By a spring at the foot of a low range of bluffs, the Californian halted at last.

He staked out the four horses, and released the two schoolboys from the steeds to which they had been bound so long.

They sank helplessly into the grass, too utterly exhausted to make any attempt to escape, even if their hands had been freed.

But the ruffian was running no risks with them; their hands remained fastened behind their backs.

The schoolboys did not speak. They sank into the grass, and in a minute, or less, they were asleep.

Numbed and cramped, hungry and thirsty as they were, they slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

A heart of iron might have felt a glimmer of compassion, but there was no pity in the savage face of the Californian.

He rolled himself in his blanket to sleep.

He had no fear of the pursuers now. Many a long mile of trackless desert lay between him and the North West troopers, and the night was thick and dark.

He slept soundly. It was not till dawn was bright in the sky that the outlaw threw aside his blanket and rose.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless were still sleeping. Their faces glimmered white and worn in the rising sunlight.

Handsome Alf did not glance at them as he built a camp-fire, and cooked deer-meat for his breakfast, washed down by whisky from his flask. When he had finished he saddled his horse.

Then a savage kick roused the prisoners from slumber.

Frank and Bob started up in the grass, blinking dazedly. They sat up, still heavy with sleep and fatigue.

The Californian stood before them, his black eyes glittering down upon them.

He rolled a cigarette, and lighted it, a cruel grin curving his lips under the black moustache.

"Got up!" he rapped out. The chums of Cedar Creek staggered wearily to their feet.

"We part here," said the Californian, grinning through the smoke of the cigarette. "I guess you're tired of my company—but I reckon you'll be sorry to see the last of me, all the same. If your friends ever find you—I guess they won't—but if they do, there won't be much of you left. You've heard of Mazeppa, in the story? It's you for the Mazeppa act now!"

He laughed.

"You villain!" muttered Bob Lawless faintly.

"I guess I've got to light out for a new section now," said Handsome Alf, between his teeth. "My crowd's been wiped out, the cattle we ran off are taken, I've got the mark of a bullet on me, and I owe it all to you! I had a safe retreat in the Wapiti Hills, and five hundred head of cattle and horses stacked away, ready to run across the border—a fortune for me. You nosed it all out. You brought the sheriff of Thompson there with his outfit—"

"I'm glad we die," Bob Lawless defiantly.

Handsome Alf showed his teeth in a savage grin.

"You'll be sorry before long, I reckon," he answered. "You'll have time to be sorry you took a hand in the game against me. I guess you'll last for some days before you die of hunger or thirst, or the wolves get you—and if your friends find what's left of you, they'll have reason to remember Alf Carson."

He threw away the stump of the cigarette, and went to the horses.

Frank Richards' horse squealed painfully as the outlaw dragged him up from the grass. The animal was dead lame.

"I guess you'll go on the mustang, Richards," muttered Handsome Alf. "This critter hasn't a gallop left in him."

He picked up his rifle.

"You villain!" panted Frank hoarsely. "Let the horse loose!"

Handsome Alf laughed, and levelled his rifle. Frank felt a pang at his heart as the shot rang out, and the lame horse dropped in the grass, rolled over, and squealed, and lay still.

The outlaw slung his rifle on his back, and released the Mexican's mustang from the trail-ropes.

Then he seized Frank Richards, and raised him on the mustang's back.

Frank struggled feebly.

But his hands were bound; his strength was spent. Heedless of his feeble resistance, the outlaw stretched

Frank Richards and his chum had given up hope now.

When the Fraser River lay behind them, and the trackless wilderness ahead, hope died in their breasts.

As far as the banks of the Fraser they had little doubt that the pursuers would track the escaping ruffian.

But now the Fraser flowed many a long mile behind them, and the outlaw was riding by rocky deile and sandy tract, where little or no trace remained of the horses' hoofs to guide a tracker.

Winding on by plain and hill and deep, rocky canyon, the outlaw was seeking to throw the pursuers off the track, and there was little hope that he would fail.

It was midnight when Handsome Alf stopped at last to rest.

The fatigued horses were moving at little more than a walk now, and the iron-limbed rustler himself was tired. Frank and Bob were almost insensible with exhaustion, drooping over the horses to which they were bound.

him, on his back, across the back of the mustang.

His face was upturned to the blue sky of the sunny morning, his head rested in the mustang's rough mane.

Coolly, methodically, the outlaw "spread-eagled" him on the mustang's back, and bound him there with ropes.

Frank's heart was like lead in his breast.

Back into his mind came what he had read, in some story of long ago, of Mazeppa—the victim of a similar vengeance—bound upon a horse, and sent adrift in the Hungarian plains.

That was to be his fate now.

Mazeppa-like, bound on the horse, he was to be sent forth into the boundless wilderness of the Canadian North-West.

Even now, he could scarcely believe that the ruffian, baffled, defeated, revengeful as he was, could really intend to consign him to such a fearful doom.

But there was no sign of relenting in Alf Carson's savage, swarthy face.

As soon as Frank was secured, he turned his attention to Bob Lawless.

The rancher's son was stretched upon the back of his horse, and bound there with lengths of trail-ropes, as Frank Richards had been on the Mexican mustang.

The two chums could only move their heads when the outlaw had finished. They looked at each other in silent despair.

Yet, even at that moment, they felt a throb of thankfulness that their chum, Vere Beauclerc, had escaped this fearful fate.

One, at least, of the ruthless ruffian's victims had eluded his vengeance. Long before this, they hoped, Beauclerc was safe with the Mounted Police.

Doubtless he was seeking them—they knew that he would seek them—that Rancher Lawless, too, would be tireless on the trail. But they had no hope.

Too many long miles of trackless desert lay between them and their friends for the doomed schoolboys to hope for rescue.

Handsome Alf surveyed them grimly.

Not a glimmer of mercy woke in his savage heart.

He was about to flee over the Cascade Mountains, into a how region, baffled and beaten and desperate, ruined instead of enriched by his incursion into the Canadian ranch-lands. But the schoolboys who had caused his defeat were to pay the penalty first.

"Say your last good-byes," he said, with a savage grin. "I guess you'll be separated soon. And as for your pard—who's escaped—some day I guess I'll come back to the Thompson Valley for him. They haven't seen the last of me in that section. He can wait. But some day I guess I shall send him on the same journey."

He loosened his own horse, and mounted. A black vulture swooped out of the morning sky, and settled on a tree near at hand, already attracted by the carcass of the dead horse, and waiting only for the departure of the riders to settle on its prey.

The sight of the hideous bird made the two bound schoolboys shudder. How long was it to be ere the vultures of the desert were claiming them for prey?

Handsome Alf waved his riding-whip, and struck the mustang a savage blow on the flank.

The animal squealed with pain, and started.

"Good-bye, Bob!" shouted Frank hoarsely.

"Good-bye, old chap!" groaned Bob Lawless.

The Californian rode after the mustang, lashing and lashing with savage cruelty, till the maddened animal raced away across the plain at a frantic gallop.

Bob Lawless' horse was still motionless. Stretched helpless on its back, Bob watched his cousin and chum till the Mexican mustang was a mere vanishing spot in the distance to the north-west.

Handsome Alf rode back to him. The whip rang and lashed again, and Bob's horse leaped away from the cruel lashes, driven off to the north-east.

By separate trails, widening over farther as the horses galloped on, the chums of Cedar Creek were sent adrift in the wilderness.

Handsome Alf looked after them till the two helpless riders had vanished from sight, one to the north-west, one to the north-east.

He laughed.

"I guess that settles my score!" he muttered, and he laughed again—a laugh that had little mirth in it.

Then he wrenched his horse's head round, lashed him, and started at a gallop due west for the Cascade Mountains that loomed up shadowy against the morning sky.

The 3rd Chapter. Two on the Trail!

"I guess we're beat!"

It was Sergeant Scott who spoke. The sun was at the zenith, shining down upon the valley of the Fraser River.

From dawn to noon the North West troopers had been seeking "sign."

That the Californian had crossed the river with his prisoners there was no doubt, and, on the farther bank, Rancher Lawless had picked up the trail of four animals in a section of soft earth a mile or two from the river.

Four tracks which he knew—those of Frank's and Bob's horses, that of the Californian's animal, and the track of the mustang belonging to the dead Mexican. The discovery of the tracks renewed hope in the rancher's breast.

But it was illusory. The tracks vanished on a section of hard, rocky soil.

Far and wide they sought for fresh "sign."

But it was not to be found. Whether the Californian had headed north, east, or west, they could not even guess.

There was no sign on the barren rocks to guide them.

For hours and hours they sought, the party separating far and wide in the quest of "sign." At noon they met again, fatigued and disappointed, and read their ill success in one another's faces.

"I guess we're beat!" said the North West sergeant gloomily. "The game's up, rancher! That fire-bug has got away!"

"With my son and my nephew!" said Rancher Lawless hoarsely.

"It's durned hard!" said Sergeant Scott. "If there was the ghost of a trail, we'd keep on with you, rancher. I guess I'd give a quarter's pay to have Handsome Alf at the end of a rope. But there's no 'sign,' and there's a hundred directions to choose from. We're beat!"

The rancher nodded.

Vere Beauclerc looked at him anxiously.

There was no "sign," no clue to his comrades who had vanished into the wilderness—into the unknown. But Beauclerc was grimly determined that he would not turn back. So long as life remained to him, he would not give up the search till he had found his comrades or learned their fate.

He was resolved upon that, and he knew that his father, if he had been there, would have approved of his resolve.

Surely the rancher was not thinking of turning back?

He was soon relieved on that point.

"You have your duty to do, sergeant," said Mr. Lawless quietly.

"You've done all you can on this trail. And I guess that if I come upon Alf Carson I shan't want any help. He's alone now, and if I find him man to man, that's all I ask. You've got your duty to do. We say good-bye here."

Beauclerc breathed more freely.

The sergeant hesitated.

"I reckon it's as you say, rancher," he answered. "If you should come on the man, you don't need any help, I guess. But do you think there's a chance?"

Mr. Lawless smiled faintly.

"No," he said frankly. "The chance is small enough, if there is one. But I cannot return to the ranch, and tell my wife that I have left her boy in the wilderness. And my nephew—his father trusted him to me. I cannot turn back!"

Sergeant Scott nodded.

"Take this lad back with you," added the rancher, "and take a message for me to the ranch. Give my poor wife what hope you can. I'm keeping on—Heaven may help me!"

"I'm not going back, Mr. Lawless," said Vere Beauclerc quietly.

"I'm keeping on with you. The sergeant will give my father a message that I am safe. Don't tell me to go; I shall have to disobey you. I'm going to find Frank and Bob, or die here in the wilderness searching for them."

The rancher glanced at him. He read the determination in Beauclerc's pale, handsome face, and did not utter a word of opposition.

"You're right, boy," he said simply. "Bob would have said the same in your place, poor lad—or Frank, either. Your father would consent if he knew, as I would. You shall keep on."

"I guess it's a wild-goose chase, but I wish you luck," said the sergeant. "You've got hundreds of miles of rock and mountain, plain and desert, without a white man inside a week's ride, if you go on. But I wish you luck—and luck may

turn out your friend. Anything I can do to help before we ride?"

"You can lend the boy a rifle, and give me what provisions you can spare," said the rancher.

"That's easily done."

A quarter of an hour more, the North West troopers were riding on the back trail.

They had done all that was possible in the pursuit of the last survivor of the rustler gang; but he had vanished without a clue into the trackless wilderness, and their duty called them elsewhere.

The rancher did not need their aid. If fortune befriended him, and he came up with the Californian, he could depend on his own rifle and his own strong right arm. And Beauclerc was with him; they would be two to one if they came upon the enemy.

The scarlet-coated troopers disappeared to the south, on the long ride back to the Thompson Valley.

Mr. Lawless sat on a boulder, and drew quietly and thoughtfully at his pipe, as he watched them disappear in the hazy distance. Vere Beauclerc waited for him to speak.

He was thinking deeply.

He looked up at last, and smiled faintly as he met the boy's questioning eyes.

"It's a wild-goose chase, lad, as the sergeant said," he muttered.

"The cunningest Redskin in the section couldn't hope to track out Handsome Alf now. But I guess I've still got hope. There's luck—and there's Providence. We're keeping on!"

"Yes, yes!"

"You're worn out, my poor lad!"

"I can still ride," said Beauclerc.

"And I'll ride till I fall, looking for my friends!"

The rancher nodded and rose.

"There's no guide—no clue," he said. "But you know that Handsome Alf was in the north-west once—a gold thief there at the mines. I guess he may be lighting out for his old stamping-grounds, and that way lies across the Cascade Mountains. He's got friends there, I reckon—rustlers like himself. There's little to choose, but we'll ride to the north-west, and hope."

And they mounted their horses, and rode forward.

The 4th Chapter. Bob Lawless' Rescue!

"A vulture!" exclaimed Vere Beauclerc.

He raised his hand, and pointed.

The day was drawing to a close, the sun, in a blaze of purple and gold, was sinking behind the Cascade Mountains. From the Rockies, to the east, dark shadows were stealing.

Against the red of the sky the vulture in the distance descended like a black streak.

Beauclerc remembered the scene he had witnessed, where the dead Mexican lay, and shuddered as he pointed.

The vulture, little more than a black speck in the distance, descended with a swoop, and vanished from sight.

Rancher Lawless drew the brim of his Stetson hat to shade his eyes, and looked.

Another and another black dot appeared against the red sunset.

Vulture after vulture was gathering, and on the same spot.

The rancher knitted his brows.

"A dead deer, or a wolf," he muttered. "Or—or a horse, perhaps. Or—"

He did not finish.

The thought was in his mind that perhaps it was one of those whom he was seeking that drew the vultures from the sky.

"Ride on!" he muttered.

The horses were weary, the riders were weary. And the vultures, specks in the distance, were far away. But the rancher and Vere Beauclerc urged on their weary animals to a gallop. Before them lay a sandy plain, patched with tufts of wiry scrub, with the mountains in the distance. Sandy dust was churned up from the beating hoofs, as the horses galloped on.

Fast, but not fast enough for their impatience, they dashed on, and more clearly the vultures came on their sight, bird after bird settling down from the heavens. Some unusual feast was attracting the vultures down from far and near.

Close by a patch of scrubby bush, an object lay on the plain, dimly discerned at first, but clearer and clearer to the view as the riders dashed on.

It was a fallen horse.

And as they came nearer, they saw that there was a rider on its back—a rider stretched on the horse's back from mane to tail, and evidently bound there, for he did not move.

Beauclerc's heart throbbed.

He knew the fate that the outlaw

had planned for his chums, and in which he was to have shared, had not his black horse saved him.

He knew now that it was one of his comrades who lay there, bound to the fallen horse, surrounded by the carrion birds.

The horse was still moving feebly, kicking as a vulture ventured too near and scaring back the obscene bird.

Round the fallen animal a score or more of the filthy birds were gathered, squatting in a circle, waiting for its death. For the carrion bird will not touch a living animal. It will sit and watch for hours a fallen deer or horse, waiting for life to be extinct before venturing to plunge its foul beak into the carcass.

Round the fallen horse they sat and watched and croaked, in a hideous circle of doom.

Clatter! Clatter!

Rancher Lawless blazed off his revolver in the air as he came galloping up, and, with savage, uncouth cries, the vultures scattered.

They did not fly away, however; but scattered to a short distance, where they settled down again—to wait.

Beauclerc flung himself from his horse.

"Bob!" he cried hoarsely.

He ran to the fallen animal and the unconscious rider on its back.

It was easy to see what had happened to the horse. It had put an unwary foot into a gopher's burrow, and fallen with a broken leg. For many a long hour the wretched animal had lain on the ground, unable to move, while the vultures gathered round it, and waited for its death.

It was Bob Lawless who was bound upon its back, and he was insensible.

The rancher snatched out his hunting-knife, and cut through the lengths of rope with a steady hand.

His heart was full.

Once, at least, of the victims had been found; the vultures had been the guide to the rescuers. But for the sight of the foul carrion birds settling down on their prey the rancher would never have seen the fallen horse at the distance—the rescuers would have ridden on without passing close enough to see it. The sight of the vultures had drawn them to the spot, to save, at least, one of the victims of the rustler's vengeance.

Bob Lawless was laid tenderly in the rancher's unrolled blanket, and water placed to his lips—his sun-scorched face was bathed with cool water.

He was unconscious, and utterly exhausted; but he lived. The rancher realised, with deep thankfulness, that he lived—that he would live! There were tears in Beauclerc's eyes as he bathed the unconscious face.

The rancher left him for a few moments, taking his rifle. The crippled horse was kicking feebly in pain; and there was no help for it. A merciful bullet through the brain put it out of its misery.

Bob Lawless' eyes opened.

He turned a wild stare upon the face that was bonding over him.

The unfortunate lad tried to collect his thoughts.

"Cherub!" he whispered.

Beauclerc pressed his hand.

"It's I, Bob—it's I, dear old fellow! And your father—your father's here!"

"Father!"

The rancher bent over his son.

"Don't move, Bob—rest, my dear boy! Thank Heaven we found you—thank Heaven for that!"

"I—I suppose I'm not dreaming!" whispered Bob. "It—it's really you, popper, and—and the Cherub?"

"Yes, yes, my boy."

"The villain—he bound me on the horse, and drove it loose," muttered Bob. "How long—how long was I on the horse's back?"

"Only this day, Bob."

"It seemed like a lifetime," Bob Lawless shuddered. "And—and when the horse fell—I'd lain here weeks it seemed—weeks. And the—the vultures—"

He closed his eyes, shuddering.

"Safe now," whispered Beauclerc.

"Safe now, old chap."

He was thinking, with an aching heart, of Frank. But it was much to have found one of his chums.

The same thought came into Bob's mind, as his brain cleared. He opened his eyes again.

"Frank! You've found Frank?"

"N-no."

"He put him on the Mexican's mustang—his own horse went lame, and Handsome Alf shot it. He's on the mustang—he was driven off to the north-west this morning."

"We shall find him," said the rancher.

He had little hope, but he spoke as hopefully as he could. Blind chance had given him back his son; he could scarcely hope that chance would so stand his friend again. But he spoke hopefully, to comfort the worn-out boy who lay weakly in the blanket.

The sun sank lower behind the mountains. At a short distance the vultures croaked and gabbled. Bob Lawless drank deeply at the pannikin of water Beauclerc held to his parched lips.

"Poor old Frank!" he muttered.

"We've got to find him, father, and the man with the car-rings. He rode west for the mountains. We'll find him yet. But Frank—Frank first—"

"Don't talk now, Bob. You must rest."

Bob lay silent, still sipping the water. He had been through a fearful experience, but rescue had come in time. Already, as the cool water trickled down his parched throat, he felt symptoms of his strength returning.

It was some time before the rancher allowed him to speak. Then, sitting up on the blanket, leaning on Beauclerc's supporting knee, Bob told what had happened since Handsome Alf had crossed the Fraser with his prisoners. From what he could tell of the route the Californian had followed, and his description of the bluffs where the outlaw had camped the previous night, the rancher made his calculations.

"That's west of here," the rancher said at last. "Your horse had brought you a good many miles, Bob, before he broke his leg in the gopher's hole. We've got to find the place where you camped, and from there, it's possible we may pick up the mustang's trail. It's a chance, anyhow. As soon as you can sit a horse, we'll start. You can ride double with Beauclerc. Demon will carry two easily enough."

"I can ride now," said Bob, manfully. "Give me a hand up, Cherub; we're not going to lose a minute."

The rancher nodded assent. Bob Lawless needed rest; but every minute was precious if Frank Richards was to be sought for and saved. The rancher lifted him to the saddle of the black horse, and Beauclerc mounted behind him, to hold him in his place.

Under the red sunset they started westward; and behind them, almost before they were clear of the spot, the vultures settled upon the dead horse, with discordant cries.

The sun sank lower, and vanished behind the mountains; stars came out in a clear sky. In the starlight they pushed on; ahead of them now was a line of low bluffs, a guide to the spot where the Californian had camped the night before.

By the glimmering starlight they found the camp at last. It was easy enough to identify, for the skeleton of a horse lay there—picked clean and white by vulture and coyote.

"Frank's horse," said Bob, with a shiver.

The rancher dismounted.

By the spring it was easy to pick up tracks in the grass, old as they were—easy enough to the experienced plainsman. There were tracks of coyotes and prairie-dogs among the others; but the rancher found the three trails that led away from the spot—Bob's, and Frank's, and that of the Californian. But beyond the fringe of herbage near the spring was dusty, stony soil, where no "sign" remained.

Bob looked up eagerly as his father came back to the camp. Beauclerc had staked out the horses by the spring, and cut wood from a stunted cedar by the water's edge for a camp-fire. The fire blazed out with a ruddy glow, as the rancher came back after seeking the "sign" on the plain.

"Any luck, popper?"

"We know the direction at least," said Mr. Lawless quietly. "In the daylight we may be able to pick up a trail; and at least we shall never give up the search till we have found Frank, or learned what has become of him. We can do nothing now; we must rest here till dawn."

In silence the three ate their supper round the camp-fire, and then rolled themselves in blankets to sleep. Their hearts were aching with anxiety for the missing schoolboy, whom they feared, with a bitter fear, that they would never see again. But they slept at last—the sleep of weariness.

Where was Frank Richards?

Somewhere in the darkness of the wilderness was the Mexican mustang, wandering at will, with the school-boy Mazeppa bound to his back.

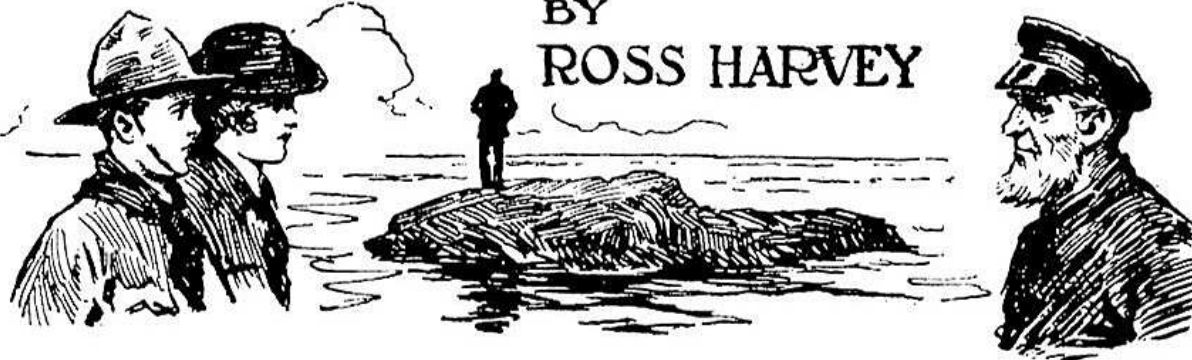
THE END.

(Be sure you don't miss "At the Eleventh Hour." Next Monday's fine tale of Frank Richards & Co.)

A SPLENDID TALE OF ADVENTURE!

THE MISSING SCOUTMASTER!

BY ROSS HARVEY



INTRODUCTION.

TED MARTIN, patrol-leader of the Otters, and his second in command, KITTO, with the patrol, rescue a blind sailor named CAPTAIN BOWERS from a small island, where he is cut off by the tide. Following on this the Otters and a patrol of Girl Guides, under the command of MISS BETTY HANSON, take part at a tournament. Wilson gives a fireworks display of scoutcraft. While the two patrol-leaders, Ted and Betty, are riding in an aeroplane as a reward for the display, they see Captain Bowers on the rocks in the sea. They return to camp, and Mr. Hendron sets off alone to interview the blind sailor. Ted Martin and Kitto recover their boat, and discover in it a message from Mr. Hendron to the effect that he has been kidnapped and is to be kept a prisoner. Later, while listening outside Captain Bowers' shack, they hear the old sailor threatening to kill someone unknown to them. While searching the island, Ted Martin and Kitto witness a fight with outlaws, which is interrupted by bloodhounds. A wounded man and the hounds mysteriously disappear, and the scouts discover their probable retreat in an underground cave.

(Now read on.)

Mr. Hendron Discovered.

And the injured sailor as well. "Yes; for a poison that's it!" breathed Ted, stepping silently forward. "These gates are locked, Jack, and there isn't an earthly chance of breaking them open!" Kitto was not conscious of any very bitter disappointment over that, for the opening of those gates might well mean meeting those bloodhounds; but apparently Ted had forgotten about them. He was still creeping forward past the gates, presently pulling up with a jerk, for the remains of what must have once been something of a fort lay right in front of him. "Fort House!" he muttered. "You've heard of it, Kitto." Jack nodded. Vaguely he remembered having heard that there was a ruined building on White Gull Island known as Fort House, but he had imagined that only traces of the massive walls remained. Instead, the building was almost intact, as far as the outside went, and Jack became openly excited. "Those gates we just passed, he whispered, "perhaps they lead to the cellars or dungeons of this place." "I expect so. Yes, they must," Ted answered, taking in the lie of things with a practised eye. "That masked scamp must live in Fort House." And the hounds as well," added Kitto, a little breathlessly. "It's dead certain to my mind that the injured sailor is there now, and—Mayn't Mr. Hendron be there, too?" The question was startling, for Ted was thinking exactly the same thing. The masked man had obviously made a prisoner of the sailor, so why not of the scoutmaster? Everything pointed to it, and Ted Martin showed the value of quick action. "Come on, Kitto!" he whispered. "We don't leave this island until we know a bit more than we know now. Don't make a sound, old chap!" Jack wasn't likely to do that if he could help it, for once the masked man heard them, it was pretty easy work guessing that those bloodhounds would be released again. In view of that the scouts picked up the first two stout sticks they came across, then, with an anxious eye on the moon and the clouds, they crept forward. Within a few minutes they had rounded Fort House, to discover that one wing of it had an uninterrupted view of the open sea, and it was then that both scouts pulled up dead. "The faintest of sounds caught their ears, the sound that someone might be making an attempt to scale a wall. The chums crouched down amongst

the undergrowth, dead silence. The scraping sound died away, there was a moment of breathless suspense, then a human voice rang out in the lowest of whispers: "Who is there?" The question, as it was spoken, hung strangely in the air, but Ted Martin was on his feet in a flash. "Mr. Hendron, is that you?" "Hush! Yes," came the answer. "Don't make a sound, but listen everything I say. I am a prisoner in a dungeon here in Fort House—at least, I believe it is Fort House!" It is, breathed Ted. "Who my gaoler is I haven't the faintest idea, went in Mr. Hendron, in a lower voice than ever, "but no attempt has been made to harm me. Food is pushed into my cell every day and no one ever comes into the room.

The scoutmaster spoke very clearly, although the chums could not tell where his voice came from, and it went dead against the grain with both lads to leave Mr. Hendron a prisoner for a moment longer than was necessary. They both stood where they were, and Mr. Hendron must have been able to see them, for he spoke again. "Take every precaution against making noise in leave the island," me his voice, and please go at that direct order. "Very good, sir," Ted and Jack turned away, their faces set, and rebellious emotions stirring them. They would have given much for something to happen which would have prevented Mr. Hendron's order being carried out. Nothing looked like happen-



THE ISLAND PRISON!

"I am being kept a prisoner here!" called Mr. Hendron, to the two scouts crouched in the undergrowth. So it was to Fort House that their scoutmaster had "disappeared."

It is utterly impossible for me to escape, though, for there are huge iron bars in front of the window!" "We'll soon attend to them, breathed Ted. "Yes; from outside you could manage to cut through the bars, but it would be utter madness for you to attempt it now. There are a huge number of bloodhounds in this building, and if once they got at you, Martin, Heaven knows what would happen! I don't like the idea of your being on the island at all to-night, so you had better go at once." "And—leave you, sir?" "Yes; leave me until the morning," came Mr. Hendron's answer. "If you attempted a rescue to-night there would be bloodshed, and I am not going to risk that. I have every reason to believe that my gaoler will leave the island during the night, so if you come here with a strong party at daybreak, you can get me out of this cell with little difficulty and very little risk." "But—but—" "That's what I wish you to do, Martin," interrupted Mr. Hendron. "Go back to the camp now, and return at daybreak."

though, so the two scouts had to creep away through the undergrowth, for direct orders have to be obeyed. They crept back to their boat, launched her, and sculled silently away just as a black bank of cloud partially obscured the moon. The light managed to show through for brief moments, so it was easy enough to steer a course for the shore; then, as they were nearing the beach, Ted backed water. "Jack, can you see anything?" "A little crowd on the sands—yes!" Ted strained his eyes, waiting for the moon to shine again. It did, for an instant, revealing a party of three men crouching among the sandhills staring out to sea. "Those sailors again," breathed Kitto. "They're watching the island, of course!" "Perhaps they mean to make another landing." "Well, we shall know before long," answered Ted grimly. "for you and I are going to sack in this boat, drifting about, until those scoundrels clear off. I'm not leaving Mr. Hendron where he is if those sailors mean to land on White Gull Island again!" "I'm with you in that!" whispered

Kitto. "What about backing a bit, and getting those rocks between us and the shore? We might be able to watch them then without being seen." Ted's answer was to paddle silently, and the boat drifted back again, to be swallowed up in the darkness.

In Fort House!

The two scouts were not to spend the night afloat, for they had scarcely got their boat to seaward of some rocks when the moon broke through the clouds again, showing the three sailors moving away along the sands. "Makin' for Captain Bowers' cottage, by the look of it!" Ted exclaimed. "We might have known they wouldn't attempt to land on the island again to-night, for they couldn't do it without a boat!" "Jove, no! I'd forgotten about the tide rising and covering the rocks. What's the next move, Ted?" "Let them get well away, then we make for the camp and set about preparing for daybreak to-morrow." This last idea of Ted's was much more to the liking of both of them, and a very short time later the boat had been safely beached, and they were on their way at the double to the camp. The pleasure with which the rest of the Otter Patrol greeted Ted's startling news about Mr. Hendron can be imagined. Tenderfoot Wilson turned several kinds of "artwheels" in his joy, living up to his reputation as "Jenah" by being unfortunate enough to finish his last one in the remains of the fire. Still, young Wilson didn't trouble much about that. Mr. Hendron was safe, and would be back with them soon after daybreak, and nothing else much counted.

ER!



The light had deal, although matter to see one thing was the rescue-party. "I'm sure to Kitto, been let heard. Y have you? Kitto sl of the isl there wast evergreen on. A sharp them to t Ted pulled "The ga All the "Hump locked las ready for l. As the gber 4th, 1920 made at all, to continue l Magnificent New did so at a flashing the Adventure Story electric torch v. The light wa sloping cave would have been it, and with a narrowed to quite Ted Martin push with Jack close or suddenly they came Ted caught at the door opened as easily done. Then one of t eager than cautious against the door, and ser against the wall. The noise of the crash back from the walls in echo, and the rescue party anxiously. Not a sound and the crash, though. Ted stepped quickly forward, find himself in what appeared to be a dungeon-like cellar right under Fort House, and almost ran into another similar compartment. Like the first one, that was empty, and the patrol leader of the Otters looked uneasy. On the spur of the moment he shouted at the top of his voice: "Mr. Hendron, where are you?" The words came in a veritable roar, helped by the echo, but that was all the answer there was. Fort House was as silent as the grave otherwise. "We must make a search of the whole place, constable!" "Yes, of course—" "You come along with me, Kitto," added Ted. "We'll find that spot where we were last night when we talked to Mr. Hendron. That'll give us a clue, perhaps, as to where he was." The spot was easily found, and the clue was ready waiting for them in the form of a heavily-barred window scarcely a yard above ground. Ted dropped to his knees and peered between the bars, an exclamation of amazement and anxiety leaving his lips at the same moment. "Why, we've just come from that cell! Kitto, Mr. Hendron has disappeared again!" "He—he must be in Fort House somewhere!" Jack spoke in desperation, for it was just maddening to think they had found the scoutmaster once, only to lose him again. Certainly, the scouts had not been to blame, for Mr. Hendron had given them the order to leave him overnight; but that did not prevent the whole thing making the chums desperate. They raced back into the ruined building, to find the rest of the rescue-party searching every nook and cranny of the place. "And there's not a sign of anyone!" cried the constable. "If this is a trick on the part of you boys, it's likely to prove a costly one, I can tell you!" Ted shrugged his shoulders. The constable, who was speaking so a surdly, was the same self-satisfied individual Ted had taken a dislike once before, so the patrol-leader fused to argue. He wheeled round, and, with and the rest of the Otters, the searched the whole place. The blankest failure was the reward, for not a trace of M dron, nor the masked man, dogs could be found anywhere. "And that injured sailor, Kitto, "he's gone, too!" "Ted did not answer. Fo of him he could not think planation to it all, although bitterly angry with himself, having left a sentry on the watch the island all night. Still, there was nothin gained by thinking of that Ted was far too sensible s

and there was a search every

on his back, across the back of the mustang... Betty was consign him to such a fate...

were waiting; then a racing stroke was set for the raft. Scarcely a couple of minutes elapsed before the scouts were level with the home-made craft...

Ted never forgot his relief as he sprang on to the raft. Then a few sashes of his jack-knife had Mr. Hendron free, and the young scout-master was sitting up, staring at him...

"Oh, we saw you land on the island all right," said Ted. "The police will want to hear your account of it, though."

The sailor darted a quick glance at Ted, then lapsed into silence, and he was rather forgotten by the scouts...

He had already written on the floor-boards of the boat how a masked man had sprung into his boat as he was on the point of landing on White Gull Island...

"After that he rowed me round to

what I thought to be the south of the island, and then I was taken to the dungeon," said Mr. Hendron.

"And—and you haven't the faintest idea who the masked man is, sir?"

"Well, and what about you?" flashed Ted to the wounded sailor. "You can answer that question if you want to—you and your three pals, and blind Captain Boyers!"

The sailor did not open his mouth, and there was nothing to be read in his face, so Ted turned impatiently from him.

"Will you come into the boat, sir?" he asked Mr. Hendron. "We can tow the raft ashore. This sailor had better go to the hospital at once, hadn't he?"

Mr. Hendron glanced at the wounded man and nodded, for the sailor was badly cut about, although he had made some sort of an attempt to bind up his injuries.

"Of course, I must explain all that has happened to the police!" he exclaimed. "But how much good that will do, there's no saying. Personally, I've a longing to solve this mystery ourselves."

"Yes, rather, sir!" And to do that we'd better get at Captain Bowers, and those choice friends of his you have been telling me about," went on the scoutmaster.

"All that we know at the moment is that the masked man is an enemy of Bowers and his gang, and none of them seem to be friends of ours. Martin, I'll just have a snack of something to eat up at the camp, and a slice down, then we'll board Captain Bower, in his cottage again."

(More of this exciting tale in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)



Once more it is time for me to write this chat column, and, as usual, there is plenty to talk about, as next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND will naturally be up to its usual standard, and that takes a lot of "chatting" about.

There will be long instalments of each of the three fine serials:

"THE LEAGUE OF THE STAR AND CRESCENT!"

By John S. Margerison,

"THE BOY WITH FIFTY MILLIONS!"

By Victor Nelson,

and

"THE MISSING SCOUTMASTER!"

By Ross Harvey.

"THE AFFAIR OF THE POISONED CAMP,"

By Edmund Burton,

is the next case to be handled by famous Grant, chauffeur-detective, and you can take it from me, it is a really exciting problem which will keep you guessing from the beginning right up to the last few lines.

"AFTER MANY DAYS!"

By Owen Conquest,

is the title of the next Rookwood yarn. By the way, this is the last of the present excellent series of Jimmy Silver tales, but there are even better to follow.

The next Backwoods tale is entitled:

"AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR!"

By Martin Clifford.

This also is the last of a series, and again there are even better to

follow. According to our English grammars, the adjective good has but three degrees—good, better, best. The yarns in the BOYS' FRIEND have, for the last twenty-five years, been getting better; the question now arises, when will they be "best" (There is no prize for answering this.—Ed.)

Have YOU had a shot at our Telephone Competition yet? There is one each week, and that means Ten Shillings every week for some astute reader. Have a try NOW. Turn to page 524. 'S easy!

I have to tell you the glad news that it is still possible to get a copy of "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL," as our publishers have just a few in hand. The price of this popular book is 6s., and well worth twice that amount. This is one of the books you DON'T have to be a profiteer to be able to afford. Buy a copy now if you have not already done so—it makes a fine Christmas present for children or grown-ups alike.

A SCOUT QUERY.

A friend up north asks me which band won the Trek Cart offered by the BOYS' FRIEND at the Jamboree for the best playing, etc. The prize was awarded to the 5th Lewisham Troop, and all good wishes go with them in their well-deserved success.

Your Editor

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