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The BOYS' FRIEND 2d.

SIXTEEN BIG PAGES!

No. 1,138. Vol. XXIII.—New Series.]

THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD!

[Week Ending March 31st, 1923.]



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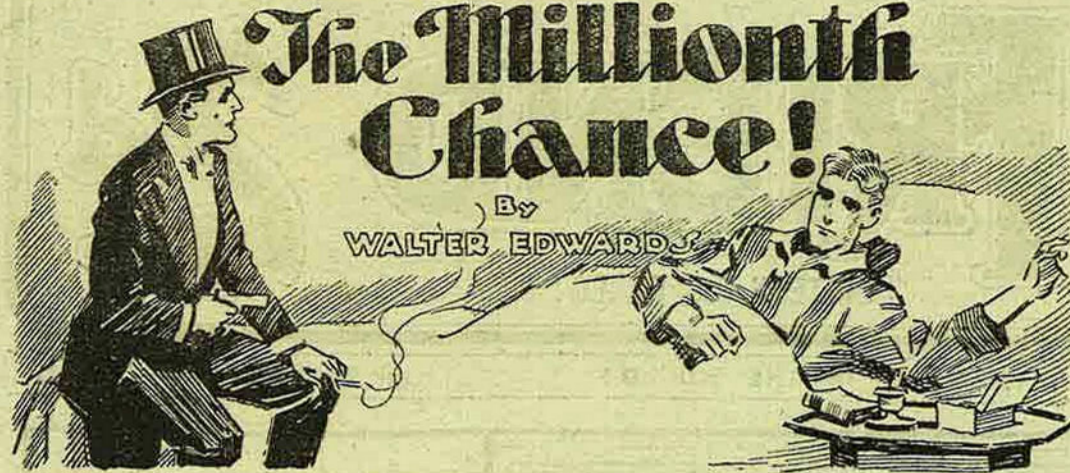


THE DUKE ASSISTS ROLLO DAYTON TO RECOVER THE STOLEN CUP!

(An exciting incident from "The Millionth Chance!" a great story in this issue!)

"LOVELL'S WONDERFUL WHEEZE!" A Splendid Story of Rookwood School by OWEN CONQUEST in this Issue!

HERE'S A STORY THAT SPEAKS FOR ITSELF!



Rollo Dayton scores off the Duke, but the master-criminal, despite heavy odds, once again avoids capture!

The 1st Chapter.

At Large!

A reign of terror had London in its grip, and the man behind it was the sinister individual who was known to the underworld of two continents as the Duke.

A criminal genius, an accomplished linguist, and a master of make-up, he was waging war against Society with a ruthless cunning and a diabolical ingenuity which stamped him as the greatest menace of the age; and the people called upon Scotland Yard to lay him by the heels without delay—to bring him to the bar of justice at all costs.

The Duke had been in the hands of the law on three or four occasions, but never had a prison-cell been strong enough to hold him. Skilled in every branch of lawlessness, he was a gaol-breaker of no mean order, being one of the few criminals to escape from the dreaded Tombs Prison in the States.

Special precautions were taken to guard against the Duke's activities; but he might have been a phantom, so elusive was he. That he was a creature of flesh and blood was certain, however, for he invariably left a neatly-inscribed ivory visiting-card upon the scene of his operations.

Famous jewels and cherished heirlooms vanished as though spirited away by some supernatural agency, strong-rooms and safe-deposits were invaded and robbed, and at least one daring hold-up took place in broad daylight in the West End, the bandits getting away with a large quantity of jewellery.

The Duke was well served in the matter of hirelings, but his was the hand which pulled the strings. North, south, east, and west, he threw out his tentacles, and thousands upon thousands of pounds poured into his coffers.

The police, of course, came in for much ridicule and condemnation, yet they were working tirelessly in their efforts to run their quarry to earth; and there was not a man in the Force who would not have risked his life for the bare chance of slipping a pair of handcuffs upon the criminal's slim wrists.

Thousands of plain-clothes detectives were scouring the districts known to be favoured by the Duke, but a house-to-house search of Limehouse, Poplar, and Soho did not bear fruit. Scores of ticket-of-leave men, old lags, and "suspects" were questioned closely, but they all declared that they had never set eyes upon the "wanted" man.

This, in many cases, was a lie, but they knew that it would be nothing less than suicide to turn informer. The very name of the Duke struck fear into their craven hearts.

The "Terror"—as one paper dubbed him—was certainly in London, and every day brought a fresh series of crimes to light, each bearing the unmistakable stamp of the master-mind.

Sitting in his private office in the clubhouse, Big John Vaughan, the managing director of the Chelsea Villa F.C., was discussing the amazing affair with the Hon. Rollo Dayton, the famous amateur.

"Where is it going to end, old man?" asked the bearded giant, tapping a newspaper which gave details of an audacious robbery at the Mint.

A number of ingots had vanished during the night—and this despite the presence of a special guard—but no trace of the thieves' methods had been discovered.

The only clue was a neat ivory visiting-card. It was inscribed:

"The Duke. With Compliments." Rollo Dayton shook his fair head. "I really can't say," he confessed, absently polishing his gold-rimmed monocle with a silk handkerchief. "Every third person one meets in the street is a detective, yet the priceless old Duke still evades arrest. It's uncanny, 'pon my word it is! One could feel a sort of admiration for the lad if he wasn't so handy with his jolly little gun and all that sort of thing."

"He's certainly a cunning scoundrel," agreed John Vaughan. "But this state of affairs cannot continue. There'll be a panic if he's allowed to run wild for another month! People are even losing their faith in banks, and—"

"Well, he managed to get into the strong-room of the London & North-minster, didn't he?" put in Rollo.

"Matters have come to a most critical pass," continued John Vaughan gravely, "and I see no bright spot at the moment."

Rollo passed a hand over his smooth hair.

"There mayn't be a dazzling spot—a real thousand candle-power illumination—but at least we've a grain of consolation," he drawled.

John Vaughan raised his bushy eyebrows questioning, half suspecting Rollo of a mild joke.

"How do you make that out?" he asked.

"Well, whilst this priceless lad is cracking cribs, bursting safes, and doing the Dick Turpin act, he is giving us a rest, isn't he?" asked the amateur. "We've not been troubled by him for well over a week; he hasn't tried to poison us or blow the ground sky-high or anything! I think it's jolly decent of him!"

The bearded giant was forced to smile, in spite of himself, for Rollo Dayton spoke the truth.

The Duke, returning from a successful "business tour" in the States, had tired of the ordinary round of crime, and had directed his sinister activities against British sport, and in so doing he at once came up against Rollo and a number of other sportsmen who called themselves the Clean-Sport Crusaders. They declared war upon the criminal.

Rollo was the leading light, and in the many battles of brain and brawn which ensued he always managed to more than hold his own.

Pluck and a punch in each hand pulled him through.

To find his equal in a fair-haired, broad-shouldered youngster who was little more than a schoolboy was a new and unpleasant experience for the Duke, and he vowed to "destroy" his youthful enemy without delay.

Rollo, strangely enough, did not see eye to eye with him in this killing business, and time and again he missed death by the narrowest of margins. And with each failure to rid himself of the youngster did the Duke's determination increase.

Then the time arrived when he directed all his energies against Rollo and the Chelsea Villa Club. Many were the schemes he launched to disgrace the footballers and bring the Villa to the dust, but Rollo always frustrated him, even though it might be at the eleventh hour.

The 2nd Chapter.

A Shock for John Vaughan.

Big John Vaughan, who looked worried and thoughtful, caressed his tawny beard and gazed across at the

handsome youngster who was perched upon the edge of the table.

"This affair at the Mint seems scarcely credible!" he declared.

"Maybe, old egg," returned Rollo; "but it has happened, nevertheless. I shouldn't be surprised to hear that the Duke had tried to get his hands upon the Crown jewels!"

"There are less likely things than that," declared Vaughan.

"And after he'd got those he might spend a pleasant ten minutes in breaking into the Bank of England!" smiled Rollo, elaborating. "There must be quite a lot of money there, you know! I paid in a postal-order for ninepence only yesterday!"

"You're joking, my son!" smiled

safe in the corner. "I don't suppose that thing would worry him. He'd open it as though it were a— a paper bag!"

Vaughan coloured and snorted, for he had unbounded faith in that safe. "It would take a dozen Dukes to open that, my son!" he declared, his voice ringing with defiance. "That safe is burglar-proof. What is more, I am the only person in the wide world who knows the combination!"

Rollo rose slowly from his perch on the table, and strolled across to the massive steel affair, which was almost a strong-room in itself. The afternoon light gleamed upon shining brass bars and handles.

"It certainly is a nice little chap!" he murmured admiringly. "Still, one should be able to open it easily enough—"

Again Vaughan grunted and glared.

"Provided," Rollo ran on blandly, "that one had about ten tons of dynamite and a corkscrew! No, there's not much chance of the precious old Cup straying out of there, John!"

Vaughan's face brightened. "That's so, old man!" he said. "It's a complicated affair, even when you know all about it. It takes me nearly a minute to manipulate the locks."

Rollo raised his fine eyebrows.

"Locks?" he queried.

"Certainly!" returned Vaughan. "There are eight or nine of them, and three doors!"

"Then why not let me see how you work the priceless old gadget?" asked Rollo, thoroughly interested.

"I may want to turn burglar one of these days, and the experience will prove useful!"

Vaughan chuckled deep down in his broad chest.



THE DUKE FOILED! Rollo Dayton's powerful legs swept the Duke from the bed, and, as the master-criminal with a savage cry crashed to the carpet, the youngster leapt through the air and landed full on top of him!

the manager. "But I really believe that scoundrel has nerve enough to do anything. He'd rob a fellow of his gold tooth!"

"What surprises me is the fact that he hasn't had a shot at bagging the jolly old Cup!" said Rollo, with twinkling eyes; for he knew that he would touch the big man upon a sore point.

"Don't you talk out of the back of your neck, Dayton!" growled Vaughan. "He's got about as much chance of putting his fingers on that trophy as he has of being found 'Not guilty' when he comes up for trial!"

Rollo refused to be convinced. "I'm not so sure of that," he returned, with a glance at the massive

"As a matter of fact," he said, feeling for his keys. "I've got to open it. The F.A. have asked for certain important papers. Now for the 'Open, Sesame!' act!"

Rollo watched him intently as he manipulated bolts and bars, turned various keys, and worked out abstruse combinations. But at last he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

He had reached the third door, a sheet of gleaming steel. He inserted a slender key.

"At last!" said Vaughan, swinging the door open.

And then a choking cry broke from him, and he became as still as a man turned to stone. His mouth gaped open, and he stared fixedly at the interior of the safe.

"What's—what's the matter?" asked Rollo helplessly, alarmed by the expression of horror upon the manager's ashen features.

"The Cup!" gasped Vaughan in a hoarse whisper. "It's gone!"

The 3rd Chapter.

And One for Dayton.

The theft of the Crown Jewels could scarcely have caused a greater sensation than did the mysterious disappearance of the English Cup.

Not that there was any mystery so far as the actual theft was concerned, for the thief—in order to simplify matters for the police!—had been considerate enough to leave a message upon the shelf of the safe.

Written in a neat, small hand, the note ran as follows:

"My dear Vaughan,—To open your 'burglar-proof' safe was as simple as outwitting your wooden-headed detectives and the band of imbeciles who call themselves the Clean-Sport Crusaders. The sport-crazy boneheads haven't enough sense to come in out of the rain.

"P.S.—It may interest you to know that a matter of hours will find the Cup in the melting-pot."

Big John Vaughan was still stunned by the tragic discovery when Rollo Dayton, having recovered from his initial shock, phoned through to the Yard and explained briefly what had happened. And less than twenty minutes found half a dozen detectives upon the scene, scouring the manager's office, the clubhouse, and the grounds for clues which might give some indication of the crook's movements after he had made his haul.

And they might have been searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack; for, apart from the taunting note, they could not find the faintest trace of the phantom who called himself the Duke. The criminal who snarped contemptuous fingers under the very nose of the force had vanished—and so had the English Cup.

It was obvious that he had used duplicate keys, and that, in some inexplicable manner, he had managed to solve the jealously guarded riddle of the combination, and the whole job had been carried out in that neat and expert manner which stamped it as his handiwork.

The Scotland Yard men, beaten and baffled at every turn, shook their heads, and tried to decide upon the next move in the game.

John Vaughan, huddled up in his deep armchair, looked a stunned, almost pitiable figure. His fine features were deeply lined, and his eyes clouded and troubled.

He felt that the whole responsibility for the loss rested upon his own broad shoulders.

The English Cup, the most coveted trophy in the world of sport, had been entrusted into his care, and now it had been stolen by the man who would not hesitate to consign it to the melting-pot. Vaughan knew that nothing would give the criminal greater joy than to reduce the handsome Cup to a mass of molten metal.

The news of the theft was flashed to every corner of the metropolis, and the small army of detectives became more vigilant than ever. Even most respectable old gentlemen who happened to be carrying a parcel were treated to a disturbing scrutiny, for the Yard did not mean to leave anything to chance.

It was known that the Duke was in London, and the police authorities vowed that it would take all his uncanny ingenuity to slip through their hands on this occasion. Indeed, Sir Henry Bellfield, the Commissioner, declared that he would organise a house-to-house search throughout the whole metropolis if necessary. The Duke, a menace which must be destroyed, had to be hounded down.

Disgruntled and disgusted, the detectives drifted back to John Vaughan's room. Some had been searching the enclosure, others the clubhouse, and the groundsmen and other employees had been closely questioned, but all to no purpose.

Every likely clue had been followed, to come to naught; and now, two hours after the discovery of the theft, they found themselves up against a brick wall.

"It fair beats me!" declared one plain-clothes man, a grey-haired giant with a clean-shaven, bulldog cast of countenance. "When did you last open the safe, Mr. Vaughan? That is, before this afternoon?"

The bearded man raised his haggard face and turned dazed eyes upon the questioner.

"Yesterday, in the evening," he answered wearily. "The whole thing

ANSWERS
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seems impossible, like a fearful nightmare; yet—

He glanced at the open safe, at the empty shelf, which but a matter of hours before had supported the English Cup.

"H'm! Then it looks as though he did the job during the night," put in another detective. "It's a knock-out!"

"It's a priceless old thump to the point," old egg," drawled the Hon. Rollo Dayton. "We're down for the count, and all that, but I don't see that we're serving any useful purpose by moping about here. The Cup has vanished, there's no doubt about that; and so it is up to us to find it."

One or two of the police officers turned scowling faces to the fair-haired amateur, who looked his usual untroubled self.

"That sounds all very fine, young man," growled the man with the bulldog face, "but perhaps you'll kindly tell us how you're going to get on the track of the Duke."

The youngster beamed through his gold-rimmed monocle.

"Then, again, perhaps I won't, old egg," he drawled. "The peerless old 'pot' is in London, and I mean to get hold of it before our man melts it down."

His mellow tone rang with confidence, and big John Vaughan raised his head. There was a light of hope in the wide-set eyes.

"D'you mean that, young 'un?" he asked eagerly. "Do you think there's a chance—"

"Of course there's a chance!" cried Rollo, walking across to the bearded giant and gripping his shoulder.

"There's one thing I don't want you to do, and that is to worry your head about the business. You can safely leave this affair to your Uncle Rollo."

The suspicion of a smile dawned upon the manager's clean-cut features as he rose to his feet and looked straight into the amateur's mild blue eyes.

"The theft has knocked me all to pieces," he declared rather huskily; "but what you say makes me think that things mayn't be so bad as they seem. You really believe you'll be able to recover the Cup?"

Rollo shot out a muscular hand.

"I do," he said, with a broad smile. "I'll rescue that priceless old 'pot' or—eg eat my hat."

Giving Vaughan's mighty hand another hearty grip, he nodded cheerily to the sceptical-looking crowd of detectives, and strode across the room to the door; and it was whilst he was descending the staircase that he realised that his soft felt hat was likely to figure in his menu at no distant date, for he had not the faintest idea as to how he was going to get upon the trail of the stolen trophy.

An optimist himself, he knew that John Vaughan would serve no useful purpose by moping in his office; and it was mainly to cheer his friend that he had made his rash promise.

Hailing a taxi, he drove to the Belgrade Sporting Club, in Piccadilly, and there, over an excellent dinner, he discussed the impudent theft from all angles; but later in the evening, when he let himself into his small flat in the Albany, he was still very much at sea, being no nearer to the recovery of the English Cup than he had been that afternoon.

Reports had come through from every part of London, yet nobody had set eyes upon the mysterious individual who called himself the Duke. He had vanished completely, as he had done on many other occasions.

Micawber-like, Rollo Dayton refused to be downhearted.

"Something's bound to turn up," was his last drowsy thought, switching off the light above his bed and preparing for sleep.

Eleven deep-throated chimes rang out upon the still night air, then twelve; and Rollo, breathing as softly and regularly as a tired child, slumbered peacefully.

He was a light sleeper, yet when the door opened on this stroke of one-

thirty he did not stir. A figure, which might have been a phantom, so noiselessly did it move, crossed the room and halted.

A little groan escaped the sleeper's lips, and then he became subconsciously, the law of self-preservation warning him of impending danger. Still half awake, he raised his hand and switched on the light; and a second or so later, when his eyes became used to the glare, a startled, inarticulate cry broke from his lips, for, seated upon the other end of the bed, was an immaculate figure in evening clothes.

The intruder's features, which were clean-cut and waxen, might have been a mask; the strange eyes were unfathomable and the lips thin and cruel.

Rollo, supine and transfixed, felt sure that the whole affair was an unpleasant dream; but suddenly the terrible truth dawned upon him, driving every vestige of sleep from his whirling brain.

"The—Duke!" he gasped, in little more than a whisper.

"Exactly!" smiled the criminal, training his vicious-looking automatic upon a spot immediately between the startled youngster's eyes.

The 4th Chapter. Rollo Gains a Point.

Rollo Dayton stared fixedly at the impressive features, looking for all the world as though he had been suddenly confronted by a gorgon's head. His lips were parted and his blue eyes wide open, and the Duke, with a ghost of a smile upon his face, seemed

is absolutely necessary. I'm losing my beauty sleep, you know."

A slight tinge of colour crept under the Duke's sallow skin.

"This is scarcely the time for cheap banter, my dear Dayton," he said, his trigger finger twitching ominously, "for you are at the present moment much nearer to death than you imagine. I need hardly warn you that you have only to make one suspicious movement and I fire—to kill. As you know, it is my intention to destroy you at my leisure, but before I do so there are one or two remarks I wish to make."

The tone was very quiet, but Rollo knew that the criminal uttered no idle threat when he spoke so dispassionately of taking life.

"Good!" smiled the youngster, with a show of enthusiasm. "Anything for a quiet life!"

"And a quiet death," put in the Duke swiftly, with a glance at the noiseless revolver in his hand.

"Well, get on with the washing!" drawled Rollo, whose quick brain was working at top speed. That his peril was very real was certain, but he did not mean to go under without putting up a fight. Furthermore, he consoled himself with the fact that this was not the first occasion on which he had found himself squinting down the disquieting end of an automatic. "However, I've had to warn you before about your playful killing habits. You'll hurt somebody one of these days, you know."

Again a wave of angry blood mounted to the criminal's broad forehead, for the youngster's ridicule

youngster throwing himself upon the slim figure with the gun.

"Duke, you cowardly hound!" breathed Rollo, his blue eyes glinting like points of steel, "you'll pay for that one day!"

The criminal, whose passion had vanished and left him quite cool, gave a light laugh.

"You are surely an optimist, my dear Dayton," he murmured, vastly amused. "You speak of 'one day'! It is my wish that you shall not see the light of another dawn!"

Rollo remained silent for a few moments, and then he also gave a light laugh; but the memory of that cowardly blow was still with him.

"By the way, gaolbird," he said, playing for time. "Have you got the Cup with you?"

A sinister smile fitted across the criminal's waxen features, and was gone.

"It is of the Cup that I wish to speak," he said quietly. "At the present moment it is in the hands of a certain enterprising gentleman who makes a living by melting down certain gold and silver ornaments and other articles which come his way."

Rollo nodded, bracing his muscles for a sudden spring.

"Meaning that he is a 'fence'?" he asked. "He's a receiver of stolen property?"

"He is," returned the Duke easily. "Slim Mawson is caressing that Cup even whilst we are having this pleasing and informal little chat. He loves pretty things—loves to destroy them! And when he puts your English Cup in the melting-pot

present, my dear Dayton, but by the time the trophy goes into the melting-pot you will have lost interest in it—and in everything else, for that matter!"

The youngster's handsome face was pale and set as he returned the criminal's mocking gaze; and the heart beneath the pyjama-jacket was thumping so hard that Rollo was afraid that the Duke would hear it.

The crook appeared to notice nothing unusual, however, and for once in his life he was taken off his guard. Perched upon the side of the bed, he was, of course, near Rollo's feet, yet he was not prepared for the sudden movement which swept him clean off his balance and sent him full length to the carpet.

"You wouldn't dare shoot me in cold blood," began Rollo tauntingly; and the criminal was about to answer when the youngster brought his powerful legs round and swept the fellow from the bed.

A savage cry escaped the Duke as he thudded to the carpet, and his revolver went slithering across the carpet, to vanish beneath the old oak wardrobe; and the next moment Rollo Dayton leapt through the air and landed full on top of him, crushing the breath from the lithe body.

The capture was by no means complete, however, for the criminal had a great advantage over his youthful adversary, who was badly handicapped by having to fight in his bare feet. And the Duke, when it came to a hand-to-hand encounter, became possessed of the savage fury of a tigress robbed of her cubs.

Using both hands and feet, and employing all the doubtful tactics of the underworld, he fought desperately for mastery, but in Rollo Dayton it seemed that he had at last found his match.

The magnificent youngster seemed to have the strength of ten ordinary men, and, try as he would, the criminal could not get his steel-like fingers round the smooth throat.

And all the while it seemed that his ribs must snap beneath the paralyzing pressure of the sturdy young arms.

Time and again he groped for the throat, only to be foiled by a lightning movement; and, chest to chest, with their breath hot upon their lips, the two rolled over and over, gasping painfully, but giving not an inch.

This was to be a fight to the finish, and the criminal, who had a horror of capture, meant to escape or sell his life dearly. The thought of the prison cell that awaited him added to his phenomenal strength, and the veins upon his pallid forehead stood out like whipcord as he battled for the upper hand.

Fighting with maniacal fury, with blazing eyes and snarling lips, he brought trick after trick into play, but each time the tight-lipped, silent youngster was on the alert.

And then—sudden, dramatic—came the end.

The Duke, in a last frantic effort to reach the pulsing throat, left his jaw unprotected, and in that fleeting second Rollo Dayton struck.

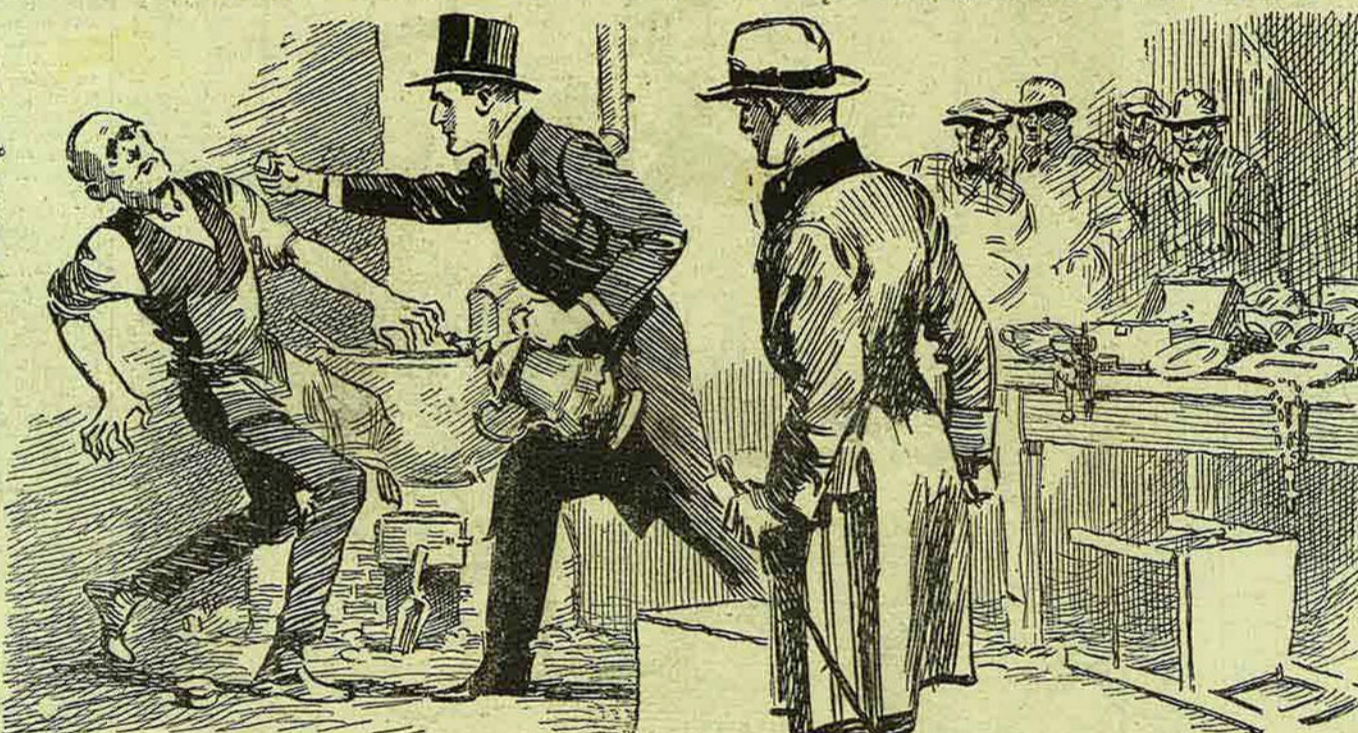
Crack!

His mighty fist swung upward, and his hard knuckles connected with the "point"; and the Duke, with scarcely a moan, became limp in the arms of his youthful conqueror.

The 5th Chapter. A Sporting Proposition!

The man who called himself the Duke was neatly bound and gagged when he ultimately opened his eyes and gazed about in a dazed, uncertain fashion.

He was seated in a comfortable armchair, and when his brain cleared he saw that he was a prisoner in a cosy sitting-room. A few good pictures adorned the walls, and a cheery fire was blazing in the grate; and a sigh of relief escaped him when he thought that he might have regained consciousness in a prison cell. (Continued overleaf.)



THE DUKE'S WAY! "But it's mine!" said Slim Mawson, retreating hurriedly as the Duke advanced. Smack! The master-criminal snatched the cup and sent Slim staggering with a lightning blow full to the mouth. "Don't argue with your betters, you rat!" snapped the Duke viciously.

to enjoy his enemy's surprise and discomfiture.

"I must really apologise for disturbing you, my dear Dayton," began the "crook" in silky tones, "but I have something to say to you, something of the utmost importance."

The sound of the Duke's purring voice caused the youngster to take a grip upon his nerves, and he did not try to hide from himself the fact that he was in deadly peril.

He stifled a yawn, and fixed the other man with his mild blue eyes. The first shock over, Rollo was now his usual imperturbable self.

"Go on, old egg!" he drawled, "but don't keep me up longer than

seared his pride. He was used to his hirelings cringing before his mere gaze, yet this fair-haired young giant, who was absolutely at his mercy, had the temerity to joke in the face of death! Rollo was within an ace of destruction at that moment.

The trigger finger moved ever so slightly, but the "crook" managed to control his rage.

"Silence, you puppy!" he snarled, suddenly leaning forward and striking Rollo across the mouth with the back of his hand.

The sharp sound rang through the bed-room, and it was only the knowledge that he would be leaping to certain death which checked the

and watches it slowly turn into an ugly, shapeless mass, its noble lines being lost for ever, he will cackle with joy and rub his skinny hands! Oh, he loves destroying beautiful things, does Slim!"

"And do you mean to say that you'll stand by and watch this sacrifice, you—you vandal?" cried Rollo, his fine eyes blazing with indignation.

He was about to sit upright, but a movement of the automatic warned him just in time.

"No, no, don't do anything rash!" begged the Duke. "I thought you would be interested in the fate of the Cup. How Slim will gloat! I should very much like you to be

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN ON SATURDAY.

Below will be found our expert's opinion of the probable results of the big games to be played on Saturday, March 31st. The likely winning side is printed in capitals. Where a draw is anticipated, both clubs are printed in smaller letters.

First Division.	Second Division.	First Division (Scottish League).
ARSENAL v. Aston Villa.	BARNSELY v. Coventry City.	Albion Rovers v. RANGERS.
Birmingham v. LIVERPOOL.	Blackpool v. Manchester United.	AYE UNITED v. Partick Thistle.
BLACKBURN ROVERS v. Oldham Ath.	BRADFORD CITY v. Bury.	Clyde v. Motherwell.
BOLTON WANDERERS v. Middlesbr'gh.	Crystal Palace v. WEST HAM UNITED.	Alloa v. AIRDRIEONIANS.
SUNDERLAND v. Tottenham Hotspur.	DERBY COUNTY v. Clapton Orient.	Hamilton Acads. v. Dundee.
CARDIFF CITY v. Preston North End.	FULHAM v. Leeds United.	HEARTS v. Aberdeen.
MANCHESTER CITY v. Chelsea.	HULL CITY v. South Shields.	KILMARNOCK v. Morton.
EVERTON v. Burnley.	LEICESTER CITY v. Port Vale.	RAITH ROVERS v. Hiberniana.
HUDDERSFIELD TOWN v. Newcastle U.	NOTTS COUNTY v. Stockport County.	St. Mirren v. Celtic.
Stoke v. Nottingham Forest.	THE W'DN'SDAY v. Wolverhampton W.	
West Brom. Albion v. Sheffield United.	SOUTHAMPTON v. Rotherham County.	

The Best Yet—"THE LAST LAUGH!" next Monday's splendid story of ROLLO DAYTON and the DUKE!



(Continued from previous page.)

Furthermore, he was alone, and this meant that either the police had not been summoned, or that they had not yet arrived.

Running his mind over the hand-to-hand struggle in the bed-room, he wondered how long he had been "out"; and then his eyes blazed with venom as he realised that he was at the mercy of Rollo Dayton, the intrepid youngster who had been a thorn in his side for months past.

The thought prompted him to tug savagely at his bonds, but he merely succeeded in tightening the knots and causing the thin rope to eat into his flesh; but the sound of his struggles brought Rollo out of the bed-room.

The youngster had washed and dressed, and he looked as debonair as usual as he jammed his gold-rimmed monocle into position and beamed down at the Duke.

"Well, and how do you feel now, my little man?" asked Rollo pleasantly.

He bore no trace of the life-and-death struggle which had taken place but twenty minutes before.

Strange noises escaped the Duke, and his usually pale face became mottled with angry blood, for never in the whole of his career had he felt so humiliated.

For his bodily injuries he cared nothing. It was this blow to his pride which stung him, robbing him of every vestige of sanity. For was not he the Duke, the criminal, whose word was law in the underworld of every great city, a prisoner in the hands of a grinning puppy, a youngster who was little more than a school-boy?

He tugged anew, beads of perspiration standing out upon his forehead, but it was all to no purpose. He chewed savagely at his gag, but only succeeded in biting his lips.

"What does the little man want?" asked Rollo quietly. "Would he like to say a few words?"

If the expression upon the working features meant anything, it seemed that the Duke had quite a number of things to say, and they were not likely to be of a friendly nature.

Strolling across to his captive, Rollo removed the gag, yet no sound came from the criminal. His lips moved, but he was past speech. Rage choked him.

"What's the matter, Duke?" smiled the youngster. "Has the little man got a pain somewhere?"

The youngster's solicitous question seemed to break the spell, and the next moment the criminal was anathematising his host in half a dozen languages—French, German, Spanish, Romany, they all tripped off his tongue with equal fluency.

He stopped at last, hoarse and breathless, returning Rollo's somewhat pitying smile with an evil glare. "I gather, Duke," muttered the youngster, almost sadly, "that you don't like me!"

This was the signal for a further outburst, but Rollo checked it with his upraised hand.

"No, no!" he said quietly. "I'm sure you can't think of anything else to call me, so we will now get to business."

This remark brought the Duke back to his plight, and his white-hot passion gave place to a strange calm. "And what do you intend to do with me, my dear Dayton?" he asked in his usual purring tone; and an insolent, contemptuous smile flitted across his pallid features as he put the question.

"First of all," returned Rollo, "I wish to know what time your friend—what is his name?—Slim Mawson is going to put the English Cup in the melting-pot?"

The Duke nodded his sleek head, and a curious light dawned in his eyes.

"And perhaps you'd like to know where to find him?" he asked mockingly.

"Yes, I certainly think you might tell me, so do one sporting action in your life!" answered Rollo, speaking

very earnestly. "You don't understand what that Cup means, Duke, or all that it stands for. It's not merely a lump of silver; it is something infinitely more. It's an institution, it's a—"

"Aw, cut that stuff out!" growled the master-criminal, with a sudden change of tone. "You and your sport and your 'play-the-game' stuff make me tired. Look here, Dayton, I'll put a proposition up to you."

"Go ahead!" bade the youngster. "Now, it seems to me that this English Cup means a whole lot to you and the rest of the sport-crazy fools," said the Duke. "That's so, isn't it?"

Rollo nodded. "Well, I'll take you along to Slim Mawson and rescue the thing on

"Every chance, my dear Dayton," declared the Duke gravely. "I promise you a safe escort, upon my word of honour."

The much "wanted" crook was talking about his honour, yet Rollo Dayton found nothing incongruous in the fact, knowing the Duke to be a man of his word.

"This is a sporting proposition if ever there was one," continued the captive artfully. "I take you to Slim Mawson's and hand the Cup over to you, after which you are at liberty to go to the door and raise the alarm. Almost every third man you meet nowadays is a detective, so what chance will I have of making a get-away? Not one in a million. Yet if you like to give me the millionth chance you shall have the Cup. Otherwise it goes into the melting-pot. This is a fair offer, Dayton, square and on the level; but, above all, it's sporting. What do you say?"

Rollo did not answer for a minute or so; he was weighing the matter up in his mind. After all, the Duke was right when he declared that he would not have a millionth chance of getting away, for London was teeming with plain-clothes men; also, Rollo felt convinced that the crook would keep his word in the matter of the safe escort.

It was the third point which settled the affair—the fact that he had vowed to find the English Cup and restore it to Big John Vaughan.

"Duke," he said suddenly, "I'll do it!"

Three uniformed policemen were standing upon the corner of the causeway, but Rollo did not wait for them to approach him.

"My name is Dayton," he said briskly—"Rollo Dayton, and I think I'm on the track of the Cup."

The constables, who recognised the famous amateur, were interested at once.

"Good, sir!" said one of them. "Can we be of any assistance?" Rollo, who had given his word to the Duke, shook his head.

"Not at the moment," he answered quietly; "but you might stay here for ten minutes or so."

The youngster was quivering with excitement, for the unusual adventure appealed to him.

"H'm!" mused the Duke as they walked away from the trio. "That reduces my millionth chance considerably, for they're standing almost on Slim's doorstep!"

He turned into a narrow alley as he said the words; and Rollo, with a backward glance at the constables—who were watching—followed him. Reaching a small door on the left, the crook turned the handle and passed into a darkened passage, to be confronted by another door.

Pausing for a moment, he rapped upon the panel; and a few seconds later a trapdoor was slipped aside and two bright, birdlike eyes peered out.

"Open, and look slick!" snapped the Duke.

And the door was unbolted immediately, and he and Rollo passed through, the latter with a sudden mis-

skinny, dangling arms, from which were suspended enormous red hands, cranelike legs, and a lean body. His head was small and completely bald.

"That's Slim!" remarked the Duke laconically.

There were half a dozen men in the room, and they became silent, and seemed to shrink into their ragged at the sight of the master criminal.

Slim, whose enormous hands were caressing the stolen Cup, looked over his shoulder as the Duke entered.

"Ah, at last—at last!" he cried, in a piping voice. "I thought you were never coming, and Sally is waiting for her breakfast!" He hobbled across to a small furnace, and grinned down at the melting-pot. "Eh, Sally, old girl, ain't that so? Hungry—eh?"

Sally was the melting-pot. "I'm afraid that Sally will have to starve this morning, Slim," said the Duke quietly. "I've changed my mind."

"But Sally wants him," said Mawson, retreating hurriedly as the Duke advanced. "It's mine—mine!"

Smack! The crook snatched the Cup, and sent Slim staggering with a lightning blow full to the mouth.

"Don't argue with your betters, you rat!" he snapped viciously, as Slim collapsed beside the furnace.

"Where is the box?"

He flashed a glance round, and one of the men pointed sullenly towards the table in the corner.

The Duke grunted, crossed the dusty floor, and commenced to pack the trophy. Rollo watched him for some moments, and then looked round the strange apartment. The place was bare save for a few rough chairs, a table, and a bench, whilst the walls were whitewashed, and the floor innocent of any covering other than dirt and litter, yet piled upon the table in a glistening heap was gold and silver plate waiting to be devoured by Sally, the melting-pot!

The youngster had no time to see more, for the Duke was again at his elbow.

"I promised you a safe escort," he said, handing the Cup to the youngster. "Come!"

He led the way through the maze of passages and opened the small door leading into the alley.

"Now," he said quietly, as the youngster stepped through, "for the millionth chance!"

The door closed with a snap, and a matter of seconds later Rollo was explaining matters to the three constables. Whistles shrilled, drawing police from all directions, and in less than five minutes everything was in readiness for the raid upon Slim Mawson's thieves' kitchen.

Three hours later, tired and chagrined, Rollo Dayton called upon Big John Vaughan.

The youngster narrated what had happened in his flat, and then described the raid. The police had taken every precaution, yet they found the kitchen deserted.

"There's only one bright spot in the whole beastly affair," concluded Rollo, cutting the string of the box upon his knees.

Vaughan's face lit up. Hope shone from his eyes.

"You don't mean—" he began eagerly, half-rising from his chair.

"I do!" returned the youngster. "I seem to have made a mess of things, one way and another, but at least I've managed to recover the Cup."

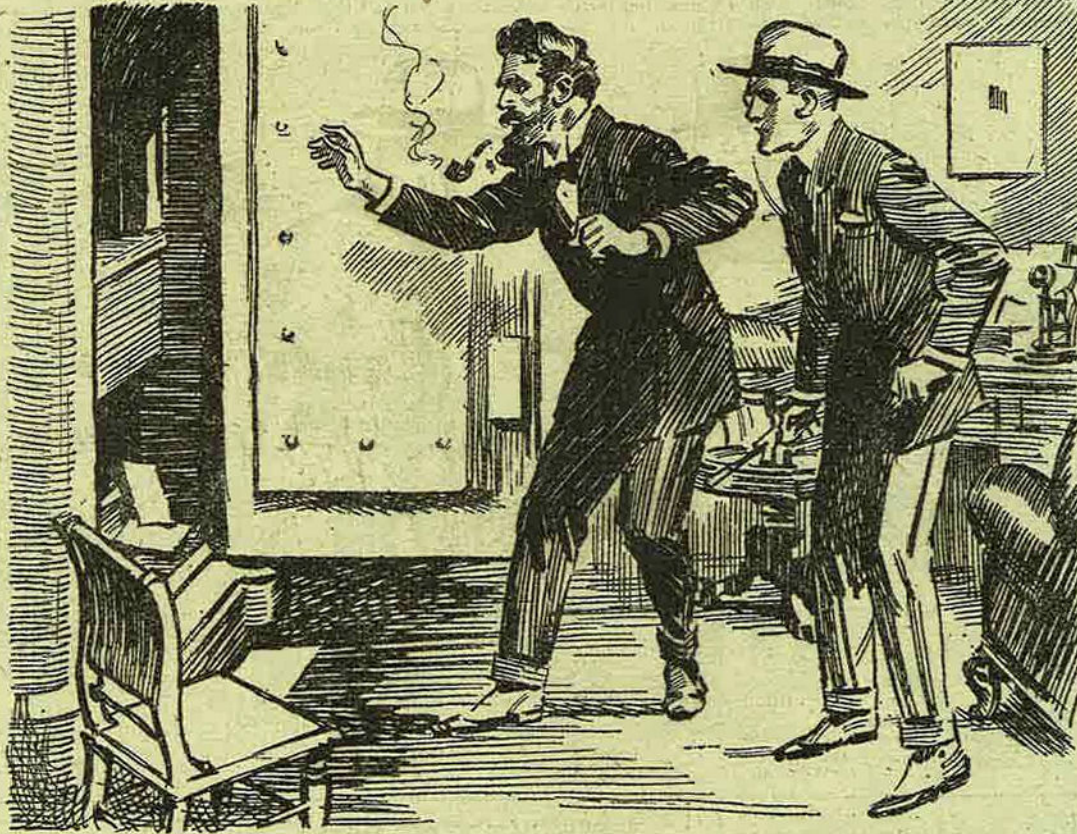
Using a penknife, he prised the lid off the box and commenced to remove the packing. John Vaughan, who had lost his haggard look, standing at his elbow.

Throwing aside the paper and shavings impatiently, eager to get a glimpse of the Cup, Rollo worked with feverish energy; and a moment later he and Vaughan gave vent to a cry which seemed to well up from their very souls, for in place of the missing trophy their staring eyes saw only four common bricks!

The box slipped from the youngster's nerveless fingers and fell to the carpet. Vaughan stood like a man turned to stone, with tragedy lurking in his eyes.

"John," said Rollo Dayton, after a long silence, "the Duke hasn't played the game; he had double-crossed me. But he is going to pay for his treachery. He doubtless thinks that he has been very clever; I expect he's chucking to himself this very minute; but—mark my words, old egg—the last laugh will be mine!"

("The Last Laugh!" is the title of next Monday's tip-top story of the Hon. Rollo Dayton and the Duke. On no account miss it. You are advised to order your BOYS' FRIEND from your newsagent to-day!)



THE CUP THAT VANISHED! John Vaughan swung open the door of the safe, and then a choking cry broke from him. "What's the matter?" asked Rollo Dayton. "The Cup!" gasped the managing-director of Chelsea Villa. "It's gone!"

one condition," continued the master-criminal tonelessly.

"And the condition?" asked his captor.

"That you don't split on me until you've got the Cup safely in your keeping," returned the Duke quietly.

Rollo gave a whimsical smile.

"That sounds all very well," he said. "I've no doubt that you would willingly take me into your thieves' kitchen, but what chance would I have of getting out?"

The 6th Chapter. Not as Promised.

A chilly dawn was breaking when Rollo Dayton and the Duke reached Mildon Causeway, Stepney, and Rollo was gratified to notice that the police were in full force in that particular area. Time and again he and his companion were stopped and interrogated, but he had not the slightest difficulty in establishing his identity, for his features were familiar to the average man in the street.

giving. But it was only momentary, for he believed that the Duke, crook though he was, would keep his word.

Leading the way through what seemed to be a labyrinth of tunnels, the Duke ultimately halted outside a room. Through the half-open door came the murmur of voices.

Kicking the door open, Rollo's guide crossed the threshold, and a mirthless smile twisted his thin lips as he fixed his eyes upon the man standing by the bench—a freak, with

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OUR HIT-THE-MARK STORY—CRAMMED WITH THRILLS!



By LESTER BIDSTON.

(Author of our recent success "The Space Destroyer!")

In search of the secret of Scund's mysterious weapon, Sid Kennedy, disguised as a Venusian, enters the city of Tarp!

The 1st Chapter.

Britain is in a panic because a large part of Lincolnshire has disappeared in a night, leaving behind a blackened and charred coastline. Similar reports are received from China, South America, and South Africa. It is the opinion of Miles Belmain, an American scientist, that the calamities are caused by projectiles from another planet. To test the American's theory, Ken Thornton, Sid Kennedy, and Tim Baynes, three adventurous youths, set out for Venus in Pearl II., a space-ship, which they have constructed from a gravity-defying metal of their own invention. In a similar space-ship they have already visited Mars and Vulcan. They reach the planet Venus, but fall into the hands of some gigantic ants, or Spays, in whose stronghold they discover Thensla, a beautiful young Venusian girl, who is also being held prisoner by the terrible insects. After many narrow escapes from death, the three youths and Thensla succeed in escaping from the Spays, though they are compelled to abandon the Pearl. They reach Nayr, capital of Apadocia, over which rules Uensl, Thensla's father, a king without power. The real ruler of Apadocia, the only inhabitable part of Venus, is Scund the Eternal, who, from his citadel, Tarp, controls all that goes on in the country. Though their arrival is kept from the people, Sid explains to Uensl the reason why they have come to Venus, at the same time urging him to throw off Scund's yoke. This the king agrees to do, and Sid outlines a plan for saving the necessity of an open war with Scund the Eternal.

The 2nd Chapter. Scund the Eternal.

The rabble from Apadocia, as they entered the gate of Tarp, attracted hardly any notice from the inhabitants of that cold city of shadows. They were a listless and unhappy band, a score of young men and women who had been ruthlessly torn from their homes and from all they held dear, simply because each one had shown skill, initiation, or individuality. They were about to become units in Scund's army of workers, and Sid, helped by the power of Uensl, had been substituted for one of his own age and appearance, and was now about to enter on the most momentous period of his adventurous career. Had he appeared irresolute or doubtful in any way, it might have aroused suspicions. But two weeks had elapsed since the Apadocian ruler had reluctantly agreed to Sid's plan; two weeks of quiet coaching and tense cramming of the language that enabled him to pass muster as a true native of the land. Now, clad in the costume of flexible chain-mail that was usually worn in the far-away province of Ayath, Sid's supposed birth-place, he differed in no noticeable aspect from the other units of this unhappy band of pilgrims.

The challenge at the gate was a direct initiation of the almost holy reverence that was accorded its overlord.

"Enter!" cried the officer of the guard. "Praise be to Scund the Eternal, Lord of Justice and Mercy, who suffers not wrong-doing to go unavenged upon Atara. Take heed, ye who enter!"

There was something suggestively ominous in those last words: "Take heed—ye who enter!" A cold tremor passed down Sid's spine as he looked about him. And that first glance did nothing to lighten the load of despondency that had perched, unbidden, on his shoulders.

Unlike Nayr—a city of white buildings that caught and held every ray of sunshine—this brooding stronghold of Tarp was a place of cracked grey-stone that was in keeping with its general atmosphere. Certainly, the streets were of generous width and thronged with a busy crowd. But here none laughed, every face was reserved and serious; and the sun—never showing more than half its circle above the horizon—threw black patches from every building, so that Sid now understood why the place was known throughout Apadocia as Tarp—the City of Shadows!

But little time was given the newcomers for sightseeing. Those who had brought them were impatient to be rid of their responsibility and they were hurried through street after street until they stood outside a place that dwarfed its neighbours, both by its size and its aspect of ugly gloom. Here, after a short parley at the wrought metal gates, they were admitted to a small courtyard, a second door opening the way into a large audience-hall.

The room blazed with light, a curious golden radiance that emanated from some contrivance hidden high up in the ceiling. But what interested Sid most, and, in fact, gripped the attention of all his fellow-travellers, was the sight of a group of nine stern-faced men seated round a horse-shoe table in the centre of the huge room.

The newcomers paused near the door whilst the captain of the guard crossed the floor, bowed humble obeisance and held a short parley with those at the table. Then he turned and beckoned them forward.

"Advance!" The officer's voice boomed eerily loud in that quiet place.

"The Lord of Tarp honours you, by audience, that you may dutifully honour him by obedience."

"A quaint way of introducing slaves to their master," thought Sid. He was conscious of a distinct thrill as he approached the table. But he was keenly curious to face this great Lord of Apadocia, anxious to see the man who was revered like a god, hated like a satyr, and feared like death.

Amongst the nine figures, that of Scund stood out like a lion surrounded by jackals. Occupying the fifth chair, his appearance caught the eye and held it fascinated.

At first he seemed to be afflicted with an almost phenomenal stoop, but this was only because he leaned far forward, his crossed hands gripping the edge of the table. The effect it gave him was that of a bird of prey; an effect heightened by his unwinking eyes as they looked on the frightened group with menacing and implacable stare. His hair was silvery white; his features harsh and repellent; his mouth thin-lipped and cruel as a steel trap. But it was his eyes that dominated everything—jet-black and piercing, they seemed able to probe one's innermost soul. A man whom it would be unwise to cross, Sid decided—a man utterly unscrupulous in himself, who would yet punish double-dealing in others with merciless severity.

Then Scund spoke, his voice quiet and refined, his words a lash to scourge the unfortunates drawn into his net. "So, skilled ones of Apadocia, you come to labour—willingly, I hope—with those happy ones who already reside with us. You are favoured above your fellows, always remember, in that you work for the ultimate benefit of your country. From now, forget the petty tasks that have wasted your efforts, obliterate from your minds those you have

cared for, and be proud that your abilities will be given full scope to an end that our people may rise to the level of the gods."

His glittering eyes began a systematic survey of those lined up before him, and it required all Sid's fortitude not to flinch as the stern glance neared him. Then he was staring straight into the jet-black depths, and for a moment he felt that Scund was reading the story of his great deception, and that it was but



THE VENGEANCE OF SCUND! Scund picked up the wand that lay before him and leaned forward, his piercing eyes looking into those of the foolhardy Venusian who had defied him. "And so—even in your defiance you may serve as a warning to those who have accompanied you—you die!" said the Eternal, and a purple beam flashed from the wand's point and struck the victim full in the face!

a question of seconds before he was denounced as an impostor—one to be crushed as casually as an offending beetle is destroyed. Then the eye-pools of brooding mystery—moved on, and Sid's pent-up breath was expelled in a long, slow sigh of relief.

"To each his task," Scund continued, as he completed his survey. "You who have skill in metal will work in metal. You who design will be given opportunity. You who invent will be given—solitude. Work in contentment, that your living day be long."

At that moment the man immediately on Sid's right—a sad, brooding figure—stepped forward, his hands held out in an attitude of supplication.

"Dread Lord of Tarp," he appealed, "I crave a hearing."

"You will get one—a short one—from Ixed, allotter of tasks," Scund answered grimly.

"But, Lord, only you can help me."

"I never refuse," said Scund gently. "But those who ask sometimes regret asking. Speak on, or be silent."

To Sid the words seemed intolerably derisive. But to the man who appealed they were a ray of intoxicating

hope, and he advanced another pace with confident bearing.

"Lord of Tarp," he said, "I have been torn away from my home, torn away from those I hold dear—my wife and my children. All that I ask is—of your pity—to let me return to them. A little thing, Lord, to you, who have so many helpers."

"Those who enter Tarp belong to Tarp," Scund answered coldly.

"But it is surely a small matter to you," the man answered recklessly, "that one out of the many thousand you claim should be returned to happiness."

"Happiness?" Scund mused, toying with a black wand that lay on the table. "True happiness comes of working for one's country, as I have done, and as I ever will do. I, who have lived to see generations come and go, to see others take their places and in their turn to be replaced by yet others—I have learned that love of wife and child is a lure that tempts man to ways of sloth." Scund placed the wand aside and looked up with an air of tolerance. "My friend, seek and find true happiness in working for your country's welfare."

Smoothly as the words were spoken, yet to Sid the air seemed charged with tragedy. Greatly daring, conscious that the eyes of all that quiet company were on him, he stepped forward and whispered a warning into the stubborn fellow's ear, only to be impatiently thrust aside.

"My country's welfare?" the

The Pit of Tarp!

Sid uttered an involuntary cry of pain as the violet ray touched and scorched his arm, and stared with unbelieving eyes at the still figure lying at his feet.

The whole fantastic scene was more nightmare than living reality; one second, his fellow-captive pleading for liberty, pitifully asking permission to return to his family; the next, stretched dead at his feet, struck down by lightning—a dread, mysterious end.

Dazed and resentful, sickened by the callous brutality of the murder, Sid was bending towards the prone figure with some lingering hope that the man still breathed, when the officer of the guard sharply rapped his burning arm and waved him back.

"No, Iram, rather let him approach, that good advice may be given to him."

The cold, studied words were spoken by Scund, and, with lips tight-closed, but his heart aflame with rage, Sid stepped forward and stared proudly and defiantly at the Lord of Tarp.

"Your name and place?" Scund demanded.

"Rei Yosa of Ayath," Sid answered.

Scund gazed at him long and searchingly. Again Sid felt the awful sensation of his innermost thoughts being read by those boring orbs.

"You speak our tongue strangely, Rei Yosa of Ayath," Scund mused, "but that, perchance, is because Ayath is a rude place, far from the refinements of Tarp." He took up the wand, fingered it, smiled gently as he laid it aside. "Yosa of Ayath, you are young and unused to our ways. You have shown feeling for the stubborn oaf who is no longer—stubborn. Be warned. Look to your own ways only. Leave all else to your Lord and his counsellors."

Scund's eyes glanced slyly to right and left, and the silent nonentities on either side nodded importantly.

But Sid was not so easily cowed.

"Sir, as you say, I am young. But sometimes youth speaks wisdom. I warn you that, though your lightning-rod strikes me as it has struck this still thing—I warn you that death might touch even the Eternal! That some day he might yet have to answer for his sins!"

"You warn me?" Scund's yellow face curled to a mass of wrinkles. "Fool's folly, boy. Understand, what had been, can be—and two can die as easily as one!" He moved his hand impatiently. "Enough, youth of Ayath. You amuse me. But back to your place ere my patience frets."

He uttered the words in an even tone that made them ten times more venomous, and he was obviously indifferent as to whether Sid lived or died.

It was that very fact that stopped Sid from speaking words which would have meant an end swift and certain. Beneath his quiet surface he was fretting and fuming and seeing red; but he realised that in Scund's eyes he was less than nothing, and, remembering the supreme importance of his task, he became as cold and cautious as the ancient himself.

"Lord of Tarp, I obey," he answered steadily, "knowing that, sooner or later, all debts are paid."

And with those words Sid calmly wheeled and returned to his place amongst the downcast prisoners, more than one of whom threw admiring glances towards him.

For an appreciable time Scund stared at him with a puzzled frown. Anticipating the demise of this overturesome youth, every soul in the vast chamber remained tense and motionless. Then Scund gave a wry smile, as if he found Sid's defiance amusing, and, with a word to his right-hand neighbour, he moved from the table and vanished behind a curtained door.

His departure was the signal for a sigh of relief from his subordinates as well as from the grouped prisoners. First, the unfortunate victim of Scund's wrath was carried out of sight, then the remaining councillors became busy. The duty of these eight hitherto silent men became evident as they questioned each separate captive and allotted him his life's task.

Eventually Sid's turn arrived. He faced the semi-circle of councillors with an apparent assurance he was far from feeling.

"So, Yosa of Ayath, you live—to purge folly by labour!" The one addressing him, evidently the

(Continued overleaf.)



(Continued from previous page.)

president of this strange recruiting board, was he to whom Scund had whispered—a thin-faced, sour-looking old man. "I read here that you are a skilled designer in metal. Know, then, that the Lord Scund desires that you be given opportunity to prove yourself as resolute in work as in upholding the wrong; as skilled with your hands as with your tongue. So, Yosa of Ayath, the probationary or lesser tasks are not for you. You have the honour of entering the pit at once, there to do your little share for the glory of Apadocia." He eyed Sid sourly. "See that you fail not, for he who rules in the Pit of Tarp has no mercy on failures."

"I fear not your pit," Sid answered proudly. "Nor will I ask mercy of he who rules there."

"Then go to it," the president answered briefly. The words were a sign of dismissal, and Sid, a minute later, was crossing the squares of Tarp in charge of two silent soldiers. During the short walk that followed he found little to interest him. Everywhere high buildings of grey stone looked coldly down on him. Shops, as we understand the word, were non-existent, the great squares half-deserted. Later he learned that the buildings were the habitations of Scund's army or the prisons of those he brought to work for him, and that the whole energy of the place was ordered to one end—detailed labour, which Scund's council alone understood as a whole.

But little time was given him for sight-seeing, and within five minutes of receiving his sentence the soldiers were knocking for admittance on a heavy iron door that was let into a twenty-foot wall. The door opened, and they stepped straight into a room in which a company of soldiers kept armed and vigilant guard.

"We bring one destined for labour in the pit!" Thus spoke one of his taciturn keepers as he held out a slip of parchment to the officer in charge.

As this individual scribbled his initials on the parchment Sid smiled and absently murmured: "Received in good order and condition—one victim!"

"You say?" the officer inquired. "Oh, nothing," answered Sid. "Just a private thought."

The officer frowned. "In here there is nought private, least of all your thoughts." He signed to a soldier, who stepped forward and saluted. "Descend, Jein. Let not this man stray, lest harm befall him and you."

Crossing the room, Sid and his latest guardian stepped into a lift that might have belonged to some modern building in far-away England.

The gate closed behind them with a clang. The floor quivered a little, then the room swept out of sight, and they began to descend at a speed which increased with each second.

"What place is this that we make for, soldier?" asked Sid, venturing a rebuff.

But Jein—a youth little older than Sid himself—was willing enough to speak.

"I know little," he said, "except that the Lord Scund acquires the land for those who are skilled above the average, and that the pick of his chosen descend this bore—as you do now." He regarded Sid with open curiosity. "You, now, are younger than most—yet you must have done something beyond the ordinary to be thus chosen?"

Sid smiled. "I angered Scund, if that counts as being beyond the ordinary."

The soldier's eyes opened. "But that cannot be. He who rules Tarp is above anger—as you are beyond hope."

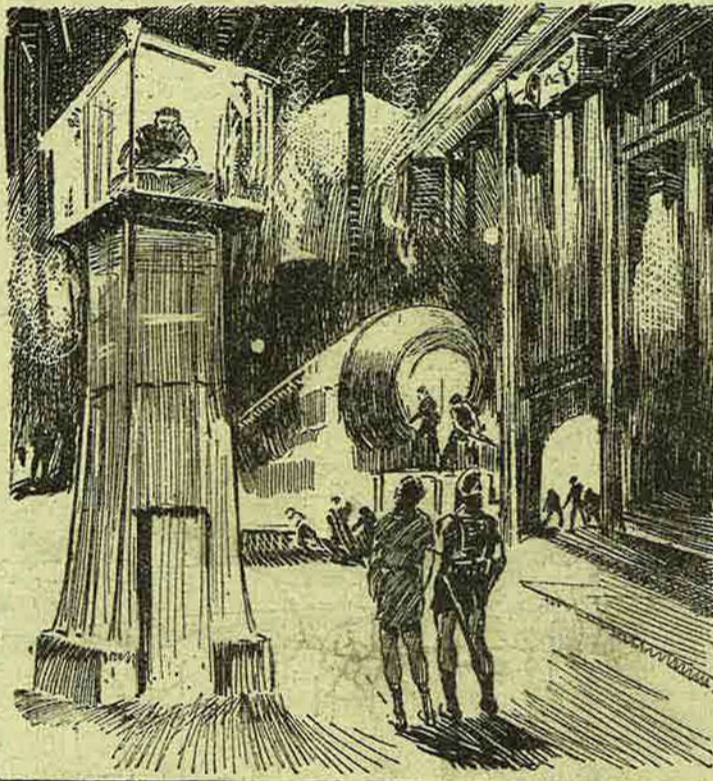
"Well, I did my best," Sid answered modestly. "But what tasks await me in this pit?"

"That is at the whim of Ixed. I only know that quantities of metals are cast—with what object, I cannot say. Each finished piece is taken to the Closed Gates. Beyond all is secrecy. Those who work there remain there. As an outer worker, you will have a certain amount of liberty;

but should you ever cross the threshold of the Closed Gates you will learn the great secret that is known to few. But come, we arrive."

As he spoke the elevator slowed and stopped, and Sid stepped out, all eyes to see this mysterious pit. The adventure was exciting; interesting. He had a shrewd suspicion that he was approaching very close to that which he had come so far to seek.

But it was an eerie place, he found, and one that filled him with misgiving. In that huge underground cavern he felt lost and absolutely insignificant. It was like standing



THE RULER OF THE PIT! The young soldier touched Sid Kennedy's arm. "Come," he said, "Ixed, allotter of tasks, looks sourly upon us!" They crossed the floor of the pit until they reached the foot of a transparent tower, in which sat a squat figure barely five feet high!

beneath the dome of St. Paul's, a dome from which a brilliant light emanated that illuminated the whole vast place with clear detail.

Hundreds of men laboured there. Armed soldiers were everywhere, loitering in companies near the several lifts, in isolated units amongst the workers. He noticed a partitioned section, wherein, under an almost blinding blue glare, a score of draughtsmen pencilled on great sheets of parchment. Little trollies—electrically driven, he thought—loaded high with ores, ran from the mouths of dark tunnels. A far off the light of white fires flashed intermittently. And over all a thin, shrill whir told Sid that high-power machinery was functioning.

It was a place of grim, purposeful activity. But that which caused a chill to course down his spine was the curious, menacing stillness of the place. It was as if he looked on a company of lost souls condemned to everlasting toil. It was almost unbelievable, despite the evidence of his eyes, that several hundred men could be working with so much energy and so little noise. Certainly, a word, a sentence, reached him now and then, but always it was in a hushed voice, as one speaks in a church. Even the shrill throb of machinery, powerful enough to send vibrations through the great cave, yet held a thin, subdued note that was entirely out of proportion to its strength, or so it sounded to Sid's trained ear. Strangest of all, in this great factory there was no smell or trace of smoke!

But now the young soldier touched Sid's arm. "Come," he said; "Ixed, allotter of tasks, looks sourly on us. Come."

They crossed the floor of the place until they reached the foot of a tower

that was raised ten feet above the ground, its transparent crystal wall making an ideal observation-post from which to watch the labours of all in the immediate neighbourhood.

Mounting the steps that gave entrance to this over-looker's den, Sid found himself facing a squat figure barely five feet high, abnormally broad, the little, pig-like eyes shining from a face that was almost covered with a coarse matting of hair. Of the features little could be seen except a thick, fleshy nose and a high, bulging forehead.

"You will be Yosa of Ayath, or the message from above lies," he began, in a quiet whisper. "You come to labour on the great task?"

The words were not so much a question as a statement of fact.

"I come because I have no choice," Sid replied. "But I'm here, and willing to do what I can."

"Willing or no, you'll do it," Ixed answered sourly. "You are, I understand, a marker on parchment?"

"A draughtsman! Yes. Also a practical worker in metal casting, in all its varied phases," answered Sid, shrewdly angling for more liberty of

in the pit, Ixed's word was law. There was no appeal against that word, and the life of a slave was of trifling value in the eyes of he who ruled.

Sid himself had been tested to the uttermost. Commencing with simple tasks of copying, he was next ordered to design larger trollies for the transport of ores; and from that was sent to the furnaces to take charge of the actual casting of metals. It was as if Ixed sought to prove his words, that he was "a practical worker in metals, in all its varied phases." Fortunately, that assertion had been based on solid knowledge, and he passed each test with flying colours. At the end of it Ixed rewarded him with a playful stroke of his lash that left a burning weal across his back.

Yet, despite even that display of spleen, Sid held himself sternly in check, remembering the great problem that had still to be unravelled.

But he was growing just a little disheartened. For six long days he had suffered the miseries of the pit without reaching an inch nearer to his goal. Try as he would, it proved impossible to penetrate that veil of secrecy. The quantity of finished castings that were turned out of the great factory must have totalled thousands of tons in the course of a year. An unending stream of heavily-laden cars ran down a closely-guarded tunnel, to return, empty, an hour later. As one tired gang finished his six-hour spell, another immediately took its place—an interminable task that knew not night nor day.

But none, discreetly as Sid inquired, knew the reason for this monumental labour. The why and the wherefore of these innumerable odd lengths of plates and bars was a closely-guarded secret. All assembling was performed behind the closed gates that Jein had mentioned, and from these same gates no living being emerged.

He had other and more immediate cause for dissatisfaction in the fact that, amongst the draughtsmen, with whom his leisure and rest-time was spent, a veiled antagonism showed itself. For instance, he would enter the dormitory to which he belonged, and at once every voice would be stilled. He would feel, rather than see, the doubtful questioning glances that were thrown at him.

But he had lived in Tarp long enough to realise that Scund was the nightmare of every soul behind its wall. In that grim city his power was tremendous, his vengeance swift and terrible, and Sid had seen more than one example where an indiscreet word had been followed by a mysterious disappearance and a shrug of resigned understanding from the absent one's friends. He came to realise that Scund controlled a tremendous organisation, an immense network of spies, who mingled with slaves and soldiers alike. One never knew, even when speaking to an apparent comrade, whether the words of an idle moment would not be immediately reported to the dread one who was reputed to be eternal.

At last, heartily tired of the impasse, he decided to force the pace, and one day, when the sudden strained silence of the dormitory had angered him afresh, he turned on his fellow-workers impatiently.

"Osen," he said, directly addressing a middle-aged man whose word had weight with those about him, "Osen, your secrets are your own; but why this sudden silence when I appear? Do you think to vanish, like others have done?"

Osen regarded him steadily. "I know not your meaning, Yosa," he answered softly.

"That you do," Sid replied hotly. "In plain Eng—Apadocian, do you think that I am one of Scund's spying hounds?"

"The Lord Scund is just—and powerful," answered Osen diplomatically.

Sid laughed cynically. "Powerful, yes. Just, no. He may live for ever, but we live just as long as he decrees, and not one minute longer."

All eyes opened wide at this reckless statement, and shocked faces met Sid's amused glance on every side.

"My friends," he said, "I have no wish to pry into that which concerns me not, but understand that Scund holds me as he holds you; that I, like you, am simply an insect to be crushed as the mood seizes him." He turned a frank gaze on the dozen men who surrounded him. "Such words, I know, are fatal if they reach the Eternal One's ears. But they are proof of the faith I put in you—faith which I would have you return, so that I be not looked on as a pariah, a treacherous thing that earns reward

by battering on the misfortune of others. I will go further, I tell you that I owe Scund a great grudge, and that, if you are leagued against him, I will gladly do what I can to help you." He paused intentionally, to give his coming words greater significance. "And that help might be more powerful than you think."

His cards were on the table now, face uppermost, for all to see. He knew that it was neck or nothing, that risks had to be taken with sublime disregard for self, or he could slave in Tarp for years, and still stand where he was. Somehow he had to dig beneath the surface or confess himself beaten.

But when it came the reply was distressingly disappointing.

"Yosa of Ayath, you are young, and young mouths speak words of folly. Sleep and forget your foolishness, and be thankful there are none here to carry your rebelliousness where it would do you harm."

But twelve hours later Sid had reason to congratulate himself on his fearlessness. The day's labour ended, faced by the fact that the law ordained two hours' open-air exercise, and sick of tramping the same monotonous streets and crossing the same stone squares, he was idly sky-gazing at the squadrons of tiny airships that ceaselessly guarded the city, when he found Osen at his side.

"Yosa, walk with me, that I may learn something of—Ayath," he suggested.

Sid nodded, thinking that Osen knew more of Ayath, probably, than he did, yet guessing that that distant province held little of interest for either of them. So they maintained a discreet silence until they sauntered, in comparative privacy, across a half-deserted square.

Then Osen spoke: "Yosa, you have said that which had been better unsaid. But if you trust me, I would hear more."

"Of course I trust you," answered Sid, "knowing that a man like you spends his life not willingly as a slave to Scund."

"In Apadocia all men do as the Eternal orders."

"More to their shame!" snapped Sid. "Where I come from—all men are free!"

Osen stood stock-still and looked at Sid suspiciously.

"Where you come from? What mean you, Yosa?"

Sid could have kicked himself for his indiscretion. He had not meant to air that secret. But now, he knew, the least sign of wavering would lose him his last chance of gaining the Venusian slave's confidence. And that, he knew, he must have.

"Osen, listen closely, for I have a strange tale to tell," he answered. "I come not from Ayath. I have but taken the place of one who willingly vacated it. My home is farther even than that distant province; farther even than anywhere on Atara. I come from that world you name—Valda!"

"You—?" Osen stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment. "You come from Valda? You are surely mad—or you surely think I am!"

"I can understand you saying so," Sid conceded quietly. "But I speak the truth—I, and two others, have journeyed from the distant world at some peril, and in response to the most urgent need."

"You—and two others? Then, where are these two?"

"Working in the quest that brought us here. Working outside Tarp, as I work in Tarp."

"But why masquerade as a slave when all Apadocia would do you honour? Friend, I know not why you seek to gain my confidence, but your tale is incredible."

"Osen, I must convince you, though I am at a loss how to achieve that end."

They paced the square in silence for a minute; then:

"Osen, in trusting you I place not only my life in your hands, but also, I think, the fate of my world. But having gone so far I must venture all, knowing that if you betray me to your master, you earn liberty, and I earn death. Listen, Osen, to a story stranger than has ever been told; to a tale that is as yet but half-written."

And with that, asking no promise of secrecy, openly placing his life in Osen's hands, Sid related all the happenings to Earth, and how those awful disasters had led to the seeking of a solution in the skies. He spoke of their misfortune in landing beyond the wall; of their capture and detention in the haunt of Spays. Only he made no mention of Thensls or of Uensls' oath to free the country from Scund's dominance. That was not his

A Desperate Plan.

In the days that followed, Sid grew to hate the brutal overseer as he had never thought to hate any man.

Ixed proved to be merciless in his dealings with the slaves; and more than once Sid nearly ruined all by allowing his outraged feelings to rise to the surface. He saw miserable creatures being cruelly flogged by the ogre for trifling faults.

In time he came to understand that,

secret, and he had seen enough of Scund to know that Uensl's days would be short if the Eternal One suspected the puppet king of conspiracy against him.

"No sooner had we won into Apadocia than we began to hear whispers that drew us towards Tarp," he concluded. "In this city of mystery, we decided, the answer to our problem would be found. What I have seen in the pit strengthens that suspicion, and—"

He paused, looking straight into the eyes of his fellow slave. "I am certain that the secret will be laid bare when the closed gates are closed no longer. That is all."

Abruptly he ceased speaking, and awaited Osen's comments on his astounding story.

"But, if true, why should Scund seek to do this terrible injury to those who harm him not?" Osen objected.

"It may be that, even if Scund's body lives on for ever, his reasoning faculties do not," Sid hazarded.

"You mean that he works ill through madness?"

"What else can I think? Perhaps that which the closed gates hide will answer many questions. But there it is, Osen; I have told you my story—simply to prove that I am not Scund's spy."

"That we had already decided, and it was to tell you our plans that I accosted you," Osen answered.

"How much of truth lies in your theories only the future—and Scund—can tell. But this we do know, and would alter if we could: that Scund crushes all that is best in the land that some giant scheme of his may reach fruition."

He smiled crookedly. "That scheme is, perchance, the smashing of Valda, as you say, though I think he will smash Apadocia first at the rate he uses up men and material!"

"Then, why stand it so meekly?" Sid asked, as earlier he had asked Uensl.

"Why does that red orb shine?" Osen demanded, pointing to the half-circle of sun that was just visible.

"Because, Yosa, we accept some things as unalterable in this sad land. The everlasting life of Scund is one; his terrible dominance is another."

They walked several paces in silence. Sid felt that Osen was eyeing him closely and seriously.

"But, Yosa of Ayath, or Valda, we slaves of the Pit have decided that we have little to lose and all to gain by challenging Scund and his soulless followers."

He bent closer to Sid. "Frankness greets frankness, friend, and truth links arms with truth. So, Yosa, know that we had planned a break for liberty when first you came, and that only the doubt of your presence has since restrained us."

"You thought I was one of Scund's jackals?"

"We did. But that is past, Yosa; else I had not placed our last shred of liberty in your hands."

He looked long and searchingly at Sid. "Stranger that was, friend that is, our paths have crossed. Do they mingle and become one, or do they just cross and go their different ways?"

"If you ask by that whether I'm out to have a go at Scund—then the answer's most decidedly—yes!" Sid replied bluntly. "What I really want is to get behind those gates."

"And what we want is to destroy that which is bleeding Apadocia to death—a something that is also behind the gates. So, Yosa, our paths are one—for good or ill."

"But what's the programme?" asked Sid. "I mean, have you a plan ready, or do you just trust to luck?"

"We have a plan, though luck enters largely into it," Osen looked cautiously around, to be sure that none could overhear him. "When next we labour, it is our intention to give Ixed the reward he has earned, and to flatten the gates, so that we can see for ourselves why the Lord Scund uses us so cruelly."

"That suits me all right," Sid agreed. "But what preparations have you made?"

"All that we can, though too little for our needs. We have secreted a few weapons, and most of the common workers of our period are with us heart and soul. Beyond that, we grasp opportunity and pray to the gods to help us."

Sid frowned as he considered Osen's words. "I like it not," he said bluntly. "The gods help those who help themselves, and, to me, it seems that you throw too much on their shoulders."

He shook his head with decision. "I repeat, I like it not. Why not postpone the rising until a surer chance presents itself?"

"That cannot be. Already we have dallied. Twice the word has gone forth, and been recalled. The workers grumble and grow restive, saying truly that in delay spies have their chance. No. Whether victory or defeat awaits us, the issue is put to the test when next we descend the pit." His lips curled. "If, as you say, you like it not, then plead illness, and stay behind."

Sid's colour deepened. "You mistake me, Osen," he replied quietly. "I fear not for myself, only for the cause. I would have you wait only that chance become certainty. But, if go forward you must, then I go with you."

"Forgive me I meant not the taunt," Osen whispered. "I will pass the word that you are now one with us. Look for the signal, and when it comes, strike swift and sure!"

Sid nodded absently. He had an uneasy presentiment that disaster awaited these desperate and despairing schemes.

Jein Pays His Debt!

As though Fate had taken a hand in the game Ixed chose the following day to soar to a height of ferocity that surpassed anything that had gone before.

Even as Sid and Osen emerged from the crowded elevator they heard

not perform such butchery, though the Lord Scund himself order it!"

"He does—through me!" Ixed hissed. His eyes fixed on Jein's face, his hands dipped into a leather pouch he wore, and he held aloft a small glass marble—or so it looked to Sid.

But that its innocent appearance was deceptive the actions of the soldiers showed. They shrank back with blanched faces, and would have

Don't Miss Next Monday's Great Number of



broken and run but for Ixed's order for them to stand firm.

"Run not my children!" he sneered. "You of Jein's company have been summoned to watch him obey, or to make the punishment I have decreed a dual one!" His eyes

that drama stood as if petrified. A choking scream burst from the overseer's lips and, as if this had been a signal, the soldiers scattered.

But, with their first movement, Ixed flung the crystal ball downwards with crashing force. It splintered into a blinding flash that hurt the eyes; a heavy detonation rumbled and echoed like a thunderclap, and a swirl of dust-laden air circled the vast chamber.

"My stars!" Sid gasped, as the cloud of acrid smoke thinned and drifted aloft. "Why, Osen, the whole company's gone—annihilated! And look, the solid rock's cracked and splintered in every direction! Ye gods, Osen, what kind of awful stuff do you call that?"

Osen's eyes remained fixed on the swaying figure of Ixed, as that stricken man plucked feebly at the sword which transfixed him.

"That is Scund's secret," he answered. "By its power he controls all Apadocia. It is everything and nothing, for it is made from the atmosphere itself. And no man, except those of Scund's council, know how that is, or what it is."

"I can guess," Sid answered. "Atomic force—the secret we on Valda have long sought—"

His whispered words were drowned by a shrill scream that issued from Ixed's lips. Thus far, by an amazing display of stubborn will-power,

direction. Isolated units fought where they stood, and four definite battles were already being waged for possession of the prized elevators.

Sid realised that, unarmed, his puny strength counted for nothing. So, instead of joining in any particular hurly-burly, he wriggled and dodged his way through fighting groups, and finally won through to Ixed's tower. There he found the late overseer, fallen face forward, his arms and legs asprawl.

But Sid knew that every second was valuable. His fellow-workers, he felt certain, would need all the help that he could give. Without hesitation, he knelt beside the still form, and, as carefully and gently as possible, worked at the fastenings of the fallen man's belt.

At last the leather strap was in his hands, and, attached to it, the punch that was his real reason for rifling the silent overseer. Hope running high, he looked into the bag to find that it was lined with thick, soft down, divided into four separate compartments, of which three were occupied by the little balls whose devastating might he had already witnessed.

"Praise be!" he muttered. "These three jolly little beggars will even the odds a bit." He ran lightly up the steps leading to Ixed's office, and through its transparent wall anxiously viewed the course of the mimic battles that surrounded him. Ignoring the struggling figures in the centre, his gaze swept round each of the lift-shafts.

Of these four vital positions the rebel cause was already victorious in Numbers 1 and 2, the guards hereabouts having been overpowered more by surprise than force. At Number 3 shaft the issue was doubtful, a fierce throng of workers armed with the tools of their craft surrounding a compact body of soldiers who thrust and hacked with telling effect against overwhelming numbers. But Sid was quick to notice that the rebels were edging the soldiers away from the lift-entrance, and that they were being reinforced each second by victorious fighters from Numbers 1 and 2.

It was the fourth and furthest danger-point that made Sid's breath expel in a gasp of fear. Here, the soldiers had been in a more isolated position, and had had time to throw their whole weight on the plucky, but ill-armed few who opposed them.

Already the weak opposition was staggering and wavering, dauntlessly throwing their lives away in an heroic effort to stem defeat. Sid realised that in another minute this fight must bring disaster to his side, whatever happened elsewhere. Holding the dangerous pouch as carefully as haste permitted, he threw himself to the ground and dashed across the intervening space.

He had perhaps fifty yards to run, fifty odd seconds to realise that if even this single elevator shot to the surface it would be the link bringing an unending army of Scund's followers to work punishment and vengeance on his desperate comrades. He had time, even in that frenzied race, to understand that, owning the lifts, they held the factory for an indefinite period, and might even yet win a way through the closed gates and solve the mystery of what lay behind them.

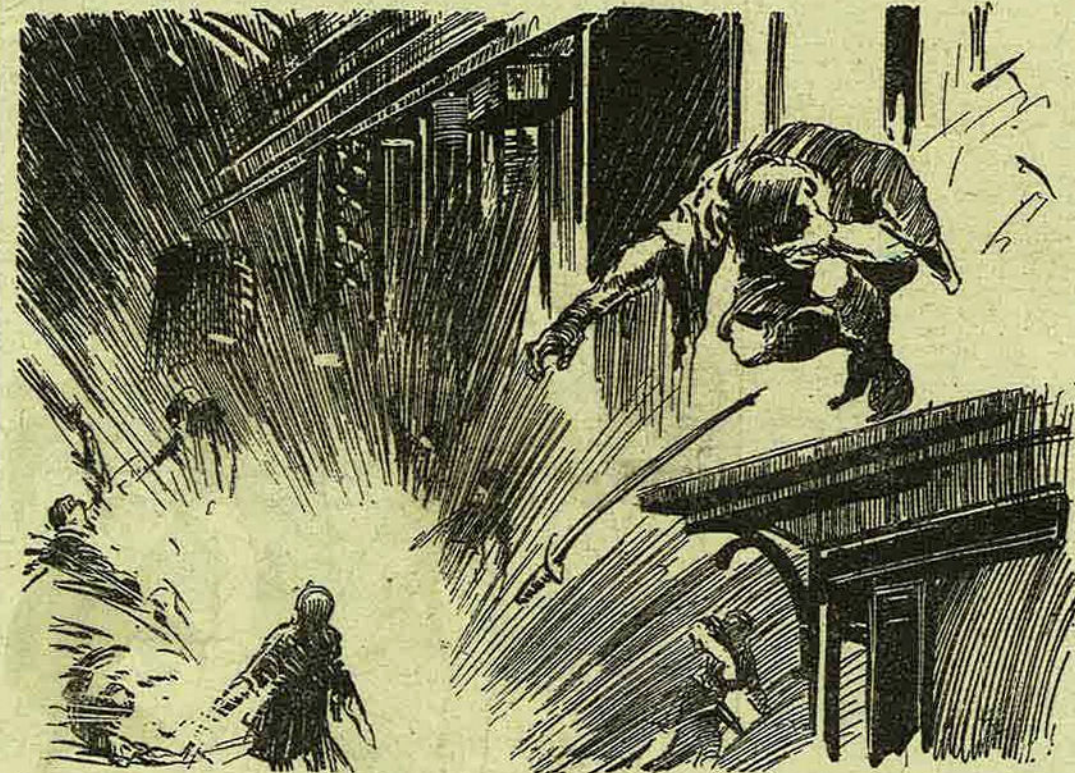
But fifty seconds can alter the fate of nations, and, but for Sid's instantaneous action, might have sealed the fate of distant Valda. To his dismay, ten yards still separated him from the struggling group when he saw two soldiers fling themselves into the lift, and, without troubling to snap the gate, move the lever that sent it shooting upwards!

Then Sid stopped dead. His hand plunged into Ixed's pouch. Snatching a tiny globe from its nest, he hurled it towards the ascending lift, the strength of despair in his aim and an unconscious prayer on his lips.

(Has Sid's action frustrated the attempt of the two soldiers to break the news of the rebellion to Scund? On no account must you miss next week's instalment of this gripping story. Order your BOYS' FRIEND from your newsagent to-day!)

A REQUEST TO ABERDONIANS.

H. Allan, 6, Charles Street, Aberdeen, asks all Aberdeen readers who are interested in the formation of an Aberdeen branch of the "Boys' Sports and Athletic Club" to meet him under the bridge forming the sea promenade on Tuesday, April 3rd, at 7.30 p.m.



THE CLOSE OF DEATH! As the company of soldiers scattered Ixed, the overseer, flung the crystal globe downwards with crashing force. It splintered into a blinding flash; a heavy detonation rumbled and echoed like a thunder-clap, and a swirl of dust-laden air circled the vast chamber!

the harsh voice of the overseer raised high in anger, and, though they walked quietly enough to their accustomed places, they followed his words with rapt attention.

From his high stand he was shrieking insults at a dozen white-faced soldiers, who stood nervously clustered at the foot of the steps.

"You oafs!" he yelled. "You grow fat in idleness, and need a lesson. Know you not that the Lord Scund expects unquestioning obedience from you, when I, his mouth-piece, order?"

Sid now noticed that the soldier, Jein, formed one of the group, and that his hand was on the shoulder of a worker whom Sid recognised as one who fashioned sand-beds to receive the liquid metal. It was Jein who looked up and answered Ixed's question.

"The fault seems so little that it should merit death," he replied fearlessly. "Just a trifling error in measurement, overseer."

"An error that might have ruined twelve months' work!" snapped Ixed. "But no matter—errors, great or small, merit death in Tarp! Soldier, again I order you to carry out the sentence I have decreed!"

The tense silence that followed was broken only by the discontented murmurs of the men surrounding Jein and the wretched slave he sought to protect.

But Jein shook his head stubbornly.

"I cannot do it! I cannot—will

again fixed on Jein. "For the last time, mutinous dog, kill that blunderer!"

Urged by his comrades, Jein appeared to waver. Slowly, reluctantly, he eased his sword from its sheath, whilst he looked uncertainly from



THE "BOYS' FRIEND!"

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Ixed to the doomed man. His arm drew back, and every soul in that great factory waited breathlessly for the stab that would mean another triumph for Ixed's brutal authority.

Then, with the speed of light, Jein flung the wretched man aside, the direction of his pointing sword changed, and, with a flash like lightning, it whirled from his hand, flew upward, and bit deep into the neck of Ixed!

For just one second the actors in

the overseer had retained his hold on life, and persisted in his attempt to dislodge the sword from his throat. Now, he redoubled his efforts, as though he thought to cure his ill by the action. Somehow—Sid almost admired him in that last moment—he succeeded in withdrawing the steel, only to scream with the agony that redoubled as the weapon slowly emerged. Then, free of its biting hold, he stared stupidly at the stained messenger of death. His left hand pressed his throat in a futile attempt to staunch the flow of blood, and his thoughts were open for all to read as he looked from Jein's sword to the cracked shambles at his feet. His face wrinkled to a ghastly grin, and, with an inarticulate cry of anguish, he fell headlong to the ground!

Not one solitary denizen of all that vast chamber moved to help him—a fitting epitaph to a fallen bully who had consistently misused his power.

But, even as this thought crossed Sid's mind, he saw Osen place a tiny whistle to his lips, and three short, shrill calls rang through the place, a tocsin sound for all to hear.

"The lift-shafts!" Osen cried loudly. "Let none escape to the upper level—or death follows for all!"

For a moment the wild stampede left Sid dazed and helpless. Wild adventure he had seen in abundance, death he had looked on in many a grim fight, but this strange underground rebellion was outside all his previous experience.

But not for long did he hesitate. One quick glance showed him that stern fighting was beginning in every

A ROLLICKING YARN OF THE FAMOUS FISTICAL FOUR OF ROOKWOOD!



Lovell's Wonderful Wheeze!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

Lovell hits upon an idea for avoiding class work, but it comes to grief when Tubby Muffin tries it!

The 1st Chapter.

Lovell's Brain Wave!

Arthur Edward Lovell had not spoken for five minutes.

This did not, perhaps, constitute a record. But it was unusual; and Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome wondered what was "up."

Lovell was taking his ease in the armchair in the end study. It was time for prep; and Lovell's three chums were sorting out their books reluctantly. Prep was one of the necessary evils of existence—one of the unpleasant things that couldn't be helped, and had to be stood—like bad weather, or a spill from a bike, or a Head's lecture.

Arthur Edward Lovell, however, was not bothering about prep. He was thinking!

The wrinkle in his brow showed that he was thinking, as well as his silence. Thinking was not one of Arthur Edward's customary occupations. Silence was still more uncustomary with him. Obviously, something in the nature of a sudden brain-wave was going on.

"Prep, old man!" hinted Jimmy Silver.

Lovell grinned.

"Prep?" he said.

"Mr. Dalton was waxy this morning," said Raby. "We had to scamp it last night owing to the boxing match with the Moderns. Better not give it a miss again this evening."

Lovell shook his head.

"I've been thinking that out!" he said.

"Thinking out prep?" asked Jimmy Silver, puzzled.

"Yes. Look here, you fellows," said Lovell, coming out of his reverie, and apparently prepared to impart to his chums the results of his deep cogitations, "it's high time something was done about this. Look at the time that's wasted in prep."

"Can't be helped."

"The question is, can it be helped?" said Lovell. "Waste of time is a jolly serious thing. Hour and a half every evening—think how that mounts up in a term. Look at the things we have to leave over, just because of prep. We might get up some boxing."

"But—"

"Or a rehearsal for our play—"

"Yes, but—"

"Or rag the Moderns," said Lovell; "lots of things, in fact! We're busy chaps, and prep takes a big chunk out of every evening. Think of the whole life of a schoolboy, from the Second Form to the Sixth, and figure it out how much of that time is wasted in prep. It makes a chap's flesh creep to think of it."

"Horrid!" yawned Newcome. "But it's got to be did! Talking won't make any difference."

"Talking won't!" agreed Lovell. "But thinking might! I've thought this matter out, right from alpha to omega, and I know how to deal with it. I'm going to tell you fellows the secret, because you're my pals; but we shall have to keep it rather dark. If my stunt is a success, we're practically rescued from prep for the whole time we're at Rookwood."

"Great pip!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at Lovell.

Never had they suspected that youth of being an inventive genius. Lovell was a good half-back; quite a good boxer with a very hefty punch; good on the cycle-track, and good at swimming. But inventive

genius had never been supposed to be one of his gifts.

But if Lovell thought of a stunt for enabling a fellow to steer clear of prep during his whole school career, it was obvious that Lovell was an inventive genius of the first water.

The discovery of printing, of steam, of the aeroplane sank into insignificance beside such a discovery as this. Lovell would be entitled not only to the gratitude of his chums, but—when the discovery became more widely diffused—of all Rookwood School, and, indeed, of all other schools in the kingdom, if the discovery were communicated to them.

"Gammon!" said Raby, after a pause of astonishment.

"Lend me your ears, old fellow!" said Lovell. "I tell you I've thought it out." Lovell was speaking with a calm, earnest enthusiasm. "Dicky Dalton is taking us, at present, in the seventh book of the 'Æneid.'"

"Don't we know it?" groaned Newcome.

"He's down on cribs!" went on Lovell. "Fellow can't smuggle a crib into the Form-room without Dalton jumping on his neck. He bagged Peele the other day with a crib."

"The silly ass shouldn't have taken it into the Form-room," said Jimmy Silver. "Too risky."

"All very well," said Lovell. "Of course, a crib is useful in the study. But it's in the Form-room that you really want it. Look at what happened to Putty Grace the other day. He cribbed enough to see him through, as he thought—and he was put on to a different place, and was all at sea."

"Hard lines!" said Raby. "But I'm blessed if I see what you're driving at. You're not thinking of taking a translation of the whole giddy 'Æneid' into the Form-room to-morrow morning, are you?"

"Not quite. We're doing the seventh book this term," said Lovell. "A translation of the seventh book will see us through all possible contingencies."

"But how?"

"That's where the beauty of my idea comes in!" explained Lovell, with a cheery smile. "Of course, many fellows would regard it as a problem equal to anything in Euclid. I don't say it was easy to think out. But I've done it. We're going to put it to the test, and when it's proved to be a success, we'll gradually let the fellows into the secret, so that they can all do the same. We shall be looked on as public benefactors."

"If—" murmured Jimmy Silver. "No 'if' about it. It's practically a cert. All the Classical side at Rookwood will be using this wheeze soon, and saving no end of time. You remember what the Head said in his lecture the other day to the Lower School, about procrastination, and punctuality, and things. He said that a fellow should never waste a minute of his day. Well, that applies to the evenings, of course; and this isn't a question of minutes, but of an hour and a half! Fancy every fellow in the Classical Fourth saving an hour and a half every evening. Why, it amounts to weeks and weeks of time saved—practically lengthening a fellow's life."

"Ye-es—but how?"

"You see, I've got the crib," explained Lovell. "My idea isn't to mug it up here in the study—the old-fashioned, slovenly way. My idea is

to do it in a modern, efficient way. When we're called on to construe, we've got the English translation right under our eyes all the time. Instead of having had to worry the thing out of grammar and dics, like a dog worrying a bone, we're ready to hand out a perfect construe without any preparation at all. See?"

"But how?"



TROUBLE FOR LOVELL! "Collar him!" roared the juniors as Arthur Edward Lovell ran for his life, for the crowd of Fourth-Formers were not in the mood to listen to argument!

"Dalton will be pleased, too—and he's a decent chap, and I'd like to please him," said Lovell benevolently. "So long as a chap hands out a really good construe, Dalton hasn't anything to grumble at, has he?"

"No. But—"

"I'll work it out, and show you!" said Lovell.

The great inventor came to the study table, and took pen and ink and paper.

And Jimmy Silver & Co—quite forgetful of prep now—watched Arthur Edward, while that inventive youth worked out the brilliant scheme which was to revolutionise school-work at Rookwood.

The 2nd Chapter.

Trying it on the Dog.

On the following afternoon there were traces of suppressed excitement in several members of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

That afternoon Monsieur Monceau, the French master at Rookwood, was taking his class in the Fourth Form room.

Four members of the Fourth, at least, were prepared to deal with Monsieur Maximilien Monceau in the most efficient manner.

Lovell's wonderful scheme was to be tried.

Wonderful as the scheme was, the chums of the Fourth hesitated to try it on Mr. Dalton, their Form master. Dicky Dalton was well known to be a "downy bird." It was feared that his extremely keen eyes might see through even the most wonderful scheme.

So the great wheeze was to be tried first on Monsieur Monceau, who was a good-tempered and unsuspecting little gentleman, not likely to be on the watch for "ways that are dark, and tricks that are vain."

If it answered with Mossoo, then it could be tried, with more assurance of success, upon Mr. Dalton the next day.

"You see," said Lovell, with great wisdom, "a fellow can't be too careful. If you've got some medicine you're doubtful about, you give some to a dog and watch the effect. That's the idea now. Trying it on Mossoo is practically trying it on the dog, see? If he takes it all right, we'll give Dicky Dalton a dose to-morrow."

And Lovell's chums chuckled, and agreed that it was wise.

So that afternoon they were going to try it on the dog—Monsieur Monceau being the dog.

If success followed, prep practically was a thing of the past; indeed, a fellow would be able to keep up in class without the slightest worry.

That this was not an excellent method of acquiring knowledge was a circumstance that escaped the notice of the juniors just then. They were too keen on the wheeze to think of details like that. Such reflections might occur later—especially when examinations came round, and they found their minds a beautiful blank

and a fire masculine. Cheerfully would Tubby perpetrate such a sentence as, "Ma livre etait sur le table," at which poor Mossoo would almost tear his hair and weep.

Muffin, being the most backward member of the Fourth Form—in French as in everything else—Mossoo gave him particular attention, with really heroic self-sacrifice. Jimmy Silver & Co. were anxious to get to "Gil Blas"; but Mossoo started with genders and Tubby Muffin. Such a sentence as "Ton oncle et ta tante sont arrives," presented to the unfortunate Tubby difficulties that seemed insuperable. Mossoo took a chalk and inscribed it on the blackboard, and went through it word by word for Tubby's especial benefit, watched by a grinning class.

"Maintenant—now—you understand, isn't it?" exclaimed Monsieur Monceau, wiping his brow.

Tubby had listened with an air of great attention; but, as a matter of fact, he had been thinking of certain new tarts that were displayed in the school shop, and wondering whether he could borrow a shilling of Jimmy Silver after lessons in order to sample those tarts.

It was irritating to be aroused from important reflections of this kind, and Tubby felt it so.

"Vous comprenez—you shall understand, Muffin?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Translate zat sentence, Muffin."

"Oh!"

"I waits for you, mon petit."

Tubby Muffin cast an appealing look round, and then blinked at the blackboard.

"Ton oncle et ta tante sont arrives!" murmured Muffin. "It—it's something about a ton of tar—"

"Comment?" shrieked Monsieur Monceau.

"I—I—I mean—"

"You shall not have listened to me, Muffin. Ecoutez! Thy uncle and thy aunt have arrived—"

"Have they?" exclaimed Tubby.

"Now you shall understand."

"Certainly, sir!" Tubby Muffin jumped up eagerly. "I'm so glad, sir!"

"Vat?"

"I'm very foad of my uncle and aunt, sir!" said Muffin.

"Comment?"

"Are they in the visitors' room, sir?"

"Hein?"

"Can I go and see them, sir?"

Tubby Muffin left his place. Monsieur Monceau blinked at him, and waved the pointer.

"Muffin! Zat you sit down!"

"But, sir, my uncle and aunt—"

"Mon Dieu! Sit down viz you!"

"Oh, very well, sir!" said Tubby indignantly. "Mr. Dalton always lets us go at once, sir, if our relations come to the school!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the class. Monsieur Monceau looked at Tubby like a man in a dream.

"Vat? Vat? Is it zat your relations shall have come to Rookwood to see you, Muffin?"

"My uncle and my aunt, sir!"

"If your uncle and your tante have come, Muffin, you may leave ze class, certainly. But how do you know zat zey have come?"

Muffin stared at the French master in bewilderment.

"You've just told me so, sir."

"Vat?"

"You said distinctly, sir, that my uncle and aunt have arrived!" exclaimed Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" ejaculated the French master, clutching at his hair. "Muffin, you are most stupid boy zat ever was! I do not tell you zat your uncle and your tante have arrived."

"But you said so, sir. All the fellows heard you!" protested Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Taisez vous!" roared Monsieur Monceau. "Ze next boy zat laugh, I give him pointer!"

Sudden gravity fell on the French class.

"Muffin I zink you are not so stupid. I zink you are lazy and you give no attention. I do not tell you zat your parents—your relations—have arrive. I translate zat sentence on ze blackboard."

"Oh!" gasped Tubby.

"Zis evening, Muffin, you write out zat sentence one hundred times, and you bring him to me to-morrow."

"Ow!" groaned Muffin.

Reginald Muffin sat crushed. Fortunately, Monsieur Monceau let him alone after that. He was a conscientious gentleman, but a certain amount of Tubby Muffin was all his constitution would stand.

"Gil Blas" came next, and at last Arthur Edward Lovell was able to

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"weigh in" with the wonderful wheeze. Generally, Lovell was not glad to catch the master's eye. On this occasion he was pleased.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome watched him eagerly, when he was put on to translate.

"Me voila donc hors d'Oviedo, sur le chemin de Pegnaflor, au milieu de la compagne, maitre de mes actions, d'une mauvaise mule et de quarante bons ducats."

Lovell translated without a falter. "Behold me, then, out of Oviedo, on the Pegnaflor road, in the midst of the open country, master of my own actions, of a bad mule, and of forty good ducats."

"Bon!" said Monsieur Monceau. Mornington looked at Lovell—other fellows looked at him in surprise. Lovell was not a brilliant French scholar. Now, certainly, he seemed to read a page of French as easily as a page of the Holiday Annual.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome distinguished themselves in turn. Monsieur Morceau beamed on the Fistical Four.

He gave them words of praise; indeed, he almost patted Arthur Edward Lovell on the head. French, that afternoon, was a triumph for Jimmy Silver & Co. Without an effort they had won great credit.

But after the class was dismissed there was rather a worried frown on Jimmy Silver's brow as he went out into the quadrangle with his chums.

The French master's unsuspecting praises smote Jimmy's conscience.

"Blessed if I quite like it, after all," Jimmy Silver said candidly. "It's jolly like spoofing."

"Oh, rot!" said Lovell. "Utter rot!"

Lovell spoke with great emphasis because his own conscience had a little twinge.

"Well, I felt a bit rotten at pulling old Mossoo's leg," confessed Raby. "Rubbish!"

"It saves no end of trouble," said Newcome. "But—but—dash it all, is it quite playing the game?"

"Bosh!" "You see, Lovell—" said Jimmy. "Utter trash!"

"But—" "Rot!"

Evidently Arthur Edward Lovell was not open to argument on the subject.

The 3rd Chapter. The Public Benefactor!

After tea there was rather a crowded meeting in the end study.

The Fourth-Formers wanted to know, as it were.

The distinction Lovell had won in the French class, naturally, could not pass unnoticed. Many of the Fourth regarded Arthur Edward as more or less of a duffer in class. In French Arthur Edward was given to stumbling woefully. Fellows asked Lovell how he did it, and whether he had a "dodge." To which Lovell replied with mysterious hints and winks—so that in a very short time most of the Fourth were aware that there was a "dodge."

Naturally, they wanted to know all about it. So they came along to the end study after tea to inquire.

Mornington was the first, and Peele and Gower followed, and Tubby Muffin. Townsend and Topham came in, and Jones minor, and Higgs, and Oswald, and several more fellows.

Fellows like Rawson and Erroll, who took their work with unusual seriousness, did not come—they, apparently, were in pursuit of knowledge, not of "dodges." But there was no doubt that the majority of the Fourth Form would have welcomed any wheeze that saved them from the peril of brain fag.

Lovell was looking pleased.

Never before had he been able to step into the limelight as a brainy fellow—as a chap who could put other chaps up to clever dodges. Naturally, he enjoyed the position.

His chums were rather lacking in enthusiasm, owing to certain twinges they were feeling in their consciences. Lovell, doubtless, had as tender a conscience as his chums, but the wheeze being his own, his enthusiasm was greater, and banished uneasy reflection.

"Let's have it, old bean," said Mornington. "If you're on to a good thing you don't want to keep it to yourself."

"Not at all," said Lovell generously. "My idea is to benefit the whole Form now it's proved a success."

"Bravo!" "Hear, hear!" "Good old Lovell!"

"Will it work with Dalton in Latin?" inquired Townsend.

"Certainly!"

"Oh, good! That's toppin'!"

"Top-hole, an' no mistake!" said Mornington. "Expound, old chap—we're all ears—especially Muffin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You let my ears alone!" growled Tubby, whose pride in his ears was not in proportion to their size.

"Wouldn't touch 'em with a barge-pole, old fat pippin," answered Morny. "Go ahead, Lovell. What's the game?"

Arthur Edward Lovell proceeded to explain to a very attentive audience. Wonderful as the wheeze was, in fact, epoch-making in school history, it was simple, like all great inventions.

"Take the section we've got for prep now," said Lovell. "I've got it here—"

"Æneas primique duces—" said Mornington.

"That's it. I've got the crib," said Lovell.

"Crib! Is that the wheeze?" asked Putty Grace in disgust. "Call that a dodge? There have been cribs in schools ever since there were schools at all."

"Fathead! You take the translation—"

"But—"

"Let a chap finish!" roared Lovell.

"How's a fellow to explain a wonderful wheeze with silly asses interrupting him all the time? Fellows have had cribs in their studies before now. I know that; but what is wanted is a crib in the Form-room, right under the master's nose."

"Oh!"

butting like a billy-goat," said Lovell crossly. "I haven't finished yet."

"Do you ever finish?" murmured Putty of the Fourth.

"Look here, Putty—"

"Order!" said Mornington. "Let's have it out! I'm blessed if I see anything in it so far."

"You wouldn't!" said Lovell crushingly.

"Do you think Dalton is going to let us stand with that in the giddy palms of our paws?" demanded Topham.

"Think he wouldn't spot us jerking it out of our pocket as soon as we're called on to construe."

"Of course he would!" said Townsend.

"I tell you I haven't finished yet," roared Lovell.

"Oh! Go ahead."

"You got a length of elastic—"

"Elastic!" ejaculated Mornington.

"Elastic!" said Lovell firmly.

"What on earth for?"

"You fasten one end to the bit of cardboard, and the other end up your sleeve—"

"Oh!"

"That keeps the card out of sight. When you want it you give your sleeve a jerk, as if you were shooting your linen, you know, and down comes the card into the palm of your hand."

"Phew!"

"If Dalton noses round too near, back it goes—the elastic jerks it up your sleeve," said Lovell. "Otherwise, there you are, with the card hidden in your hand and your eye on it. You can construe as fast as you can read English."

"Great Scott!"

"Well?" said Lovell. "This won't help me with genders and irregular verbs."

"Blow your genders and irregular verbs!" howled Lovell. "Do you expect an invention to do everything? Expect it to get you up and wash you in the morning, and find your collar stud, if you've lost it? Don't be an ass!"

"Gentlemen," said Mornington, "I suggest a vote of thanks to Arthur Edward Lovell. In my opinion he has deserved well of his country. Lovell is a public benefactor."

"Hear, hear!"

And the meeting in the end study broke up with considerable enthusiasm.

That evening quite a dozen of the Fourth, instead of devoting their attention to prep, devoted it to Lovell's wheeze.

Ten minutes served their purpose, instead of an hour and a half; a saving of time that was very considerable.

Fellows borrowed Lovell's crib in turn, and round pieces were cut out of old fragments of cardboard, and upon them the required translation was written in abbreviated form.

Not a single grammar or dictionary was opened by the happy possessors of this great invention.

Prep became rather a lark than a labour.

There was a great demand for lengths of elastic. Fellows who happened to possess that commodity were able to effect sales at profiteering prices.

With great glee the juniors practised in their studies the art and

word to dash the happy satisfaction of his chum Lovell. But he was rather worried.

Lovell's wheeze had been adopted keenly by a dozen fellows, but with especial keenness by the slackers of the Form, such fellows as Peele and Gower and Lattrey and Tubby Muffin.

When Peele & Co. approved of a thing, Jimmy Silver naturally felt that there must be something wrong with it.

It was a great invention—a wonderful wheeze. But Jimmy could not help realising—on reflection—that a scheme for dodging work was so admirable as it appeared to the enthusiastic eyes of its inventor.

This opinion, however, Jimmy kept to himself for the present. Moreover, he was not absolutely certain of success. Mr. Richard Dalton was a far keener gentleman than Monsieur Monceau.

There was a thrill of excitement in the Form when P. Vergilius Maro came on the scene that morning.

Arthur Edward Lovell, as it happened, was the first fellow called on to construe.

All eyes were upon Lovell as he started at "Æneas primique duces, etc.," Lovell, who was not brilliant in French, was still less brilliant in Latin, as a rule.

On this particular morning Arthur Edward Lovell won golden opinions from his Form master.

His construe was almost perfection.

Mr. Dalton gave him a smiling nod of approval, though there was surprise as well as approval in his smile.

Mornington was called upon to go on where Lovell left off.

Morny gave his sleeve a little jerk as if to set his shirt-cuff, and went on cheerfully. He construed without a fault.

Peele came next.

Cyril Peele was a slacker of the first water, and was often in trouble in class. On this occasion the most critical master would have had no reason to find fault with Peele.

Mr. Dalton could not help being surprised. He was still more surprised when Raby, and then Newcome, gave him faultless renderings.

Then Tubby Muffin was called upon.

Tubby Muffin gave his sleeve a little jerk.

The juniors waited, prepared to hear Tubby, for the first time in his life, construe without some egregious blunder.

But Tubby was not in a hurry to begin.

He jerked his sleeve, and jerked it again, and his fat face became very red.

"Muffin!" repeated Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubby. "A—a second, sir!"

He jerked at his hapless sleeve; but Tubby's sleeves were tighter than other fellows' sleeves. Tubby was a plump youth, not to say podgy. His cardboard disc was there ready, attached to the elastic, but it did not come down in the palm of his plump paw when jerked.

Mr. Dalton eyed him curiously.

"I am waiting for you, Muffin," he said.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubby.

There was no help for it. The card was jammed in Muffin's sleeve. He slipped the fat fingers of his other hand up the sleeve and jerked the card down. Mr. Dalton's eyes, which were fixed on the fat junior, grew wide open—wider and wider.

"Muffin!"

His voice resembled thunder.

"Eh? Yes, sir!" gasped Muffin.

"What is that in your hand?"

"N-n-nothing, sir!"

Mr. Dalton strode towards him. Muffin jerked desperately, and this time the elastic obeyed, and jerked the little card up his sleeve.

"Hold up your hand, Muffin."

Muffin held it up—empty.

Lovell & Co. looked on, scarcely breathing with anxiety. Obviously "Dicky" was suspicious. Perhaps he had already noted that juniors had fallen into a habit of jerking their cuffs when called upon to construe.

Possibly Lovell's wonderful wheeze was not so new and original as he deemed, but might have been known to Mr. Dalton in his own far-off schooldays.

"Muffin," said Mr. Dalton, "step out before the class."

"Yes, sir."

Reginald Muffin stepped out.

"Take off your jacket, Muffin."

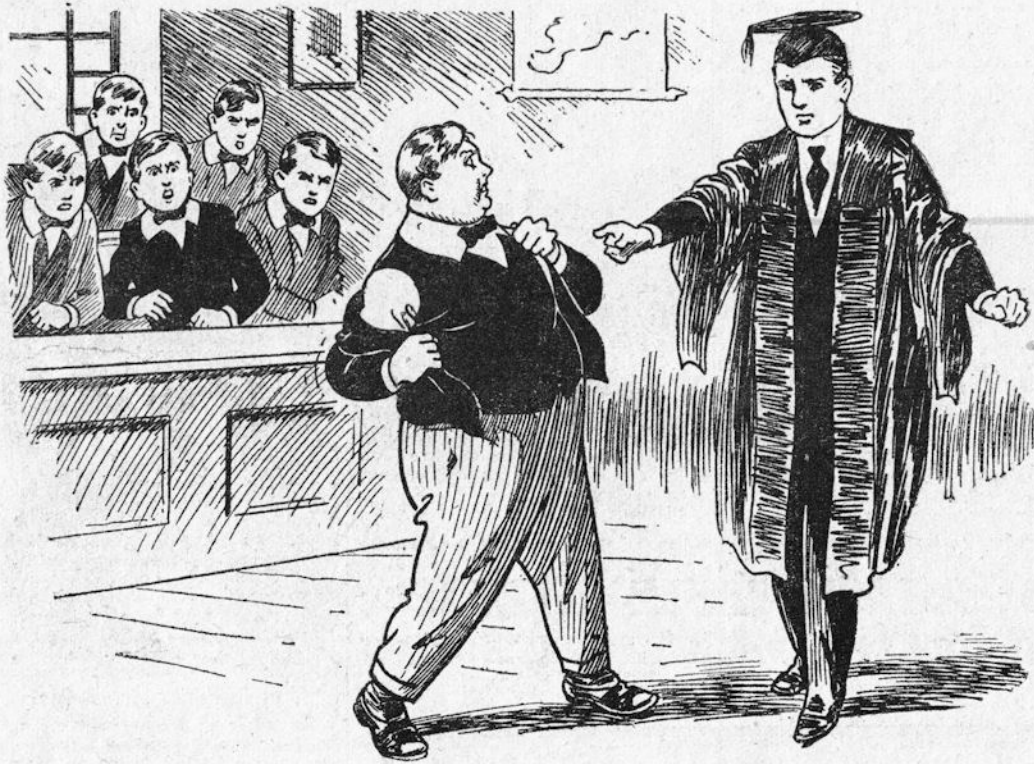
"Mum-mum-my jacket, sir?"

"Yes, at once!"

"Oh dear!"

Slowly and reluctantly Tubby Muffin peeled off his jacket. The Fourth Form watched him as if fascinated.

(Continued overleaf.)



CAUGHT OUT! "Take off your jacket, Muffin!" said Mr. Dalton. "Oh dear!" gasped Tubby, slowly peeling off his coat. "Now turn the sleeve inside out!" continued the Form-master, and as the fat junior obeyed he grimly picked out the card and elastic from the interior of Muffin's sleeve!

"And one crib," said Lovell impressively, "is enough for a whole Form."

"Oh!"

"You simply take your section and copy down the translation," said Lovell, with a glare at Putty Grace.

"You write it out small on a round piece of cardboard that can be held in the palm of the hand—with abbreviations to save space—like this—"

Lovell took a pen and jotted.

The juniors watched him attentively.

With the help of the English version, it took Lovell no more than a second or two to turn "Æneas primique duces et pulcher Julius" into

"Æneas and his chief captains and the handsome Julius."

This Lovell jotted down as follows:

"Æ and chf captins and hndsme J."

"You see, that's plain enough for anybody," explained Lovell.

"Leaving out most of the vowels saves space, and you can see the word all the same—something like short-hand, you know."

"That's so," agreed Morny.

"But—"

"On those lines, in the smallest fect you can do, you get the whole section written out on a bit of cardboard no bigger than a five-bob bit," said Lovell.

"Yes, but—"

"Of course, you must keep on

"My word!" said Tubby Muffin.

"Oh, great!" gasped Jones minor.

Admiration was general. Arthur Edward Lovell's frowning brow cleared, and he smiled. The great inventor was receiving his due meed of praise at last.

"You see, a chap simply can't be nailed," he said. "At the very worst, you let the card jerk back up your sleeve, and there you are—no worse off than if you hadn't got it. Generally, of course, it will be all right—a glance at the card sets you going. Mr. Dalton will be jolly pleased to find everybody so proficient."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at," said Lovell. "I'm speaking seriously. Of course, I should like to please old Dicky. He's a good chap, though he does worry us in class. With this invention he will stop worrying us, and we shall stop worrying him. Good for both sides."

"Hear, hear!" chortled Putty.

"We tried it in the French class, as you saw," went on Lovell. "That was my idea—trying it on the dog, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That was a success," said Morny, with a nod. "My hat! Looks as if we're on to a good thing."

"I say, though—" said Tubby Muffin.

science of jerking the disc up and down the sleeve.

Juniors who were not in the secret were surprised to see fellows, in the studies and passages, engaged in "shooting their linen" with untiring industry.

Practice makes perfect, and before bedtime Lovell's followers felt quite prepared to deal with Dicky Dalton in the morning.

Before their dazzled eyes stretched the enticing prospect of a term with practically no "swotting"—Latin classes with no "lines" and no "jaw."

Arthur Edward Lovell—on this evening, at least—was a great man in the Fourth Form. He felt that he had brought credit and distinction on the end study. With becoming modesty, Lovell bore his blushing honours thick upon him without "swanking." But if ever a fellow was entitled to swank, surely it was Arthur Edward Lovell, public benefactor!

The 4th Chapter. Black Ingratitude!

Jimmy Silver had a very thoughtful expression when he went into the Form-room the following morning.

Uncle James of Rookwood was not wholly satisfied.

He felt that he could not say a



Lovell's Wonderful Wheeze!

(Continued from previous page.)

"Now turn the sleeves inside out, Muffin."

With a groan Tubby Muffin obeyed. Mr. Dalton grimly picked out the card and the elastic from the interior of Tubby's sleeve.

"As I thought!" said Mr. Dalton calmly. "A very ingenious device, Muffin. Quite an improvement on a device known to me twenty years ago. I used only a bootlace."

"Oh!" gasped Lovell involuntarily. Mr. Dalton glanced at him.

"Elastic," he said, "is an improvement. I am afraid, Muffin, that you are thoughtless. You have lost sight of the fact that you are sent to school to learn. Schoolboys are liable to lose sight of that fact—it is a master's duty to keep it present to their minds. On the occasion I have referred to, twenty years ago, my Form master gave me two severe cuts with his cane, which, though painful at the time, benefited me. They caused me to reflect. I shall try the same method with you, Muffin, and trust that it will produce an equally beneficial result."

"Oh!" gasped Muffin. Mr. Dalton glanced over the breathless class.

"Every boy present will take his jacket off and turn out the sleeve!" he said.

"Oh!" With glum faces the hapless juniors obeyed. Twelve fellows had adopted Lovell's invention, others had waited to "see how the cat jumped," as they expressed it.

Mr. Dalton took his cane. The delinquents were ranged in a row before his desk. Mr. Dalton proceeded to deal with them one after another.

"You first, Silver!" Swish, swish!

One after another the unhappy culprits went through it. When Mr. Dalton laid down his cane he looked a little breathless.

"We will now resume!" he said genially.

They resumed. Construes, after that, were not perfect. It was not a happy morning in the Fourth Form room. Nearly a dozen fellows were giving Lovell deadly looks. They had only one solace—the happy anticipation of dealing with Arthur Edward Lovell after lessons!

"Collar him!" "Scrag him!" "Lynch him!"

It was a roar in the corridor. Arthur Edward Lovell ran for his life. He did not stop to argue or to expostulate. Obviously the enraged Fourth Formers were not in a mood to listen to argument or expostulation.

There was a rush of vengeance on his track. Sounds of strife were heard in the end study. Lovell had had no time to lock the door. Then there was a sound of bumping that seemed to shake the floor. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome rushed to the rescue at last, and drove the infuriated avengers out of the study. They found Lovell sprawling on the carpet, breathless, dizzy, dusty, dishevelled.

He sat up and spluttered. "Ow, ow, ow! Wow! Wow! Grooooooh! Catch me—groogh!—making any more inventions—ow!—to save them fag—Woooooop! Ungrateful—oooh!—rotters! I'll never—groooh!—make another—gug-gug-gug—invention, so long as I'm at—grooh!—Rookwood!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell didn't!

THE END.
("The Cousin From Canada!" is the title of next Monday's ripping story of Jimmy Silver & Co. Order your BOYS' FRIEND to-day!)

HEALTH AND SPORT!

By Percy Longhurst.

Shut Your Glove!

Never yet have I witnessed a boxing competition, but I have heard—several times in the evening—the command from the referee, "Close your glove!"

Now, this practice of hitting, perhaps I should say flicking, with the open glove is a most pernicious one, and the sooner any boxer with a liking for it gets out of the habit, the better it will be for him, for it is silly, useless, and dangerous.

To begin with, no blow struck with the unclenched hand scores a point, no matter where it lands. Open-handed hitting is sheer waste of time. It doesn't hurt the other fellow, and it is a prolific cause of damaged thumbs. Yet, novices' tricks as it is, one sees it used by boxers with years of experience behind them, who ought to know better.

To a very large extent, it is due to the practice of trying swings and hooks in place of honest "straight-from-the-shoulder" blows. Try the latter blow with an open glove, and you won't need any warning from me to be aware how ineffective it is. But with round-arm hitting and wild swings it seems to come natural to allow the hand to open, or, rather, to fail to close the glove.

For the hand should not be tightly clenched all the time that one is boxing. To try that is to make another error. Keeping the fist always closely doubled, strains and weakens the muscles and tendons, and uses up energy that is wanted for more useful work. But the hand, loose except when hitting, should be closely doubled as the actual blow is struck. The straight hitter does this automatically. The wild swinger too often forgets it.

Some Ingenious Inventions.

Some years ago a man invented a boxing-glove that did not allow the glove to be straightened after the fist was doubled. Another ingenious person used to fasten the part over the finger-tips to the palm by the aid of a strong glue. Both efforts were failures. The boxers' hands lost power through being fixed in the cramped position. And both devices were wholly unnecessary. Let a boxer learn to hit straight, to keep away from wild swinging, and he won't hurt his hands, but will score more points, and won't have the referee admonishing him for not closing his gloves.

(Another helpful article shortly.)

ANOTHER SPLENDID FOOTER CHAT.



Our Football Corner

Easter Football.

The programme of matches for the Easter holiday is the end of the really big trials of the season for the footballer. As one player put it the other day, these Easter games—three matches in four days for most of the clubs—provide the last straw which break the footballer's back.

The footballer, having played week in and week out since last August, has begun to be a little bit tired of the game. This specially applies to the players of clubs who have taken part in many drawn Cup ties, for this is simply a means of piling up the number of engagements.

Tired Players.

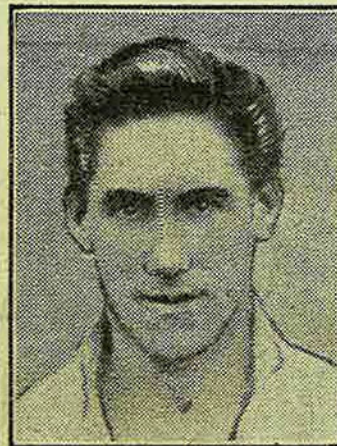
Moreover, I think the players have had about as trying a season as any

Broad originally get the centre-forward berth by accident. In his early days James Broad was a goalkeeper, and, as such, was actually a professional at one period of his career. One day when he turned up as usual to hold the fort for his club, the centre-forward failed to appear, and as there was a deputy-goalkeeper available, Broad volunteered to do his best as leader of the attack. It would appear that immediately he started trying to score goals, he liked the business better than the stopping of goals, for he never went back to wear the gloves, and has just steadily developed into a more than useful centre-forward. His father is the trainer of Manchester City, and, before joining Stoke, Jimmy played for Oldham Athletic and Millwall.

Cheap Players.

There have been fewer remarkable things in recent football than the way in which the Tottenham Hotspur club has picked up good players really cheap. One of these is another "Jimmy"—Seed. Before the war, and immediately after it, Seed was on the books of the Sunderland club as understudy to Buchan, but they did not think it worth while to retain his services, so off he went to Mid-Rhondda. There the 'Spurs picked him up a couple of years ago, and he has already played for England at inside-right, thus providing a case of the understudy doing the master out of a job. Seed is something of an artist, and has had many of his caricatures of famous footballers published in the newspapers.

Many who watch football as a recreation have little conception of the difficulties which often confront the big League clubs in travelling to fulfil their engagements. Scores of players, who scheme to avoid the necessity of spending a night in an hotel, have, when trains have not been running



J. SEED (Tottenham Hotspur).

which I can remember. For long spells the grounds were on the ultra-heavy side, making the games specially hard, and tiring to the muscles which were asked to propel a ball about three times the ordinary weight. In fact the other day I saw a match between two First League sides on a heavy pitch which was an absolute farce during the last half hour. As the game progressed the mud became more and more stickier; the ball heavier and heavier, until the final stages of the game might be said to have consisted of twenty-two players ambling about, dog-tired, waiting for the final whistle.

Relegation or Promotion?

For some of the clubs there will be no chance to go at all easy during the coming Eastertide games, for the big problems of championships and relegation have still to be settled, and success or failure during the Easter games may make a lot of difference to the future of some of those clubs. By the way, it is not generally known that under the regulations of the Football Association, a registered professional player may, if he likes, refuse to play on Good Friday or Christmas Day without incurring any penalty. Not many of the players avail themselves of this clause, but I remember one particular player—a man of international ability—who steadfastly declined to play on either of those two days. Some people have also wondered why the Arsenal are never playing at home on Christmas Day or Good Friday. The answer to this is simple—there is a clause in the lease of the Arsenal ground which forbids them to play on these two occasions.

From Goalie to Centre-Forward.

Taking the season through, the Stoke club has not had a particularly successful time, and the officials must still be a bit troubled about the position of the side in the First Division League table. In centre-forward James Broad, however, they have had one of the most consistent goal-scorers of the season, and a man who has been carefully considered by the International team selectors. Indeed, Broad, who has a brother in the Stoke forward line, played for England against the South in one of the trial matches. Just as he got his place in the England team that day, owing to an accident, which prevented Wilson, of Huddersfield, from playing, so did



J. BROAD (Stoke).

up to time, been compelled to dress in the train, jump into taxi-cabs, and rush straight on to the field of play. Referees, also, have to do this sort of thing, when they cut matters too fine. Some interesting and amusing stories could be told of some of the lengths to which some team managers have been put to avoid a late start in a League game.

Lincoln City went to Nelson and spent one hundred and forty-three minutes there. Of course, ninety minutes went in play, ten minutes for an interval, and the remaining forty-three minutes their players had to get to and from the station and dress. They were in the train on their homeward journey eleven minutes after the game ended.



(Another splendid article next week.)

£10 OFFERED AGAIN THIS WEEK! THE HISTORY OF THE QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS CLUB.

FIRST PRIZE £5.
SECOND PRIZE £2 10s.
and 10 PRIZES of 5s.

INSTRUCTIONS.

Here is a splendid footer competition which I am sure will interest you. On this page you will find a history of the Queen's Park Rangers Football Club in picture puzzle form. What you are invited to do is to solve the picture, and when you have done so write your solution on a sheet of paper. Then sign the coupon which appears under the puzzle, pin it to your solution, and post it to "Queen's Park Rangers" Competition, BOYS' FRIEND Office, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, so as to reach that address not later than THURSDAY, April 5th.

The FIRST PRIZE of £5 will be awarded to the reader who submits a solution which is exactly the same as, or nearest to, the solution now in the possession of the Editor. In the event of a tie the prize will be divided. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit. The Editor reserves the right to add together and divide the value of all or any of the prizes, but the full amount will be awarded. It is a distinct condition of entry that the decision of the Editor must be accepted as final. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

This competition is run in conjunction with the "Gem," the "Magnet," and the "Popular," and readers of those journals are invited to compete.



I enter "QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS" Competition and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

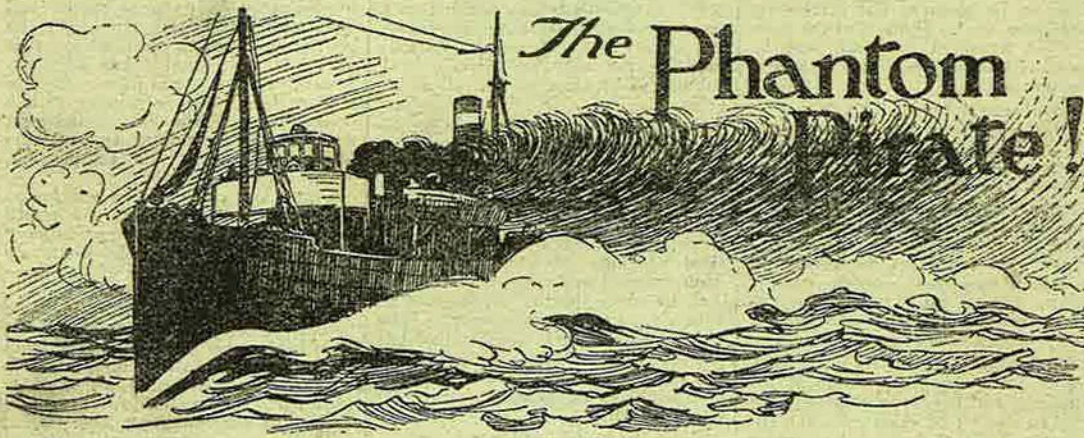
Name.....

Address.....

B.P.

Read "FOR THE HONOUR OF HIS CLUB!" a grand football story in this week's "Gem" Library!

A REAL BREEZY SEA YARN BY POPULAR MAURICE EVERARD!



Joe Tremorne and the Polruans discover a lost Spanish city, which the modern pirate has turned into his headquarters!

The 1st Chapter.

Hearing of the mysterious loss at sea of more than twenty ships within a month, Captain Joe Tremorne, the Polruan cousins, Frank and Dick, and Harry Rawson, their chum, set out in the *Defiance*, a camouflaged high-speed destroyer, to discover the modern pirate to whom the loss of the vessels is attributed. With them is Pieface, their negro servant, the crew of the *Enchantress*, Joe's old ship, and Bunjie, Pieface's baby elephant. They inform the Press that they are on a treasure-hunt, thus hoping, when the news gets about, to more readily fall in with the pirate. When they have been at sea some weeks they come upon a derelict vessel, the *Octoroon* of New Orleans, and find that the passengers and crew have been murdered, and the officers are missing. The ship's papers, log, and valuables have been stolen. Suddenly time-bombs explode on the *Octoroon*, sending her to the bottom without a trace. On the way to the Gulf of Mexico the *Defiance* runs into a terrible storm and is badly damaged. She weathers the storm, however, but encounters a tidal wave which carries her into an inland lake of a mysterious island. With the assistance of Bunjie the marooned seamen manage to cut a pathway through thick forests to the top of a range of hills, from whose summit they gaze down upon one of the lost cities of the Spanish Main.

The 2nd Chapter. The Movie-Makers.

It was fortunate, as after events were to prove, that during the last six days no cause had arisen for any of Tremorne's party to fire a gun, or otherwise give warning of their presence. Had they done so, the course of this chronicle would have been very different.

"It takes a lot to fix a silencer on this son of a skyrocket," said Joe, rubbing his eyes as though scarcely able to believe the evidence of his own senses; "but this outfit has beat me altogether. What d'ye make of it, boys?"

Frank, Dick, and Harry, grouped at Tremorne's side, in the shade of an immense walnut-tree, stared long at the amazing panorama slowly being unfolded, and then there broke from Frank, who was the first to find the use of his tongue, a confession of hopeless bewilderment.

"Nail me to the yardarm, Joe, and I couldn't pretend to explain it. A wonderful lagoon, lined with modern-looking quays, cheek by jowl with beautiful, old-fashioned houses, churches, and buildings that remind one of a mediæval European city like Bruges, a real live galleon of Old Spain still afloat, and a brand-new up-to-date yacht just putting to sea. How can you explain it?"

"Only by propping our peepers wide and keeping our mouths shut," answered Joe promptly. "Otherwise the policy of 'Wait and see.' Harry, tell all those fellows coming up the slope to stay where they are until I send for 'em. Dick, you and Frank get into the long grass under the bushes, and don't show anything more than the tips of your proboscises—I mean, proboskisis. There's a mystery here I don't understand."

At that they snuggled down on the warm earth, where, from the gently-waving guinea-grass, they could observe all that was going forward without themselves being seen.

Perhaps a couple of miles, or a

little more, separated them from a scene of the most extraordinary activity and natural charm. Immediately below them virgin forest, starred with brilliant-hued flowers, and scattered trees golden with fruit, stretched to a belt of cultivated ground, laid out as plantations, lemon and orange groves, patches of barley and Indian corn, and, extending close up to the wooden-built gabled houses, plots of vegetables.

Beyond these were row upon row of quaint, old-fashioned structures, divided by narrow, winding ways, and here and there a quaint tower with a belfry casting its black shadow upon a sun-kissed patio. This was evidently an old Spanish town, built centuries before by the colonists who flocked from Spain and France in the middle of the sixteenth century, to establish a new Empire overseas.

To the left, on somewhat higher ground, rose the white walls, covered with flowering wistaria and cluster-roses, of a building which looked like a monastery. This was surrounded by a garden filled with shrubbed walks and shady trees. The large courtyard, bathed in sunshine, was deserted.

But perhaps the most outstanding feature of all was the old-time fortress, which consisted of an immensely thick wall, broken at intervals with towers showing arrow-slits, machicolations, and enclosing a number of smaller forts, and at the north end the still powerful remains of a mediæval castle. This latter was constructed of stone and mortar, with very thick walls and a large ditch round it, and had as a means of entry a single door, lying behind a drawbridge spanning the dried-up moat.

From the embrasures peeped the frowning muzzles of old-fashioned guns, so brilliantly polished that in the sunlight they gleamed like gold.

It was, however, the vivid contrast between the old and new, the curious admixture of the modern with the bygone, that held the watchers so spellbound with amazement, for beyond the old city were modern erections—long lines of wooden sheds with galvanised roofs, all lying adjacent to a quayside dotted with litter and derelict junk; rusting boilers, barnacle-covered steel plates, winchless derricks, broken spars, empty drums, and the hundred-and-one odds and ends which mark the departure-place of men who go down to the sea in ships.

A little distance removed from the town, and separated from it by a grassy plain some half a mile across, was another set of modern buildings, like the quayside buildings, temporary erections, but on a more lavish scale, for one was roofed in with glass, and another with stretched canvas painted a delicate shade of sea-green. And upon the outer wall of the building was this legend in immense capitals:

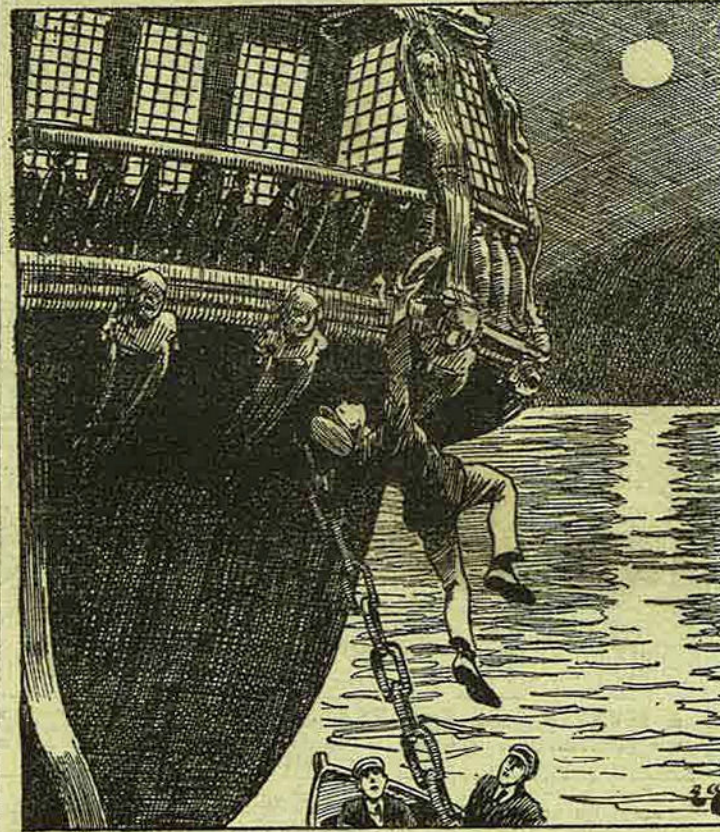
"THE NEW YORK TROJAX
FILM-PRODUCING CO."

A low chuckle escaped Joe, and the seriousness vanished from his wrinkled face.

"I see what it is, boys. We've stumbled upon a mob of movie-makers," he said, and was about to rise when the pressure of Frank Polruan's hand restrained him.

"Not so fast—not so fast, Joe!" said the boy. "I'd like to watch a few more moves in this game before we go down and make our numbers. Take a squint at what's going forward over there."

He pointed to the mile-wide expanse of the lagoon, on the glittering surface of which rode the two craft in such amazing contradiction—the wide-waisted, bluff-prowed galleon, with its immensely tall poop, and the modern yacht, with her long, graceful lines, polished brasswork, and walnut deckhouses glinting in the hot rays of the rising sun. Her racing stern and sloped funnels were indicative both of power and speed, and as she lay rocking ever so gently in the roll created by the revolution of



A PERILOUS CLIMB! Frank Polruan grasped one of the balusters and commenced to draw himself up. Then a cry almost escaped him as the baluster broke and he felt himself falling!

her own screw, she looked a wonderful picture of combined grace and efficiency.

"Ever seen anything like her before?" questioned Frank grimly. The sailor shook his head.

"Never, in these waters. My, but for speed I should say she has the old *Defiance* beaten to a frazzle!"

"You don't think that's the vessel that passed us in the Atlantic? See, she's fitted with extra masts, so that she can travel either under steam or sail. I was thinking—"

"Nonsense! That craft belongs to a film company who have lighted on this place, and are using the settings for making pictures. Jer-roo-salem, but now she's travelling!"

There was a hurry of dark figures upon the spotless deck, the running up of a flag to the masthead, and the stern, dull boom of a gun from a battery, mounted on the grey castle walls, and the yacht headed through a narrow passage to the open sea.

The wonders of the morning were not yet, however, at an end, for as the yacht passed the anchored galleon there appeared on the decks of the latter a group of figures so

curiously dressed that even Joe could not repress a start of surprise.

Each man wore knee-breeches and coloured stockings, a steel cuirass which shone like silver, and on his head was a morion pointed at each end. For all the world they looked like the sea-dogs of Old Spain, just stepped out of a mid-sixteenth-century picture.

"There! What did I tell you?" said Tremorne again. "Film people. They've either found this old galleon, or have built her out of spare timbers, and now the yacht is steaming to a distance to take long shots."

But, as though to disprove the prophecy, within a very few minutes the yacht gave every indication of doing nothing of the sort. Once clear of the narrows she turned her knife-like bows eastward, and, though scarcely a trail of smoke was visible from her funnels, she steamed at such a terrific rate that her stern was almost hidden in a smother of white foam.

"I'm done," said Frank, rolling over on his back, and locking his hands behind his head. "No use asking me what the notion is, because I haven't one. The only way to find out is to make a bold dash for it, and chance our arm by walking straight into the city. But, Joe, how did a place like this get here—in such an out-of-the-way part of the world, I mean?"

"Easy enough to understand, if you've done your skuleing proper," replied Joe, in his most superior manner. "Now, when I was a student at the Anniversary of Oxford they taught us all about these places on the Spanish Main like Tortuga,

unflecked blue of the morning sky, and over his bronzed face crept a look of curious determination.

"Not at all," he retorted crisply. "What do film people want with modern guns, fired from even an old-fashioned fortress?"

"Who said they had modern guns?" argued the skipper.

"I did," was the swift answer. "The gun that fired the salute wasn't an old black powder stunt. A blank shell was used charged with ordinary cordite smokeless. There was nothing but a tiny cloud of grey-white vapour—and with an old-fashioned muzzle-loader—"

"Great Aunt Cloopatra, but I never thought o' that!" said Joe, sitting upright. "Mebbe, I'm in the wrong cart after all. What do you suggest?"

"Nothing for the moment," replied the boy, puckering up his brow. "I'm trying to think—and to think hard. D'you see anyone moving about the streets?"

"Nary a soul."

"But those fellows are still on the galleon?"

"No"—parting the long grass and looking down—"they've gone below. Listen."

A light breeze blowing from the eastward across the town and the lagoon brought to them the faint notes of a musical instrument.

"Either a piano or a gramophone," said Dick, breaking the silence. "Seems jolly funny that if those fellows are supposed to be making pictures they should be fooling the morning away with a gramophone. Don't you think it would be a nutty wheeze, Joe, if we could find out what was going on aboard the galleon?"

"It would," the skipper agreed. "But a jolly difficult one."

"I don't know," Dick was examining the quayside through the glasses.

"There's no one in the streets, and a number of small boats lie up moored to the wall. We could put off in one of them, climb up by the anchor-chains, and have a good boss round—"

"At night, if you like, but not by day," said Joe. "Either we must come right into the open or go cautious like. What's it to be?"

"I'm for caution, every time," replied Frank. "The day is ours, and nothing can be gained by hurrying. So far no one has seen us, and isn't likely to so long as we keep our fellows over the ridge. This afternoon two or three of us can sneak forward as far as the plantations, cut across 'em when it is dark, and make the lagoon under cover of night. I'll volunteer for number one."

"Put me down as the second," came from Dick.

"And me as a third," said Harry. Joe thought a moment the while his horny forefinger stroked his iron-grey beard.

"All right, I'm agreeable. But for goodness' sake be careful. You must agree upon a signal—three shots fired rapid from an automatic in case of trouble."

It seems a very different mission from that which they had originally embarked on, this night boarding of an old-time ship carrying men dressed up in old-time clothes; but Frank had an uncanny presentiment that in this particular case things were not quite what they seemed. Why, if Joe's contention were the correct one, a company of picture-makers should take the trouble to equip themselves with a vessel as powerful and perhaps more fast than the *Defiance*, he could not for the life of him make out.

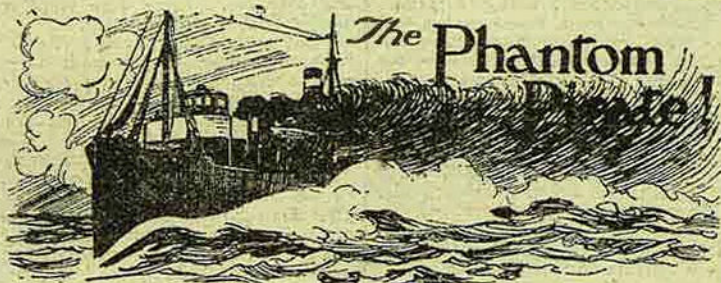
They partook of their midday meal in one of the long neglected savanna groves, and carefully refrained from kindling a fire or betraying any other signs of their presence.

When at length the sun began to decline behind the range and the shadows lengthened upon the dense undergrowth, the three boys, armed with an automatic apiece and a dozen clips of cartridges, left the main body, and, topping the rise, worked their way gradually through the thick cover. By five o'clock they were within three hundred yards of the old sugar plantations of which little remained but clusters of tall jointed stems, many of which had been broken down in the recent hurricane.

As the boys approached there were faint squeaks and the scurry of many tiny feet on the marly ground, and hundreds of rats scurried away into the deepening twilight.

No further move was made until darkness dropped a veil over sea and sky, by which time, although the city still remained wrapped in sable gloom,

(Continued overleaf.)



(Continued from previous page.)

lights began to shine dimly behind the horn panes of the many windows in the high poop of the galleon.

"Whoever the inhabitants are, they evidently make the old hulk their home," said Frank. "Now there are two ways open to us; either to sneak cautiously through the streets and take a peep at some of the houses, or to make straight for the quayside. What do you say, Dick?"

"The houses, of course," was the quick reply. "I've seen some with gables and overhanging stories before in Exeter, and jolly interesting they are, though of course these are all wood instead of half timbered. I suppose we sha'n't meet an ancient conquistador or a hidalgo round the first corner?"

"Don't know what they are, though they sound jolly romantic," laughed Frank. "Come along, and for Heaven's sake don't kick up a row."

It was as though they were walking in a city of the dead when once the citron and orange-groves lay darkly behind them, for in the deserted ways, thick with fallen rubble and drifted sand, there was no sign of life. At the end of a couple of hundred yards or so they came to an immense doorway supported by carved columns of marble, and overhead, but faintly discernible, a fresco depicting some religious scene.

"Old-fashioned church," whispered Harry. "Let's look inside."

They pushed back a rickety, iron-studded door which creaked horribly, and found themselves in what had once been a magnificent building. But now the stained glass was gone from the windows, the tracery was all smashed, the High Altar upon which in the long dead years gold and silver candlesticks and jewelled crosses had glittered, was now a heap of mouldering ruin, and on the marble floor, which once had echoed to the tread of countless worshippers, were baulks of decayed timber, broken pieces of armour and musty shreds of clothing.

In the darkness Harry's foot kicked against something. There was a clatter, and a cluster of dry bones, scattering a little cloud of dust, rolled away over the floor. They bent down and made out the skeleton of a man, to whose fleshless head a steel morion was still attached, and from his rib-bones protruded the haft of a cutlass.

In those grim remains were written a story of which as yet they were ignorant—the sack and pillage of this town by a force of Elizabethan freebooters. The church, once a noble edifice, was pock-marked with musket bullets and cannon balls, and, though nothing of value remained, on all sides were evidences of a once grim and dreadful tragedy.

They were glad to turn their backs on the gruesome spot, and, gaining the street, to creep by the walls under the projecting balconies of the Spanish wooden houses. Had they examined these by daylight, they would have seen that the timbers, the doors, and window frames were all made of cedar wood or mahogany, exquisitely carved and scarcely marred by the slow passage of time. But now, behind the horn windows no lights gleamed, and when they tried several of the doors they found them still locked.

"That's rather curious," remarked Dick. "Why should the doors be locked when other parts of the town are in ruin. It looks as though there are things inside we ought to see."

"Not now," Frank counselled. "We've a long way to go, and it won't do to return to the camp without some news of the galleon. Come along down this wide street. I can see the waters of the lagoon at the far end."

No sound save the creak of a disturbed owl or the rustling of bats' wings and the slither of their feet in the drift sand disturbed the night quiet until they reached the quay-side, and there floated across the starlit water the strains of music, followed by the roar of voices singing in unison a sea chant of the days of long ago.

"All the better for us. They won't hear us coming," said Frank, bending down and untying a mooring rope which held one of the small craft to the stone wall. "You take the sticks, Dick, and Harry can steer. The moment we run in under her stern I'll make a line fast and shin up by the anchor chains."

The Rogues of the Galleon.

Before pushing out on the still waters of the lagoon, Dick took the precaution to muffle the oars, then, setting himself amidships, he pulled steadily, while Rawson steered in the direction of the great hulk. Immensely dark and sinister the galleon looked, with her flat, high stern and full-bellied waist, and the projecting cabins over the huge rudder looked

him to make the attempt, and, raising his arms, he began to pull himself up hand over hand. The size of the links afforded excellent foothold, and he mounted the forty odd feet in a very few minutes.

Now came the most difficult part of his task—to hang on by one hand, while with the other he raised himself on to the platform. Below him yawned the black surface of the lagoon. Failing strength or the slightest slip would send him hurtling down to drop with a tremendous splash. He visualised the peril both to himself and to the others waiting below, swung far out, caught the projection of the platform, and for a second hung dizzily suspended.

His fingers began to slip, but, releasing his hold, he grasped one of the balusters and began to draw himself up. In the act of raising himself the baluster broke. A cry of warning almost escaped him when he felt himself falling; then a shock of pain ran through his body as he struck the anchor chain, down which he started to slide. The rusted links rasped the skin from his fingers, but, gritting his teeth and fighting back the inclination to cry out, he began again, and once more came to the place from which he had made such an inglorious descent.

This time he tackled the proposition differently by retaining his hold on the chain by entwining his legs tightly about it and grasping one of the

edge to make sure that Dick and Harry were still below, decided on a jumping-off place in case of discovery, and then crept forward on all-fours until he reached the window from behind which the sounds of music came.

His hand shook a little when he drew the pistol from his pocket, and, with one finger curled round the hair-trigger, cautiously lifted his eyes to a level with the horn pane. What he saw almost took his breath away—a long, low, ceilinged cabin, once panelled with figured walnut, but now damp-cracked and weather-scarred, so that the whole apartment presented an uncanny, greyish appearance. The continual saltiness in the air had left on the wood a fine deposit, which glistened like myriad points of silver in the yellowish light from a swinging hurricane lamp.

Down the middle of the cabin ran a narrow but stout table of oak of the Elizabethan refectory type clamped to the deck with rusty iron bands, and about it were ranged a number of men, not the picture-que figures which Frank and his friends had seen earlier in the day, but very matter-of-fact-looking individuals in ordinary seafaring attire. On the floor in one corner were heaped a quantity of old-time costumes, faded doublets, worn and patched hose, frilled coats with slashed sleeves, shining breastplates and dented helmets.

The theory that he was in close

dark, projecting eyebrows. To this unpleasant-looking individual had been allotted the task of keeping the gramophone going and seeing that everyone at the table had his glass well filled. He would fix a record on the revolving disc, announce with a roar like a bull the title of the song or piece, then waddle towards the table and supply his companions' wants from the bottles.

Frank had come to the conclusion that he had seen all that was worth while seeing of this strange company—grim-faced men, all obviously injured to the rough life of the sea—when something happened.

The big man furthest from him—he judged him to be the mate by the gold lace on his sleeve cuff—suddenly pushed the box from him, and in doing so turned it round so that white letters painted on its side were clearly visible to the watching boy. And, with his eyes almost starting out of his head, Frank read the tell-tale inscription:

LOG-BOOK AND SHIP'S PAPERS. S.S. OCTOROON.

In a moment the harmless calling which Joe Tremorne had relegated to these men was forgotten. His inner vision framed a picture of a derelict ship rising and falling in a heavy sea—and in her fo'c'sle and cabin the bodies of dead men sliding and rolling with every motion of the vessel. He saw again the white, agonised faces, the marks of the life and death struggle, and heard once more the dull boom as bomb after bomb exploded below her water-line.

When Frank tried to gather his straying thoughts together he found himself trembling like a leaf, and beads of cold moisture trickling from his forehead. Then the mists began to clear in his brain, and the glint of a purposeful resolution shot across the clear, grey eyes.

It was these men—men who could drink and laugh to the maudlin tunes of a stolen gramophone, for he did not doubt that the instrument had been stolen from some plundered ship—who had dealt death and destruction to the Octoroon and all on board her. And the vessel, the spick and span yacht which had steamed out on the early morning flood: what of that? Was it the same vessel that had sent the Octoroon to her doom?

If the moment for great and grave decisions had not come, the time had arrived when he must get back and convey the astounding news to Joe. For not only their own lives, but the lives of hundreds of innocent seafaring men and defenceless ocean travellers depended on the manner in which this stupendous discovery was treated.

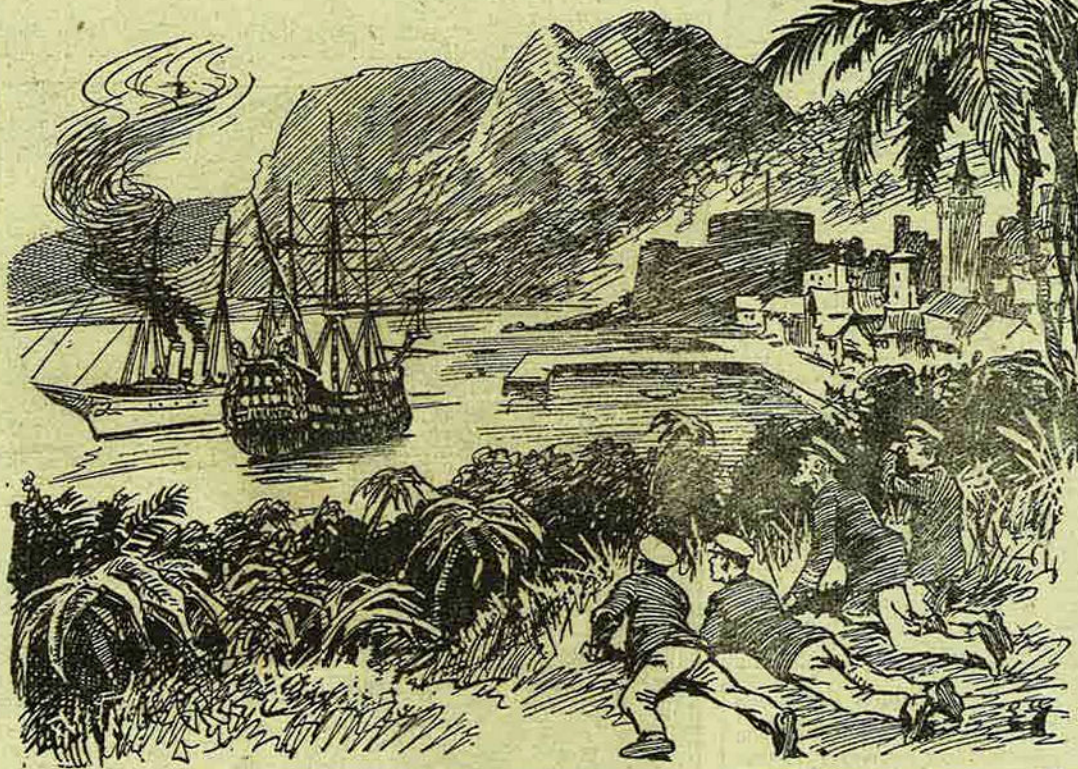
He drew back, working his way cautiously along until he came to the gap in the deck-rail. Lying flat on his face, he looked down and sent the softest of whistles into the darkness. But no reply came back. Like one in a dream he stared at the spot where a quarter of an hour before the row-boat containing Dick and Harry had rocked gently against the tight-drawn anchor chain. Now there was nothing but the darkness and the gentle wash of the rippling water under the galleon's stern.

A second and a third signal bringing no response, Frank began to let himself down. Ten feet above the surface of the lagoon he stopped and looked around. But the boat with Dick and Harry in it had completely vanished.

Then a fresh thought came to Frank. Perhaps, tired of waiting, they had drawn round to the far side and boarded the galleon by climbing the bow anchor chains. If this were so, there was every chance of their either stumbling on the occupants of the cabin, or of being discovered and held before they had a chance to escape. He climbed once more to the platform and following the poop round, came to the quarter-deck. But here all was as still as the grave. From the quarter-deck he descended to the waist, and moved about among bales and huge barrels stacked one upon another. On some of the former was painted in black letters the name "Octoroon."

A complete circuit of the old ship proved fruitless, and the realisation began to dawn on the perplexed boy that for some cause, which he was totally at a loss to fathom, Dick and Harry had been forced to return to the quay, leaving him at the mercy of the pirates of the Cayos.

(What has become of Dick Polvan and Harry Rawson? Will Frank be discovered upon the Spanish galleon? You must not miss next Monday's instalment of this ripping adventure story. Order your copy of the BOYS' FRIEND from your newsagent to-day!)



A MYSTERY OF THE SEA! From behind a cover of guinea grass Joe Tremorne and the boys saw a flag run up at the yacht's masthead, and heard the dull boom of a gun from the battery mounted on the grey castle walls. The next moment the yacht headed past the galleon and into the open sea!

so far above the water that it seemed impossible to reach them.

Frank knew, however, that the main anchor chain ran through the floor of one of these cabins, along the front of which was a narrow balustraded balcony very much like a veranda.

The night was dark and clear, the sky only faintly powdered with stars, the glow from which touched the ripples left by the gently-dipping cars with iridescent fires. As they drew closer in, Frank crouched in the bows, grasping a pistol in his right hand. The noise of the singing and the metallic jarring of the gramophone easily drowned the swish of water under the rowboat's straking.

"That'll do! Let her drift alongside," whispered Frank, as the smaller craft grated gently against the huge hull. "I can work her along to the stern."

He slipped his weapon into his pocket, and, pressing against the galleon's sides with the flat of his palms, slowly drew the boat under the bulging counter. There was a momentary jar, which almost knocked him off his feet, when they struck the taut chain, but, passing the painter line round one of the links, they made fast, and all was ready for the great adventure.

Frank's pulses quickened a little when he looked up and noted the long black line of the chain stretching interminably upwards, but the recollection of how much was at stake nerved

wooden balusters in each hand. The distribution of weight solved his difficulty; he drew himself up, threw one leg over the balcony rail, and a moment later was lying on the platform, breathless, exhausted, but triumphant.

In a little while he peered over the



AT THE EARTH'S CORE EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS
THRILLING NEW STORY in this week's
PLUCK

proximity to an adventurous film company began to revive in the boy's mind, until his glance went again to the table, and he saw something which speedily dispelled the notion.

At the end of the table sat a big, heavy-jowled man, whether a Dane or a German it was impossible to tell, and at his elbow reposed a wicked-looking six-shooter. Two black bottles and a glass in front of each man completed the table decorations save for a black japanned box, the contents of which the big man was examining with a considerable show of curiosity.

On an upturned packing-case near the open door of the cabin stood a big gramophone, in the charge of as disreputable-looking a scoundrel as Frank had ever set eyes upon. The blue jersey and thick sea-boots which he wore only increased a suggestion of dwarfishness—he wobbled rather than walked, and when he moved Frank saw that his legs were badly bowed. The face, however, was the most arresting part of him, a strong, brown face, fixed by a livid scar that ran from a prominent cheekbone to the point of his jaw.

When he laughed, which he did every now and then by throwing back his huge head and filling the confined space with a harsh, metallic cackle, he showed his only redeeming feature, teeth as regular and as perfectly white as any woman's. From his mouth one's glance wandered irresistibly to his eyes—deep-set black eyes, the brilliance of which was increased by

A GREAT 12,000-WORD STORY OF DESERT ADVENTURE!



The Adventurers of the Sahara!

By JAMES T. SKINNER

Frank Harland is left to perish in the wastes of the desert by a rascally foe, but fortunately for the youngster the great motor expedition comes his way, and he is rescued!

The 1st Chapter.

Arab Vengeance.

"Move a hand, dog of a Nazarene, and you die!"

With a stifled cry, Frank Harland sprang to a sitting posture, and tried to make out the face of his assailant in the darkness.

"Who are you? Let me go!" he shouted, as a strong hand fell upon his shoulder.

Then, thrusting out his fingers towards the pistol-holster he had flung across the camp-chair at the side of the bed, he fumbled desperately for the revolver he had left there.

It was gone!

In a moment he realised the horror of his position. There was no doubt about it. The camp, set up in the early evening out on a lonely stretch of the great Sahara desert, had been suddenly attacked by roving Arab bandits—razzia, as they are called.

Strong and powerful though the lad was, he felt like a weakling in the deadly grip which had been fastened about his throat.

With a superhuman effort he slid his head sideways, and sprang from the bed.

"Let me go, you fiend!" he yelled. Then: "Jack, Jack—are you there? I'm attacked—Touaregs!" came his choking cry.

In an instant he had flung himself across the tent. There was a fierce scintillation of arms and legs, and the entangling whirl of a burnous folded swiftly round him.

Dark as it was, he could tell that there were at least three men within the tent. Now and again there was a savage grunt as some of the lad's wind-mill blows got home on the attackers; but, except for the first half-whispered ejaculation that had startled him into wakefulness, the bandits had uttered no word to betray themselves.

Lashing out right and left, Frank Harland sent one of the Arabs flying into the farther side of the tent with a blow like a battering-ram. Vaguely, through the conflicting maze of thought that held him, he wondered where his brother could be. Not more than two hours ago both had retired on the camp-beds under this single tent, with Hassan Ali leaning across his carbine over a brushwood fire before the entrance, and Howard Gillespie, their companion, in the tent adjoining.

"You brutes!" Frank hissed, as the truth broke upon him. "My brother—Jack—Jack—have they got you? Gillespie!"

Not a sound, except for the forced breathing and the crack of heavy blows, followed the shout.

Frank knew then that his brother must have been suddenly overwhelmed as he lay on the canvas bed beside him, and, all unknown to the slumbering youngster, had been spirited out into the starlit night.

It was obvious that Hassan Ali and Gillespie had been similarly dealt with. Frank was not a heavy sleeper, but it was extraordinary that all this could have happened without him hearing a sound. Yet happened it must have done, for there was no response to his repeated cries.

"Jack! Gillespie! What are they doing to you?" he yelled again.

A hot breath fell on the boy's face, and then he felt that choking grasp once more about his throat. The clutch was strangling him. Fight as he would there seemed no breaking from that terrible hold. He knew his strength to be slowly but surely ebbing. Were these Arabs garrotters as well as thieves? was the grim thought that flashed through his brain.

Then, as his struggles grew weaker, he felt a heavy hand thrust into his face, and heard dimly a voice that seemed to be growing more distant every minute.

"If the English whelp is wise," it said, in a hissing whisper, "he will lie quiet whilst the knife is also still! I have a blade held straight above your inbred heart!"

Feeling that he was utterly over-

powered, Frank Harland ceased his desperate struggling. The grip on his throat was relaxed, and he had an opportunity of peering into the darkness at his attackers.

That they really were Arabs he saw now, for the flap of the tent was suddenly lifted, and the desert moonlight came streaming through the open space.

Closely hooded, and with the striped burnous, or cloak, of the Algerian desert-rover folded about them, three figures stood silhouetted above him in the aperture.

To Frank's surprise he caught sight also of the flickering glare of the watch-fire they had left burning outside the tent. Where was Hassan Ali, who should have been there on guard? he wondered. Was he also a prisoner? The state of the glowing flames showed him, at all events, that the latter could not long have disappeared.

A savage jerk from the nearest of his assailants—a tall, bearded, and desperate-looking ruffian—and the lad was swung to his feet.

He caught the glint of a knife held firmly against his side as he moved, and he knew that any attempt at escape would be useless. There was nothing for it but to see what the Arabs' intentions were.

"Perhaps the Feringhee dog will go quietly now?" the taller of the Arabs exclaimed. "You see—there is no way out!"

"What do you want with me? What have you done with my friends?" was Frank's impassioned reply.

"You will learn that later!" the Arab declared. "In the meantime know that I am the Sheikh Abdul Kad'r, from the land of the Little Wells yonder. Look, dog!" he broke in fiercely, as they passed through the tent doorway.

Gazing across the glare of the fire that roared and crackled to the right of him, Frank made out the forms of some half-dozen camels standing motionless in the shadow a few yards off. There was a patch of thick alfalfa scrub to the left of the tent, above which rose the tall, slender columns of a knot of feathery-fronded palm-trees. Save for the myriad points of flashing starlight in a sky of the deepest indigo, the night was of inky blackness, the silence broken only by an occasional wheezing noise from one of the camels or the far-off howl of a hungry jackal.

Alone on the desert, in the hands of Arab brigands! The situation might well have stricken terror into the heart of the bravest. To Frank, however, the chief concern was his brother's safety, not to speak of that of their friend Gillespie.

As the lad turned with a puzzled stare and glanced up into the evil-looking face reflected in the glow of the brushwood fire, the Arab broke into a guttural, clucking sound.

"I see nothing, Sheikh of the Little Wells," he answered in Arabic. "But you shall answer for this! My brother—"

"The Sidi Harland will indeed be clever," Abdul Kad'r broke in, "if he is able to help you in any way. My score with him is already settled. You will follow—now!"

As he spoke he swung the lad round and pointed towards the knot of camels just beyond them. Pinned as he was in the grip of the powerful hands that had helped to overwhelm him, Frank was forced to yield to the pressure exerted.

"See there, then, Feringhee," the Arab exclaimed, "and know in one of those camels the fate reserved for you! Perhaps, when you are far out on the desert yonder, a prey to the vultures and the jackals which have their habitations there, you will learn that it is unwise for the white man to defile the holy ground of the Arab with his hideous works!"

Amazed at the revelation which these words conveyed, no less than the terrible end to which this fanatic tribesman had condemned him, Frank could only stare blankly at his savage captor.

He knew now what sense of imagined wrong had inspired this outrage. Some fifteen kilometres behind him, over at

the desert town of Tuggurt in Northern Algeria, the work of excavation in connection with the building of a canal to the military station of Wargla was in course of progress. John Harland, his elder brother, was the engineer-in-charge, and the youngster—who had only the other as his guardian—having journeyed out from England together. The Compagnie Francaise d'Algerie, who were constructing the canal, had taken the elder brother into their



A FIGHT FOR LIFE! As the jaws of the alligator reared in front of him, Frank Harland snatched up a heavy boulder and dashed it with all his force between the snapping rows of teeth!

employ following a successful engineering feat in the Eastern Soudan, and had permitted Frank Harland to enter the service of his brother as assistant.

Already they had pushed far out from Tuggurt into the confines of the desert, and the clamour of shovels, steam-narvies, and concrete-mixing plant in the deep cutting which was being pushed through the sandy bed, had awakened echoes never before disturbed in this lonely region.

Rumours had come to Jack Harland and his younger brother from time to time that some of the tribes inhabiting this part of the desert resented the intrusion on their domains. In one place the cutting would need to dam a stream that ran beneath a dried-up wady to a small oasis, where some of the Arabs grazed their cattle and horses. This was regarded as desecration by the natives, and formal protest had been lodged with the French official in charge of the district. Nothing could be done, of course, except to placate the Arabs as much as possible, and hope to show them later that the building of the canal was all to their advantage.

Frank knew now that his Arab assailants—mistaken by him at first for ordinary desert razzia—were actually tribesmen from the district in which the work of excavation was going on. He and his brother Jack had left the canal-head that afternoon, in order to carry out a further survey of the area through which the cutting would need to pass. This examination they

intended to continue on the following day, but evidently the Arabs, learning the purpose of the white men's journey, had determined otherwise, and had waited their opportunity to break into the camp and seize the English engineer. Once he was out of the way, Frank guessed, the Arabs no doubt imagined that work on the canal would come to an end.

These thoughts had barely time to frame themselves in the youngster's mind than he was thrust heavily forward, and thrown upon his knees at the rear of one of the camels, the figure of which loomed up weirdly in the blackness. Then, at the sharp word of command that broke through the hood of the bearded sheikh, the grunting beast was caused to kneel, and Frank felt himself lifted incontinently into its high-peaked saddle, his feet being strapped securely to the leathern girths that held it, and his arms bound tightly behind him.

"To-morrow, infidel dog," Abdul Kad'r shot up at the lad as the camel rose, "and you will learn how it feels to lie out under a withering sun in the open desert—waterless and alone. In that way are punished those who would deprive the Arab of his life-giving wells!"

"You are wrong—wrong," Abdul Kad'r! Frank ejaculated. "Do you not see that the work we are doing is for your own good? But it is useless to make you understand! The canal will more than replace the tiny stream—"

"Enough that I have said it, dog!" was the savage rejoinder. "Now, mount—and forward!" he called to his two companions, as he himself sprang to the back of his camel. Next moment, and the others had taken

which he and the Arabs were mounted had been set into a steady lumber before the lad could run his mind over the scene of events leading up to this pass; but presently, as they moved down in the sandy watercourse that lay beyond the place of encampment and broke through the darkness southwards, Frank found himself reviewing the facts, despite the horrible discomfort of his perch and the surging gait of the camel under him.

"The treacherous hound!" he muttered savagely. "I can see through the whole thing now. All this tumult among the natives about building the canal has been inspired by the lies he has spread. His object is to ruin Jack; to put a finish to his work on the canal; to wring from him the fortune that Uncle Anthony has left in Chancery!"

Indeed, it was all too plain, the lad concluded. When Anthony Harland, their father's brother, had died, his will had proved a matter of astonishment to everyone. Neither his sister's son, Godfrey Stone, nor Jack Harland were to benefit under it unless both were able to show, at the end of ten years, some personal accomplishment of abiding public usefulness. Both his nephews had been trained to the work of civil engineering, and each had an equal opportunity of winning fame and the fortune he was leaving behind. Jack Harland and his brother Frank were fatherless, but the terms of the will—so the lawyers had told them—were such that Frank would share in equal proportion if his elder brother were the one successful; whilst any other issue on their cousin Godfrey's side would benefit similarly. In the event of neither of his nephews making good in the manner provided, then, apart from the legacy bequeathed to Godfrey's mother, the residue would go to aid the work of some charitable institution.

Jack Harland, at any rate, had felt every confidence in his ability to satisfy the lawyers at the end of the period named. Of Godfrey's intentions in the matter neither he nor Frank had any exact idea, but it seemed that the look of venomous disappointment which their cousin flashed at them across the table that day in the London solicitor's office boded little good will to any project of their own.

All this had happened only some six months previously. Shortly afterwards Jack had received his appointment as irrigation-engineer with the Compagnie Francaise d'Algerie, and had later been asked to undertake the work of constructing the present canal. There was no doubt, Frank told himself, that their cousin Godfrey had learned of the undertaking through news in the Press, which had given considerable space to descriptions of the work and its officials.

"And that brute has followed Jack here with some scheme or other to wreck his chances of completing the canal!" Frank assured himself. "I was not mistaken when I thought I caught sight of his face that day in the Souk-el-Attarine at Tuggurt!"

Glancing ahead, Frank could dimly see the line of camels moving in single file before him. There was a cold wind blowing across the surface of the sandy plain, and he shivered as it bit through his khaki tunic. He had barely given a thought till now of the fate towards which these cowardly Arabs were leading him. What could it be?

Sand, sand, nothing but blazing, changeless, never-ending waves of sand. As far as the eye could reach, the empty, desolate plain stretched out in one unbroken monotone of glaring gold.

Overhead the noontide sun was blazing down with a heat like that from an open furnace-door on a sheet of molten metal. There was a film of violet haze over all the vast expanse, and the sandy surface quivered and glowed in the blinding rays.

Not a sign of leaf, not a solitary blade of green relieved the wild, appalling waste. Lifeless—not a movement anywhere, save for the line of drifting sand that swept in some sudden gust across the summit of a near-by sand-hill.

Yet stay! Something black moves slowly in the strip of shade thrown down at the foot of this rearing sand-bank by an isolated pile of saw-toothed rock. Painfully it drags itself closer into the shelter of the stone, seeking to elude the scorching beams that are creeping closer every minute. Nearer scrutiny reveals it to be a human form, crouched up and peering helplessly out across the infinite leagues of straw-coloured sand. Tortured with the agonies of thirst, worn and faint from trudging aimlessly on under the pitiless glare, the lad—for it was Frank—had cast himself down at length in this tiny stretch of shade with the feeling that the end had come.

"No hope! Not a sign of anything!" he murmured. "I wonder if Jack will ever know? The fiends!"

It had been early dawn when the Arabs dragged their prisoner from his painful perch and threw him down savagely at their feet. From certain landmarks revealed at the coming of daylight Frank saw that their course had been by way of the Wady Igharghar—a great trough in the sand that cuts in two the eastern Erg, or stretch of dunes, of Northern Algeria. Formerly a mighty river rising in the distant Ahaggar Mountains of the central

(Continued overleaf.)



The Adventurers of the Sahara!

(Continued from previous page.)

Sahara, and emptying itself into the Mediterranean, this wady was now not only dry but almost blotted out by the shifting sands that for ever swept across it. It was close against the winding banks of this long-dried water-course that Abdul Kad'r and his civil companions had abandoned Frank to his fate, knowing that here, in this terrible, uninhabited, trackless waste of desert his chances of rescue, of relief, were nil.

And now the lad, after pacing on helplessly hour by hour, dragging himself step by step across one sandhill and down the other had sunk at this spot exhausted, feeling unable to move his limbs a yard farther.

"Water—water!" he gasped, striving to draw himself for further shelter against the jutting elbow of rock that rose behind. "Give me water! I'm parched and dying!"

Yet even now he would not abandon hope. Though his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, he felt that he could not give up the idea that rescue was beyond all possibility.

Luckily—or, perhaps, with the more sinister purpose of prolonging their victim's agony, the Arabs had left Frank in possession of his pith helmet. This, at least, would save him from the ravings of insanity through sunstroke as well as the horrors of thirst. Now he lay with his khaki tunic torn open at the throat, gasping in the refracted heat that shimmered about him.

For an hour—or was it two?—he sat huddled up, looking out blankly across the serried lines of undulating sand-hills. After a while there came to his ears a faint chugging sound—a sharp, curious popping that caused his heart to leap in an agony of suspense.

"Great heavens! Am I going mad?" he asked himself.

Chug-chug-chug—pop-pop-pop! Frank stared wildly around him. Then a sight that almost overpowered him met his gaze.

For there, not a hundred yards away, lifting up over the deep cutting of the Wady Igharghar, and hidden until then in the trough that lay through the sandy waste, reared the radiator-head of a heavy motor-car, whilst in the driving-seat behind were men—ruddy-faced men, garbed in solar tops and the khaki wear of Europeans!

"Help! Hallo, there! Help!" the lad shouted, racing forward. The answer was a cheery yell. Then the whole world faded out, and Frank sank to his knees in black oblivion.

The 3rd Chapter.

The Motor Expedition.

"Well, mon brave, how are you feeling now?"

The voice was in French, a language of which Frank had more than a passing knowledge. As he opened his eyes, he stared up dazedly into the face of the speaker. Before him he saw a tall, dark-moustached man, young-looking, but with a sun-tanned face on which there was a certain anxious expression.

"Where—where am I? What has happened?" the lad exclaimed, staring wildly round him.

"Nothing to worry about now," came the prompt assurance. "Drink this—but slowly, mind, and only a little at first!"

Eagerly Frank seized the metal cup that was held to his lips, feeling that the liquid trickling down his throat was like some heavenly nectar. He gave a heavy sigh as the vessel was withdrawn from between his clenched teeth, and dropped back into his rescuer's arms.

Feeling stronger after a while, Frank began to gaze about him again. There were sounds of stir and bustle all round, whilst now and again he heard men's voices and the clatter of steel. He was lying on some canvas material under the shelter of a lofty bell-tent, and through the doorway he could see the first faint shadows of the night that would swiftly follow. He must have lain several hours unconscious then, was his sudden thought.

"Where am I?" he asked again. Then, remembering the strange vision which had burst upon his gaze earlier in the day, he exclaimed: "The motor—you, you picked me up—saved me?" "Seems like it, youngster," the man beside him replied, with a smile. "You are now lying camped with us among the dunes of Kheghabra. Lucky we chanced along in time. Why, you were thirty kilometres from the nearest oasis, and at the last gasp, too! You are British, I think?"

Frank mentioned his name, and then, in reply to further questioning, was acquainted with the identity of his rescuer.

A light broke upon the lad's train of bewildered thought.

"I know now," he added, after a

pause. "You are the leader of the French Sahara Motor Expedition. You are crossing the desert—two thousand miles—from Tuggurt to Timbuctoo!"

"Exactement!" was the answer. "And it was my technical leader—the man you see yonder—who caught sight of you from the forward car. Another hour or two, and I think we'd have been too late."

"I owe you my life, and am more than grateful, monsieur," Frank answered simply. "It was indeed a lucky chance by which you happened to hit upon me!"

Then, briefly, he told the famous French pioneer all that had happened to bring him into the plight in which they discovered him. It was only when Frank was narrating the story of some mysterious rifle-shots he had heard as the Arabs were taking their flight that the Frenchman broke in.

"Then you need no longer fear for your brother's safety," was his joyful revelation, "for it was he who burst in upon our camp last evening, and told of your disappearance. Whilst lying asleep in his tent, he informed us, some Arab ruffians had overpowered his guard, rendered him helpless by enveloping his head in a native burnous, and then half-stunned him. Three of the fellows were carrying him off through one of the deep sand-valleys close by your camp, when Monsieur Gillespie came to his rescue. Unarmed, he fought like a tiger to overcome your brother's captors. It must have been

no time in flashing out the news of his rescue.

"And now, how shall I get back to Tuggurt?" Frank asked, after a while.

"I'm afraid you will not get back to Tuggurt for a long time yet," the Frenchman answered. "There is no choice for you now but to accompany the expedition to Timbuctoo. It would be more than I dare do to send you alone across that waste without a camel, and I cannot spare a car to take you back."

It was with difficulty that Frank suppressed the cry of joy which rose to his lips. Here was good fortune, indeed! To take part in one of the most daring ventures of modern times, to penetrate into an unknown land where the foot of civilised man had never before been set, this was something which would have been beyond his wildest dreams. But seeing the expression which had passed swiftly across the youngster's face, the leader was prompt to add:

"At the same time, I need hardly tell you that the perils and difficulties this mission will encounter are such that would try the strongest. My drivers and mechanics are specially selected men, and all are subject to a very rigid discipline. Success can only be hoped for along such lines. I shall expect you, Monsieur Harland, to conform to the same routine. That is, of course," he put in, "when you are recovered sufficiently to take your place in the party. Otherwise you will never win through to Timbuctoo alive."

Frank knew now the meaning of that anxious expression he had seen on the leader's face. It was concern for his well-being. "I shall do nothing, sir," Frank earnestly assured him, "that could bring discredit on my own country, or in any way impede the success of the expedition."

On the following day, feeling practically recovered from the effects of his exposure and thirst, Frank had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the various members of the mission and of inspecting the cars. His surprise and interest knew no bounds. The entire personnel consisted of twelve

"That is the invention of the garage chief of the late Czar of Russia," the Frenchman answered. "It consists, you notice, of an endless band of solid rubber and fabric, which revolves around the two wheels at the rear of the car. Those two wheels do not touch the surface. It is the four small wheels fitted between them that press down the endless band and bring it into contact with the sand. The cars are thus able to traverse snow, sand, mud, or marshy ground without sinking in, and can climb any slope, no matter how rough, with an angle varying from thirty-two to ninety-five degrees."

"It is all very wonderful," Frank declared earnestly. "And I see you also carry searchlights, machine-guns, and complete camping equipment."

"That is so," the lad's informant replied. "Everything that could possibly be needed has been provided."

"And you hope to cover two thousand miles in three weeks?" Frank asked. "Why, it would take a camel caravan six or seven months!"

"Even assuming it to be able to endure the conditions," was the answer. "We shall travel at the rate of nearly 200 kilometres a day—that is, roughly, 120 miles."

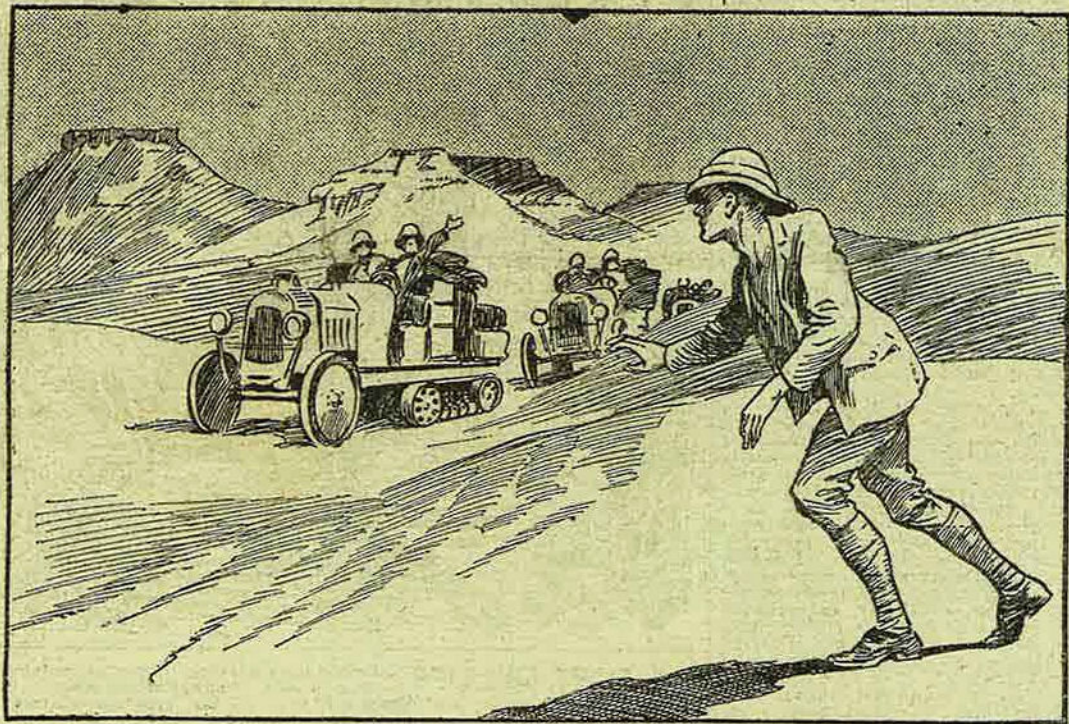
"And the object?"

"To link up the colonial possessions of France in Northern Africa with those in the equatorial regions. Hitherto, our countrymen have had to rely solely on the camel. Railway communication is out of the question, as it would take from six to twelve years to establish a route—even if practicable. Ordinary motor-cars have been tried, but the tyres were bitten into holes by the sandy grit. For myself, I have also tried the aeroplane, but the dangers of flying across the desert, far from any sort of depot, are too grave to admit of a regular service, and our only hope is centred in the cars fitted with this caterpillar wheel. But now, monsieur, to your seat," he broke in suddenly. "We are about to start the day's journey."

The 4th Chapter.

The Death Wind.

Look there, lieutenant!" Frank turned at the sound of the



HELP AT HAND! Chug! Chug! Frank Harland stared wildly around him. "Great Heavens! Am I going mad?" he cried. Then a sight that almost overpowered him met his gaze. For there, not a hundred yards away, appeared a heavy motor-car, in which was seated ruddy-faced men in solar tops and the khaki wear of Europeans!

during this struggle that the Sheikh Abdul Kad'r seized the opportunity of securing you."

"And Jack—my brother—Gillespie saved him then?" Frank exclaimed.

"Both of them broke in on our camp last night—bruised and mauled, but otherwise unhurt. Monsieur Gillespie had put the cowards to flight, and he and your brother then returned to the tent for you. Monsieur Harland was beside himself—you were gone! And the Arabs had seized your camels as well. Without further delay I dispatched a wireless message—"

"Wireless?" Frank echoed.

"Yes; wireless," was the smiling reply. "A wireless message to the military post at Wargla. The commandant promised to dispatch a rescue-party at once, and your brother, with Monsieur Gillespie, afterwards left to join them on their way back across the desert. Beyond saying that I would keep a sharp watch for sign of you, I could do nothing, for the Arabs might have taken any direction, and my mission is due to reach Timbuctoo in less than three weeks."

It was with heartfelt relief that Frank learned of his brother's safety, though he knew that the uncertainty of his own fate must be a matter of terrible anxiety to Jack. Fortunately, however, he was assured by the mission commander that the latter would lose

sturdy fellows—gallant Frenchmen who were risking their lives in the service of their country. First, there was the commander himself; secondly, the technical leader, an ex-flying officer, famous already for his attempts to penetrate into the Sahara by aeroplane; a young French Army lieutenant; and finally, the doctor of science who had charge of the observation work and was also the mission cinematographer. Subordinate to these were the eight drivers and mechanics.

It was the technical leader of the party—a fine, well-set-up man, with shrewd, penetrating eyes—who explained to Frank the mechanism and equipment of the five cars which comprised the convoy.

"This car, you will see," the officer said, during the course of the preparations necessary for the day's journey, "carries the drinking water we shall require in the terrible Tanesruft district, where no wells exist. That one contains the cinematograph outfit; the third yonder has a rear platform holding the general supplies. The others are the petrol cars, those huge tanks containing four casks each of fifty gallons of fuel."

Frank found his greatest interest centred in the wonderful mechanism which made it possible for the cars to traverse the soft, shifting desert surface without so much as leaving a trace, let alone sinking in.

sudden cry and peered in the direction of the mission-commander's outstretched finger.

A moment before, and the vast yellow expanse in front of them had stretched silent and lifeless in the scorching glare. Now, as though they had sprung into existence from the very air, a line of Arabs mounted on camels broke into view not more than a thousand yards away.

"They've been lying in wait in some hidden watercourse there!" the lieutenant declared. "Desert bandits, most likely—the blue-veiled Touaregs of the Sahara!"

He gave a shout. Instantly the four cars, which were travelling behind them in single file, were brought to a halt. The commander sprang from his seat and hurried across to his companions in the second vehicle.

"Looks like brigands!" he exclaimed. "No ordinary caravan, that. Train your glasses on them, monsieur," he said, addressing the technical leader, "and see what you make them out to be."

The other man bent his binoculars on the distant procession and studied it intently for a moment or two.

"No sign of pack-camels," he said. "I believe you are right. There's one man amongst them I can't quite make out. Looks white to me—the others are Arabs!"

By this time the band had begun

to move out in semi-circular formation in front of them. Frank felt his heart leap at the commander's reference to the white man, and wondered if his cousin, Godfrey Stone, had dared to follow him even here. Yet the thing was possible. Only by hard riding through the night could he and the Arabs have overtaken the fast-travelling cars, but probably—as the Frenchman had only begun their journey the previous day—they might have covered the distance on flying camels, or Bisharia camels.

At all events, Frank could not dissociate his mind from the possibility.

Any doubt as to the intention of the surrounding tribesmen was suddenly dispelled by the sharp, peremptory crack of a carbine shot from their midst, and almost immediately a wisp of sand shot up from behind the car in which Frank was seated. In an instant all was activity. Leaping from their seats, drivers and mechanics sprang to the posts appointed them in the event of any such desert attack.

The machine-guns were slewed into position and trained on the centre of the outflung line of riders, the men sheltering themselves behind the impediments loaded on the chassis of the motors.

Seeing no further movement on the part of the mission members, the Arabs grew bolder and began to draw in rapidly upon them. As they came closer shouts were heard, and then one of the foremost tribesmen broke out from his party with upraised rifle.

"Steady now with the mitrailleuse!" the commander called out to the man in charge of the machine-gun. "Hold your fire until the shooting breaks out again. Perhaps this approaching rider wishes to speak with us."

If he did so, his fellows revealed no desire to wait for the outcome. At that moment a crackle of shots burst out all round the bunched-up motor-cars, and then, still in semi-circular formation, the band began to sweep in with fierce cries and waving arms.

"Now, lieutenant!" came the commander's sudden shout. "Let them have a volley from the rifles—overhead. If they advance a further dozen paces after that, open fire with the machine-gun! Action!"

Next moment a crackling roar broke into the din, and the oncoming tide checked its impetuosity with a suddenness that was dramatic.

Whether this was due to the impression created by the well-armed front on the part of those attacked, or to any warning of the horror that was swiftly to follow, no one ever knew.

It was just then that a startled cry burst from the lips of the young lieutenant.

"Cease fire," he yelled, "and cover for your lives! A simoom is upon us!"

Glancing up, the party saw that the words were all too true. In the excitement and clamour of the sudden attack, none of the expedition members had noticed the change which had come over the face of the sky. Now, as they stared, they saw the sun shrouded in a mist of eerie-looking bronze, whilst a stifling breeze from the south began to beat in upon them, whipping the surface of the desert into spiral sand-wraiths.

Suddenly the air became filled with a curious singing noise, and then, rushing swiftly towards them, they noticed a huge black cloud, preceded by isolated columns and funnels of similar clouds. Not a moment was lost by the Frenchmen in the work of covering the cars with tarpaulins and in burying themselves in the most sheltered parts of the car.

As it invariably does, the simoom had sprung up from the southern desert with scarcely a moment's warning. Needless to say, the attacking band had disappeared somewhere into the labyrinth of the winding sand-valleys beyond, not was the mission party ever to see them again.

The air about had now become breathlessly, almost eerily still. From a fierce, oven-like waste of blistering heat the desert had been plunged into an atmosphere of almost paralysing chill, and the darkness grew more intense every second.

Then, with a mighty, wailing roar, the sandstorm broke in all its fury upon the spot where Frank and his companions crouched. Shrieking and howling, the wind hurled the sand in all directions about them, suffocating—blinding even, covered though they were—tingling in their ears and rattling down upon the tarpaulins in a ceaseless, deafening tattoo. It was all that Frank could manage to keep his senses in the appalling pandemonium that racked his brain. He could feel the car quiver and rock under him with the smashing blasts of wind and sand that were hurled against the chassis.

For what seemed a lifetime of discomfort and tension, Frank lay crouched in his kneeling position, unable to move and scarcely able to draw a breath. Gasping, and with his ears singing from the surge of blood that pulsed through his temples, he felt as though his senses would be literally hammered from his body. Then, to his inexpressible relief, he became conscious of a momentary lull in the roar and lashing of the storm. This was followed by sharp, convulsive gusts that sounded like the cracking of whips as they flung the desert sand in waves against the framework of the car.

Gradually, it seemed, the simoom was tearing over and beyond them, and presently the lad was able to lift his head above the covering and peer out cautiously at the surroundings.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, able once more to breathe without that awful

sense of suffocation. "The storm has passed."

As he looked he saw to the northward the great black column of dust and sand being whirled rapidly into the distance.

It was not long after this that the cars were once more got under way. Terrible though the experience had been, the party realised that no time must be lost in shaking off its effects. Already it had caused them serious delay, and they must make up with a spurt that would help to recover the hour's enforced halt.

"We are travelling now through the bed of the Wady Mia," the commander said later to Frank. "In a short while we should reach the fort of Hassi Infil, the finishing-point of our second long lap on the journey."

That afternoon the mission duly arrived at the lonely and desolate military post, the sole occupants of which were three French wireless operators and four native camel drivers. On the following morning the third stage was begun, the cars traversing the stony Tardanel plateau, and afterwards descending by the sinister gorges of Anguettara towards the sandy plains of Tidikelt. Two days' halt was made at Insalat—the last oasis of Northern Africa—and then, at dawn, began the most arduous and dangerous section of the journey.

In front of them, extending right across the desert from east to west, was a long, white track, narrow, but stretching without a break as far as the eye could reach.

"The Arab caravan route," the leader informed him. "That white line you see is made up of the bones of countless camels which have fallen and died by the way."

Two hours later they had entered the first steep defiles of the desolate Ahaggar range, among the last Blue Mountains of Goudir, in the very centre of the great Sahara. Down into the beds of stony water-courses, up and over the sheer-sided banks, twisting and turning among the formidable ramparts that had fallen from the heights above them, the cars swept their way undaunted by any sort of natural obstacle. Their performance was wonderful, and Frank expressed his admiration in no unmeasured terms.

When camp was pitched, the lad, despite the bodily fatigue that possessed him, was among the first to render a hand in setting up the tents. Then, after a meal, the party settled down over their brushwood fires among the desolate mountain heights, intending, after the night's rest, to set out for the terrible "Land of Thirst" that still lay beyond.

The 5th Chapter.

A Race With a Lava Flow.

"Back—back for your lives! There's a lava flow!"

In an instant Frank's frenzied yell had roused the sleeping camp to action. The darkness around was as black as the pit of Tophet, and this, added to the eternal gloom that prevailed in the rockbound pass, made it difficult to see whence the danger threatened them. That Frank was right the suffocating waves of sulphurous vapour now winding and twisting among the tents of the camp told only too well.

It was not long after he had retired to his tent for the night that Frank detected the peculiar odour which had come stealing suddenly through the narrow gorge. He had sprung to his feet on the instant, and then, peering out into the bleak, windswept night, saw the curling wreaths of yellow smoke approaching him. The choking tang of brimstone was sufficient to reveal the source of the fumes. Somewhere, creeping over and between the ironstone crags on the slopes above him, was a liquid mass of burning lava—spumed from some mighty volcanic fissure in the crest of the plateau overhead.

At that moment a long, muffled roar split into the silence, reverberating ominously along the walls of the pass. With a gasp of horror, Frank looked up through the fumes and blackness towards the summit of the slope behind. There—now visible in a white-hot mass that oozed and bubbled as it wound its way slowly towards the lower galleries—was a huge cascade of molten rock. Already the dried and withered grasses among which the mass was welling its course had taken fire and were burning furiously. Yet scarcely a minute had elapsed from the time Frank quitted his tent.

At that moment Frank heard the commander's voice in a hoarse string of orders to the drivers and mechanics.

"The cars!" he was yelling. "Save the cars, at all costs! Are you all there? Hurry, for your lives, or the flow will be on us!"

A swift glance back, and the youngster saw that the moving mass would soon be sweeping down to the floor of the pass. There was a steep descent along the winding track in which the tents had been pitched, and the white-hot flow would trail its fiery course among the rocks and boulders where the tents now stood. Narrow and sheer as the walls of the canyon were, unless the penned-in men were able to make their escape along the pass before the lurid tide could overtake them, its burning, liquid mass must instantly engulf them in a horrible fate.

To add to their difficulties the air became completely filled with the acrid, blinding vapour that poured in waves before the oncoming tide.

Dark forms hurried here and there past the lad as he groped his way forward through the blackness, and presently he heard the chugging sounds

of the motors ahead of him. Not a second had been lost by the drivers in swinging themselves into the cars, for none knew better than they to what extent the lives of the whole party depended on the safety of their charges. Any accident to the machines—any sudden calamity by which they might be rendered useless, even if no worse befell in the horror that was creeping towards them—and all would be lost, cut off and buried as the travellers were in this trackless waste of the great Sahara.

"That you, lieutenant?" Frank heard the commander call from in front. "Everything clear now, I think! Dieu! These poisonous fumes—"

And the voice was lost in a spasm of coughing. At that moment the lad felt a heavy form reel gropingly against him. He flung out an arm, exerting all his strength to retain his balance. Choked and blinded himself, he could scarcely see a foot beyond him, and all the time he was conscious of that molten mass spurting in vicious jets among the lower terraces of the rock behind.

"Who's that?" was the sharp inquiry. "I'm half-blinded! The cars—"

Then Frank felt the figure stumble forward in the darkness at his feet.

For a moment the lad experienced a pang of consternation. The fallen man was his leader—the mission commander himself. Half-asphyxiated and almost sightless in the sulphurous mist, the gallant Frenchman had plunged head foremost over one of the heavy boulders with which the floor of the pass was strewn, and now lay helpless and inert. "Help! Help! Bear a hand here! Help!" Frank shouted into the darkness.

A glance behind and he could see the hideous, quivering stream moving breast-high between the narrow walls not fifty yards away.

To the front there was a mingled confusion of moving machinery and high-pitched voices. Of the cars he could see no sign. Were they hurrying away beyond him, was his thought?

Exerting every ounce of his strength, he managed to hoist the unconscious form across his back. Next moment, in

this great mountain range frowned sombrely above them.

There was a flood of brilliant moonlight over the open space, and, safe again and relieved to rid their lungs of those poisonous vapours, the travellers drew the cars to a halt. Despite the horrible danger that had threatened them, none of the party had suffered any hurt. The motors, too, were found to be undamaged, and the only loss had been two of the tents in which the drivers had been sleeping.

"It is now my turn to thank you, monsieur," the commander said later to Frank. "That darkness and those fumes would have done for me, I think."

"Also, it was due to Monsieur Harland's warning," the young lieutenant broke in, "that the camp was roused in time to get clear of the danger."

"Later, then, we shall find an opportunity of showing him our gratitude in practical form," the leader declared. "Once we are back in Tuggart—"

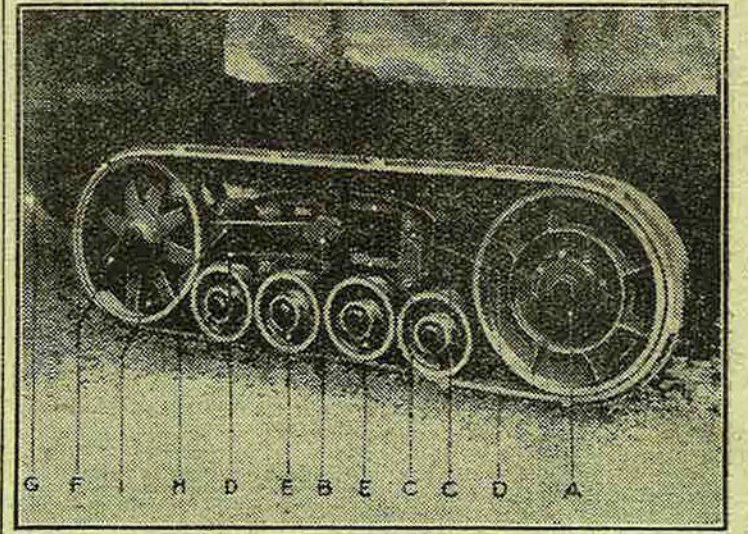
But Frank waited to hear no more.

The 6th Chapter. On to Timbuctoo!

At dawn the next day the expedition began its journey into that great unknown stretch of sand and rocks known as the Tanesruft, or "Land of Thirst." Three hundred miles of sun-parched, desolate country, where no solitary spring or underground well existed, lay before them. Pathless, uncharted, their course depended solely on the accuracy of the mariner's compass on which they were now compelled to rely.

At the Well of Tin Sawaten the rigours enforced on the travellers across the grim, mysterious Tanesruft, came to an end. An hour after leaving this tiny oasis the party were surprised, on glancing up suddenly towards the distant horizon, to find that a strange, copper-coloured haze had lifted itself into the blue expanse above the skyline. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, this yellow film dissolved itself into a pearl-hued mist that was shot with a thousand rainbow bars, like strips of cloud.

THE WONDERFUL ENDLESS TRACK WHICH ENABLED THE CARS TO TRAVERSE THE SANDS OF THE SAHARA!



DETAILS OF CATERPILLAR MECHANISM.

(G) is the endless band of indiarubber and fibre. (A) and (F) indicate the two pulleys which take the place of the driving-wheel. They are placed in front and behind the back axle (B), and their own axes are not fixed to the chassis of the car, but rise and fall with the irregularities of the ground. The front pair of pulleys (F) merely rest on the ground by their own weight, being secured to the main axle by the arm (H). (B) is the special axle which supports the weight of the car, and is rigidly fixed to the chassis. Attached to this axle by means of a bridge of springs (I) are the four small roller wheels (E), which are held in pairs to the springs (C) by the swing bars (D).

would no doubt have tempted them into a frenzied effort of which the outcome could only have been death. Day now succeeded day, and the cars

journey. Yet he never felt better in his life, and the joy of having come through with the mission on a venture unprecedented in desert history was worth everything.

Towards sunset that afternoon the last camp was pitched before the cars made their entry into Timbuctoo. The spot chosen was a clearing in the forest some twenty or thirty yards from the river-bank.

Just before the beginning of the evening meal, Frank was sent down to the river-side with two small water-tanks that required replenishing.

He had just stooped and filled one of the water-tanks when the stone on which he had poised his foot slipped suddenly from under it. He gave a quick gasp as he felt himself falling, and dropped the tank among the tangle of reeds. Flung out both arms in the endeavour to save himself, he was plunged next second among the maze of the evil-smelling rushes, and found himself up to the waist in ice-cold water. The shock was numbing.

He caught the grassy blades of the reeds between his hands as he slithered down, but these only bent and splayed out beneath his weight. Then his feet touched something solid again, and he began to flounder about in the effort to draw himself up. All about him now twirled the black, oily-looking water, its surface broken with reed-patches and giant lily-leaves. Scarcely an arm's length distant from him a huge, white-stemmed mangrove flung its branches out across the stream. Its roots twined out of the water like the curling arms of some monster octopus, all covered with slime and reeking with an overpowering odour.

It was when Frank had set one of his heels in the gravel of the bank, and was exerting all his strength in a backward movement, that the truth became plain. His other foot was fixed—gripped like a vice in the entangling ropes of some hidden water-vine. He was trapped!

Struggle as he might, there was no breaking from that awful, unseen hold. Half in and half out of the water on the sloping bank as he lay, it was only now he realised that the network of reeds prevented him from slipping in completely. Any sudden or heavy movement on his part, and the reeds might open and let him through—never to rise again beneath that tangled mass of vegetation.

It was only twenty yards from the camp, and a shout would soon bring the men hurrying to his rescue.

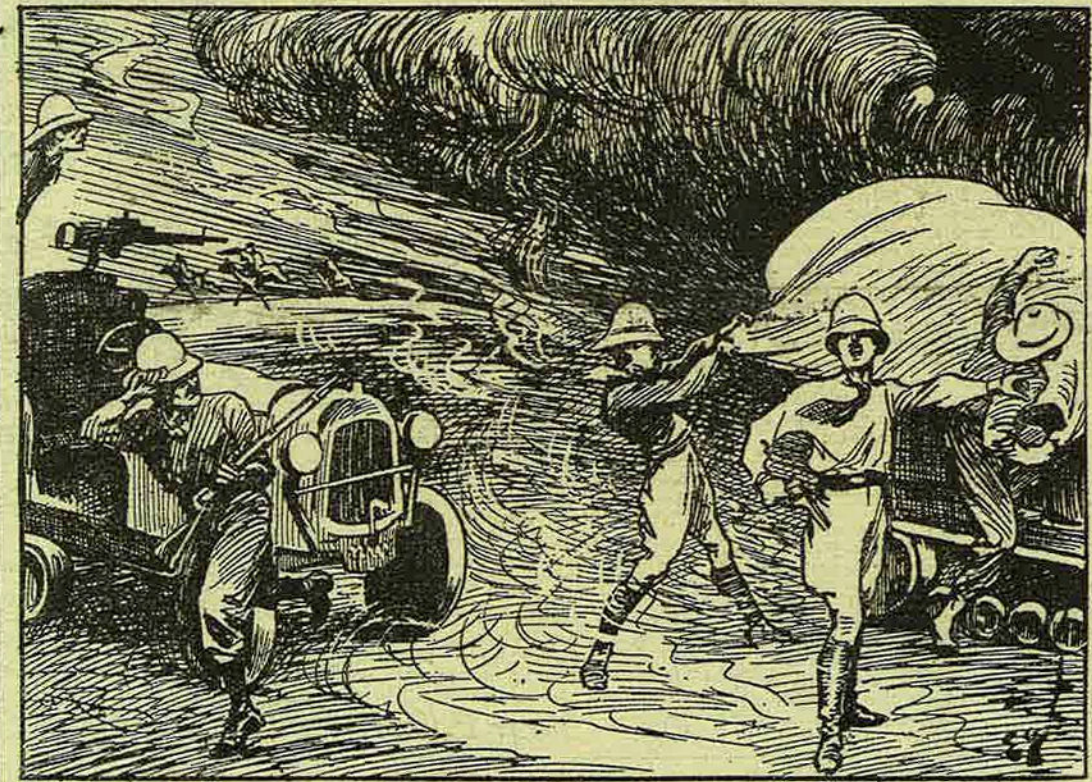
"Yet I don't want them to think I'm just scared of a wetting!" he told himself. "Ugh! These foul reeds! I must try to get this foot out somehow!"

Just then a stealthy movement among the frondage half a dozen yards to the right attracted his notice. Alarmed, he found it impossible to remove his eyes from the spot. Then, slowly, the screen of rushes and aquatic plants was thrust heavily aside, and, protruding through, rose the snapping jaws of a monstrous alligator.

Next moment Frank gave voice to a loud, resounding cry for help.

In spite of all his frantic jerking and struggling at the mass of roots which held his foot, not an inch would it give. Cold and numbed from the shock of water, it seemed that a deadly paralysis was creeping into his limbs. Would his companions come in time to save him?

Already now he saw the squat fore-arms of the alligator plunged forward (Continued overleaf.)



CAUGHT IN THE SANDSTORM! "Cover—for your lives! A slioom is upon us!" yelled the lieutenant. The air became filled with a curious singing noise, and a huge black cloud came rushing swiftly across the desert towards the party!

his endeavour to rise under the man's great weight, he heard a shrill shout almost in his ear, and felt an arm flung over and around him, seizing the commander's figure from his very grasp.

"It's all right, youngster!" came the welcome voice. "We've got him safely! Swing to the right now—the car is against you!" It was the lieutenant who spoke. "For your life, now—hurry!"

Scarcely a moment later Frank found himself being hauled by willing hands into the seat of the vehicle. In the Stygian blackness it had been impossible to see its outline, close though it was all the time. He had been stumbled on not a minute too soon. Close behind him now he could hear the hissing surge of the bubbling lava stream, which appeared to be gaining impetus on the sharp incline.

Every care on the part of the drivers was necessary in this dark, unknown gap between the mountain heights. Haste was equally important, but, for all they knew, some steep declivity might be met with at any instant—and one or other of the cars would go plunging headlong over the brink of destruction below.

After what seemed an eternity of strain and suspense, each of the cars emerged from the narrow, closed-in walls of the pass, and found itself in a rock-strewn opening. All round the mighty crags of the inner fastnesses of

"Look! What does that mean?" Frank asked the commander, who was seated beside him. "Is it the portent of another sandstorm?"

"Watch!" was the reply. Presently the mist, moving in tremulous lines towards the zenith, was succeeded by a blood-red glow, for all the world like a vivid sunset. Then, deep in the centre, a strange vision unfolded itself, striking a breathless stillness into the watching men. For there, as real as though human hands had erected it, lay the towers, the rearing pink minarets, the mosques and flat-roofed houses of a veritable fairy city of gold, its walls fringed with clusters of palm-trees and clumps of lucerne.

"The mirage!" came the commander's cry. "Such is the mocking illusion that lures the thirst-stricken traveller farther into the desert in the hope of reaching water!"

"Why, it looks quite close at hand!" Frank exclaimed. "That is the mockery of it," the Frenchman said. "You will find that this dream-like city is merely a reflection in the sky of some tiny, squalid Arab village at least twenty kilometres distant. We are more experienced travellers, as it happens. The vision does not deceive us."

And so it eventually proved. Had they been lost, despairing wayfarers, dragging themselves slowly through the sand in search of an oasis, the sight

were rapidly drawing the mission members towards the goal of their success. Despite the sweltering heat, the fatigue, there was no rest. On, on, on, ever through a country that changed not; always the same breaks and ridges, the same limitless plains of sand, the same scant surface-scrub, the same heat-shaken horizon—still the cars plodded their endless way.

The brain reeled at times with the heat and the daze, but the convoy halted not nor stayed. The energy of its commander drove the men forward even as the engines impelled the cars. His voice, his very presence, his unflinching optimism, was a spur to effort that the other members readily acknowledged among themselves. He was their leader, and their inspiration.

The military fort of Kidal was the next point reached, and then came the first grass-grown steppes of the French Soudan. Approaching Bourem, the party eventually saw lying ahead of them the black, glistening waters of the River Niger, a sight that was never more welcome to these weary men, whose eyes had been blinded so long by the glaring yellow of sand and sun.

The route now lay through the swampy region parallel with the river. To Frank the change into the fresh, cool green of forest groves was an inexpressible relief. Like the rest of the travellers, he was bone-tired and exhausted with the hardships of the

Who is YOUR favourite author? What is YOUR favourite type of story? Write and tell YOUR Editor!

In Your Editor's Den



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers upon any subject. Address your letters to: Editor, "Boys' Friend," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

OUR NEW NUMBER.

This week's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND is a fair proof of the all-round appeal of the best boys' paper on the market. The BOYS' FRIEND has something for everybody. That's the reason why the "Green Un" has always caught on. Take the present number with its prime budget of stories of all kinds—sporting, adventure, school, and top-hole romance. You cannot beat such a programme. And I have some record surprises in store.

ANOTHER MASTERPIECE.

"The Last Laugh!" is the title of next week's yarn of the Duke. The master-rogue has a firm hold over a player in the team opposing Chelsea Villa, and he orders the man to play an unsportsmanlike game. At the critical moment Hercules Samson, bland and irresistible as ever, comes on the scene. The Duke's victim, who is acting under duress, and who dreads the master-criminal, receives a handsome hiding from Hercules, who is a humorous guy, and rightly named the Wizard of the Wing. Rollo learns the truth, and he plays up to the treachery of the Duke. Of course, the player who has been got at does his best to make up for his wrongdoing, and, after confessing his share in the plot, agrees to assist Rollo in the capture of the Duke. The latter is to be found in a certain thieves' kitchen. En route something happens, and you will be thrilled by the mystery and grim tragedy of the happening in question, for the trail of the Duke is found, also a message of a saturnine kind. I am convinced that next week's tale beats anything yet in the splendid series.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

I am always eager to strike out a new line, and next Monday's grand 12,000-word complete story, "A Deal in Diamonds" does this, and no mistake. The story is from the fertile pen of Mr. Percy Longhurst, the man who gives those pithy little "Health and Sport" articles each week in our paper. On this occasion Mr. Longhurst addresses himself to the elucidation of a baffling diamond mystery. The "sparklers" have supplied material for a myriad yarns, but nothing quite as gripping as on this occasion. The tale hinges on the enmity existing between a daring youngster who dashes in and wins the diamond claim, his partners, and a gang of rogues who will stop at nothing. The story is packed full of

thrills, and when you have read it you will be ready to say once more, as we have all declared many times, that this famous author is as deft at handling a stirring plot as he is at serving out sage counsel about keeping fit and strong.

ROOKWOOD FOR EVER!

For some weeks past it has been in my mind to speak of the big surprise I have been saving up for my chums in connection with those magnificent Rookwood yarns by Owen Conquest. Then over and over again I said to myself that the great news would keep—nothing lost by a slight postponement, and consequently nothing was done. But the new move was there, all in course of preparation, though I am not half sure even now that it will not be better to hold back the details of it all till you can see what was under way. For reasons which it is not necessary for me to go into, since they are all pretty obvious, Rookwood has grown more and more popular with each week's yarn. It is a topping series, and all the different characters increase in favour as one gets to know more about them. Now, what if a sudden startling change were made? I am a firm believer in swift changes. They bring in their train just that tuning up result which everybody wants—not that I would suggest Jimmy Silver, or Tubby Muffin, or Bulkeley, or Mornington stood in need of a further dose of pep. Well, there it is. I shall not, after all, let the cat out of the bag this time. You will be able to see for yourselves very shortly indeed what is afoot, and I shall be immensely astonished if you do not admit the new idea was a rattling good one. Without a doubt Jimmy Silver would shake down and make himself thoroughly at home, no matter where he chanced to find himself. For the moment I will content myself by asking you to keep an extra sharp look-out for the new sensation. It is a bumper one.

OUR FIRST-CLASS SERIALS!

"Sound the Eternal!" and "The Phantom Pirate!" are winning hands down. Full of amazing possibilities as each of these stories is, they are as far apart in style, treatment, and idea as the Poles. I find that Lester Bidston's thrilling conceptions of unexplored worlds are catching on no end. As for Maurice Everard, he is magnificent, and once he ups with the anchor of the pirate craft, you know there will be very peculiar incidents to chronicle.

AN EXTRA FEATURE!

You will easily call to mind some of the excellent shorter completes we used to have in the BOYS' FRIEND. I have a decided liking for this kind of extra feature when space permits, and I know my chums are all of the same mind. For this reason I am giving next week a rattling fine complete school tale called "A Double Conspiracy!" This deals with a wonderfully well thought-out jape, but, good as was the brain-wave of the japers, others had a better one, and those who went out to jape came back shorn. Anyway, they fell into the soup, though it was not exactly soup. Still, you will see next Monday what a lively, all-in yarn "A Double Conspiracy!" is.

OTHER FEATURES.

You can rely on a fine Football Competition next week, while interesting and instructive articles will be found in their old places.

RESULT OF THE WEDNESDAY PICTURE COMPETITION.

In this competition two competitors sent in correct solutions of the pictures. The first prize of £5 has therefore been divided between the following:

- G. PURDEY, 9, Rosedale Road, Richmond, Surrey.
- DORA WILLIAMSON, 39, Willoughby Street, Gainsborough.

So many competitors qualified for the third grade of prizes that division among them of the prizes offered was impracticable. The second prize of £2 10s. and the ten prizes of 5s. each have therefore been added together and divided among the following sixteen competitors, whose solutions contained one error each:

- Peter Wood, 21, Pleasance, Edinburgh; W. A. Ellsey, 97, Carlton Terrace, Radcliffe, Manchester; Cyril H. Horton, Rodford, Westleigh, Chipping Sodbury, Glos.; Mrs. McMahon, 35, Macclesfield Street, Chester Road, Hulme, Manchester; Henry Urquhart, 115, Causewayend, Aberdeen; E. Nunn, 1, Alexandra Road, Windermere; James Russell, 44, Norman Street, Glasgow, E.; Cecil Winslow, 6, Fairfield Terrace, Douglas, I.O.M.; Wm. Mustoc, 5, School Lane, Cirencester; R. B. Curtis, Hillside, Taplow, Bucks; Norman Reed, 48, Northcote Road, Clapham Junction, S.W. 11; David Johnstone, 30, Martin Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow; Miss D. Stephenson, 68, Keppel Road, East Ham, E.; Fred Archer, 96, Humberstone Road, Plaistow, E. 13; Leslie Tapscott, 141, Coronation Avenue, Stoke Newington, N. 16; S. Walker, 26, Padwell Road, Southampton.

SOLUTION.

The Wednesday is an ancient club, for it began in the sixties, fifteen years before football properly took root in the provinces. Like many other well-known clubs, the Wednesday has had several homes, and its association with the Cup competition has been long and honourable.

Your Editor.

THE ADVENTURERS OF THE SAHARA!

By JAMES T. SKINNER.
(Continued from previous page.)

into the edge of the pool as it began its approach towards him. Frank could plainly see the glistening, scale-covered back, with its long, serrated ridge, and was sickened with the fetid, musk-like smell that rose to his nostrils.

In a last, despairing effort, he lashed this way and that, jerking up his leg in a sawing motion and putting out all his strength in the frenzied tugging. The mass of reeds by which he was supporting himself sagged and bent ominously under the strain, but presently, to his surprise and relief, he felt his hands close upon hard rock between the sword-like blades.

This enabled him to obtain a firmer hold and exert more leverage in the endeavour to release his foot. Plunging and twisting, he now began to pull upwards in sharp, sudden jerks. Something was giving! This time he was able to move his leg farther out of the water. Again he strained, breathless with fear and almost exhausted, but spurred with this first encouraging success. Then, crack! The mass of roots seemed to tear apart under the water, and he was free!

It was the work of an instant to regain his upright position on the sloping bank. Swiftly he glanced towards the spot from which the alligator was advancing. The reptile was almost upon him. Thrilled with horror, Frank saw the great, gaunt jaws snapped open, displaying the quadruple rows of sharp, gleaming teeth. The brute emitted a grunt of fury as the lad sprang back, and floundered about from side to side, as if to prevent his escape, the strokes of its tail lashing the water into foam.

Then, as the scaly snout was raised almost within a yard of him, Frank felt his foot in contact with loose rock.

Drawing cautiously back, he then made a sharp dart forward, snatching from the water a heavy boulder that was almost as much as he could lift. A second later, as the snapping jaws reared in front of him, he dashed the stone with all his force between the rows of teeth, and sprang back for his life towards the safety of the bank.

As he did so he heard shouts behind, and saw the forms of his friends breaking hurriedly through the screen of reeds. Another moment, and he was pulled out of danger, and carried back into the shelter of the camp.

Of how the last stage of the expedition from Bourem to Timbuctoo was accomplished in twenty-seven hours without a stop all the world now knows.

The journey was ended—success had been won. For the first time in history man had covered the whole two thousand miles across the great desert of the Sahara in motor-cars, and a means of practical and rapid communication between the French colonies north and south was established. In twenty days had this incredible journey been accomplished, fifteen of which were devoted to travelling. The desert had been conquered at last!

The 7th Chapter.

The Reckoning.

"Another word, Godfrey Stone, and I'll choke the life out of you!"

Pausing at the doorway of the little weather-board office that overlooked the sandy cutting of the Wargla Canal, Frank heard his brother Jack's voice coming in loud, angry tones from the inner room.

It was six weeks after the entry of the expedition into Timbuctoo that the lad found himself back once more in

the town of Tuggurt, having accompanied the party on their homeward journey through the desert.

Hastening over to the place where his brother was still engaged on the work of the canal, he had reached the office-hut in time to find Godfrey Stone held prisoner there, with Jack's firm grip about his throat.

From words that had passed Frank knew that their rascally cousin had made another attempt to wreck the canal workings, this time by opening one of the dams and flooding the heading where the native workmen were engaged in the excavation work. The dastardly plot had been discovered in the nick of time, and then, after an hour's frantic struggle, in which he succeeded in closing the sluices, Jack had hurried back to find Godfrey Stone in the office-hut searching everywhere for the plans which he knew the engineer had left there.

"By thunder, Godfrey," Jack was saying, "it's only the fact that you're my cousin that saves me from hurting you! I've suspected this for a long time past—and now I've caught you!"

"Let me go—let me go! I'll never come near you again!" the other whined.

"You will never get the chance to, you hound!" Jack exclaimed savagely. "I've another score to settle with you! What did you do with my brother Frank over there at Kheghabra?"

"Nothing—nothing! It was Abdul Kad'r!" came the cry.

"You are a liar, cousin Godfrey! Get up—so!" A yell of pain reached the listener, and he chuckled grimly.

"You know you bribed Abdul Kad'r that night to attack our camp, even if you did not take actual part in the deed!"

"You are wrong—no, no—I mean, I didn't!" Godfrey Stone made answer. "Abdul Kad'r—"

"Has himself confessed to it," Jack broke in. "I wrung the truth from him when I went out to make further inquiries after Frank. For all I know the lad may never get back. Luckily, he was picked up by the Sahara Motor Expedition, as I had a wireless message from the military station at Wargla."

"Picked up!" echoed Godfrey Stone incredulously.

"You thought he was dead—eh? No thanks to you that he isn't. But if that mission fails and he never gets through alive, Godfrey Stone, I'll hunt you out, wherever you are, and settle it with you!"

Frank could prolong his brother's anxiety no longer. At that moment he flung open the door of the office and broke forward with outstretched arms. "Jack—Jack!" he cried. "I am here again! I've got back—safe and sound at last!"

With a startled gasp, his brother swung round and saw the lad's smiling face before him.

"Frank!" he yelled. Then, seizing his opportunity to break from the strangling grip that was fastened on his throat, Godfrey Stone rose to his knees and leapt for the doorway.

"Let him go, Jack!" Frank exclaimed. "I don't think he'll trouble us again. I'm safe, and you've won through in building the canal—that's all that matters now."

And Jack agreed.

THE END.

(Next Monday's ripping 12,000-word complete is entitled: "A Deal in Diamonds." You should make sure of reading this extra special story by ordering a copy of next week's BOYS' FRIEND from your newsagent NOW!)

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