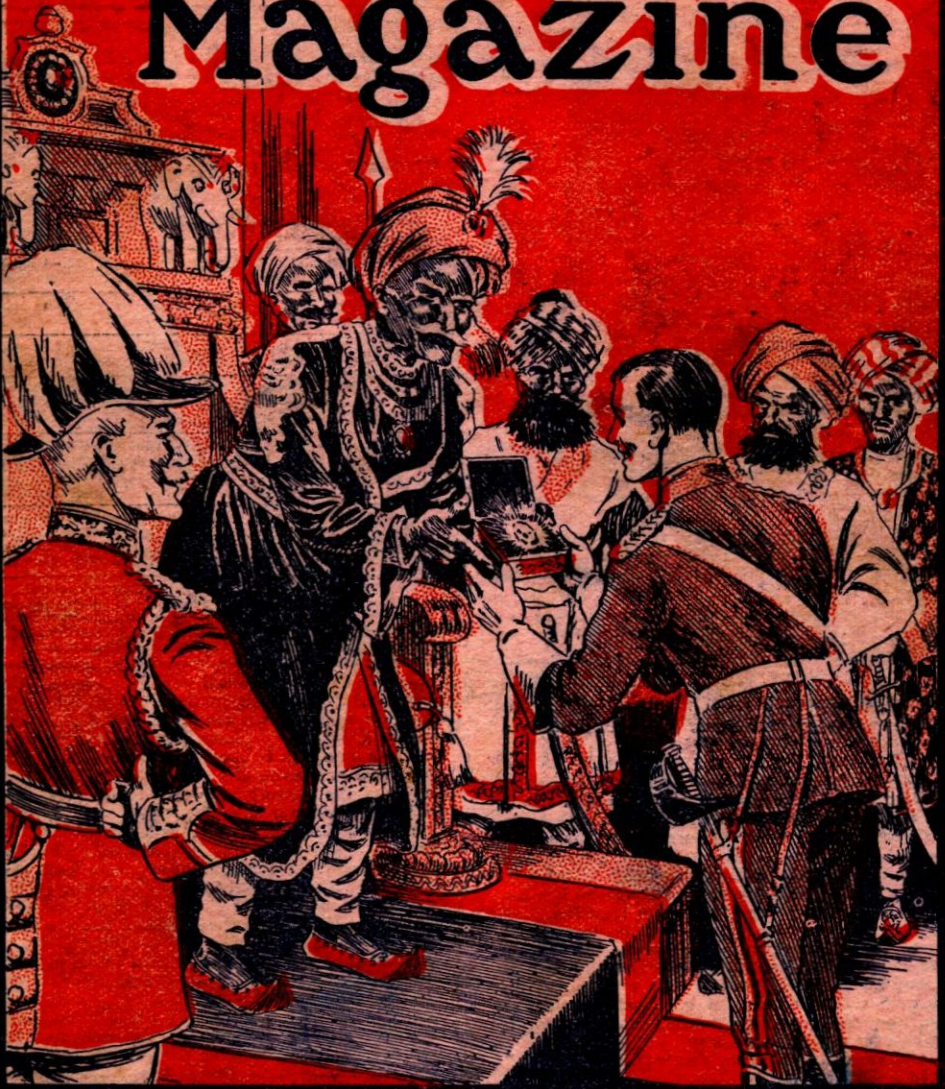


**THE BOXING DRAGON. THRILLING ARMY
YARN INSIDE.**

Boys' ^{2D} Magazine

EVERY SATURDAY



THRILLING YARN OF INDIA'S MYSTERY.

Vol. X—No. 284—August 13, 1927.

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THE BIG GAME CRICKETERS—

(Continued from page 30.)

Velasquez stooped over them. He buried his face
 amongst the leaves of it.

"Yes," he cried. "It's the Huruculane!"

AS fate would have it, precisely at that moment
 Sambo was leading his party of natives by a
 slightly different and more circuitous route
 through the clearing in the forest to what was nothing
 less than a giant cliffside of rock, rearing to the sky.
 "Golly, dis nigger has been and gone and lost his
 way," he wailed, turning round upon his tribe.

They put their knuckles to their teeth and
 murmured. They did not understand, but Sambo
 looked more serious than they had ever seen him yet.
 And they had learned to know that when his white
 teeth were not shining in a grin, something was
 wrong. Sambo generally grinned at the world,
 and whatever else came his way.

"Guess dis chile got to try de ole climbing stunt,"
 he murmured.

There were many jagged and jutting pieces of
 rock that promised a foothold. A hazardous climb,
 but one that Sambo in his mood was disposed to try.
 He cared little for what might happen. The fever
 was in him to the extent that he was blindly reckless.
 He commenced to climb.

The natives below watched with awed gaze. Up,
 inch by inch, the black man in his soiled white
 cricketing flannels, slowly climbed, up the sheer side
 of that rocky wall.

He became a speck to the gaze of those below, like
 a fly moving on the rim of a giant saucer.

And then the natives below suddenly gave vent
 to wild, inarticulate noises.

A dreadful, disquieting thing was happening.
 Sambo was screaming, his deep voice piercing the
 tropical stillness. He had almost fallen, and now
 was clinging with one hand to a ledge of rock.

What had happened? The natives scarcely
 paused to ask themselves the question, but prepared
 to run in their terror.

And then they saw a striped animal's face snarling
 over the ledge, very near Sambo's face.

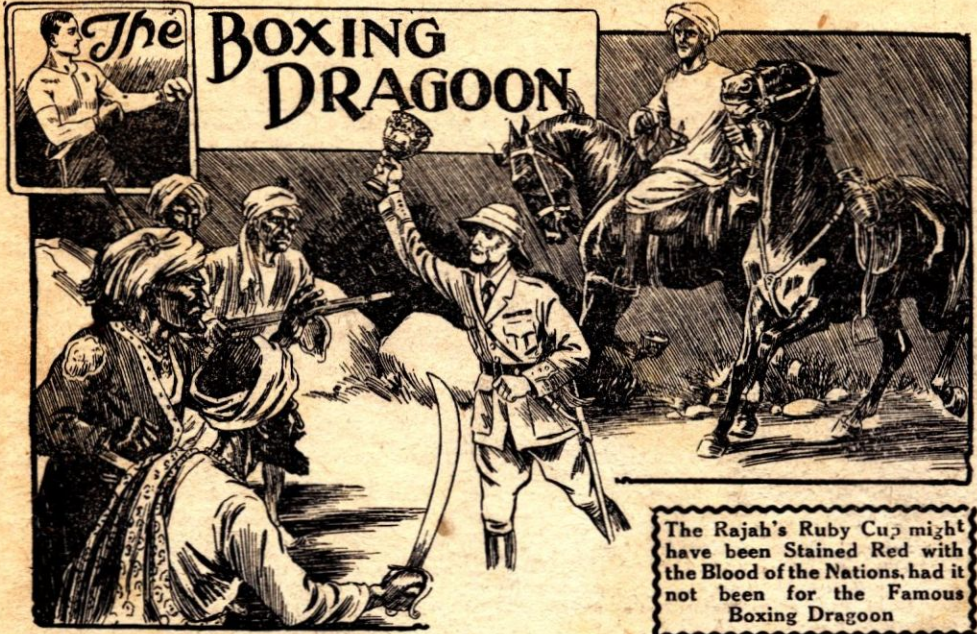
What had happened?

As the black cricketer and big game hunter had
 come to the edge of his long, weary climb and his
 glistening face appeared over the top of the ledge,
 he saw something that brought a startled gasp,
 and then a wild scream from his lips, and almost
 made him relax his hold. It was a puma.

Sambo's hand slipped. He screamed again—

Does Sambo fall to his doom on the ground far below?
 Don't miss next week's instalment of this ripping
 tale of the wilds, chums.

"Shiny" Hallem, the Fighting Soldier, Salutes You, Chaps. Here's the Stirring Tale of How He Kept the Union Jack Flying in India at a Critical Moment.



Shiny Hallem of the Drags.

SHINY HALLEM'S heart was getting a bit heavy. It was like slamming his gloved fists into solid granite.

The dark-skinned boxer in the roped, sun-lit square before him, was dealing with every trick, move and blow he carried.

Shiny Hallem wanted to win that ten rounds contest bad. He owed it to the men of his regiment, who had so lustily cheered him when he had stepped into the ring, thirty-eight minutes before, to battle ten rounds with this rugged fighter, Shale of the Fusiliers.

All about the dint, between rocky Indian hills, were troops drawn from every outlying camp and barrack by this contest for the middle-weight championship of the British Army in the province of Lanpore, that rugged, mountainous stretch under the shadow of the Hindu Kush.

The winner would be qualified to fight for the proud title: the Champion of all India. And for Shiny Hallem, just turned eighteen, that big honour was wonderful.

But now, facing Shale, the great thing had become nothing. He longed to beat Shale without glory—to punish him as he knew he deserved.

The blow-blotched boxers met mid-ring, both drooping from the toll of nine hard, ding-dong rounds.

Even at that last moment of the contest, Shiny still hoped for a knock-out. He lowered Shale's guard with a clover feint and renewed himself to pelt

in a blow that left a ruddy patch on Shale's face. The Fusilier stood up to it as a slab of stone, then tried to rush Shiny to the ropes with a weak semblance of one of the vigorous rushes he had opened up at earlier stages. Shiny slithered out of range and clopped in a stinger as the staggering Fusilier slogged on.

Gong!

The young trooper went slowly to his corner, deaf to the appreciative cheers that burst out.

In his corner, with towel and sponge, stood his trainer and chum, Clash Morgan, D.C.M., bronzed, cheery and one-time holder of the Army Heavy-weight championship belt.

"Dash every blinking thing!" panted Shiny as he dropped on to the stool, "I just couldn't hit the brute hard enough—I deserve kicking!—I'm soft!"

Clash Morgan cold-sponged new life into the boy and shook his head cheerfully.

"Sonny, you're a double-sized wonder! Couldn't put that bird out?—I should say not!"

The King's Fusiliers to a man groaned as they saw their hope, the hefty Private Shale, leave the ring. They, like the Green Dragoons, who boasted of Shiny Hallem, had built on strengthening their sports record with a champion of India.

Captain Starrit frowned as the jaded, much-punched infantryman faced him in the dressing-tent. "You're going back," he declared sourly. "You know how I built on you beating this boy—putting him and his sharp wits out of the likelihood of him

All the characters in the stories printed in this paper are fictitious: the names do not refer to any living person or persons.

smelling a rat should he recognise me. If I had not been one of the ring-side committee you'd have lost the decision. Understand, he's got to be kept out of our game!"

It was strange an officer and a private being on such confidential terms, but both had personal reasons for this.

"The kid's tough—it'll want hard pressure to break him!" snarled Shale.

"He's got to be kept blind to us. The big coup should fix us and the others up rich. But if this boy gets one hint—there's danger! We're here for pure business—the job's got to be done quick, without hitch or hesitation—I'm depending upon you to-morrow!"

"I'm depending upon myself," shot back the private grimly. "This roasting country ain't no picnic for me—nothing short of becoming rich for life would have tempted me to set a foot here. I'm no pack-carrying Tommy Atkins no more than you're the genuine article inside that khaki."

Clash Morgan Learns.

A KEEN, merry-faced, bright-eyed youngster, Clash Morgan had known Shiny Hallem for that ever since he had spotted him in the depot gym, back at Blighty, battling his ten and a half stone against twelve of husky rustiness with a pair of well-used gloves.

Within three months Shiny was the best boxer of his division. Clash took him right up and instilled him with his vast knowledge of every department of the game.

Clash was talking to the O.C., Major Hardy, when the young trooper stepped on to the barrack-square after his gruelling fight. The officer caught sight of the boxing hope of his regiment, and motioned Shiny forward.

Shiny faced him, clicking his heels and saluting smartly.

"Sport" Hardy was one of the most popular officers of the division. Horses and men were his life and there was never a keener judge of either.

"Congratulations, Hallem—you did fine! But I've some news for you two—you've both been chosen with Sergeant Davis and myself for special escort duty to-morrow. It is unusually important—we shall have the honour of representing the regiment in conveying a much-valued trophy from the railhead at Sivat to the up-country palace of the Rajah of the Province, where the general commanding will present it."

Shiny's interest had deepened.

"Can this trophy be the Ruby cup, sir? The lost drinking cup that started all the unrest here?"

Major Hardy stared hard at the young trooper.

"Hush! not so loud! Jove! how on earth do you know so much? It's a guarded secret—none but the general, a few chosen officers and the Rajah himself knows its real nature."

"I merely guessed, sir," responded the young trooper promptly. "I knew that the General has been spending the best of his life tracing this cup—for the purpose of establishing peace here."

"You did, by gad?"—then the Major relaxed. "You're far keener than I expected, Hallem." He turned towards the older soldier. "I'm placing you both on your honour to keep still tongues about this. The cup is worth a cool million. Every crook in India would be active if the news leaked out."

The two troopers saluted as the officer touched his helmet and moved off towards his quarters.

"Gosh! sonny," declared Clash to his pal. "We're in high favour. First time I've ever got my orders direct from the O.C. We're risin' in life, kiddo!"

But we'll nip over to the coffee-bar, and you can tell me why you want to be biffing hunks of Mr. Shale."

A couple of minutes found them seated before iced drinks in the cool of the troopers' canteen—Shiny talking—Clash listening to the queer story of the dimming past behind the day when Shiny had marched cheerfully into the cavalry depot back at Blighty.

"I was only a kid, and my cousin, Herrick, had been gambling, had opened the house to a set of tough characters who had made themselves at home with everything. Dad was away at Aldershot. He was a soldier, an officer, and Herrick was getting a commission soon. That wild crowd had him tight and I wanted him clear of them. But it didn't work. I suddenly got to know that the old man was on his way home. Herrick was drunk when I entered the room, trying to play cards. I set about trying to get him to his room, getting the others away before dad came. One of the chaps got wild and went for me, knocked me insensible. When I came to Herrick had pulled himself together, and explained to the old man that I had done all the dirty work. Someone had stuffed a forged cheque into my pocket—it had a clever imitation of dad's signature under the demand for a big sum."

The story had gripped Clash's interest.

"Couldn't you have explained?—the servants would have backed you up."

"Herrick had cleared them all out—he was taking no chances! Dad was a storm! I was told to get out within an hour—disowned! The chap who biffed me into insensibility is Shale!"

Harvey of Laxpore.

A BOUT two hours later General Harvey received the O.C. of the Green Drags in his private "den" at headquarters.

Here the two hardened campaigners were rank-free, two friends grappling with the big problem—India.

"Get seated, Hardy. Infernally hot!"

The General pushed forward cigars, lit one himself and stretched out his legs.

"Recollect Monand Khan, Major?"

"The fanatic who brought a hord of tribesmen down on the mountain-battery barracks a couple of years ago?"

"Correct!—four thousand was the exact number. Monand Khan is an old Oxford man with high honours. His creed is a black Empire for India. England has given him the up-to-date art of campaigning his mountain-sheltered forefathers never had. Well, here's the position: From native hill-nomads I get the news that he has gathered under his banner ten thousand warriors and is only waiting for word from the local rajah before he launches an overwhelming assault on our division defences."

Major Hardy sat up with compressed lips.

"Startling!—Ten thousand!—double our divisional strength and these tribesmen all hardened soldiers—well equipped!"

General Harvey nodded.

"Our counter is diplomacy and we deliver it to-morrow in restoring the Ruby cup to its ancient seat. Monand Khan's back will be broken when you carry the cup from the Sivat railhead. I, myself, will be at the Rajah's palace to go through the important ceremony of restoring it—and clinching a permanent peace compact."

The quiet seriousness of the words suddenly took the Major's mind to his brief interview with Shiny Hallem and Clash Morgan on the cavalry barrack square.

He at once explained his unexpected discovery of the young trooper's knowledge.

Puzzlement and a hint of alarm glinted in the General's eyes.

"I would like to see the man. It is quite beyond me how he got hold of this well-guarded secret."

"He will be one of the escort to-morrow. But I'll vouch for his honesty—he's a soldier born, his whole heart in India. If all my troopers were like young Hallem I'd be proud."

The General's air of concern relaxed.

"One final word!" he concluded. "Mr. Starrit of the Fusiliers is to be your fellow escort-officer to-morrow. As you know, he is my nephew—I have built a future for him—he is replacing someone I lost. Therefore I have specially detailed him for this particular work."

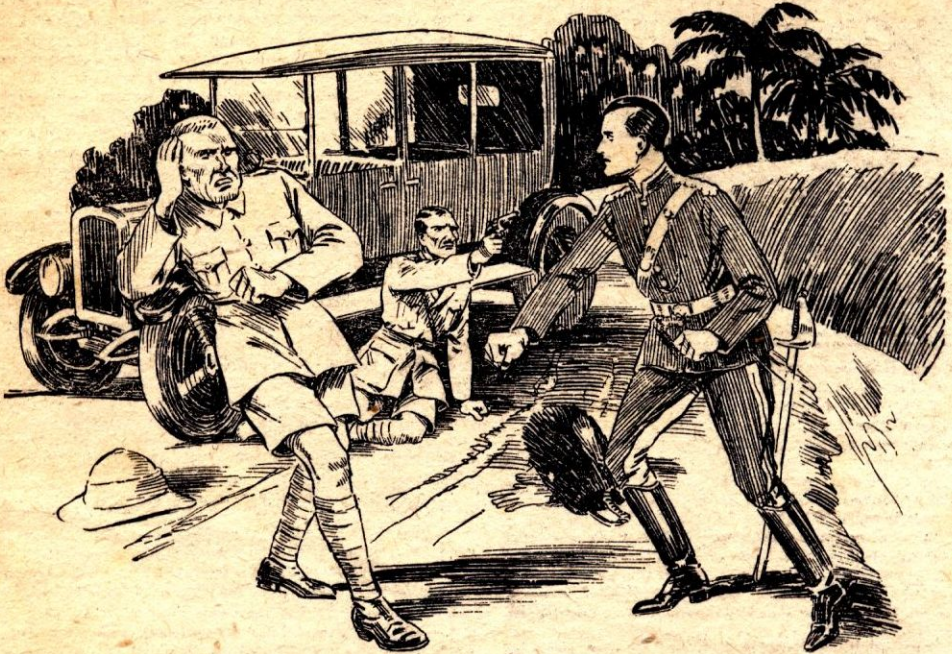
Surprise, hate and annoyance surged up within those dark eyes. Then the infantry officer mustered himself, saluted the major and faced his men.

He brought them to the "slope" and rejoined his superior on their short journey to the train.

The Ruby cup had come to Siyat under military escort. No precaution had been left unattended. Its case of old silver shielded it from prying eyes as it left the hands of the train escort and passed into those of Major Hardy.

From fifty yards distance, Shiny saw but little of the proceedings. The boy was following the movements of his cousin, thinking of the strange prank of Fate that had flung them together again.

A sudden din behind him snapped his thoughts. A stiff tug at his reins and his horse shied in sudden



ODDS AGAINST THE BOXING DRAGON.—The cowardly pug recovered as he saw his accomplice reach for the revolver. The bullet was like a red hot barb striking Shiny's shoulder. He tottered back.

THE jet-black chargers of the picturesque cavalry escort of the Ruby cup cantared their smart-uniformed riders clatteringly on to the open space before the train that had just puffed into Siyat from down country. A double line of khaki-clad infantrymen with fixed bayonets, the escort party of the King's Fusiliers, were drawn up facing the long line of carriages.

Captain Starrit came forward as Major Hardy dismounted.

Shiny watched the two officers exchange salutes. From the erect figure of his O.C. his eyes moved to the other.

Shiny almost leaned forward in his saddle. It was a struggle to suppress the cry of surprise that came to his lips.

He was staring at his cousin, Herrick. And just for a fleeting instant the other's eyes were drawn to his.

fright. The next instant a big touring car tore madly into the open space before the train.

The driver, hanging on to the steering-wheel, seemed to be straining to recover control of his runaway charge. But this was not accomplished before the infantry troops were scattered, before everything was tossed into wild confusion. The car had nigh run down the cavalry officer, and the silver case was only saved from damage through the timely securing of it by Captain Starrit.

When the car was mastered, Starrit was aboard, had thrust the driver from the wheel, was jamming on the brakes.

"Thunder!—that bird's Shale!" came the unrestrained cry from Clash Morgan.

Shiny had already recognised the driver as the middle-weight hope of the Fusiliers.

Starrit was angrily reproaching the private. Then the infantry officer sprang from the car, returned the

silver case to Hardy with a string of apology and the car moved slowly from the scene.

The calm routine of the escort duty was regained.

The Rajah's Palace.

SERGEANT DAVIS was left in charge of the two troopers when the escort party left the railhead and faced the hot, up-hill journey through rocky defiles, valleys and wild, life-vacant country.

REWARD FOR CAPTAIN CRASH—BUSHRANGER.



He's Coming Again Next Week
in a tip-top Tale.

Major Hardy, together with his fellow officer, had taken his place in a waiting motor in which the Ruby cup was to be safeguarded by a file of infantrymen on either side and the troopers trotting ahead.

Shiny was wondering if his cousin, in the car, was now relating his false story of the past, but Clash's insistent voice claimed his attention.

"It's deuced queer Mr. Alias Cummings, being in that runaway and getting 'nerves'!"

"It's all queer!" declared Shiny with a start. "The queerest part's that infantry chap with the three pips being my cousin, Herrick, the rogue I spoke of in the coffee-bar yesterday!"

Clash whistled softly and spent half-a-minute in deep thought.

"Sonny," he said at last, "for the first time in my puff I'm getting imaginative—I'm considering this Rajah's cup—a big coup for any clever jewel-lifter—and your loving relative, Herrick, here together with his one time pro-pug pal—an' the consideration ain't exactly nice with the old Rajah and his bare-teethed tribesmen ahead."

The loud voice of Sergeant Davis calling a halt put an end to the conversation.

The frowning walls of the Rajah's fortress-palace lay at the end of a hill-flanked defile.

The troopers waited until the body of the escort party came up and then trotted through the flung-open, stout gates, passed a mounted sentry like an expressionless bronze statue, and on to the open space, the scene for the ceremony of the restoration of the Ruby cup.

It was an imposing scene of colour and pomp. The old Rajah, gorgeously robed, seated on a silk-draped platform, his troops, horse and foot, lined up near to him.

There was an atmosphere of restraint, a seeming struggle between the long-standing hate of those soldier-tribesmen and the much-desired conciliation of the visitors.

General Harvey and his staff came forward as the escort drove in, the motor coming to a stop with grinding brakes, the two lines of Fusiliers turning inwards and bringing bayoneted rifles to the present.

Clash, beside Shiny, wondered at the sharp indraw of breath that came from his pal, as the general momentarily paused and glanced keenly into their faces.

Then General Harvey passed on to the car, received the salute of the two officers and took the extended silver case from the hands of Major Hardy.

The general swung about and, followed by his staff, advanced towards the old Rajah.

Shiny found himself watching his cousin again. There was something strange and tense in the set face of Captain Starrit that forcibly held the young trooper's eyes. Shiny saw that he held well behind the major, stood near to the chuffing car.

It was a sudden stir near the Rajah's seat that switched about Shiny's attention, a sense of sudden snapped suspense, a growing buzz of voices.

The Rajah had taken the silver case into his skinny claws, they had found and pressed the hidden spring, the case was open before him. He was staring incredulously, with growing rage, into its taunting emptiness. Then it clattered from his hands to roll to the feet of the dumbfounded general.

The enraged Rajah snarled out an order, and the tribesmen's rifles snapped amid the sudden, wild confusion. Two or three khaki figures pitched forward.

General Harvey shook himself as if from sudden stupour and shouted to his officers to get the men out before the tribesmen formed an obstacle to their retreat.

But a turbaned warrior was leaping towards him with uplifted sabre.

Shiny saw it all as a glimpse into a wild nightmare and spurred his charger. The flat of his down-swept sword crashed into the black, contorted face and the hindu rolled to the dust, his sabre missing its objective by a mere inch.

Shiny reined about to retreat beside his comrades to the gate.

He caught the quick throbbing of the motor and uttered a cry of sudden understanding as he saw the car shoot through the gate with the crouching figure of his cousin, Herrick, before the driving-wheel.

Then Shiny was driving a gap through the confused mass of black and white soldiers, galloping full stretch for the gate and out into the hill-lined defile after the jolting car.

"You're at the back of this, Herrick," he muttered grimly, as his horse thundered on. "You know all about the movements of the cup—I'll lay my life you know where it is this very moment!"

Ahead Starrit drove his swaying charge out of the defile, and swung on to a track-like road leading to the obscure, native village of Monbar, twenty miles away.

For five miles Shiny clattered behind him, the space between them gradually widening. Then the rough nature of the rock-rutted track forced a slackening down.

Shiny urged his charger on. Hoof-beats on rock then reached Starrit's alert ears and swung him round in sudden alarm.

He recognised his cousin at once, let out a curse and jammed on the brakes.

His right hand was near to his revolver holster as the trooper galloped forward and reined in.

"Well—what's this mean, Hallem, leaving your party without orders?"

"It means that I am risking all that to stop you getting away and leaving Lanpore with the Ruby cup

I suspect you cleverly contrived to steal at the Siyat railhead!"

Starrit's face became a storm. His right hand had moved. Shiny was staring into the grim eye of the service revolver.

"Get back, Hallem, at once, or I shall shoot you for desertion and insubordination!"

Shiny did not hesitate. The glint within his cousin's eyes told him that the man would press the trigger whether he moved to carry out the order or not. He flung himself sideways from the saddle and leapt upon the man in the car.

The report of the discharged revolver deafened him but its deadly message went wide and the next instant the struggling pair crashed out on to the road.

Starrit fought like a tiger, but Shiny, with his tough boxing training, was the stronger. He grunted as Herrick's head drove hard into his face. But the twisting figure was tight in his strong grip, was fast weakening. They rolled across the road and slid into a rocky dike.

At that moment another car sped up the road. It was the high-speed touring car in which Shale had so well acted his part at Siyat. Shale had pulled up, shot out and was joining the fight before Shiny became conscious of his arrival.

It was the trickle of water at the ravine bottom that assisted Shiny's quick revival. The shoulder of his tunic was soaked with blood. But he was relieved to find that he could still use his arm fairly easily. The bullet had only grazed the bone.

He washed and bathed his wound at the stream and bandaged it tight with a strip torn from his shirt. Then he climbed back on to the track.

In the dim distance he made out the fast-disappearing high-powered car.

"They're making for Mobar," Shiny told himself. "They'll lie low there with the cup and then gradually work their way down country to sell the swag and make a clean get-away out of India."

He looked around for his horse, resolving to follow them on to the distant native village. But the charger had evidently been put to flight by the fighting men.

But on the track-side, half driven into the rocky dike, Shiny's searching eyes saw the car that Starrit had driven through the gates of the rajah's palace.

Shiny was beside it in a flash. The two scoundrels had created some damage, but the young trooper had dealt with other things beside horses, and ten minutes' work put the car into action once more. It was hard work getting it out of the dike, but Shiny managed it at last and was speeding after the two fugitives.

He knew a short run to Mobar, through a deep-lying valley, track-vacant. But, swinging the car from the road, Shiny chanced that and drove her over the rock-seared way, zig-zagging and switch-backing through troughs and over bossy humps.

The car bumped into the flunk part of the sun-dried village with two punctured tyres, but Shiny



TROOPS TO THE RESCUE.—Shiny saw it all as a glimpse into a wild nightmare, and spurred his charger. The flat of his downswep sword crashed into the black, contorted face, and the Hindu rolled in the dust.

The young trooper, seeing the new danger, relaxed his grip of his cousin and swung round to deal the private a blow between the eyes that only brought a savage snarl from the hardened pug. But the next moment Shiny landed again, under the right ear, a pelt that staggered him backwards.

But Starrit was fast recovering. He saw his accomplice go back from the stinging delivery and reached for his revolver which had fallen on to the edge of the dike. He lifted it and took careful aim.

The lead was like a red-hot barb striking Shiny's shoulder. It numbed the power of his whole body, swayed his senses. He tottered back, sank into the dike and slid deep into a low-lying ravine.

was in time to see Starrit and Shale enter and be able to watch their movements and bide his time for vital action.

He pulled up and pushed his charge into the road-side, well out of observation from the main approach to the village.

The hot, midday sun had forced the few natives into the shelter of their crude houses. But two men had watched the advent of the young soldier. Two white men, who viewed the dust-stained uniform with its blood-blotch at the shoulder, with no small interest and alarm.

Had Shiny got a look at them he would have recalled two of the men he had met in his father's

house before the hour that Shale had attacked him and he had been thrust into the disfavour of his father.

Shiny had won the race by mere minutes. Starrit and Shale had stripped off their uniforms and to all appearances they were now two ordinary-garbed tourists halting at an out-of-the-way native village.

Shiny left his concealment as their car drove past and watched it pull up before one of the biggest houses of the place, saw them alight and enter. The two strange watchers followed the newcomers into the building.

For some moments the trooper stood perplexed. Here, face to face with the big job of watching and beating these crooks, he was greatly disadvantaged. His uniform stood between him and required action. One glimpse of him by the enemy would destroy his chances.

It was the soft rustling of bare feet behind him that jerked him from abstraction.

"Sabe Hallem—the boxer horse-soldier!"

Shiny was looking at the grinning, dirt-caked native.

"Hello!" he shot back, "can't say I've the pleasure of knowing you, young feller—but you seem to have got my label correct."

"Me go to Cavalry-barrack yesterday with my father, he much like box; we see you fight. Plenty good!" The boy stretched a black finger towards the house which the motorist had just entered. "He keep that shelter. Plenty white man visitors to-day. Arranged to stay one night at good pay—go down country to-morrow."

Shiny had been thinking hard.

"Look here, Mister Snowball. Could you let me have a rig-out of native togs. I've got a pin-prick in the shoulder, and this uniform's blessed warm."

The native boy, proud to serve the young gladiator he had so admired in the ring the day before, eagerly consented to supply his small demands.

Half-an-hour found Shiny shorn of his trimmings and looking like a sturdy young son of India, the delusion assisted by the deep sun-tan of his face.

"Now, young fellow," he told his new friend, after his uniform had been packed away inside the bush-hidden car, "I'm putting up at your worthy father's house to-night, and don't dare breathe a word about my presence to the other guests."

K.C. for Shale.

THE box-like bedroom placed at the disposal of Shiny lay at the back of the native shelter.

Had Shiny desired to sleep he would have found the job difficult. Mosquitoes and vermin prevented that.

But to as much as shut an eyelid was Shiny's last intention.

He had one important point well registered. The big touring car had been garaged in a shed exactly facing his window. He could keep the place well in eye-range, be ready to act should the scoundrels decide to make a sudden departure.

But the night wore on without a sound. Shiny settled down to sit it through. He fell into deep thought, his mind moving on the happenings that were likely taking place among the divisional troops, the shuddering threat of red warfare breaking through to the plains following the affront to the old Rajah.

A sudden creak in the passage beyond the door caused Shiny to start up from his bedside. Then a soft rap.

Tip-toeing to the door, he opened it an inch and peeped through the darkness.

"Sahib—it is I—the master of the house. No need to fear. Let me in lest I should be overheard."

The whispered words were anxious, but the voice friendly.

Shiny decided to risk things, at least he had his two trained fists to defend himself.

Quietly he opened the door.

The man moved in with no more noise than a shadow. Shiny recognised him as the father of the native boy who had so assisted him during the day.

The door was softly closed.

"Sahib—you are in peril here. The white man, Starrit, has been informed by the two who have been here for some days, of your presence. He and his boxing servant are scheming to attack you while you sleep. Now the Sahib Shale is to enter this room any moment. You are the better fighter, and I wish to see you beat this dishonourable servant here—it will be good sport for me to witness, and you will thereby defeat the end of your enemies."

Apart from the seriousness of the situation, Shiny could hardly suppress a grin at the old Hindu's desire to see another battle between himself and Shale. And Shiny saw in him a useful ally in many ways pointing towards the big job he was there for.

"All correct, old pal. But listen; you have heard of the Rajah's Ruby cup?"

The man nodded gravely.

"Well, it was stolen to-day for the second time in its history by the white sahibs now under your roof. It is to try to regain it that I am here in secret. That is why these rogues so wish to harm me."

The shot had its desired effect. Like every true Hindu in Lanpore this old man still lamented the loss of the sacred drinking-cup so valued by his ancient rulers.

But the boards of the passage were creaking again.

Shiny's new ally quickly flattened himself against the darkened wall. Shiny dropped quietly across the bed and lay quite still.

Slowly the door opened without the squeak of a hinge. The room was flooded with moonlight and, through his half-closed eyes, the young trooper saw his enemy creep in. He saw the old Hindu's hand shoot out, the turning of the key, its noiseless removal as Shale tip-toed towards the bed.

The private paused over the rough shake-down, his face a scowl of revenge. He knotted his fists and prepared to drive the lad who had stood up to him between the ropes yesterday, into insensibility.

But the down-driven right missed its object as Shiny suddenly twisted out of its range and sprang upright.

His ripped out left caught Shale between the eyes and staggered him backward, his snarling voice reverberating throughout the building. The next instant they were fighting minus the leather pads, with no ring rules and far more at stake than the championship of Lanpore.

Heavy fists battered on the outer panels of the door, the yelling voices of Starrit and his two accomplices. But the old Hindu was busy piling heavy furniture against the quivering door.

Shale brought Shiny down as they closed with a hooked-up right. His booted foot drove brutally into the trooper's side before he could rise.

"That's you real!" panted Shiny. "The dirty game—I'm squaring it right now!"

He feinted for the jaw, now boiling from the unsportsmanlike act, brought up Shale's guard and hammered with all his strength to the stomach.

Shale grunted noisily and went backward, all his defence dropped. With the flight of yards behind him and eleven stone of muscle and grit, Shiny went forward. His right knuckles battered true to

the point and the fusilier went down, knocked out at last by the trooper.

Shiny had the defeated private up and across his strong shoulders the next moment.

"Sling up that window," he yelled out to his now delighted host. "And I want that car out of the shed—I'm getting this rogue to barracks somehow—he's going to tell the general all about the Ruby cup!"

The Hindu was a willing assistant. Shiny's convincing victory had made him a worshipful thing in the old sportsman's eyes.

"Yes!—yes! sahib—I understand and will help! This whole village shall know of these white men's traitorous work before daybreak, and not one of them shall be allowed to leave."

The window was shot up in a trice and Shiny, with his insensible burden, sprang down on to the open space below.

The Hindu came after him, Starrit and the others still battering under the door.

They had the shed open, the big car out, before

He dropped before the driving-wheel again and jammed down the clutch. The powerful car responded as an unleashed greyhound, and Shiny was tearing on towards his comrades and the onswEEPing hordes of Monand Khan.

The regular detonation of the guns loudened and stabbed into the night to be joined by the snapping of rifle-fire.

Was Shiny to be in time to prevent the scorching flame of war from sweeping through the whole of Lanpore? Could he get his prisoner before his general, get a confession wrung from the lips of Shale and recover the Ruby cup for its return to the Rajah before the toll of hundreds of lives had been taken?

The road swung and sloped down deep into a gully. For the speeding space the moonlight was swamped by encompassing heights.

Shiny never knew that he had run right into an



THE DISGUISED TROOPER'S PRISONER.

—Shiny had the defeated private up and across his shoulder the next moment.

the others got scent of what was happening, and Shiny was steering out on to the moon-spread road, when the three men rushed out.

"Keep 'em here, old friend!" was Shiny's parting words. "Your Rajah shall have his cup soon!"

Then the car was put to its speedy, up-country rush with the wild yells of the others fading in his ears.

With the likelihood of pursuit annulled by miles Shiny pulled up and made more sure of his captive by binding his hands and feet with a length of cord he had snatched up from the shed.

"Now it's right ahead!" muttered the trooper. "By morning—Hello!"

Shiny suddenly became still, his ear-drums registering a muffled salvo coming out of the night-wrapped hills ahead.

"The crack of eighteen-pounders!" he decided with alarm piling up. "The divisional gunners are in action!"

ambush until bullets were splattering on to the panels of the car, and the snap of the tribesmen's guns-burst out about him.

He felt a rag snip from the flimsy cotton that clothed him and, gritting his teeth, crouched low and drove her through the danger zone up the opposite slope and on to the high road again.

"Phew!" he grunted. "Narrow squeeze that! The black beauties have put over a flank movement, cut behind the divisional troops and are ambushed there ready to give 'em a hot reception."

Crushing a War.

"HALT there!" Shiny caught the sharp command and saw the outline of a horseman loom out of the darkened road. Others followed and, as the young trooper jammed on the brakes, he found himself hemmed in by men of his own squadron, tired, khaki figures, among whom he recognised Clash Morgan.

Shiny was out on the road in an instant, telling his story to a grave subaltern, warning him of the ambush which the section of cavalry would have surely run into but for his timely arrival.

Shiny found himself between two troopers. Shale was taken from the car, now in a maze of fear and growing understanding of his position.

"Hallow is under temporary arrest," said the officer sharply, and then swung about to a sergeant. "Bring this man, Shale, along!"

The terrified fusilier vanished into the darkness under the escort of a stalwart trooper, and Shiny was answering Clash Morgan's rapid questions.

"Gosh!—what a stunt!" gasped Clash. "I knew the minute you spurred from the Rajah's shanty after Starrit that you'd got your teeth firm into the beauty. Since then it's been red-hot rockets! The old Rajah had a few thousand tribesmen ready to manhandle us, and we've been going back by inches since. This is the escort of the general and staff. Darned lucky you discovered that ambush or we should be deficient a C.O."

Before Shiny could explain more the subaltern returned.

"Take Hallow forward to the C.O. at once," was his crisp order.

The Green Dragoons section reined their horses to the roadside as two remaining guns of an over-worked field battery jolted past, unlimbered and swung muzzled "action-rear."

The rending cracks filled Shiny's ears as he found himself facing the erect figure of General Harvey.

There was a catch in the old campaigner's voice as he looked at the boy before him.

"Shale has already endorsed your account, Hallow," he said. "In spite of your action this morning being directly without order, your independent decision reflects great credit. I am proud to have you in my division. We are now waiting Major Hardy's report from the car you so pluckily rode through the enemy's ambush. Shale has told us more than we expected."

At that moment the figure of "Sport" Hardy moved quickly into view.

Shiny uttered a cry of astonishment. The major held something in his hands. It was the Ruby cup!

"Shale's confession is correct, sir. Starrit had hidden the cup for safety under the locker seat of the car."

The general took the trophy that betokened an early peace to the outbreak in Lanpore, eagerly from the major. In dumb amazement Shiny saw him swing himself into the saddle of his horse, twist the animal sharply towards the enemy's front and clatter off into the darkness.

The young trooper uttered one word.

It was "Father!" Then he was up on and urging a nearby mount into a swift dash after the vanishing figure of his C.O.

Past a couple of crimson spurting guns, a barking machine-gun, then on through an opening ribbon of rifle-busy infantrymen, the two sweeping horsemen drove.

Boulders now concealed white-garbed figures of the fighting, victory-flushed tribesmen.

A frantic warrior leapt suddenly towards the general's horse. But a flung-out word in Hindustani, a sweeping display of the cup, and the man sprang back. An open way was left for the general's heroic advance. Harsh voices snapped the news of the cup through the tribesmen's ranks.

The general turned and glimpsed the cotton-garbed rider beside him. He uttered a cry that said satisfaction and pride, then they were riding into a group of chieftains that formed the escort of the Rajah and Monand Khan.

The general staggered with a bullet wound in his shoulder as he dismounted and went forward with the cup held out towards the Rajah.

* * * * *

The fighting had ceased. The tribesmen were trailing back to the hills, the white troops marching steadily back to their barracks.

Shiny sat at the general's bedside in the hospital. A strong, brown hand was gripping his.

"You're going down country to the military college to qualify for an early commission, son," the quiet, steady voice of the man was saying. "Herrick has not been caught, but after his crime I well believe how I came to be blinded at home."

"I'm a trooper, Dad," Shiny said with a determined note that echoed that of the general's: "I want to stay one until I can climb. And I want to win the boxing championship of India—I'm qualified after knocking out Shale!"

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HITTING THE HIGH SPOTS WITH A SPOOK.



Stan, the Star Steeplejack, and His Fat Pal, Podger, Go Ghost Hunting on the Heights of a Church Steeple.

Stan Scents Mystery.

"PODGER, old son, are you scared of ghosts?"

"Ghosts?"

Stan Rogers, steeplejack, grinned at the alarm in Podger McIntosh's fat face.

"If you are," he went on, "that fat body of yours will shake like a jelly on this job. We've got to repair the steeple of Overtown Church. The Haunted Church it's known as, and some of the tales that's told about it would make your hair stand on end. I've accepted the contract so we look like having an interesting job."

Podger McIntosh shivered. There was no mistaking the alarm in his fat face. Podger always ascended a chimney or steeple in fear and trembling, swearing that every ascent he made would be his last. But Stan strongly suspected that Podger's nerve was as firm as his own. More than once his fat chum had averted threatening danger when on a climb.

Gathering up their climbing ladders, the chums made their way to the job, Podger's fat short legs moving fast to keep pace with the lean, wiry Stan. They soon arrived at the old church, which stood on the outskirts of the town, and quickly they got to work.

Overtown Church was rapidly falling into disuse. The brickwork was old and unsafe, and Stan was obliged to test carefully before driving in his staples. But soon the chums were swarming quickly up the old church, and Stan settled himself at a spot where a hole showed through the brickwork.

"We'll start here, Podger," he said. "I reckon—"

Stan broke off. Staring through the hole at him was a man's face. The eyes, dark and glittering, seemed to bore into the young steeplejack, and then suddenly the face disappeared.

"Gosh!" For a moment Stan was petrified with amazement. The saturnine face had startled him. Not a sound came from behind the steeple to show whether the man had moved or was still waiting there.

"Podger, I'm looking into this." Quickly Stan dislodged more of the bricks, until he could get his head and shoulders through the hole. Then he peered into the interior of the old church.

For a moment he could see nothing. Then his eyes made out a shadowy outline of a thick wooden beam, which stretched away into the darkness from the steeple wall.

"Suffering smoke!" Stan muttered. "What on earth was the fellow doing up here? How did he get up?"

Stan paused, his lean face a trifle pale. Overtown Church bore a sinister reputation, many strange tales had been told of the Haunted Church. It seemed impossible that a human being could get up to that beam.

"Podger!" Stan turned to his fat chum, who was working at the steeple side, blissfully unconscious of his chum's alarm. "I've either seen a ghost in broad daylight, or there's a man behind that hole. I'm going into the church."

Before Podger could answer, Stan had forced himself through the hole in the steeple wall, and on to the wooden beam. Down below, the musty darkness seemed to strike his senses in a choking wave. If he missed his footing on the beam, a sheer fifty feet drop awaited him.

Standing on the beam, Stan struck a match. In the flickering light he saw other beams running parallel with the one on which he stood. But of the man he had seen there was no sign.

"Gosh!" Stan's scalp began to prickle. "Surely the tales about this old church aren't true? Yet only a ghost could float up here on to this beam. I'll have another look, anyhow."

He struck another match and then peered excitedly down at the beam. Clearly outlined in the thick dust was a footprint. Instantly, with a strange relief at his heart, Stan commenced moving along the beam, on hands and knees.

Half way along, his groping hands closed on something that ran round the beam. Stan struck another match, and a thick rope was disclosed, stretching down into the musty darkness.

"So that's it." Stan chuckled to himself. "The fellow climbed up that rope to the beam. But what for?"

For a moment the boy steeplejack hesitated. The end of the rope was invisible in the pitch darkness of the church. Then, with a shrug, he swung himself over the beam. An instant later he was going down the rope hand over hand into the interior of the Haunted Church.

Suddenly he paused in his downward climb.

The Crook Vault.



THE FIRST SHOCK! Staring through the hole at the boy steeplejack was a man's face. The eyes, dark and glittering, seemed to bore into Stan. And then suddenly the face disappeared.

Legs entwined about the thick rope, he swung there, poised in the darkness, his pulses racing madly. An eerie moaning came to his ears, and then, unmistakably came the staccato bark of a revolver shot. A hoarse muffled scream followed, and then . . . silence.

"B'gosh, there's something queer going on in this old church!" Stan muttered. "But I'm going down, ghosts or no ghosts."

Slowly he resumed his descent, and then, quite suddenly, his feet touched bottom. Stan felt in his pocket then for a weapon. His hand came forth, grasping a small, heavy-headed hammer.

Stretching out a hand, Stan moved forward, and a gasp escaped him. His hand had touched something—something that swung away from him.

"A door!" Stan peered intently through the gloom. "A small, stone door. Now, what?"

Gripping the hammer, he stepped forward. His feet let on a shallow flight of steps, and without hesitation he felt his way down. Queer shuffling noises came to him through the darkness, and once he heard the metallic click of steel on steel.

And then an eerie thrill snaked along Stan's spine. He stopped and half-turned, for the low wailing of a dog came to his ears. It seemed to echo along the dark, musty passage, low and mournful. And on a sudden Stan realised where he was.

He was in the vaults beneath the old church, groping his way towards the tombs of men long buried. His hair on end, Stan began to retrace his steps. Came a swift patter of footsteps. A shadowy figure loomed up through the darkness, and then something struck the youngster a stunning blow on the forehead.

Stan felt something bending over him, and then he relaxed into oblivion.

PODGER McINTOSH peered cautiously through the hole in the steeple wall. Five minutes had elapsed since his chum had disappeared into the church, and Podger was growing anxious.

It was queer, to say the least of it, and Podger's fat face was pale. He pushed his head through the hole and shouted:

"Stan, whaur are ye, man!"

There was no reply but for the echo of Podger's voice booming up from the musty depths. Quickly the Scottish lad swung down the steeple and made for the church door. It was locked, but without hesitation Podger smashed the lock with a "pointing" chisel. Then he commenced a thorough search of the empty church.

He reached where he could see the hole in the steeple walls, and there he came upon a number of dangling ropes. They were the bell ropes.

"Ye ken this place gives me the jim-jams," the fat youngster muttered. Half consciously he clutched one of the ropes, and a gasp escaped him. For the rope had remained taut.

Next instant Podger was tugging at the other ropes. Every one except the first, gave to his touch, showing that they were connected with the bells.

"Yon's not a bell-rope at a'," Podger stared at the thick rope. "If Stan got doon here he came doon this."

Striking a match, the Scottish lad looked about him, and then an exclamation escaped him. At his feet was a small patch of red. It was blood!

Following the thin trickle that led to it, Podger's startled gaze came to the stonework of the church wall.

"He canna have walked through yon wall," Podger stared with a puzzled frown at the blank surface.

Next instant he had blown out the match and stretched himself tense against the wall. A faint shuffling noise came from behind the stones, followed by the low mumble of a man's voice. And then Podger's hair stood on end.

For within a few inches of where he stood, part of the wall swung inwards, and a dark shadowy figure crept through. It almost touched Podger, and then, as he stood paralysed with fear, it made for the rope and commenced to climb.

And then Podger acted. The fact that the figure was climbing showed that it was no apparition, but flesh and blood. Like lightning the fat steeplejack dived for the climbing figure. There was a muttered curse, and next instant Podger was fighting furiously.

Something ripped through his coat sleeve—his assailant was using a knife. For an instant Podger felt the man's jaw brush his arm as the sweep of the knife carried him forward, and without hesitation the Scottish lad punched up.

There was a short cough and a grunt, and his assailant fell back. Quickly Podger struck a match. He was gazing down at the figure of a tall, powerfully built man with brutal, heavy-jawed features. The lucky blow in the dark had stretched the man unconscious.

Podger took the man's knife, a thin-bladed dagger, razor-sharp. Quickly he cut part of the dangling rope and split the strands apart. In a trice the man was firmly bound.

Clutching the knife, Podger struck another match, and made his way through the stone doorway and down the shallow flight of steps. He reached the bottom and stood there, tense. A low voice, full of menace, came rumbling towards him.

"You interfering young fool. I'm going to teach

you a lesson you'll not forget. You'll never live to tell what you've seen down here. Get the stuff ready, Dago."

Came Stan's voice, grim and determined. "I tell you you can't get away with it. My partner is bound to trace me here. Then——"

Stan's voice broke off suddenly in a choking gurgle, and with a sudden fear at his heart, Podger crept forward towards the voices. A light showed up through the darkness, and swiftly now Podger made for it.

It was a single, electric bulb, fixed in the tunnel wall, leading to the vaults, and beside it was a small wooden door. Carefully Podger tried the door. It was open. He pushed it forward a few inches, and then an involuntary gasp escaped him at the sight that met his gaze.

He was staring into one of the church vaults. But it was a vault the like of which he had never expected to see. It was lit up brilliantly with a cluster of electric lights dangling down from the roof on a single cord. The stone floor was covered with a thick rug, and the vault was furnished like the lounge of an expensive hotel. A huge gas-stove gave warmth to the place, and six men were standing in the centre of the floor, where stood a gigantic tomb.

Podger craned forward through the door, and thus he saw Stan. Bound hand and foot, and looking strangely pale, his chum was standing in a narrow coffinlike recess in the wall of the vault.

One of the men, a tall immaculate figure in evening dress, stepped forward. A sneering smile spread over his saturnine face.

"Son," he said, "neither your partner nor the police or anyone else will ever find you. You've come poking your nose into this place, and you've got to be silenced. For ten years we've used this den. We can never be found."

He turned towards a small rat-faced man beside him.

"Dago, we'll build him into the wall, like they used to do in the old days. Why, the very hole he's standing in might have been made for him. It's a perfect fit. Get busy."

On a sudden the ghastly truth broke in on Podger. They were going to build the wall up about Stan's bound body. They were going to bury him alive!

Podger started forward then. For a moment he had forgotten the knife he had taken from his assailant. Now he took it out and measured the distance from the door to the gigantic tomb in the centre of the floor. The cluster of electric light bulbs dangled within a foot of the tomb top.

Cautiously Podger pushed the door open. The six crooks, intent on their ghastly work, had their backs to him, and in one sudden forward leap Podger reached the tomb. His bunched fist smashed into the cluster of globes, and darkness descended on the vault.

Without hesitation Podger leaped down towards his chum. His fat fist sent the crooks staggering back like ninepins. Several quick cuts with the knife, and Stan was free.

Clutching his chum's arm, Podger dived for the tombstone. Before the crooks could recover, the pair had reached the door of the vault, and were through.

Buried Alive.

"WE'RE lost, Podger!"

Stan gasped the words out. For nearly five minutes the chums had been half-running, half-stumbling along the narrow, vault corridors. Regardless of bruises and cuts from the sharp walls, they had hurried on. Long ago they should have reached the secret stone door that led into the church.

"We've taken a wrong turning," muttered Stan. "Hold on, I'll strike a match."

Aided by the fitful flame, the pair looked about them. They were in a narrow corridor, rocky and evil-smelling. Sounds of pursuit had long since died away behind them.

"This place smells like a grave," muttered Podger, as the light flickered out. "Did ye see yon coffins in the wall?"

"Sure," said Stan. "This place is hundreds of years old, Podger. They used to bury their dead



FATTY ARRIVES.—In one sudden forward leap Podger reached the tomb. His bunched fist smashed into the cluster of bulbs, and darkness descended on the tomb.

in the walls at one time, and these tunnels run for miles beneath the city. That's why that crook gang have never been found."

"Who are they?" Podger asked.

"They're the cleverest gang in the city. They've hidden in these vaults for over ten years. Two of them are the crooks who broke gaol a month ago and escaped. They were scrapping amongst themselves when I tumbled on to the vault. Did you see that youngster?"

"Youngster?" Podger stared at his chum through the darkness.

"Yes," Stan went on. "The gang kidnapped Lord Kindleton's young son yesterday, and they've got him prisoner in the vault. The guy we saw looking through the hole in the steeple was looking out for a signal from the street below that it was safe for him to leave the church. I tell you— What's that?"

A soft *pad-pading* noise came along the corridor towards them. It was eerie, weird.

"Gee, Podger, this is the limit. Can you hear it?"

"Hear it?" Podger groaned. "If I ever get out o' here alive I'll—"

He broke off with a yell. Something had brushed his knee, and for a moment Podger felt that his last moment had come. But Stan was bending down on the corridor floor.

"It's all right, Podger, it's only the little terrier that kid had with him when the crooks got him. They fetched it along with him. Keep still while I grab him. He's our only chance."

In an instant Stan was groping in the darkness for the terrier. When he had it safely Podger struck a match.

"It's a thousand to one those crooks will think we're lost in these tunnels. The pup will lead us back to where the youngster is."

With Stan's handkerchief knotted to the dog's collar, the chums slowly retraced their steps through the darkness. For three minutes they paced along and then the terrier gave a low whine. Almost instantly there came a muffled detonation, followed by the thud of falling earth.

"They've blocked the corridor, Podger. We're caught like rats in a trap."

Stan struck a match, and his face blanched. Just ahead of them was a wall of earth, completely blocking the narrow corridor. Before the match went out Stan had a glimpse of Podger's startled face, and then he saw the terrier begin to paw fiercely at the earth.

"Come on, Podger, it's our only chance. We'll not last long in this atmosphere."

Following the terrier's example, the chums commenced to dig frantically. Podger still had the crook's dagger, but it seemed futile to hack a way through that earth-wall. Sweat poured down the

chums' faces as they worked on, and of a sudden Stan uttered an exclamation. The terrier had disappeared.

"He's through, Podger. Come on!"

Quickly the chums widened the hole the little dog had made. Five minutes later they were through. Straight for the vault the little dog led the way, and a quick scrutiny showed that the crooks had gone, taking Lord Kindleton's son with them.

"They can't be far away," Stan muttered. "It's doubtful if they've left the church."

Quietly they paced along the corridor leading to the secret door. Reaching it, Stan paused with a warning gesture. A voice came clearly from beyond the door.

"Me and Dago'll take the kid now that his lordship's agreed to the ransom. You crowd get back to the vault. I've fixed the church door so's nobody will disturb us."

Almost before the voice had finished, the stone door opened, and a number of shadowy figures crept through. Tense against the corridor walls, Stan and his chum saw the crooks pass. Not until their footsteps had died did Stan move. Then:

"Come on, Podger. You tackle Dago. I'll go for the youngster."

Even as he spoke Stan dived for the door. The two crooks were standing in the gloom of the church, with Lord Kindleton's son between them. Straight for the tall crook Stan leaped. His bunched fist took the man clean to the point.

Then, with a vibrant leap, Stan reached the youngster and thrust him across his shoulder. Next moment Stan was climbing swiftly, hand over hand, up the taut rope which had brought him into the church.

Before the crooks could recover, the young steeplejack had reached the beam and was groping along in the darkness. An instant later Podger, with the little terrier buttoned inside his coat, was swarming up the rope in Stan's wake. One blow with the dagger had stretched Dago *hors-de-combat*.

Within two minutes they had reached the hole in the steeple wall and were swinging down to earth. Whilst Podger secured the church door, Stan sent off a "hurry" call to the police, and within five minutes a strong posse of constables had rounded up the crooks.

And with their capture came the end of a gang that had troubled the police for years. Their crook headquarters had defied detection. The gloomy vaults of the Haunted Church, with its mysterious happenings, had never been suspect. The "hauntings" had been enough to keep investigators away, and but for Stan the steeple-jack's, cool nerve the crook gang would never have been smashed.

Captain Crash, The Bushranger, Who Makes Things Hum, Coming Next Week, Sonnies.

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Your Editor's News.

CAPTAIN CRASH, the Aristocratic Bushranger, appearing in a Magnificent Long Complete Yarn Next Week, Chaps. You Must Read **THE WHIP WONDER OF THE BUSH.**

Other Old Favourites.



MY DEAR CHUMS,

At this very moment I have before me the whip used by that wonderful Australian, Salt Bush Bill.

It is a present chaps, from an old bushwhacker who has lived pretty nearly all his life in the "never-never land" of the Aborigines and kangaroos.

The donor of this wonderful gift has been for many years the author of forceful, virile stories of the great out-of-doors and of the wilds. And it so happens that he is the writer of our stories of Captain Crash, the aristocratic English bushranger.

Salt Bush Bill, as you know, chaps, is the Australian prototype of Buffalo Bill, the old-time cowboy. Both lived for many years in the wilds, both turned showmen in their later years. And it is so with the author of our Captain Crash series. He is an educated man, who always used to carry in his pack volumes of Kipling and other poets. And when civilisation cut with a great shining sword through the lonely bush, our author trudged farther into the wilderness, sorrowfully thinking that the untamed, wild world in which he lived was ending. He turned philosopher and writer of stories of the stirring days not so long gone by. And, my dear boys, he is one of those rare beings whom your old Editor is always looking for to write yarns for the good old *Boys' Magazine*. And so I snapped him up, and persuaded him to create the character of Captain Crash, the Daredevil Bushranger. He has now become a friend of mine, and presented me with the whip of Salt Bush Bill. And that's how things happen in this funny old world of ours.

Aren't I writing in a curious way? The truth is I'm a bit annoyed with myself. I have tried my hand with Salt Bush Bill's long-tongued whip, and after a great deal of practice I can get a very fine crack out of it. But I'm hanged if I could cut a cigar in half (which feat our author has just performed for my benefit—the cigar being gripped between the teeth of his assistant. Not mine. I wouldn't chance it.)

I have listened to his entrancing tales of the great sun-burned bush, of bushrangers, and of kangaroos and wonderful black trackers, and lonely creeks. And he keeps mentioning names like Woollamaroo and Ballyho. And frankly, chaps, he's

got such a grip on your old Editor, that I'm going away with him this week-end to brew tea in the wilds and make "dampers" (you make 'em by mixing flour with water, and wrapping the dough thus made round a staff and sticking the same in a camp fire until nicely browned). And I'm going to wrap up in blankets and sleep under the stars, and I'm wondering how I shall like it all. And what a lot of "ands" there are in this chat, aren't there?

Well, chaps, our grand long complete story in next week's Mag. is all about bushrangers, and particularly about Captain Crash.

The Whip Wonder of the Bush.

That's the title of the yarn. It's a kick-a-minute tale of the wilds of the Australian bush, seasoned with thrills and peppered with excitement. And Captain Crash and his son, Jack, who can disguise himself as a native bush boy at a moment's notice, are well in the limelight. Get your pals reading *Boys' Magazine* next week. You'll be doing a great favour to your Editor.

Chaps, I guess it's a real full-blooded outlaw number next week, for it's distinguished by a particularly clinking tale of Dick Turpin, the highwayman. Vivid? Well, it's such a vital, dynamic yarn that you'll almost fancy you can see the gayly-accoutred highwayman chief in his black, crêpe mask and lace ruffles spurring his gallant black mare to the adventure of which the story tells. It crackles with the electric atmosphere of realism, this tale.

Not only that, but you'll laugh. You'll guffaw. Because Bootles, the black highwayman, is booming and strutting in his three-cornered hat and silk coat in this tale. In fact he fills the picture. The yarn's called

Bootles the Brawny.

And because the Mag. caters only for brainy, imaginative readers, I'll leave you to imagine the yarn of the jovial big nigger's adventures—until you read them next week.

Well, chaps, in this number that would put you off a picnic just to read it, appears Thrill Phil, the boy film actor, and Roughneck Harry, his bluff, jovial director, and Karell, his faithful wolf dog. The story is entitled

Old Pals in a Peril Picture.

I should think it was peril—plus pluck. Phil has to fight with snakes, and—

Gee, I'm coming to the end of the page, boys. Write to me, won't you? Address: Editor, *Boys' Magazine*, Tallis House, Tallis Street, London. E.C.4. Let me have a letter from you soon. And in a special benefit number of the *Boys' Magazine* don't miss one thundering good tale of your old pal, Rory Milligan, the Demon Motor Driver, Racing

Like Lightning for a Life.

Now the truth is I'm excited, for I've got something up my sleeve for you. I may be able to tell you about the big surprise next week. I hope so.

Always Your Friend,

THE EDITOR.



NO ROOM!

"I wish," exclaimed the editor's wife, "that you'd be a little less absent-minded when you're dining out."

"What have I done now," said the harassed man.

"This evening when our hostess asked if you'd like some more pudding, you told her that owing to the tremendous pressure on space you were reluctantly compelled to decline."—G.E. (Ruabon).

NOT ANNOYING HIM!

One day a gentleman bought his five-year-old son a donkey to amuse himself with. He got on all right at first, but one day he came in crying. The donkey had kicked him.

"You have surely been annoying him," said his father.

"No, I haven't," replied the boy. "I was only trying to cut my name on him."—J.E.P. (Shute).

HE DIDN'T B SHARP!

POLICEMAN (taking down notes from musician who has been knocked down by a car): Did you see the number of the car?

MUSICIAN: No; but it had a horn that sounded Doh in the key of B sharp!—A.S. (Notts).

A NEW COMPLAINT!

A man was taken ill and his wife hurried him to the hospital.

"Has he got pyjamas?" said the matron, as she arranged for his admission.

"Pyjamas?" exclaimed the wife. "I dunno what it is, but he's got an awful pain in the stummick."—F.I. (Longwood).

HOW EXTRAORDINARY!

The lecture had gone very well, but towards the end the orator waxed exceedingly eloquent.

"Yes," quoth he, "all along the untrodden paths of the future we see the footprints of an unseen hand!"—W.R.W. (L'don).

WASTE NOT—

FIRST FARMER: Do any of those motorists stop when they run over a chicken?

SECOND FARMER: Yes, they stop for the chicken.—A.C. (Walthamstow).

THE NIGHT HE LIKED!

It was little Jacky's first experience in a train, and the succession of wonders had reduced him to a state of astonishment.

When the locomotive plunged into a tunnel there came from his corner sundry grunts indicating dismay and suspicion. Then the train rushed into daylight again and a voice was lifted in profound thankfulness and wonder.

"Lumme! It's to-morrow!"—H.G. (Cork).

SOME PAN!

JUDGE: The plaintiff here says that he lent you a milk-pan, which you broke, and he claims damages.

FARMER: That's a lie. In the first place, he never lent me a pan; secondly, the pan was broke when he gave it to me; and, thirdly, the blinkin' pan was whole when he had it back!—W.H. (Skewen).

TRUE TO LIFE.

JONES: Hello, Smith, I hear you are taking up Art?

SMITH: Yes, that is right; in fact, I have already completed one painting. See (showing Jones a canvas painted black all over); here it is.

JONES: Great heavens! What is that supposed to represent?

SMITH: Oh, that is a cat sitting in the coal cellar with its eyes shut!—F.G.R. (Birkenhead).

BRIGHT LAD.

TEACHER: How many seasons are there in the year?

BOY: Two, sir.

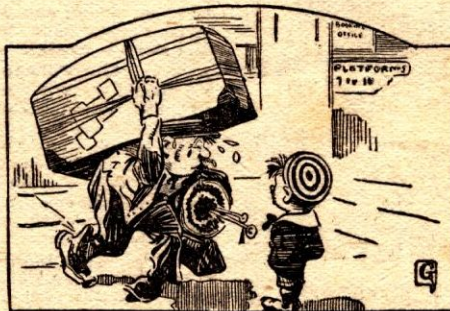
TEACHER: Indeed! What are they?

BOY: The football season and the cricket season.—J.S. (Ruardean).

A SURPRISE!

"D'ye know old Brown died when he was asleep?"

"Did he? Poor chap, 'e won't know what's happened!"—H.B. (Radcliffe)



Boy (to porter): Can I help you?

Porter: What can you do?

Boy: Oh! I'll grunt while you lift.

CRICKET BATS and FOUNTAIN PENS awarded to senders of all jokes printed on this page. Send in your favourite joke to: Joke Editor, "Boys' Magazine," 146, Fetterlane, London, E.C.4. Coupon on Page 22 must accompany every joke submitted

BACK AGAIN, CHAPS! TICH, THE TERRIBLE—THE BOY FIREATER IN HIS MOST LAUGHABLE STUNTS.



The Treasure Map.

THE wind filled the sails of the schooner, *Bungle Bay*, and the halliards rattled against the mast as the ship ploughed its way through the starry Southern Seas.

A hatchway above a stern hold was lifted, and cautiously a blue-eyed, snub-nosed, freckle-faced boy looked out.

"Is't all clear, Tich?" he asked himself. "If so, the wicked stowaway will emerge and walk the deck more silently than any flickering ghost."

Hoppy Travers, the boy millionaire, glanced fore and aft, then, seeing no one in sight, scrambled out on deck, closed the hatchway after him and hurried over to the shadow of a hanging lifeboat.

Hoppy, or "Tich" as all his friends called him because of his diminutive stature, was placed in the most peculiar position that surely ever a boy had been in.

His eccentric uncle's fortune of a million pounds was to come to him if within six months he succeeded in spending the sum of two hundred thousand pounds.

He had tried all ways of getting rid of the surplus two hundred thousand, with the annoying result that his money had multiplied instead of diminished.

One of his ways of spending money had been to take lessons from a professor in ventriloquism—and very expensive lessons they were, too. But what was the result? Tich had become so proficient in the art of voice-throwing that he had been offered a huge weekly salary to go on the music-hall stage.

His lawyer had seriously advised him that he had better accept the offer.

That was the trouble. His lawyer watched his every move, and he had to render accounts to show how he had spent his money. He must not throw it away, give it away or spend it foolishly.

For instance, he had bought this schooner because one of his new friends, a man named Sir Archibald Platte had told him a story of buried treasure on a Southern isle.

Sir Archibald had invested all his own money in the expedition. And then his plans of the treasure had been stolen. Sir Archibald, who was a poor man, had to give up the project.

But Tich's obstinate nature would not allow him to do so, and thus he had become a stowaway on the *Bungle Bay*, his own ship.

For he suspected two certain men of stealing the plans.

The skipper of the *Bungle Bay* was a creepy villain named Creevy, and the mate of the vessel was an even worse specimen of manhood who, on account of the fact that he had a wooden leg, was called Stumpy.

Hoppy had kept watch on Captain Creevy's vessel since the treasure hunt project had dropped through, and had not been surprised to see preparations being made for it to set sail one night.

Just before the ship put off, Tich slipped aboard unnoticed and stowed himself unseen in the forehold. He had soon fashioned himself quite comfortable digs behind some huge crates.

Hoppy had had no difficulty in stealing from his hiding-place at night time and collecting food for himself.

Also he had managed on several occasions to get to the fanlight above Captain Creevy's cabin and to listen from there to the skipper talking to his mate.

On the previous night he had heard Creevy tell Stumpy that forty-eight hours would see them in sight of the treasure island. To-night the boy millionaire was eager to overhear the latest details. Crawling to the skylight where the shadow of the ventilator would hide him from view, Hoppy gazed down into the cabin.

Captain Creevy, inclined to be fat, unshaven and bleared-eyed, sat at a table directly under the fanlight. On the other side of the cabin was Mate Stumpy, with the black patch over his eye, and his wooden leg stuck out straight before him.

"What I don't understand, Stumpy," Captain Creevy was saying, "is where all my food is disappearing to!"

Hoppy Travers smiled. He could have answered the captain's question.

"Bother the food!" Stumpy replied. "You're always thinking of your stomach. What about the secret map? You know we've not yet worked out where the treasure is hidden which we are going to

find and hand over to Sir Archibald Platte—yes, I don't think!

Captain Creevy crossed to the door of his cabin and locked it on the inside.

Then he returned to the table and, taking a paper from his pocket, spread it out between himself and Stumpy.

The chart seemed to have thrown a spell of silence over Stumpy. He reached out for the map, but as his fingers touched it, Captain Creevy's hands moved quickly.

"No, you don't," he growled and placed his hand right over the chart. "I only trust people—and you in particular—about half as far as I can hit them."

"Well, let's have a look at the map," growled Stumpy.

After a moment of hesitation, Captain Creevy raised his hand, and the two pored over the ancient parchment.

"Stumpy—"

"Don't call me Stumpy!"

"Well, you've got a wooden leg, haven't you?"

"Well, you've got a face that would crack glass, but I don't call you Crackglass!"

The voices seemed to come from the skipper of the *Bungle Bay* and his mate, and yet both looked up and at each other in astonishment.

Neither knew that Hoppy Travers, the boy millionaire, still on the fanlight, was practising his art as an accomplished ventriloquist.

Captain Creevy glared at his mate.

"I'll have you shoved in irons for that insult, Mr. Rodgers," he roared.

"I never spoke," Stumpy protested. "At any rate it's done you good if it's made you address me by my proper surname at last."

Mate Stumpy gasped as he heard himself add the last sentence.

Captain Creevy leapt to his feet, and looked as if he were about to strike a blow at his mate when suddenly a voice behind him ordered:

"Hands up. I'm not such a fool as you thought I was. I've discovered your duplicity, and I'll shove you both in irons."

"Sir Archibald!" gasped Captain Creevy, and Mate Stumpy, as they thought they recognised the voice, but it was only Hoppy's mimicry that he mixed so successfully with his ventriloquism.

"Hands up!" repeated the voice.

Captain Creevy and Mate Stumpy both threw their hands above their heads.

"Don't look round. Both walk to the wall of the cabin, near the bunks."

Captain Creevy and Mate Stumpy did as they were ordered.

A minute later they heard a slight sound as of a weight falling on the table they had just left.

They were about to risk a look round when the voice spoke again.

"Don't look round. I'll fire at the first one that does," it warned.

That was too much for the skipper and his mate. Neither was blessed with even half as much courage as they had honesty.

They stared at Captain Creevy's bunk and kept their hands above their heads.

And Hoppy Travers, pleased with the success of his ventriloquism, pulled up a heavy piece of wood with a nail in it, which he had dropped through the open skylight, and which Captain Creevy and Stumpy had heard thud on the table.

His aim had been faultless. The nail had pierced the chart, and the piece of paper was now travelling skyward with the block of wood.

Wood, chart and string were pulled through the skylight, and then Travers clambered down and

commenced to make his way back to his secret hiding-place in the hold.

Discovered.

CAPTAIN CREEVY and Mate Stumpy remained for many minutes with their hands stretched above their heads, and their backs to most of the cabin.

Beads of perspiration rolled down the two men's faces.

But at length, because his arms began to ache, Captain Creevy ventured a glance round.

Stumpy, seeing what his skipper was doing, waited



THE VANISHING PLANS.—Hoppy, pleased with the success of his ventriloquism, pulled up the heavy piece of wood with the nail in it. The chart was now travelling skyward.

for a shot to ring out. Stumpy did not feel anxious on Creevy's behalf. If the skipper was shot, that was his fault.

But when no shot rang out, Stumpy, too, risked a slight glance round.

He turned his head a little more, and then a scream of rage came from his lips.

"There's no one there!" he cried. "Sir Archibald has gone! We're alone in the cabin! Now I know where the food's been going. Sir Archibald's pinched it—"

"Shut up about the food," screamed Stumpy. "The chart—where's the chart. The chart's gone!" Captain Creevy looked at the table. Then he glared at Stumpy.

"Come off that trick," he growled, and drew a revolver. "Hand over, Stumpy. I don't know how you tricked me, but you're not going to leave this cabin with the chart."

Stumpy glared at his boss in amazement.

Then, with a howl of rage, he threw himself at Captain Creevy, knocking the weapon out of the man's hand. Captain Creevy was forced to grapple with his mate.

Stumpy's anger, however, quickly subsided as he thought of the treasure.

"Just a moment, skipper," he said, putting his hands to his side. "I—"

He said no more, because Captain Creevy, finding himself free, let fly with his left fist and caught the mate a thwacking blow on the point of the chin.

Stumpy measured his length on the floor.

Somehow he clambered to his feet. He felt as if two or three of his teeth were loose in his mouth, but he started to speak, nevertheless.

"I haven't got it," Stumpy protested. "I'll allow you to search me—but the real thief's escaping."

"The real thief?" gasped Captain Creevy. "Who do you mean? Sir Archibald? He can't have escaped; the door was locked."

"Through that," Stumpy said, and pointed.

Captain Creevy glanced up at the skylight, and he became panicky.

He subjected the floor to another and more careful search, in which Stumpy joined in and helped him. But as the chart was not forthcoming, his suspicions returned and gathered against Stumpy.

He subjected that individual to yet another search, Stumpy fuming with impatience all the time.

Then he tried something new. He ordered the mate to undress, and when that highly indignant but helpless worthy had removed all his clothes, the skipper gathered them up, stowed them in a locker, turning the key.

"If you're tricking me," he said, "you'll have to get your clothes out of that locker before you recover the chart. Now I'll search the rest of the vessel. Come out of this cabin; I'm going to lock it."

"I can't come as I am," Stumpy protested. "I'm stark naked."

Captain Creevy had overlooked that.

He took some of his own clothes out of another locker. "Get into them, quick," he ordered.

By the time that Captain Creevy and Stumpy emerged from the cabin, all the vessel had been searched by the crew except the hold in which Tich was actually hiding.

The crew entered the hold and were approaching Tich's hiding-place when suddenly a voice came from the hatchway.

"What are you fools doing down there. The fellow wouldn't be there. Come up at once!"

It sounded like Captain Creevy's voice, and the crew obeyed with alacrity. They were not to know that it was Hoppy Travers' ventriloquism.

They hurried back on deck, and the first person they encountered was Captain Creevy himself.

"Have you searched that hold thoroughly?" he demanded.

The crew looked at him in amazement.

"No, sir," one of them ventured. "We'd only just got down there when you ordered us to come up again."

"Dolt, what do you mean? I didn't order you to come out! Get back in it at once, and search it carefully."

Believing it's always best to humour a madman, the crew obeyed.

Hoppy had heard all that had passed, and as the crew approached his hiding-place, he threw his voice to the far side of the hold.

"I see you, but you can't see me. I'm going to fire!"

They awoke with a start. Like one man they leapt for the steps to the deck.

Captain Creevy was just about to descend. Stumpy was close behind him. A wave of frightened seamen suddenly swamped up the steps towards them.

OLD PALS IN A PERIL PICTURE.



That's the Title of the Latest Exploit of Thrill Phil, the Boy Film Actor, and his Almost Human Dog, Karell.

Captain Creevy went down beneath that wave. He carried Stumpy down with him. Stumpy's head went back and hit the boards hard, but his wooden leg went up in the air.

It caught Captain Creevy on the top of his head, almost cracking his skull. The portly skipper slid down the steps, literally forcing his way through the seamen who were trying to scramble upwards.

Stumpy's wooden leg caught a seaman who had almost worked his way to the top of the steps, on the point of his nose, pushing that organ upwards and backwards until it threatened to spread itself over the man's forehead. Then the wooden leg found a billet in somebody else's eye.

Confusion flourished for several moments, until everyone else was out of the hold except Captain Creevy.

At last he picked himself up. He was feeling very bruised, and was not quite sure in his mind what had been happening. And he was still more unsure the next moment.

Suddenly the vessel shook, and with a howl and a roar, as if a thousand motor buses were charging, a mighty wind descended.

The skipper, the mate and the crew of the *Bungle Bay* had been so intent upon the search of the vessel that they had not noticed the black clouds that had appeared on the horizon.

The ship shook and tottered.

For a moment it seemed as if it was going to be blown right over, and turn turtle, but with a resounding crack, all three masts went by the board.

Crew, captain, mate and all disappeared under a sheet of canvas, as the sails flopped down to the deck.

Some of them trailed overboard, and again came the danger of their weight pulling the ship over on its side.



A TAP FOR HIS TUPPENY!—The wooden leg caught Captain Creevy on the top of his head, almost cracking his skull. Then it found a billet in somebody else's eye.

Huge seas swept the vessel from end to end. Hoppy Travers in the hold, would have been swamped out, but a double thickness of canvas had fallen over the open hatchway and kept every spot of sea water out.

Then a black cloud loomed above.

"Land!" cried a voice. "Hard astarboard or we'll strike rocks!"

It was the voice of Stumpy, the mate.

But his warning came too late.

There came a grating sound from the keel of the vessel, and she stopped and then commenced to sink at once. Water was coming in at her hold where her bottom had been ripped almost from her. The *Bungle Bay* was a total wreck. In less than three minutes she had sunk beneath the surface of the sea.

The Talking Idol.

"WHERE the Blue Alsatian Mountains am I?" Hoppy Travers, the boy millionaire, opened his eyes.

"Oh, stripes and circles!" he muttered. "Principal boy in a blinking cannibal's feast. Gosh, I am up the pole."

He tried to move his hands, and found them tied behind him to a stout stake. On top of a huge pile of brushwood stood a large stewpot, and around him as far as he could see in every direction were hundreds of black-faced savages.

"Oh, look at the gollywogs," Hoppy continued to mutter.

He licked his parched lips.

The savages were pointing from him to the pot and rubbing their stomachs.

"I wonder where Captain Creevy, Stumpy and the rest of the crew of the *Bungle Bay* can be."

He looked round, but saw no signs of any other white people. He searched the ground.

"No, no bones," he muttered. "Thought perhaps I might be forming a kind of after course."

Hoppy tried to think how he had reached the island, but he could remember nothing that helped him. There had been a wreck, of course, but—

He suddenly started as he heard a voice speaking to him in English.

"Have you any firewater, white boy? I might move the gods to spare you if you have firewater."

Hoppy turned to see a thing that was half a crocodile and half a bird looking at him. From between the crocodile's jaws a native's head glared.

"Struth!" exclaimed Hoppy. "The medicine man. Come again, old bean. What is it you want?" he added, addressing the native in the queer attire.

"I am the medicine man," said that individual. "My power is great. I could save you from certain death."

He was evidently growing impatient. His love for the "firewater" made him impatient and fidgety. "You were found on the shore," he said. "And now you make food for our pots. That is if the idol so wishes. He must be asked if he says 'Yes,' I will be given first taste of you."

"I hope I poison you," muttered Tich.

The medicine man gave a mighty cry and started dancing madly. Every time he came near Tich, he would change from his native language to his peculiar broken English.

"You die," he would yell as he passed. "You're for the pot!"

"What a cheerful individual," muttered Hoppy. "I don't think I could ever learn to like him. Though he'd like me for a taste of firewater. I wonder if he would really save me. I wouldn't back on the treacherous-looking blighter. Still, I haven't any 'firewater,' so why worry?"

The dancing, chanting and yelling reached its height, and then a weird procession came into view.

It was composed of twenty or thirty natives, evidently the priests of the tribe, for they bore a huge wooden idol, carved out of a stake, in the midst of them.

Half of the priests were dressed in alligator skins, with huge, dummy alligator heads, and the others were faked to resemble colossal birds.

The medicine man stopped dancing and awaited the arrival of the procession.

"Hoka Woola woo," he cried.

The natives had prostrated themselves face downwards to the ground. All Hoppy could see now were hundreds of fuzzy heads.

The procession approached nearer and nearer. The medicine man had assumed a dramatic position and was pointing reverently at the oncoming idol.

The procession reached a spot midway between Hoppy and the stewpot.

"Talla!" called the medicine man.

The procession stopped, and the whole crowd of prostrate natives looked up.

"Yakka Doodle doodle jika," called the medicine man, and Hoppy could interpret from the medicine man's gesture what he had asked.

The medicine man started nodding his head vivaciously.

"Yat," he called, and turned to the boy millionaire.

"The idol commands that you shall be put in the pot."

"You old liar!"

A moan of terror came from the assembled natives as three words, clearly heard by them all, came from the mouth of the wooden idol.

Rory Milligan, Demon Motor Racer, Crashing In Again Saturday, Chums. 21

The medicine man's knees began to shake.

Hoppy grinned.

"You flaming old liar!"

Four more words came from the mouth of the idol.

The medicine man seemed to jump in his skin.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the idol. "This comes of being a medicine man and not believing in your idol. I have called the great white god to see how you abuse your trust."

The medicine man gave a howl and threw himself face downwards on the ground. The hundreds of watching natives, who had not been able to understand one word of all that had passed, also gave vent to howls as they saw the respect with which their medicine man treated the boy tied to the stake.

They threw themselves prostrate, and all that could be seen of them again was a sea of fuzzy heads.

Hoppy could have howled with laughter at the success his ventriloquism was bringing. He could also have yelled with relief as he realised that he would not end his days in a stewpot now. He had the medicine man frightened half out of his life, and would use that fright for his own benefit.

"Rise, base deceiver," he cried in his natural voice, but purposely making it deep and awe-inspiring. "I will spare thy miserable life—perhaps," he added as the medicine man was about to rise and howl out his thanks.

"Release me," ordered Tich.

The medicine man hesitated.

"Hasten, varlet,"

screamed the idol.

"Unloose the lord.

Fearest thou not his vengeance? Look, I see a spark in the brushwood beneath the stew-pot. My lord has lighted it; it will blaze up in the instant, and you will feel yourself pulled backwards and thrust into the pot by unseen hands if thou movest not quickly to the lord's release."

The medicine man leapt to Hoppy's side and, drawing a knife from his clothes, proceeded to cut the prisoner's bonds.

The boy ventriloquist was not without anxiety in those moments.

Had the medicine man had the courage to turn that knife upon Hoppy instead of upon the bonds, our boy ventriloquist would have ended his days then and there. But the medicine man feared too much the vengeance of the supposed god.

In a few moments Hoppy was free of his bonds.

He waved his hand above the heads of the still prostrate natives.

"Arise," he cried.

Nothing happened, because none of the natives understood his language, but the idol screamed out an order.

"Worm!" it cried. "Translate the great lord's order. If thy people do not obey the great white god, his vengeance will be visited on you."

The medicine man started jabbering at once. A sea of black faces appeared all round Hoppy.

"I forgive you all," said the boy millionaire,

solemnly addressing the black people in English. He paused, he did not look round, but the voice of the idol yelled out: "Translate!"

The High Priest got busy again.

And then Hoppy spoke again. In a long and rhetoric speech, he made much of his arrival on the island, of his displeasure with the people, and how he had come to see things put right in the future.

Hoppy's mode was to speak a few words, and wait for the High Priest to translate. It was beneath the dignity of a god to speak his people's tongue.

The High Priest was careful what he said in his own tongue, for he honestly believed Hoppy understood every word.

The natives were terrorised by their witch-doctor's evident fear. They, too, threw themselves on the ground and howled with dismay.

But Hoppy was kindly disposed towards them. He spoke again in English.

"Up, Worm," he cried. "Tell the people I wish to be their king during my stay upon this island. Call the present king to me."

Hoppy looked round ready to spot the king as he approached.

"Ya-o, Ya-o," cried the witch-doctor and pointed to himself, and thrust himself in front of Hoppy.

But Hoppy turned away from him, and pretended not to see his signs.

"Lord," came the voice of the idol. "This Worm was their king."

"Crown me king," ordered Hoppy without turning.



SOME PET!—The strange thing, half crocodile, half bird, danced and shouted and yelled. "You die," he would yell as he passed. "You're for the pot."

"Roll that stewpot from the fire, and turn it upside down. That shall be my throne for the ceremony until a better one can be made. Come on you, and you, and you, and help."

He pointed to half-a-dozen savages in the forefront of the rest.

The High Priest translated, and the natives got busy.

They rolled the stewpot from the fire and upturned it.

Hoppy solemnly mounted to his throne.

Then, just as seriously, Hoppy demanded a crowning ceremony. He instructed the natives how to make a crown from palm stems, and with dramatic impressiveness had himself crowned.

By the time the ceremony was over the sun was sinking in the sky.

"I would rest," said Hoppy. "Take me to my palace."

The surrounding natives made a pathway for their new king, and the High Priest conducted Hoppy towards a village of straw-roofed huts.

Hoppy pointed to the largest and newest-looking of the huts.

He then instructed the natives to plant the idol firmly in the ground outside the hut. "He will see everything that happens in the village, and will tell me in a voice that I alone will hear. I hope I shall see marked improvement in my people's conduct."

With that Hoppy passed into the hut, and drew the curtains too after him.

"Phew!" he whispered as he found himself alone. "Thank goodness that's over. Saved from the steward! I'm alone on a desert island with a mob of cannibals. I wonder if I'm better off than—"

He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a soaked piece of parchment.

"Sir Archibald's chart," he muttered. "I got that just before Creevy and Stumpy met their fate, poor brutes! but I wonder if I'll ever be able to escape from this island and find the treasure for Sir Archibald."

Hoppy settled himself down to sleep. His wonderful confidence to which, almost as much as to his ventriloquism, he owed his present comparative safety, enabled him to sleep at once.

And whilst he slept he dreamt.

He dreamt that Captain Creevy and Stumpy had escaped from the wreck, and turned up on this very island, and that the treasure was hidden on this island too.

Hoppy awoke with a start, and looked at the chart. Something he saw there caused him to rise and go to the door of the hut.

It was the dead of night outside. White stars glistened in the sky.

"Come along, Wilfred," he said, and pulled the idol from the ground.

All was asleep in the village. Not a native was in sight.

When he returned some hours later there was still no sign of movement in the village.

But Hoppy was too excited for sleep.

"This is the island upon which the treasure was buried," he told himself. "I've picked up all the landmarks shown on the chart. And those bootmarks on the beach! And those round a nail holes! Stumpy is on the island so nowhere, and another man, probably Captain Creevy! I must start to search for the treasure to-morrow—before they can find it!"

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Boys' Magazine. 13/8/27.

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Gee Whizz! Fancy Jumping Like a Giant, Cross Country in Quest of Adventure!



AT LAST!
STARTLING
APPEARANCE
OF THE
BOY SPACE
DESTROYER.
A TEMPEST
OF THRILLS.

"WONDER what the stunt is over there?"

Bartholomew Beck turned his gaze to where a stream of people were making their way through an open gateway. He decided to investigate, and a few minutes later he was gazing at a paybox which guarded the entrance to a field.

"Grand Exhibition of Balloon-Jumping," he read on the poster above the paybox. "Come and see the latest sport! Admission sixpence."

"Gee, I'm on this!" said Barty, and paying up, passed through the barrier.

Barty had read of balloon-jumping, and how a man, attached to a balloon and properly weighted, could make the most astounding jumps, over trees, houses and rivers, and an astonishing height above the ground.

In the centre of a field, fastened to the earth with stout ropes, was the balloon, surrounded by a crowd of rustics. A couple of men in charge were chatting together when Barty arrived alongside.

"There'll be a row if Carson doesn't turn up," one said anxiously. "This crowd'll tear the balloon to bits!"

There was no doubt that he spoke the truth, for already people were beginning to talk about being hoaxed. And then, through the crowd came a boy.

"Got a message for you fellows from a bloke called Carson," he blurted out. "His car skidded down the road and he broke his ankle. Says he can't do anything to-day."

"Gosh, that's torn it!" The two men faced each other anxiously. The crowd, who had heard the message, began to get annoyed.

"Don't believe there ever was going to be any jumping!" yelled one man.

"Come on, boys, let's have our money's worth out of the old balloon."

There was a menacing rush forward, but that was just the moment that Barty Beck decided to take a hand in the game.

"Half a mo!" he cried and, leaping over the ropes, dashed up to the attendants. "Look here. I'm game to do the jumping! What do you say? The crowd'll get their money's worth, and I'll get the excitement."

One of the men put out his hand.

"Shake, kid!" he said. "You've got us out of a hole. Come over here."

As Barty went forward to have the balloon explained to him, a cheer broke out from the crowd.

In a few minutes the boy was ready, and the straps fastening him to the balloon were attached.

"Here goes!" Barty started. "Whoop-oo!"

The next moment he was about fifty feet in the air, sailing as easily as a cloud over the heads of the people below.

"Jehosaphat!" gasped Barty. "It doesn't look as though I'm ever coming down!"

And, for a while, it didn't! Barty went sailing away merrily over the trees which bordered the field and, as he realised to his amazement, not far from the little cottage in which he lived.

Then his keen eyes caught sight of two men pushing their way through a hedge in furtive fashion. They looked up, and one of them, as soon as he caught sight of Barty sailing through the air, gave a cry.

"Collar him, Carl! See if he's got the plan on him!"

As he cried this he raised a revolver and fired. The shot pierced the windbag of the balloon, and Barty, careering madly through the air, pulled a cord desperately and so changed his course that he was able to grab hold of the weathervane of the nearby church steeple.

Barty clung to the weathervane while the balloon bounced and crashed in the wind.

One of the men ascended the roof of the squat and ancient church, and actually commenced to climb the steeple, but a shout from his companion, who saw people running across the field, quickly brought the fellow down again.

Left alone, Barty found that the balloon was not much harmed and he jumped back to his starting-place and allowed the owners of the balloon to tether it and take off his straps.

In the excitement of the jumping he did not mention the two strangers who had wanted to get hold of him, but, when he reached the cottage, he remembered them.

Bill Fisher, his pal, a red-haired, freckle-faced youngster, was working in the workshop attached to the cottage. He was the assistant to Barty's father, a manufacturing jeweller who was at present out of England.

Barty told him of his adventures that afternoon, and of the two men who had attempted to get hold of him.

"I wonder what they meant by a plan!" mused Barty. "Still, you'd better pack up work, Bill, and let's get into the cottage."

Since the departure of his father for some destination which he had not even told Barty, the two boys had lived together in the cottage. Mr. Beck was a widower, but the two boys managed to look after themselves without other help than that of a cottager's wife who came in for a few hours during the day to clean up.

In a few moments they were inside and the doors were locked.

"Barty!" Suddenly Bill gripped his pal's arm and whispered in his ear. "There's someone here in the cottage. Listen!"

There came a scraping sound from overhead, and the noise of a window being closed. Barty started.

"The window over the outhouse!" he gasped. "I forgot about that. Gosh, they've broken in. Come on, Bill."

With fists clenched the two boys began to creep carefully up the stairs and approached the door of a room, the window of which overlooked the outhouse, and then, suddenly, Barty flung it open.

If the two chums expected to see a couple of brawny men they were disappointed! There, in the centre of the room, stood a weedy-looking fellow—obviously a foreigner—and who hardly seemed capable of hurting a mouse.

"What are you doing in here?" demanded Barty, striding forward, and the man shrugged his shoulders.

"I 'ave to be careful," he said in broken English. "I am follow by two vaire bad men, who want to steal from me the message I 'ave for you."

He held out a bulky envelope as he spoke, and Barty took it. Inside were two papers. One was a letter from his father, the other was a paper covered with straggling lines, bearing a great resemblance to a maze.

Barty scanned the letter eagerly.

My dear boy, I have left instructions that this letter is to be brought to you if I do not return to the village of Cataran in the Pyrenees within a week. I am now able to tell you that the journey which I undertook so secretly was to this place. I had heard that there was a great treasure on the top of a mountain here which has always been believed to be inaccessible.

From an old Frenchman I discovered that a cave in the mountains—the old course of an underground river—led upward to a part of the mountain above the precipitous parts which have made the mountain unclimbable. If I do not return within a week, something will have happened to me, and I wish you to come to my rescue immediately. Jules, who brings this letter, is to be trusted, and he will guide you to Cataran, and show you the entrance to the caves. Then follow the plan enclosed. But be on your guard for there are others who are seeking to find the treasure although they have no map to guide them through the caves. All good wishes my boy.—Your father.

Barty had read the letter aloud to Bill and when he finished the two boys stared at each other for a while without speaking.

"Bill, my lad," said Barty, at last. "We start this very night. Get the old mo-bike out. If we drive to London to-night we can see dad's manager, get the money we want, and push on to Folkestone," he said.

"We can catch the early morning boat, and be in the Pyrenees the morning after. How's that?"

"Fine!" said Bill.

They had been working as they talked, and a small portmanteau was already packed. Jules, who had been standing in silence, picked up the portmanteau and moved towards the door. In a few moments they were in the yard, and Bill had wheeled out the motor-cycle combination which the boys shared.

"Get in there, Jules," said Barty, shoving the luggage in the bottom of the side-car. "You ride pillion, Bill, and I'll drive. Ready?"

He kicked the starter and the engine roared. Just at that moment there came a cry from Bill.

"Look out, Barty!"

The headlights lit up the yard and the gate to the road. Two men—villainous-looking scoundrels—had dashed out from behind a hedge. Their intention was obvious. They were going to close the gate so that the cycle would crash into it and be wrecked!

But Barty was one too many for them! He shot out a foot as they dashed through the closing gate, and it crashed open. Simultaneously Bill swung a blow to the jaw of one of the men, sending him reeling back into his companion's arms.

Next moment the motor-bike was dashing along the road, leaving two scoundrels rolling in the dust!

Trapped in the Caves.

"AND this is the entrance to the caves?"

"Oui, monsieur," answered Jules to Barty's question.

The three of them stood outside a curious crack in the mountain side.

Some two miles away was the village of Cataran. "Well," said Barty, "so long, Jules. If we don't return in a week you know what to do."

"Oui, monsieur," was the reply. "I will organise a search-party."

"Then that's all right," Barty replied. "Come on, Bill. Now for it."

Switching on their torches, the boys plunged into the crack in the mountain. For a while the caves were not very large. The crack by which they had entered had evidently been only a small outlet of the main river which had, so many years ago, poured into the very bowels of the earth. But soon an amazing change took place.

"Gosh!" gasped Bill. "By Jimminy, I never expected anything like this."

The two boys halted in amazement. They had evidently come to the old course of the main river, for they were in a tremendous cavern, where stalactites and stalagmites glittered in the light of their torches.

Many were of various colours and shades, mostly pink or blue. The scene was one of the most wonderful the chums had ever seen in their lives.

Apart from the main course of the ancient river, there were innumerable smaller openings through which the waters had once poured. Barty looked at his chart.

"We'll have to be careful here," he said. "If we take the wrong turning, we stand a good chance of wandering around until we drop. Let's see, the third opening on the left is the one for us."

The third opening on the left proved to be a vast split in the cavern. They passed through, to find themselves in a similar cavern to the one which they had just quitted.

"I shouldn't like to do this journey alone," confessed Bill. "Gosh, what's that!"

They listened intently. A curious shuffling sound had come to their ears. Something was following them!

"Down here," whispered Barty, pulling his pal down a turning.

They switched off their torches and waited! Presently the noise came nearer, and then, suddenly, two lights stabbed the darkness! The sound they had heard resolved itself into the footsteps of men! And as the reflected lights of the torches showed who they were, Barty gave a gasp!

"It's those fellows who wanted the plan!" he whispered to Bill. "They've tracked us, and they're following us to find out the way."

They looked at each other. What was to be done? The footsteps had ceased. Obviously the men had discovered that they had been tricked, for they were now flashing their lights into all the openings in the cavern. Barty had an idea!

"Let's beat it down this passage," he suggested. "I can make a mark on the chart, showing where

For hours it seemed they were carried on in the maelstrom bruised and battered till it seemed any moment would be their last.

And then the miracle happened!

One moment they were in pitch darkness, being hurled along by the raging torrent; the next they were out in blinding sunlight.

They were in a lake—and in the open air! From a cleft in the mountain side a river was pouring—the river which had carried them through the caverns, and which had poured out of the first available outlet.

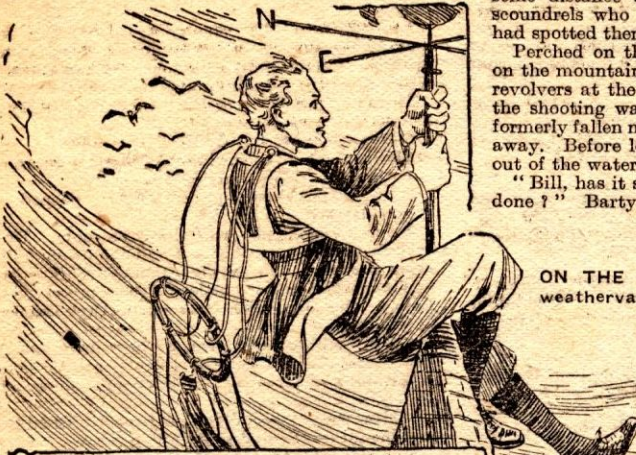
Crack!

A sudden report rang out upon the air, and it was followed immediately by two others.

Little sprays of water jumped up from the surface of the placid lake. Barty turned his head, and there, some distance above them, he saw that the two scoundrels who had diverted the mountain stream, had spotted them swimming in the lake.

Perched on the high land that bordered the lake on the mountain side, the men were now firing their revolvers at the boys, but the distance was far and the shooting was erratic. The splashes, which had formerly fallen near the boys, were now some distance away. Before long the two had dragged themselves out of the water, and solemnly shook hands.

"Bill, has it struck you what those blighters have done?" Barty's tone was grave. "The only way



ON THE STEEPLE.—Barty clung to the weathervane while the balloon bounced and crashed in the wind.

we've gone off the track, and we can find our way back by that."

But the boys had forgotten that sound was magnified, and the men heard their footfalls and discovered which passage they had gone down.

A revolver shot rang out, followed almost immediately by another. The men were firing at them! "Bob down!" yelled Barty. "It's no use trying to run. Return their fire!"

They were down in a flash, seeking cover behind a stalagmite. With their revolvers they returned the fire, and they saw the men hesitate and draw back. But still the boys could do nothing, for if they rose to their feet they stood the risk of being shot.

They saw the men whisper together, and then, while one remained on guard, the other left the cave.

"Wonder what mischief they're up to now?" whispered Barty, but it was not until about a quarter of an hour later that he discovered!

Suddenly, there came the swishing sound of water, and a great gush of water poured into the mouth of the outlet. The second man sprang back and avoided the rush, but the water swept on like a great wall upon the trapped boys.

Barty turned white.

"Gosh!" he gasped. "The blighters have diverted a mountain stream, and the waters will catch us and bear us down to the inside of the earth!"

Hardly had the words left his lips before the two boys were seized in the mighty grip of the rushing waters, and swirled away helplessly!

Bruised and battered, the chums battled with the stream, but it was a hopeless fight.

to the summit of that mountain was by means of the caves. They've blocked that way by diverting the river. Nobody can reach the top of these mountains now by that way! And my poor dad is up there somewhere—waiting for us to get to him—and we can't do it!"

"Gosh. I never thought of that!" gasped Bill.

The two boys faced each other. They had been spared, but how were they now to reach Barty's father and save him from starvation?

Silently they turned towards the village of Cataran, and began walking back!

"CRIKEY!"

Barty seized his chum's arm and pointed upwards. Bill turned, and he gave a start as he saw the object to which Barty had drawn his attention.

There, in the air, and descending slowly, was a balloon! They had not noticed it previously, for

they had been too occupied with their own thoughts. But now, as the balloon came nearer and nearer, they ran forward. A voice yelled out to them through a megaphone.

"Say, you boys, give us a hand to land, will you? We'll throw a rope. Get it around a tree!"

A rope snaked through the air. The boys caught it, and before long had the rope fast to a near-by tree. In the basket of the balloon the boys could see two men, who, as soon as they touched terra firma, clambered out.

"Lay, you boys, that was real good of you," said the first aeronaut, speaking with a pronounced American accent. "Can you tell us where we are?"

"You're not far from Catalan in the Pyrenees," answered Barty.

"Pyrenees, eh?" said the first speaker. "Guess we haven't done so badly, then, even if our compass did go wrong. Say, let me introduce myself. I'm Hiram Swift of New York, and this is my friend Bud Jennings, of the same little old burg. Guess we thought our number was up. We started off from Brussels on the Gordon-Bennett race, and got carried out of our bearings. Then there came a leakage of gas in the envelope and we had to come down. Guess we'll let the gas out of her, and arrange to have her packed up and shipped back to the States!"

"No!"

It was Barty who spoke the word as he stepped forward excitedly. Back to Barty's memory had come that day when he had taken the place of the injured balloon-jumper. And a new thought had struck the lad!

"Say, kid, what's the game?" asked Hiram Swift. "Just this!" answered Barty. "I've done balloon-jumping, and my dad's somewhere on the top of that mountain over there. I can't get to him by any other means, so, I'm going to borrow your balloon and jump across the gorge and up the precipice!"

A Leap to Save a Life.

"KIDDO, shake!"

Hiram Swift spoke. He and his companion were standing by Barty and Bill on the edge of a precipice which dropped away to the valley beneath. Across the valley rose the precipitous heights of the unclimbable mountain.

Barty extended his hand and gripped that of the American balloonist who had willingly agreed to lend his balloon when he knew what was at stake.

Then, after exchanging a hearty handshake with Bill and the other American he gave the order: "Let go the ropes, boys. I'm off!"

The ropes were cast off, and Barty braced himself for his effort. Then, with a little run, he jumped vibrantly—and soared into the air!

Beneath him lay the gorge! Behind him were his chum and the Americans. Before him was the sheer side of the precipice which guarded the approach to the inaccessible mountain!

What would happen? Would he be able to get foot or hand-hold upon the mountain side? Or would he find no means of clinging there, and be carried down into the depths of the gorge beneath!

And then, even while he was in mid-air, his ruminations were cut short by the report of a revolver, and he looked below, to find that the scoundrels who had already attempted the lives of himself and his pal, were standing on a little plateau at the foot of the precipice, and were firing at the balloon!

He gritted his teeth. He was absolutely helpless, and if the gas-bags were punctured, it would be good-bye to all hopes of saving his father. It would be good-bye to life, too! And he could do nothing but remain there suspended by the balloon, which

was carrying him across the deep and rocky gorge.

To Barty it looked as though the mountain was rushing at him, and then the balloon began to drop! Would he manage it?

The next moment his feet had touched ground—on the very brink of the precipice! A piece of land crumbled from beneath his feet, and for a second he slipped. But he threw himself forward, and dropped face downward on to the top of the precipice, worming his way to safety.

"And that's that!" he muttered as he scrambled to his feet again.

Despite the danger of the undertaking; despite the bullets which had winged their way around him, he had succeeded. With a rope he tethered the balloon to a rock near at hand. He was free now to devote himself to the search for his father. There were no trees here, and the ground was rocky and barren.

Staring into the saucer-like depression which marked the summit of the mountain Barty's face lit up as he caught sight of a tent, pitched there. He set off at full speed, and pulled open the flap.

Inside a man was lying full length and Barty gave a cry as he saw him.

"Dad!—you're not dead?"

Slowly the man opened his eyes, and a groan came from his lips. He turned over uneasily.

"I—I'm not dreaming, am I?" he gasped. "It is you, Barty, isn't it?"

"Sure thing, dad," was the lad's reply. He had expected to see his father in a bad condition, and had come prepared. From the American balloonists he had borrowed a water-bottle and some preserved food. Before long his father was sitting up and eating ravenously.

"My food gave out two or three days ago," Mr. Beck explained. "Luckily there is a little pond of rainwater not far away, so I haven't suffered from thirst."

"How was it you couldn't get back?" asked Barty, and his father pointed to his ankle.

For the first time the youngster saw that there was a bandage around the ankle.

"It's broken," explained Mr. Beck. "I slipped and caught it against a rock. I couldn't walk back through the caves."

"Gosh, this is serious," gasped Barty. "Dad, the caves are flooded, so there's no chance of getting back that way."

"The caves flooded? Then how did you get here?"

"I jumped!" grinned Barty. "Jumped across the gorge."

His father looked at him as though he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"It's true, dad," reiterated Barty. "You've heard of balloon-jumping, haven't you? Well, by a bit of good luck, I got a balloon, and here I am. But what about this treasure you mentioned?"

For answer Mr. Beck limped painfully to a corner of the tent and brought back what appeared to Barty to be merely a piece of dirty rock. The underside was covered with spikes of a crystal formation. They were very dirty, and Barty could not see what connection they had with treasure.

"Know what those are, Barty?" asked his father. "They are amethysts, and that piece of rock you are holding is worth hundreds of pounds. Now the whole top of this mountain is rich with jewels—mostly amethysts."

He broke off. Another thought had struck him.

"But if the caves are flooded, how are we going to arrange to work this amethyst field?" he asked. "You cannot jump back and forwards across the gorge with heavy machinery and explosives."



A TORRENT—IN TONS!—The two boys were seized in the mighty grip of the rushing water, and swirled away helplessly.

Barty's face fell. Here was a snag indeed!

Then he brightened up!

"I've got it, dad!" he exclaimed. "Look here, you don't mind being left alone again, do you? I promise you I'll come back, if I break my neck in doing it!"

"What are you going to do, Barty?" asked his father.

"Wait and see!" was Barty's reply. "In the meantime, take this water-bottle and the rest of the food, and keep your pecker up until I return!"

Barty found the balloon as he left it, and once again he fastened himself to it. The return jump would not be so bad as the former one—for the opposite side of the gorge was lower than the top of the precipice on the mountain side.

Taking a run, he leaped into the air and again he landed without mishap. But there was no one to greet him on that side, for Bill and the Americans had gone to Cataran to secure volunteers to hunt the two scoundrels who had attempted to murder the lads.

"I daren't leave the balloon here," reflected Barty. "Those scoundrels might spot it and finish it off. Besides, it's going to be quicker to reach Cataran in jumps. So here goes!"

The consternation of the humble villagers can better be imagined than described when they saw, rapidly approaching the village, a balloon which went up and down in tremendous leaps!

Barty was becoming more and more proficient in his jumping, and he could time his leaps perfectly. That enabled him to arrive right in the inn-yard—to find Bill awaiting him! The terrified landlord had seen this strange "monster of the skies" as he termed it, coming towards his inn, and had fled indoors in a panic and blurted out his news to Bill.

"Bill, old man, never mind about those crooks," gasped Barty. "They'll clear off now they know they're beaten. There's no time to lose. I want ropes—plenty of them, and long enough to stretch right across the gorge. And I want pulleys and a basket. Quick, we've got to act before too much gas leaks from this old bag."

"What are you going to do?" queried Bill.

"I'm going to rig up an aerial railway, my boy," was the astonishing reply. "I'm going to jump back

across that gorge and carry a rope with me. When I make it fast we'll rig up pulleys and a basket.

The whole of Cataran was ransacked, and the necessary implements were obtained. Within an hour or so Barty, Bill, and a number of helpers stood on the brink of the gorge. Once more Barty was going to attempt the dangerous jump—this time even more dangerous than it had been before, for there was no doubt that the gas was leaking from the balloon.

The onlookers held their breaths as Barty took a little run, and then, with a leap, was soaring into the air. A groan came from Bill as he saw the balloon was dropping too rapidly.

"It's going to let him down!" he cried. "He won't get the top of the precipice!"

And it looked as though this jump was, indeed, going to end in disaster. For the balloon was coming down too quickly, and the next moment Barty had been dropped beneath the edge of the precipice upon which he had planned to land.

But, even as a gasp of horror came from the onlookers, it gave place to a cheer. For Barty making a violent effort and swinging himself forward, had gripped the rocky ledge of the precipice.

He had won! The top of the hitherto inaccessible mountain was now linked to the outer world by means of the stout rope!

"THERE you are, my boys, what do you think of that?"

Some considerable time had passed, and Barty, his father, and Bill were paying their first return visit to the mountain which had so nearly been the scene of all their deaths. Barty's "aerial railway," amateurish as it was, had been sufficient to allow him to send Mr. Beck over in a basket attached to a pulley, and to pass him into safety.

It had been an easy matter after that to have a proper overhead railway fixed up, and a company had been formed immediately to exploit the wealthy amethyst fields of the Pic de Cataran. Barty, his father, and Bill became rich beyond all their wildest hopes, and now, as they stood and watched the overhead cars running back and forwards across the gorge, bringing their wealthy freights of uncut amethysts, they could not repress a little feeling of pride to think that they had won through in the face of difficulties such as few people are called upon to encounter.

Thrill Phil, The Boy Film Actor, in a Tense Drama with His Faithful Dog, Karell, Next Week.



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HURCULANE! That was the magic substance that took James Brent, Esq., Man about Town, to the Dark Continent.

Velasquez, the Big Boss of the Underworld, plotted to use Herculane for his own crooked ends—for by its aid a man's strength was increased a hundredfold. He schemed to compel a black boxer, Sambo Mauley, to take the wonder-drug.

But Jimmy Brent knew, and together with Dick Challenger and Sir Martin Anton, Bart., went out to Africa where the mysterious plant, Herculane, grew in abundance. Sambo went with them.

What the others did not know was that Sambo had taken a dose of Herculane—which he himself had originally discovered in the black depths of Africa. He and Jimmy Brent and Co. were attacked by Velasquez and his villains. Velasquez, fearing Sambo's knowledge declared that he must walk the plank.

Sambo walked the plank, plunging into the infested river just as the yacht was attacked by savage warriors. In the confusion Jimmy Brent and his big game cricketers escaped, only to be recaptured by Velasquez, who pronounced sentence.

They were to be his slaves!

IT was not long before Jimmy Brent and Co. understood exactly the meaning of Velasquez's words when he had said that they were to be "his slaves."

Exhausted and beaten as they were, they were dragged on board the white yacht *Zena* by Henri Velasquez's followers—as villainous a crew on closer inspection as it would be possible to find anywhere in the world. They were laid out on deck in the broiling sun to recover as best they might.

And in the meanwhile Velasquez's followers did the last actual manual work they were likely to do for some days—they let loose the cables and shipped anchor, and the queenly little *Zena* slipped down the steaming river, dark with its own mystery.

The yacht was escorted down the bank of the river about a mile by the warriors of the Osari tribe who had helped to capture Jimmy Brent and Co. Then the forest even at the water's edge became too thick and impenetrable even for them to negotiate.

Less than ten minutes after they had disappeared, however, wild screams might have been heard coming from the forest. Neither Jimmy Brent nor any of his cricketers paid heed. But Velasquez and his followers did hear the screams, and they looked at one another significantly.

They knew from the sound that the daring Osari warriors penetrating N'Gwambi territory were probably at that moment being attacked in overwhelming force by their bitter enemies. But what they did not know was that Sambo Mauley, an African gentleman, lately domiciled at Wanstead, England, was leading the attack of the much injured N'Gwambi warriors.

And Sambo was a mighty fighter. He could fling a spear with the skill and presence of a Zulu head-hunter and with the force of a giant catapult. He was a devastating force at the head of the N'Gwambi warriors. He caught two Osari warriors and cracked their skulls together like billiard balls, so that they went reeling after the encounter. And that was early in the fight. As it progressed, Sambo proceeded to lay out a stricken field. And it was from his exertions mainly that the screams of the routed and discomfited Osari warriors rose on the jungle stillness.

It might have given Velasquez cause for reflection, if not for alarm, had he known that Sambo was still alive.

Sambo was a very vindictive person for a negro whose ancestors had picked cotton way down in Alabama for the last three hundred years. Sambo could grin and he could sing, and he could shuffle along happily without a cent in his pocket. But, by Golly, to use his own phraseology, he was "powerful roused 'bout dat dere Velasqueeze, and he allowed he'd lay for de big stiff."

Which, being interpreted, meant that Sambo was on the warpath, and firstly that he meant to make for the Hidden City and the marvellous drug, Herculane; and secondly that he meant to discover Velasquez and settle accounts with that gentleman.

Sambo did not like being forced to take a bath in a river infested by alligators and other terrible creatures of prey, nor did he like being potted at with a machine-gun whilst bathing in the aforesaid river.

Sambo laid his plans.

After his devastating attack on the Osari he was formally made chief of the N'Gwambi tribe. The elaborate ceremonies and rites performed in the dark interior of the forest having been disposed of, Sambo laid bare his plans.

His fighting men rapped their knuckles against their white teeth and eyes goggled in fear and dismay as they listened. For Sambo, their new king, actually proposed that they should beat and cut a way into the terrible Ju-ju land, a land never yet explored even by the natives themselves. The land of N'Shimbi-N'Shambi, the God of Wailing Storms and of other black magic.

Sambo heard in patience and in calm the protests and the stories of his warriors concerning the forbidden

land. He agreed that it was infested with terrible magic, for he was superstitious to a degree himself and, moreover, he had penetrated the land and he had discovered many strange things.

Yet he insisted upon going once more, and upon taking some of his N'Gwambi warriors with him.

He would lead them into the Hidden City, he said, and he promised many things. Sambo did not mention Hurculane, for he did not think that was wise, but he made free with the names of many other commodities of which it was doubtful that they were products of this country at all.

At length he managed to persuade his followers that it was meet that they should take these terrible risks and follow their new leader into the mysterious ju-ju land where the storm wailed and all manner of terrible things happened.

They took to the river in canoes first of all, but it was not long before they reached a point where they would have to abandon them for the interior.

They searched around and at length concentrated on one point and commenced to cut and hack their way through the dense tangle of the forest.

It was slow and dangerous work. Lianas and thorns knotted into an inextricable tangle confronted them on all sides. It seemed that they advanced a yard, only to find that the dense forest closed up behind them as if by the snapping of an elastic band.

that arose from a country of fever swamps, the N'Gwambi warriors lit a camp fire. It served to keep away the wild beasts, but not the mosquitoes and scorpions who played havoc with these black rivermen.

Yet they clung faithfully to Sambo Mauley, the East End boxer and crook. Nature is the same the whole wide world over, and the tendency of human nature is to be clean and just, despite the poisonous doctrine of the cynics. It is civilisation that makes for evil. These black warriors saw Sambo attending to those of them who had fallen sick, and they marvelled and muttered to one another in admiration of their new chief.

Not a man amongst that company died.

And so, though Sambo's heart fretted because of the fate that might have overtaken Jimmy Brent and Co. in this perilous quest for the Hidden City and the marvellous Hurculane, in reality he did his cause the best possible service by yielding to his better instincts. For he cemented the loyalty and affection of those who had elected him as their chief.

Yet, for all that, if he had known all the facts and weighed in the balance the material results of that first fourteen days' track through the jungle, he would have groaned aloud in his despair.

If he could have witnessed the fate of Jimmy



A SURPRISE FOR SAMBO!—As the black cricketer and big game hunter came to the end of his long, weary climb, and his glistening face appeared over the top of the ledge, he saw something that brought a startled gasp from his lips, and almost made him relax his hold. A puma!

Sambo, in a fever of impatience, worked the warriors of the N'Gwambi tribe almost to dropping point. In a sense it was unwise, for there were many murmurs and grumbles from the natives. For here lurked manifold dangers from wild men and wilder beasts. Snakes abounded amidst this tangle and crept surreptitiously upon the superstitious natives whose charms to ward off the effects of their bites availed them little.

Three young men of the N'Gwambi tribe were bitten in the first four days of that jungle trail, and they were attended by Sambo, who seemed to have the sorcery of a witch in medicine. The giant big game cricketer was as gentle as a nurse with these untaught heathens, and though his soul chafed at the delay he would not let one linger behind, but kept the whole party waiting until such as fell sick had recovered.

And Sambo was no miracle worker. His cures were effective, but they were not instantaneous. At one point they rested for three days and three nights while one of the young warriors recovered from snake bite. During that time the rest of the N'Gwambi warriors hacked a clearing at their camping place, so that they might be prepared for the attacks of the wild beasts who lurked in the forest and whose subdued cries filled the air with menace at night.

At night, despite the intense heat and the moisture

Brent and Co. as he sat by the glowing camp fire at night—

The big game cricketers—ten of them now, without Sambo—roused from the apathy of despair after their recapture only with nightfall when the stars cast a velvety sheen over the sluggish river.

The yacht was moving slowly, feeling her way in this river that sometimes could rage with the rage of the storm god who changed the whole face of Nature. There were hidden tree trunks in the mud, there were sand bars and there were sudden swift currents for which no man could account. And the navigator who served with Henri Velasquez was not an expert at his job.

Still with the night the intense heat was somewhat abated, though the monkeys chattered maddeningly in the tree tops, and the forest gave weird echoes to the cries of the wild animals. Jimmy Brent, struggling with a sick headache and an awful giddiness, raised himself to one elbow.

"You chaps there?" he asked cautiously.

There came murmurs from all sides in answer. Sir Mark Anton, Dick Challenger and others roused to Jimmy Brent's call. The one-time man-about-town struggled to his feet, and tottered over the deck, trying to make for the rails. He could not answer his friends or speak to them again. His heart was beating painfully with a wild hope, and yet a hope so forlorn that he might have abandoned it there and then.

For he had seen under the faint starlight that the yacht was hugging the shore very closely. Trees loomed up over the rails and before them swarmed in a haze the mosquitoes. Escape—freedom stretched before them. Yet what a mockery it held!

Escape into that dense, fever-ridden forest, without food and without arms! Surely it was going half-way to meet death. Surely it were better to stay here as prisoners of the sinister Big Boss!

Jimmy's reason dictated all that—it drummed insistently each separate point into his brain. Yet his instinct told him to take this avenue of escape, to fight, fight all the time, though they plunged into that forest of death.

He crept to the rails and rested his shaking arms upon it. He stared for a few moments at the dense tangle that seemed to surround the nosing bow of the ship, then he half turned and beckoned to those who watched him.

Even as he made that gesture there suddenly rang out upon the night fierce, exultant yells and the white deck of the yacht was invaded by Henri Velasquez and his followers, who had been strangely quiet. The Big Boss loomed in front of his men, a monstrous, menacing figure in the tropical darkness, a squat shape in the hand that he stretched out—the shape of a revolver.

"No, you don't. Hold up, or I shoot!" he snarled.

Jimmy stared helplessly as the man advanced, and his last hope seemed gone from him.

The villainous crowd advanced gleefully on their hapless, trembling victims. They had been playing with them as a cat plays with a mouse. They seized Jimmy Brent and Co roughly, and the Big Boss, revolver in hand, walked around his victims as a man might walk with impunity round caged beasts.

"So you want to go to the forest, do you?" he snarled with a ginny laugh. "Well, b'gar, you shall. You shall. Give 'em axes, boys, and give 'em knives. We're going to land. And these swine are going to hack our passage through the jungle."

They were tumbled over the rails, thrust at from behind with rifles, and they landed in a heap on the soft mud of the river bank, trembling with fever as they were. Quinine tablets were given to each of them—little tablets that worked miracles—and then huge axes and knives were thrust into the hands of the big game hunters, and they were ordered to begin work.

The ordeal of that labour to the weakened men! It was an ordeal such as they never wished to go through again, such as they never hoped to survive. In truth they were slaves, working for a monstrous master. Henri Velasquez wielded a whip during those days and nights of horror, and he exulted in its use. Not one of the party of ten escaped the lash of it, not one but what would have dropped dead and bleeding save for one fact.

Jimmy Brent had a tiny supply of the marvellous Herculane which the first night he divided amongst his companions. A tiny fragment of a leaf for each man, that was all. Yet once swallowed, it worked wonders. Each member of the party was as a giant refreshed both in strength and vitality.

And so they hacked and cut their way through

the jungle tangle. What need to describe that slow, laborious journey, fraught with danger from both man and beast? Sufficient to say that Jimmy Brent and Co., all unconsciously, were working away from the rescue that Sambo would have brought to their aid.

Sambo, the faithful, divided between his frantic desire to help his friends and his humane instincts towards the natives of the N'Gwambi tribe was seven days behind Jimmy Brent and Co. in the journey to the Hidden City, reckoning each day as comprising two miles of slow travel.

Velasquez followed in the wake of his slaves with his villainous crew. Night and day they imbibed of the vile spirits they carried with them, of which they seemed to have an illimitable supply. Daily they became more bloodshot, more livid of countenance, more ridden by the terrible jungle fever.

Matters reached such a pass that even their brutal instincts became placid. They neglected to flog Jimmy Brent and his companions. It is a moot point, if it had come to a fight, whether Jimmy Brent and Co. could not have put paid once and for all to the evil aspirations of the Big Boss of crime.

Jimmy's companions whispered to him, urging the cause that loomed obvious now: that they should fight and overthrow the tyrants who saddled them with so heavy a yoke. But Jimmy Brent, in whispered conversations with his friends at night, now revealed the whole matter of their strange quest.

They were after the Herculane. And Sambo, their friend, who could have led them to the Hidden city, was dead. Or so Jimmy believed. Velasquez alone held the key to the situation. He held the map. If they overpowered him, Jimmy might get control of the map again, but on the other hand it might be lost forever.

Better to let Velasquez lead the way. So Jimmy counselled, and the others saw the wisdom in his advice.

Daily Velasquez became more bloodshot, more fevered and excited. And at length, when they came out into a huge clearing with the red ball of the sun striking pitiously down upon them and with a great carrel's hump of a hill before them, his impatience could scarce be contained. He became a ravening animal, using the whip once again, and it was manifest that they were nearing the end of this strange quest.

They toiled up that hill somehow. None afterwards could have told how. And at length, with the falling of night, and the rising of the moon, red and glorious, they came out upon a great bare plateau, with, in the distance, the vague shapes of buildings.

The Hidden City.

A city long forgotten, long dead. A city of mystery and peril, as those adventurers were soon to discover.

And the beasts of this long-forgotten city of a savage tribe paused in their search for meat to watch with wondering, fearless eyes, the coming of that strange, unknown animal—man.

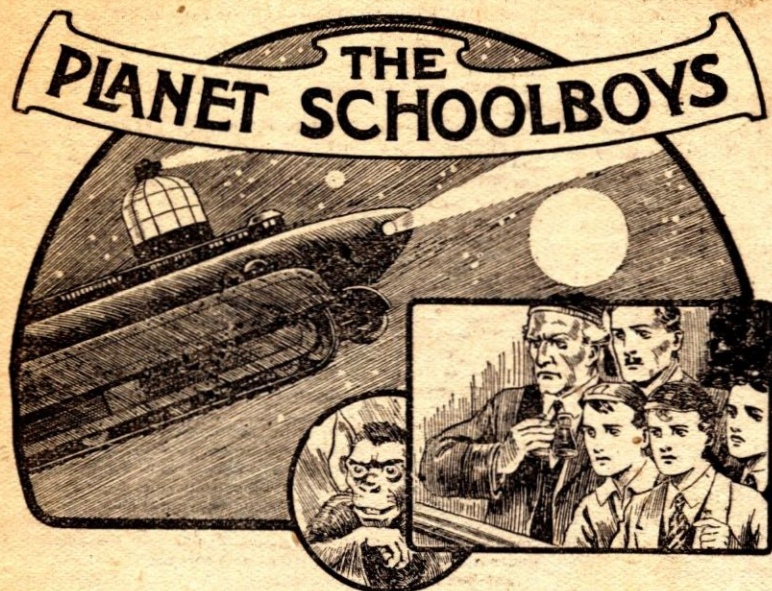
The others watched, fascinated—awed!

For Velasquez, half mad, his whip gripped in his hand, staggered forward in front, possessed of most strength of all of them at that moment. He was snarling like a wild beast who wishes to keep others from his food.

To the faces of the others was wafted a faint, pleasant odour. They stood on the vast tableland which melted away in the moonlight, watching Velasquez. Studded over that tableland at irregular intervals were a number of little bushes.

(Continued on page 2.)

Magnificent New School, Fun and Scientific Serial Just Commencing. Alive with Stupendous Thrills of the Unknown, it Tells of the Amazing Adventures of a Daring Band of Schoolboys Among the Mystery Worlds in Space.



A Voyage of Discovery Among the Stars! Who can tell the Marvels that Wait the Bold Adventurer in the Limitless Ether? There are Adventures, Dangers, and Triumphs, too. Incredible to Mortal Man! Your Chance to Experience Them, Chums, is in the Vivid, Forceful Chapters Below!

By EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.

The Great Invention.

IT came down from the stars—a thing of gleaming metal, bristling with strange, scientific contrivances yet possessed of neither planes nor propellers. A crowd of schoolboys gasped at the magic of the wonder machine's flight and, when it reached *terra firma*, came in a bunch to investigate the phenomenon.

Professor Roxley Drewe and Sir Clarence Bagshot met them on board and chatted with Mr. Jerome Mannering, the popular Fourth Form master, while Barry Drewe, the Professor's nephew, proudly conducted his chums, Don Masters and the Hon. Freddie Trevor, on a tour of inspection.

"But—but how does the blessed thing work?" demanded George Freeman, leader of "The Firm" at Castleton School.

The Professor was now explaining to Sir Bags and Jerry, as the knight and the schoolmaster nicknamed each other, this very secret.

"By harnessing wonderful forces from the ether, I can reduce the earth's attraction to nil and travel in any direction I care to direct," he was saying, when there came a dramatic interruption. Count Popandos, a sinister-looking foreigner, appeared, and before any of the three could stop him, he dragged at a lever near the Professor's hand. It snapped off short. Simultaneously the aerial monster gave a tremendous lurch and shot heavenwards, throwing the juniors gathered on her decks to their faces.

To the voyagers' intense joy, they were able to make a safe landing on the planet, Venus.

Shouts of anger and amazement left their lips when, after journeying back to the *Solar Rover*, they found Count Popandos in command of the wonder flyer.

With a mocking wave of the hand, Popandos sent the *Solar Rover* hurtling upwards—but not before Barry Drewe and Freeman had managed to clutch at one of the great tractors and so gained the deck.

They leapt upon the Count, but bribed members of the crew overpowered the daring youngsters, and they were incarcerated below. When they had become used to the darkness, they found they were not alone. Three queer forms confronted them. They were Puggy Dibble, Royce and Hoskins—stowaways from Castleton School!

And then exploring their prison, the youngsters came upon a trap-door—a road to freedom!

The adventurers left on Venus were at that moment facing terrible danger. Captured by giant bat-men they were taken to the strange beings' stronghold—caves in the face of a great cliff. It seemed they were doomed . . .

In a bid for escape the adventurers came out on a rocky ledge—to see the *Solar Rover* swooping towards them. Freeman and Barry had regained command, and they took their comrades back to safety.

The *Solar Rover* flew on—to find, on the other side of the mysterious planet, a wonderful city with grotesque buildings towering for thousands of feet in the air.

Shocks and surprises crowded one on another. The Venusians were ruled by an earthly monarch—Hudson Jeff, who had left Kansas ten years ago in a projectile. He had taught the Venusians American!

And then, returning to the *Rover*, the greatest surprise of all startled the adventurers. Count Popandos had got free.

The rascally plotter in his flight from the *Rover* suddenly met Hudson Jeff, and introduced himself as the real inventor of the star ship. With a queer glint in his eyes the American agreed to capture the voyagers.

While this was happening Puggy Dibble and Co. were in a sad plight. After stealing some Venusian food they were taken ill and collapsed, apparently lifeless.

Not Dead After All.

WITH alarm and consternation, the other Castleton boys stared down at the still figures of Cyril Dibble, Claude Leslie Royce and Alfred Biggs Hoskins. The unhappy trio were utterly still—and their sudden collapse had not only been dramatic, but significant. They had not been eating Venusian food—and this was the result!

"Are they—dead?" asked Billy Ward, in an awed voice.

"I'm blessed if I know," said Jefferson, looking rather pale. "They were all right a minute ago, and then they suddenly fell down, and—"

"Here comes old Bags," interrupted Frank Mason, with relief. "Hi! Bags! Something's happened to these three chaps. Quick! We want you!"

Sir Bags and Professor Drewe and Mr. Mannering were hurrying up, accompanied by Barry Drewe and Don Masters and one or two of the other juniors. They had found the men and had told them that Count Popandos had escaped. And Sir Bags, in fact, was now hastening back to the *Rover* in order to strengthen the guard.

But Sir Bags himself and all the others now came hurrying across to the spot where Puggy Dibble and Co. were lying so motionless.

"What's happened?" asked Sir Bags quickly, as he knelt by Puggy's side.

"Why, they were eating some Venusian food, sir," said Jefferson quickly. "They came out, shouting to us that it was ripping, and then all of a sudden they collapsed."

"This is dreadful," said the Professor, in alarm. "The boys have obviously poisoned themselves. They may be dead. Good gracious me! What possessed them to eat—"

"Keep your hair on, Prof!" grinned Sir Bags, as he looked up. "There's nothing much the matter with these youngsters. They're drugged."

"What?" shouted several of the other boys. "Well, that's what it seems like, anyhow," said Sir Bags. "Their hearts are perfectly normal, and as far as I can see, that food contained a powerful drug of some kind. It acted suddenly—and caused them to lose consciousness. I don't think it will really harm them."

And at that moment Mr. Hudson Zeff came up, carrying a stone vessel containing some kind of liquid.

"You'd best let me deal with these boys," he said briskly. "I've heard about them—and this stuff will soon bring them round. The Venusian food is quite wholesome, but these creatures thrive on different food to humans. Some of the vegetable substances they eat contain the most potent drugs and poisons. I guess these boys will soon be O.K."

And, sure enough, after Hudson Zeff had forced some of the liquid into the throats of the three unfortunates they showed signs of recovering.

"You'd best quit sampling these Venusian eatables," said Hudson Zeff, drily. "They're none too healthy."

"But wasn't there some talk of a grand banquet this evening, Mr. Zeff?" asked Sir Bags, politely.

"Sure!" agreed Hudson Zeff, nodding. "But I guess that'll be a different proposition, stranger. I've lived on this globe for eleven years now, and I know just what's good for me. You can be quite sure that all the food at this evening's banquet will be of the right kind."

"We have plenty of stores on the *Rover*—"

began the Professor.

"No, sir," interrupted Hudson Zeff. "This is

my picnic, if you don't mind. I'll give you a taste of good, wholesome Venusian foodstuffs. You'll have no cause to complain."

Not a word did Hudson Zeff say about Count Popandos, or of his encounter with the Greek regue. He kept that incident entirely to himself.

And while Sir Bags was giving certain crisp orders to the crew of the *Rover*, Puggy Dibble and Co. recovered. Indeed, their recovery was almost as speedy as their collapse. But they were determined that one taste of Venusian food was enough for them.

And then a diversion was created by the sudden appearance of the Firm. The Hon. Freddie was the first to catch sight of them, and he clutched at Barry Drewe's arm, and swayed slightly.

"Good g'ad!" he ejaculated. "Do you see what I can see, old chestnut? I mean to say, this is a bit too muh to spring on a chappie without warning."

The others yelled with laughter. Messrs. Freeman, Hardy & Willis Limited were a comic-looking trio. They had discarded their own clothing, and were now attired in Venusian garb. It didn't fit them anywhere—which was not surprising, since the majority of these queer Venusian people were much bigger than the human beings. Moreover, they possessed those wings, and the clothing was made accordingly.

George Freeman rather thought that he looked impressive as he came striding across the big square towards the *Solar Rover*. But Hardy and Willis were a utely conscious of their ludicrous appearance. Those tunics were hanging loosely round their figures, and the discomfort was abominable. Although the fabric looked soft and silky, it was excessively irritating to the skin, and only a fellow of Freeman's obstinate determination could have worn the stuff without flinching.

"What's the idea of this, you ass?" asked Barry, with a chuckle, as the Firm arrived.

"In honour of the Venusians," said Freeman promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I rather think they can do without honours of this kind," said Sir Bags, drily. "Just you three go back and get into your own togs. What next? You look too awful for words!"

"We feel too awful for words, sir," said Willis, unhappily.

"Yes, but look here—" began Freeman.

"Either we all wear this Venusian get-up, or none of us does," said Sir Bags. "And I'm jolly certain that the rest of us are quite content to potter along in our own rig-out. So that's that!"

"But we want to create an impression at this banquet, sir," protested Freeman, obstinately.

"Very likely—but we don't want to create an impression of this sort," replied Sir Clarence, with a grin, as he nodded towards Freeman's clothing. "Besides, I want all you boys together—as quickly as possible. There's something I've got to tell you—something on the strict Q.T. And it's highly necessary that you shall all be wearing your ordinary clothing—because the pockets are important."

All the juniors looked at Sir Bags curiously.

"Why, what do you mean, sir?" asked Hardy.

"Never mind now," replied Bags calmly. "When you've made yourselves look like human beings again I'll explain. But I'll only repeat that it's important."

And as the Firm hurried off to recover their own clothing, they had a vague sort of an idea that Sir Bags had something more than a brawny arm up his sleeve.

Hudson Zeff's Bombshell.

THE White House—Mr. Hudson Zeff's Presidential residence—proved to be an imposing marble edifice, built on exactly the same lines as all these other Venusian structures. It wasn't even white, but that was only a detail. For it was clear that Mr. Zeff had named his residence after the celebrated White House at Washington, U.S.A.

The banquet proved to be an occasion of wonder and delight.

All the members of the earth-party were there, except half-a-dozen of the crew, who had been placed on guard. Several of the *Rover's* officers were included in the banqueting party, and Mr. Hudson Zeff was an extraordinarily entertaining host. The food proved to be both quaint and enjoyable. In many ways it resembled earth food—for Mr. Hudson Zeff had taught his Venusian servants a good many tricks in the culinary art. And there were certain roots and plants on Venus which were edible to human beings.

There was not the slightest hint that anything was amiss until the banquet was nearly over. It was still broad daylight although the sun was sinking low in the sky. The feasting chamber was a great marble apartment, with many of those open window spaces. The great table was of solid marble, too, and the eating utensils were of the simplest.



TOPPING TOGS—WHAT!—The others yelled with laughter. The three Fifth-formers were a comical-looking trio. They had discarded their own clothing, and were now attired in Venusian garb.

Hudson Zeff sat at the head of the table, and he kept up a running flow of talk, telling his guests of

the many peculiar features of Venus, and of the struggles he had had "humanising" these strange flying bat-men. It had been a long and patient task, and Mr. Zeff was apparently well satisfied with the result of his efforts.

"I am content here," he went on, looking round at his guests with a strange gleam in his eyes. "I am the lord and master of everything. I am the President of Venusville—the supreme Boss. Except for the hours of darkness, the life on this planet is all that I could desire. I have no wish to return to earth—I have no longing to see the strife-ridden world again. Here, in Venus, I am happy."

"But why did you except the hours of darkness?" asked Professor Roxley Drewe.

"The darkness?" repeated Hudson Zeff. "There are many things on Venus that are most mystifying and terrifying. There will be time to tell you of these things later. For the moment, there is something that must be made clear to you. In fact, I will put it quite bluntly, my friend," added Hudson Zeff, in quite a casual tone. "It is this. You are all my prisoners."

Just for a moment there was a tense silence.

"Prisoners?" whispered Don Masters. "What does he mean?"

Sir Clarence Bagshott leaned over the marble table.

"Prisoners?" he said, looking straight at Hudson Zeff. "What do you mean by that, Mr. Zeff?"

"Surely my meaning is obvious!" said the President of Venusville. "I have made up my mind to keep you here—on this planet."

"But—but this is preposterous!" said the Professor, half-rising. "You cannot mean what you say, sir!"

"But I do mean it."

"Let's get this quite clear," said Sir Bags, coolly. "We're your prisoners, Mr. Zeff—and you mean to keep us on this planet—for ever?"

"Until you die!" nodded Hudson Zeff, his voice taking on a new note, and his eyes glittering with a



maddened light. "Make no mistake, my friends. I am not talking wildly—I am not acting in this way for amusement. I am telling you, quite plainly, that you will never return to the earth!"

During the last few moments Hudson Zeff had dropped all his slang expressions. He was now talking in the way of a cultured American—that is to say, he was using perfect English. It had pleased him, hitherto, to adopt a certain amount of slang. But now he was serious—he was in deadly earnest—and he had no time for "effects."

"Of course you cannot mean what you say," said Professor Drewe, coldly. "You have no reason for keeping us here, Mr. Zeff. We have done you no harm, and we are peaceful—"

"One moment," interrupted Hudson Zeff. "You say I have no reason for keeping you here. But I say I have. An excellent reason—a reason that will become obvious to you after I have explained matters. You have succeeded in getting to Venus across the vast intervening space—and this vessel of yours will enable you to get safely back to the earth. Is that not so?"

"Well, we hope to get back," said the Professor. "There is no certainty, of course, but with my ship there is at least a great likelihood—"

"Enough, sir!" interrupted the host, rising to his feet and standing there, a mishapen monstrosity of a man. "Enough! You know perfectly well

that you can return to earth. And, what is more, if one of these space-ships can be built, a hundred can be built. A thousand—a hundred thousand!"

"Yes, but—" "Listen to me!" thundered the hunchback. "What is the greatest curse on earth to-day? Conquest—conquest! Always conquest! As you all know, there is scarcely a foot of land on the earth that has not been explored—and exploited. What is there left? Africa—Brazil—Australia—Borneo—the very wilds of the earth. All have been explored—all have been commercially utilised. Before long the people of the earth will be looking for new worlds to conquer. And where will they come? They will come into Outer Space—to the planets."

"But this is sheer nonsense!" said Sir Bags, amusedly. "In five hundred years, perhaps—or in a thousand years—something of this sort may happen. But not to-day Mr. Zeff. You cannot possibly imagine—"

"I imagine nothing," interrupted Hudson Zeff. "And I take no chances. You have come to Venus on this airship of yours—and on Venus you will remain."

And there was something in his voice which caused all those guests of his to experience a tinge of—fear.

Another Surprise.

PROFESSOR ROXLEY DREWE uttered a short laugh.

"Of course, Mr. Zeff, you cannot be serious," he said. "You do not really intend to keep us here."

"Can I possibly be plainer?" demanded Hudson Zeff, passionately. "My mind is made up. You talk of these things happening in a thousand years' time? Why should not they happen within ten years? As I said before, if one airship can be built, a hundred thousand of them are equally possible. And if you return to earth I shall never know peace again. Always I shall be looking into the sky, expecting a host of earth-ships, come hither in conquest. And do you think my Venusians could battle against such an invasion? They are peaceful creatures—with no knowledge of warfare. They have served me well; they have proved faithful. I shall not submit them to any such dangers. And my only certainty of everlasting peace is to keep you here. And to this end I have evolved a scheme."

He turned, and made a motion to a number of Venusians who were hovering about in the background.

"Keep steady, boys!" murmured Sir Bags, glancing up and down the startled faces of the juniors. "We may be in a tight fix, but I shall soon know for certain. Do nothing until I give the word. And keep cool."

"All right, sir," breathed Barrv. "Trust us." "Rather!" said Freeman, tensely. "But if we don't do something pretty quickly it may be too late."

"Trust old Bags!" said Willis, in a confident voice. "He won't let us in the cart."

All eyes were attracted, at this moment, by the arrival of Count Alexis Popandos. He was brought in, bound hand and foot, in the grip of several Venusians. The Count was looking startled—frightened—enraged.

"What is the meaning of this?" he snarled, as he caught sight of Hudson Zeff. "Have I not told you that these men are liars? Have I not explained—"

"It is you who are the liar, Count Popandos!" interrupted Hudson Zeff contemptuously. "Did

you think that I was deceived by your rigmarole of falsehood? I knew, from the very moment you opened your mouth, that you were a rogue! These gentlemen have already told me of your villainy, and I have decided that there is only one possible punishment for you."

"Are you mad?" panted the Count, white to the lips.

"You desired to secure possession of the *Solar Rover*, did you not?" went on Hudson Zeff, whimsically. "It was your own wish, eh? Well, I guess you'll have it granted now. For, Count Popandos, I am going to place you on board the *Rover*—alone! And I am going to send you into Outer Space—alone!"

"No, no!" screamed the Count. "You are talking madness."

"By jiggery, the Count's right for once," muttered Freeman. "It is madness! What does old Zeff mean? How can he send Count Popandos into Outer Space—alone?"

"Shush!" breathed Barrv. "There's something awful about this, you chaps!"

"Absolutely!" murmured the Hon. Freddie.

They all held their breaths; they all stared at Hudson Zeff. The situation was dramatic—tense. And it had come so suddenly, too. Five minutes earlier the banquet had been pleasant, genial, enjoyable. Now there was a feeling of deadly peril in the air.

"I have a double motive for dealing with you in this way, Count," went on the ruler of Venus. "It is fitting that you should be punished for all your crimes. And what better punishment, under all the circumstances, than to send you hurtling into Outer Space, in the sole possession of the very ship that you have plotted so strenuously to obtain possession of?"

"I'd like to point out," said Sir Bags, "that we're rather interested in that airship, too, Mr. Zeff."

Hudson Zeff spun round on him. "You've said it, my friend," he agreed. "You all have an interest in the *Rover*. But what of me? Have I not already told you my plans? Have I not explained my objection to your returning to earth? Count Popandos is to be taken to the *Rover*—at once—and he will be imprisoned in one of the lounges, or cabins. It has already been explained to me how the mechanism is worked. Professor Drewe was kind enough to show me the various levers."

"Fool!" panted Professor Roxley Drewe. "Fool that I was!"

"That control lever—the one that is most vital—will be pulled over, and the *Rover* will go shooting forth into the vast illimitability of outer Space," continued Hudson Zeff. "And thus I shall kill my two birds with the one stone. I shall rid myself of Count Popandos, whom I despise, and I shall assure myself of the lifelong society of all you gentlemen and youngsters, whom I respect. Could anything be better? Furthermore, there will be no possibility of invasion from earth."

Count Popandos struggled madly to get himself free.

"You cannot do this," he screamed. "It is murder—"

"Nonsense!" said Hudson Zeff. "Did you not always desire to gain full control of the *Rover*? Well, Count, you are to be placed on board, with none other to worry you. And once you are set in motion on that ship you will go on for ever and ever—always flying through space—always flying onwards, to the very limits of eternity!"



And Hudson Zeff laughed amusedly to himself. But it was a laugh that sounded like a horrible knell for all his listeners.

The Only Chance.

THERE was something so grim—so unutterably purposeful—about Hudson Zeff that none of his guests doubted that he meant all he had said.

This strange creature—this misshapen hunchback—was not exactly mad. There was, after all, certain twisted logic behind his plan. He did not want to return to earth—and small wonder, considering his hideous, pitiful figure. He was, indeed, only a caricature of a man. It was not surprising that he desired to remain on Venus, in sole control of all his thousands of bat-men. He was the ruler of the race—the supreme lord of all he surveyed. On earth, should he return, he would obtain fame and fortune. But Hudson Zeff had grown into such a lover of Venus that he did not want to leave this planet. Neither did he want hosts of human beings to come here in conquest. His only safe way was to prevent these adventurers from returning.

And his plan for sending the *Solar Rover* hurtling into Outer Space was a simple one—and easy to accomplish.

But Sir Clarence Bagshott had been doing some quick thinking during the past few minutes.

Bags knew that the only possible way of retrieving the situation was to act now. Within a minute or two it might be too late. And Bags was ever a man for action. He suddenly sprang to his feet, one hand diving into his side coat pocket.

"Now, boys!" he shouted. "Now, Professor and Jerry! The bombs! Quick! Let them have them!"

And immediately afterwards an amazing thing occurred.

There was a loud explosion, a great puff of dense smoke, and a chorus of queer, animal-like cries from the Venusians. Sir Bags had flung a smoke-bomb, and it had exploded with terrific effect right in front of Hudson Zeff! Dense, impenetrable clouds of smoke arose.

STRANGE STEEDS.—The "Solar Rover" was being pulled bodily along, dragged over the ground by sheer strength. And in order that this feat could be accomplished hundreds of strange creatures were being pressed into commission.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Three other explosions came simultaneously, and Sir Bags was yelling at the top of his voice.

"This way!" he roared. "Keep together, everybody! If we lose sight of one another in this fog we're lost. Come on—I know the way out!"

The boys were tremendously excited, but fortunately they kept all together. And, in the confusion and hubbub, they succeeded in getting to one of the big openings in the marble wall, and in another moment they were outside, in the glowing sunset.

"Quick!" yelled Sir Bags. "To the *Rover*!"

"Upon my soul, Clarence, this is wonderful!" panted the Professor, breathlessly.

"Never mind about it being wonderful," snapped Bags. "Our very lives depend upon our speed."

A quick glance assured him that all the members of the party were present. Billowing clouds of smoke were coming out from the White House, but there was no sign, as yet, of any of the Venusians. They were confused, bewildered—frightened. There was no pursuit so far.

"It's a bit thick, treating our host like that—but he asked for it," went on Bags, as they raced along. "Jolly lucky thing we brought those smoke-bombs with us, eh?"

"It was your idea, Bags," said Jerry Mannering. "It might mean the saving of us!"

"It was a brainwave, sir!" said Barry, tensely.

They well remembered how Sir Bags had called them aside before they had left the *Rover*. He had handed round to all the boys a number of the tiny smoke-bombs. He had told them to put them in their pockets, and to forget all about them—until they received the word. In all probability they would never be wanted—but Sir Bags, who had been in many a tight corner, always believed in the policy of "safety first." Precautions, as he had said, cost nothing.

Those smoke-bombs were very effective. They were hardly any bigger than hens' eggs, and every junior had carried several in his pockets.

I don't suppose we shall have to use 'em," Sir Bags had said. "but we can never be sure. We want to be on the right side. We're in a strange

land—and amongst a strange lot of cattle. If we have to get back to the Rover quickly, and without kissing anybody good-bye, they may come in handy."

And, as events were proving, Sir Clarence Bagshot's precautions had been timely.

As the fugitives ran they hurled bombs in their rear, and to their left and to their right. The quiet evening air was full of the sudden booming explosions, and the air, in the rear, was becoming choked with the yellowish fog. Overhead, hundreds of Venusians were wheeling round, screaming with terror, and showing every sign of confusion and dismay.

They swung round another of the great towering buildings, and at last they went surging into the central square, where the Rover had been left in charge of the guards.

And then suddenly Baxy Drewe uttered a loud shout, and pointed.

"The Rover's gone!"

And Sir Bags came to a sudden halt, his very senses reeling. For the centre of that great square was empty. The Solar Rover had vanished!

The Sign in the Sky.

DURING these first throbbing, agonising seconds the adventurers were stunned. For they knew in a flash. They had been tricked—duped. While they had been banqueting in the White House, guests of Hudson Zeff, their host had caused the Solar Rover to be spirited away!

But how?

By what extraordinary trick had this thing been accomplished? Never for a moment did Bags doubt that the men who had been left on guard had been overpowered and rendered helpless. If otherwise, those guards would have given a warning, by firing one of the Rover's guns. Sir Bags, indeed, had arranged for that signal to be given.

But no sound had been heard, proving clearly that the guards had been overpowered swiftly and unexpectedly.

But where was the Rover now? How could these Venusians have taken that great vessel away?

"We are lost!" shouted Professor Drewe, in anguish. "What has become of my ship?"

Sir Bags looked round, his eyes keen, his powerful face eloquent of coolness and determination.

"Steady, Prof!" he said quietly. "We don't want to get into a panic. It's pretty clear what's happened. Zeff thought it as well to have the Rover removed, in case there was a hitch. But she can't be far off, that's certain. And I rather fancy we can guess in which direction she lies."

"But how?" asked Mr. Mannering quickly.

"Look!" replied Bags, pointing.

And all eyes were turned in the direction of his pointing finger. There, in the sky, not very far distant were hundreds of wheeling Venusians, circling about in formation. There was something beautiful in their appearance as they wheeled in the sunset. But just at the moment the explorers had no eye for beauty.

The Venusian sunset was marvellously glorious. Nothing on earth had ever been seen like it. It was staggering in its sheer wonder. The whole sky was ablaze—a livid, flickering, stupendous blaze of red and orange and heliotrope and purple. Great shooting beams of light stretched upwards from the sunset, like a magnificent example of the aurora borealis.

And against that background flew the flocks of Venusians. It was unbelievably impressive.

But why were those Venusians flying out there in such numbers? Was it because the Solar Rover was on the ground beneath them? Were they an escort? At least it seemed a likely supposition, and one well worth following.

"Come on!" roared Bags, as he glanced in the rear. "The beggars are after us. Quick, you chaps! Run for it!"

"Oh, corks!" panted Puggy Dibble. "We're going to be collared—and murdered!"

"Dry up!" shouted Freeman. "We're all in the same boat, and we don't want any croakers."

"Hear, hear!" yelled Don Masters. "Never say die."

And on they rushed, these Castleton schoolboys, as cool and as reliable as any of the men. Puggy Dibble and his two companions were the only weaklings. And they were sustained by the courage of the others.

In the rear, flocks of the Venusians were coming along, most of them in the air. But there seemed little chance that they would make any attack. Hudson Zeff was coming, too—carried along in that peculiar sedan-chair of his—that flying crane.

The fugitives ran as they had never run before. As yet there was no certainty that they would come within sight of the Rover. They were running blindly, madly. But it was the only thing to be done. To stand still was pointless. Now and again a smoke-bomb would be hurled, and the sudden explosion and the great puff of yellowish smoke served to keep the Venusians at a distance.

"Hurrah!" croaked Barry Drewe, at last. "There she is! There's the Rover!"

"Oh, my only hat! So she is!"

"But look!" shouted Robin Hardy. "She's moving! And look what's pulling her!"

They had arrived at the top of a little rise, and there was a long slope below them, beyond the outskirts of the Venusian city. Down there, in the dusk, the outskirts of a great forest could be seen. The trees went towering up for thousands of feet, immense monarchs, vast, terrible giants.

But none of the adventurers gave more than a single glance at the forest. They were looking at the Solar Rover, two or three hundred yards ahead of them. And now they could see how that great vessel had been shifted. It was being pulled bodily along, dragged over the ground by sheer strength. And in order that this feat could be accomplished, hundreds of strange creatures were pressed into commission.

They appeared to be animals, quite as large as horses, but resembling rats, and yet, at the same time, looking very much like rabbits. They had ratlike noses, but long ears, and their hindquarters were unlike any animal on earth. These, apparently, were the domestic "animals" of Venus. And hundreds of them were in harness, pulling at the Rover, dragging her over the ground.

And then, at that moment, just as Sir Bags was about to lead his party on to the final dash, the whole sky seemed to flicker. The glorious lights dimmed, sprang into full glory again, and then dimmed again, to a pale, unearthly radiance.

And with that strange flickering came a chorus of screaming cries from the Venusians. They wheeled about and went scurrying back towards the city, alarmed and frightened.

What Phenomenon is Now Taking Place on Venus? And What Effect Will it Have on the Schoolboys Engaged in This Strange Quest in the Ether? Don't Miss Next Week's Solid Long Instalment of The Wonder Yarn, Chaps.