

WONDERFUL YARNS AND SURPRISES INSIDE

Boys' 2D

EVERY SATURDAY

Magazine



THE MYSTERY OF THE MANDARIN'S ISLAND

VOL. XXIII—No. 605—October 7, 1933

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BY CANADIAN MAGAZINE POST.

Make a B.M. Football Your "Goal"

THE JESTER'S REALM



Footballs and Fountain Pens awarded to senders of all jokes printed here. Send your favourite jokes on p.c. with coupon on this page to the Joke Editor, "Boys' Magazine," 195, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Burglar: Sorry, guv'nor, I shall want this pillow-case for this stuff.
(Football to RALPH PICKSTOCK, Kithn Cottage, Erbistock, nr. Wrexham, N. Wales.)

ROCK BOTTOM.

TEACHER: I told you to do a composition about your holidays this morning, and you spelt the long word, Llandudno, correctly in every place. Come and write it on the board now, and show the class how you can spell it.

BILLY: I can't—I've eaten all my rock!
(Fountain pen to N. PYRAK, 3, Imperial Road, Edgerton, Huddersfield, Yorkshire.)

JOKE COUPON.

Stick on postcard and send with your favourite joke to the JOKE EDITOR.

Boys' Magazine, 7/10/35.

DISSATISFIED.

DISSATISFIED FOOTBALLER: Look here, captain there are two players you've picked to play on Saturday who oughtn't to be in the side!

CAPTAIN: Oh, indeed! And who is the other?
(Fountain pen to W. M. MAIN, 5, Queen Street, Newton Stewart, Wigtownshire.)

ONE WIND.

The traffic was held up by a tiny motor-car that refused to restart. Over its honnet leant the owner, furiously cranking it, but all in vain.

"Hi, guv'nor!" called out a motor-bus driver. "Why don't you buy one of those eight-day ones?"
(Fountain pen to CLIFFORD GILBERT, 52, New-lan Road, Argoed, Blackwood, Mon.)

HIS MEDICINE.

BURGLAR (to companion during raid on chemist's shop): I'll take the cash. You'd better take something for that cold of yours!

(Fountain pen to C. CLAYTON, Stone Cottages, Drayton Penkridge, Staffs.)



Scotsman: How much do ye char-r-rgo to take people across the ferry?

Ferryman: A halfpenny.

Scotsman: An' have ye nae excur-r-r-r-sions?

(Football to WILLIAM UFFENDELL, 9, Stewart Terrace, Gorgie Road, Edinburgh.)

NOT RIGHT!

JOHNNIE: Please help me with this sum, Dad.

FATHER: No, my boy, it wouldn't be right.

JOHNNIE: You could have a try, anyway, Dad!
(Fountain pen to W. CH. HUGHES, Ty Fry, Penrhyn-deudrath, Merioneth, North Wales.)

A RECORD.

A young negro dashed down to the river as the ferry-boat was about to leave. Taking a terrific leap, he landed on deck in a heap. After lying there a little while, he got up and looked towards the shore, which by then was from sixty to eighty yards away. "Gee! Some leap!" he cried, astounded.

(Fountain pen to R. CROSIER, 15, Fairfield Road, Brentwood, Essex.)

CUTTING.

BARBER: Do you want a hair-cut, sonny?

CHEEKY LAD: A hair cut! I want the lot cut!

(Fountain pen to KENNETH BEER, George Street, Queen's Park, West Australia.)

PART CURE.

DOCTOR: Your recovery is largely due to your own powers of resistance.

SCOT: Then you won't be charging full fee!

(Fountain pen to BEVERLEY 94, Harlech Road, Dewsbury Road, Leeds 11.)

BOW-WOW!

OLD SAILOR: Hey, sonny, why are ye staring at me like that?

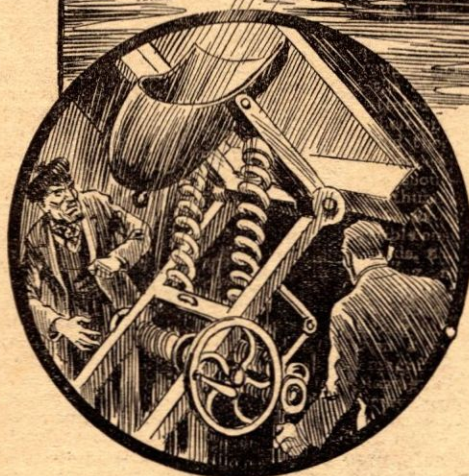
JIMMY: Well, mister, you told me you were an old sea-dog and I be a-waiting to hear ye bark.

(Fountain pen to BEVERLEY HESLOP GRIFFIN, 1, Hanbury Terrace, Barton Road, Tewkesbury, Glos.)

(With which is incorporated "Pals.")

BULLDOG HAMILTON'S MOST BIZARRE ADVENTURE ! Grand, Glorious, Superb—that's the Only Way to Describe This Thriller, chums.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MANDARIN'S ISLAND



A PAGODA OF PERIL ! The Steamy Mystic Atmosphere of the Orient brought to Britain by a Sinister Plotter. Why? The Answer is Told in the Tale of White-Hot Drama and Startlement Below. **IT'S A BULLDOG HAMILTON YARN, FELLOWS !**

The Death Call.

SIR ALAN McROSS sat rigid, alone at the head of the great table in the oak-panelled dining-hall of Rosstrevor Towers. Every scrap of colour had drained from his young face, and he was listening with an agony of intensity.

"The Death Call!" muttered Sir Alan hoarsely.

He was little more than a youngster, and on this bleak autumn evening it was the first time he had been alone since his father had died, three months before. For that day his uncle had been obliged to go to London on business.

Again came the cry, from somewhere out in the

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

night—a low, mysterious wail, shuddering away to silence. The door of the dining-room burst open, and a middle-aged man in the uniform of a butler staggered towards the table. His face was drawn and ashen.

"Did ye hear, Sir Alan?" he croaked. "'Twas the death call of the McRoss clan! Laddie, laddie! It sounded in like manner three months ago when your father..."

His voice trailed away and he fell in a limp heap. Alan sprang to his feet, and ran round the table.

"Hamish!" he cried.

But Hamish was in a dead faint, and after a moment's hesitation the sturdy Scottish lad,

strengthened by the sight of the man's weakness, ran to the great window and flung the curtains aside. He thrust the casement wide, and the cold, clammy mist, coming straight from the waters of Loch Rosstrevor, swept past his face. There was no repetition of the uncanny, mysterious call.

As Alan stood there, his back to the room, a sudden change came over Hamish. The man lifted his lined, dour face, and his eyes, charged with cunning and evil, surveyed the boy with mocking satisfaction. As Alan moved, the man fell silently back to his original position.

Alan quickly closed the casement, and then, with cold water, gently bathed the brow of his butler. At last Hamish showed signs of recovery, and when he opened his eyes they were full of dread.

"Get ye gone from this accursed house, laddie!" he muttered. "Have ye forgot how your poor father was took?"

"Easy, Hamish—easy!" said the lad sturdily. "I'm thinking that you're more frightened than I. Not that everything is as it should be," he added. "I'm suspicious of trickery, Hamish."

"Hoots! What are ye saying, laddie?" asked the other.

"Nothing—forget it!" replied Alan abruptly. "You're better now, Hamish? The other servants heard nothing? Good! Get you to bed."

Alone, Alan strode purposefully to the library and, sitting down at his father's desk, he wrote. He placed what he had written in a stout envelope with five shillings in silver. This he sealed, and two minutes later, clad in a heavy ulster, he was striding down the misty drive.

The night was damp, with a brooding stillness. So dense was the mist, that Alan could not see a yard in front of him; but he knew, by heart, the way along the desolate road to the stone pillar-box which stood at a junction, where another lane joined the highway. On his right rose the hills; on his left, now invisible, stretched the long expanse of Loch Rosstrevor.

He had covered scarcely more than half the distance when two black, mysterious figures closed in upon him from either side. Not until it was too late did he hear the faintest crunch of gravel. As he swung round, his senses rearing, his feet were swept from under him, and he went down on his back with a jarring crash. The letter was jerked from his hand, slewing off to the roadside, to fall in a clump of heather.

Crash! Something hard descended on the lad's head, and his limbs became limp. Not a word had been spoken. He was lifted and carried swiftly between the heather and gorse clumps, his captors leaving the road and making their way down the steep hillside towards an ancient stone hut on the loch-side. There was a tiny click as a key was turned in the lock of the stoutly built door. Entering, the mysterious men flung their victim into a sack and secured the top.

"Get ready!" muttered a guttural voice.

The sack, with its human contents, was placed in a kind of metal cradle; and at the same moment a large section of the roof slid back, allowing the mist to drift in. One man was working hard at a handle, and the soft clicking of an oiled ratchet hinted at mechanism.

Click—swooooooosh! An extraordinary thing happened. The metal cradle shot upwards and outwards through the opening in the sloping roof. Sir Alan was catapulted into the air with terrific force. Out he went into the darkness, soaring high above the black, dismal waters of the loch. The sack commenced to drop, not into the water, but in the

centre of a deeply wooded island, well out in the loch.

It seemed that the youngster must inevitably go to his death, for he was falling amongst the stark trees. . . . But there was a clearing, and, stretched high there, a great net. The living missile was caught neatly. Soon, the net was lowered, and clawlike hands seized the sack and bore it away—into the hidden, inky blackness of the trees.

Thus, within the space of minutes, young Sir Alan McRoss had been spirited completely away. Yet there was one thing which had been overlooked. . . .

IN the misty light of the early morning a rural postman trundled his bicycle laboriously along the rough road. As he was approaching the lonely pillar-box his eyes caught a glimpse of something white which rested in the heather. The man dismounted.

"Ma guidness!" he ejaculated, in wonder. For the letter was simply addressed to "Jock, the postman"—which was himself. He opened it and found a telegraph form within, also a short note written on the embossed paper of Rosstrevor Towers.

Dear Jock (the letter ran),—As you'll be the first man in the village in the morning, I want you to send off the enclosed telegram as soon as you get there. It will cost nearly four shillings. Five shillings enclosed—you can keep the balance for yourself. Thanks.

ALAN.

The postman, who had known Alan from a baby, frowned. He would have thought nothing if this note had been left in the pillar-box.

"Ah, weel, it doesna matter," decided Jock, with a shrug.

And with that he remounted and rode on—an unconscious instrument of justice.

Island of the Unknown.

MR. BULMER HAMILTON, Adventurer, was essentially a man of quick decisions and even quicker action. He received Alan McRoss's telegram while he was at breakfast, and within five minutes he was at the telephone, chartering a plane from Heston Aerodrome.

The telegram itself was as urgent as any Bulldog Hamilton had ever received:

Suspect my father met foul play. Death Call sounded again to-night. Please come at once.

ALAN McROSS.

Bulldog finished his breakfast in the deliberate way in which he did all things. Then he went to a great rack beside the fireplace and selected one of his favourite briars—a pipe with an enormous bowl. When this was filled and drawing to his satisfaction, he clamped it between his strong teeth and turned over the files of a leading London newspaper. He read the reports of the tragic death of Sir John McRoss, three months earlier.

"H'm! Might be something in my line," muttered the big man. "Anyhow, I'll take the chance."

It was a rainy, dismal day in London. Bad flying weather. But Bulldog Hamilton's chartered plane set off to the minute, and as it flew northwards the weather, if anything, grew worse. It was thus nearly evening when the Adventurer reached his destination.

He left the plane at the nearest aerodrome, which was over thirty miles away from Rosstrevor Towers. In a hired car he completed the journey—to find the Towers in a minor ferment owing to the strange disappearance of its young master.

"Tis a mystery, sir," said Hamish, the butler, as he spoke with the unexpected visitor in the hall. "It seems that young Sir Alan must have left the house in the early morning."

"The death call sounded last night, did it not?" demanded Bulldog.

"Hoots!" ejaculated Hamish, a startled light coming into his eyes. "How did ye know, sir? Ay, it sounded—and I heard it with my own ears."

"Was Sir Alan seen this morning by you, or anybody else of the household?" went on the adventurer.

"No, sir."

"Then how do you know he didn't disappear during the night?"

"His bed was slept in, sir," replied Hamish, his eyes dropping before the steady gaze of the powerful six-footer who faced him. "He bade me good night at the top of yon stairs last night," he added, pointing.

"I will wait," said Bulldog shortly.

"I shouldna do that, sir," said Hamish. "The young master didna expect visitors—"

"No?" interrupted Bulldog. "Yet he sent me a telegram this morning, urging me to come straight down."

Hamish changed colour—for this was the first he had heard of any telegram. But he made no comment and he was just as silent when Bulldog abruptly replaced his hat and took his departure.

The Adventurer's powerful jaw was grimly squared as he got back into his car. His first act, now, was to make inquiries at the telegraph office in the village, two miles distant. From there he was directed to the cottage of Jock, the postman. Such was his power of persuasion that Jock was soon in his car,

jutting out like a tree-branch from his face, settled down to an investigation.

No ordinary man would have read anything on that hard road surface, or in the rank grass which grew between the clumps of heather. But Bulldog's trained eye was soon rewarded. Leaving the road, he made his way down the hillside towards the bleak, cold-looking rock. His gaze was fastened to the ground, and he walked slowly and deliberately. There, written before him, he could see the trail. Already, he was reconstructing what had happened—aided by the knowledge that Alan's telegram had been found in the heather.

At last, the trail took him to the stone hut on the shore of the loch. An examination of that dwelling intrigued him, for it was no ordinary edifice. The walls were solid, the door was like that of a strong-room.

He stood there, gazing out across the misty water. Vaguely, he could see an island almost in the loch's centre. Not in any spot could Bulldog detect a break in the trees that grew thickly to the very water's edge. A grim, lonely island, apparently deserted.

"Huh!" grunted the Adventurer. He turned abruptly and strode back to the lonely highway. By chance he met an aged shepherd, a man with crinkled face and wearing a faded, weather-beaten tam-o'-shanter. The old fellow saluted respectfully, and gave Bulldog good-evening.

"Who owns the island out yonder?" demanded Bulldog, pointing.

"Why, 'tis the home of Old Tam, y'ken," said the shepherd. "Nae doot ye'll be from the Polis, sir? It's bad news, I'm thinking, aboot the young laird—"

"Who is Old Tam?" interrupted Bulldog, brusquely.

He soon obtained the information. Old Tam was



A LIVING PREY.—The steel arms swung the adventurer out over the stream. Suddenly they released their grip and Bulldog was dropping towards the cruel jaws of the alligators.

and they went to the exact spot where the message had been lying in the heather.

"Good!" said Bulldog, in his abrupt way. "That's all I need from you, my friend. Can I rely upon you to go back home and keep quiet about my activities?"

Jock was ready enough to keep quiet, for there was something about this burly, square-jawed man which inspired his confidence. The postman trudged away into the gathering mist, and Bulldog, his great briar

a lonely Scottish farmer who had long since retired, and for years he had lived in an old house on the outskirts of the village. Two years ago, however, he had purchased Rostrevor Island and, building himself a lonely house in the centre of it, he had retired there to live the life of a lonely recluse.

Bulldog Hamilton was looking more grim than ever when he heard this news, and with a curt nod he left his informant and walked on up to Rostrevor Towers. He was admitted by Hamish, and, with

characteristic abruptness, he went into action. In attempting to hang his hat on the hallstand he stumbled clumsily, crashed against Hamish, and bowled the man over. As Bulldog bent down he caught a clear view of the butler's shoe-soles.

"Sorry!" grunted the Adventurer. "Very careless of me." The butler was on his feet now, and Bulldog seized him by the shoulder. "Better tell me the truth, Hamish. Last night your young master went for a walk and you followed him."

"No, sir," gasped Hamish, pale to the lips. "Ye're dreamin'—"

"Don't lie to me!" thundered Bulldog. "You went with Sir Alan to the shore of the loch. What happened there? Out with it, you treacherous hound!"

His threatening manner, his uncanny knowledge of the truth, reduced Hamish to a shivering, abject figure. But the man fiercely maintained his innocence and at last, with a laugh, Bulldog Hamilton let him go.

"You'll do, Hamish!" he said coolly. "Forget this. I was just testing you, that's all."

The man, his terror gone, quickly recovered himself and he protested, in an aggrieved tone, at the treatment he had received. But Bulldog only laughed again.

"I'll be staying in the village," he said shortly. "To-morrow, perhaps, your young master will be home. I'll call in the morning."

Without another word he went—leaving Hamish, as he had intended, torn with doubt and worry. The Adventurer did not go far. In the deep dusk he waited behind the cover of some stunted bushes. He expected some action by Hamish—for he had deliberately thrown a scare into the man. Sure enough, within ten minutes the butler appeared, heavily cloaked, and made off across the grounds in the direction of the loch.

By the time Bulldog reached the water's edge, Hamish was well out on the loch, pulling steadily at the oars of a squat boat. Both boat and man vanished into the rising mist.

"So that's that," muttered Bulldog contentedly. "The truth, then, lies on the island."

He removed his overcoat and placed it under a clump of heather—but not until he had placed in the pockets every article which could have given a clue to his identity. On his person he retained nothing but his gun and a water-tight box in which he kept his tobacco and pipe.

These preparations being completed, he plunged into the icy water of the loch, and swam with powerful strokes towards the now invisible island. His constitution was of iron, and a swim like this did not even inconvenience him. It was all in the day's work.

When at length he pulled himself out of the water, he found that his first impression of the island was short of the truth. It was even more densely wooded than he had supposed. The trees grew closely together, and, at their base, they were choked with tangled undergrowth and reeking masses of dead and rotting leaves.

Somewhere, of course, there would be a pathway through this wilderness, but Bulldog preferred to keep to the untrodden woods; and to a man of his strength and determination, the forcing of a passage was not difficult. Foot by foot, and with the silence of a Red Indian on the trail, he moved towards the island's centre.

Breaking suddenly through the disordered tangle he came upon a scene which caused him to stand and gaze, startled beyond measure. Darkness had not yet completely fallen, and in the gloomy, misty dusk he saw a structure of Oriental picturesqueness, with

curving roof and eaves, painted pillars and quaint windows. There were strange gardens, too, and a wide brook, bridged in one place, surrounded the astonishing dwelling. It seemed to Bulldog that mist, or steam, was rising lazily from the brook. But there was something else. . . . some familiar chord was touched in Bulldog's memory . . .

"By the living James!" he ejaculated in amazement.

With only slight variations, that scene was the exact representation of the well-known "Willow-pattern" so commonplace on dinner ware! Everything was there—the pagoda-like house, the quaint trees, the water, and the trellis-work humped bridge. Only the human figures of the "willow-pattern" scene were lacking.

Not a light was showing from the pagoda—this house to which Old Tam, the Scottish farmer had retired. As the Adventurer moved cautiously forward, making a closer inspection, he saw that the brook was of such width that no man could jump it. Over all brooded an ominous, uncanny silence. It seemed to Bulldog that the very temperature, near the pagoda, was higher by many degrees. The whole place reeked of stagnant rot—and something else. Something vile and loathsome.

As the intruder paused near the picturesque bridge, he thought he detected, out of the corner of his eye, a swirling eddy of movement in the waters of the brook. His ears caught a slither of sound, at once horrible and mysterious. But when he turned his gaze in that direction, he saw only a mass of vapour rising sluggishly to join the Scottish mist.

"Ugh!" muttered Bulldog. "What infernal place have I found here?"

He removed his empty pipe and thrust it into his pocket. Then, with one hand on the butt of his gun, he advanced up the steep steps of the narrow bridge. He moved across, reached the centre and was in the act of gazing down into the steaming vapour when he felt something "give" under his foot. Instantly, a metallic click sounded, and before Bulldog could dodge back, the bamboo-like balustrades of the bridge, on either side, shot towards him. In that second he was gripped as in a vice, and he knew that the bamboo was a fake. Actually, the balustrade rails were made of steel.

But this was not the end. As he was gripped tightly in that cold embrace another mechanical movement followed. The bars hinged abruptly out, sweeping the Adventurer off the bridge, until he dangled, feet first, over the waters of the brook. Then the steel arms swept apart, and Bulldog dropped like a stone.

Splash! The Adventurer plunged into a thick, oozing mass of slimy water; but instead of the cold shock he expected, the water was positively hot! This then, was the explanation of the steam. And there was something else . . .

From Bulldog's left came a swirl, and something slapped the water dully. He caught sight of an object which looked like a rotten, floating log. Another was drifting up on his right. One of the logs split in half, and a nauseous, sickening breath swept into Bulldog's face. He saw rows of terrible teeth. . . . And then he knew the truth.

He was at grips with alligators!

The Mysterious Celestial.

ALLIGATORS on a peaceful island in a loch amid the Scottish Highlands! The thing was incredible.

The creatures were of giant size, and they came at their victim hungrily. The deadly teeth of one gator snapped within an inch of Bulldog's arm, and

but for his lightning-like movement that limb would have been bitten clean off. *Crash!* With all his force, Bulldog sent his clenched fist into the snout of the brute, and it plunged sulkily beneath the sticky surface.

But another monster was attacking, and only in



THE DEATH SLIDE.—"When the minute hand passes the quarter mark," purred Wu Changfoo, "the rope will slip off and you will be food for my little pet."

the nick of time did Bulldog fling himself round to meet the razor-toothed jaws. With great daring he leapt; his two feet landed on the tip of the alligator's lower jaw, and at the same moment he gripped the

upper jaw with his bare hands. He exerted his full strength, keeping the monster's jaws wide open for a moment. Twisting round, he leapt, and gained the creature's back.

As it dived, Bulldog hurled himself towards the inner bank, narrowly missing the outstretched jaws of another 'gator. One foot caught against the weed-infested bank, and he managed to maintain his balance. The next second he was on dry land, and only by a miracle, it seemed, did he haul himself to safety. The alligators were unable to follow owing to the steepness of the bank. The Adventurer flung himself down in the grass, breathing hard.

He quickly recovered, and rose to his feet. A little to his left and leading to the pagoda, there was a neat paved pathway, towards which he stepped. Still there was no sign of life from within that strange building.

But somehow Bulldog felt that eyes were watching him. He sensed a lurking danger, and never had his wits been more alert.

Reaching the path, he advanced cautiously towards the house. Alert as he was, expectant of traps, so cunningly was the next one set that he was in it before he could draw back. He stumbled over an invisible wire, and the instant he sprawled on the path, steel prongs, in a perfect network, leapt over and about him, imprisoning him in a low cage, which held him prone to the ground.

"Unbidden guests, my good friend, meet with disaster on this island," said a soft, soothing voice. "I regret to see you in such an undignified attitude. I am, indeed, desolated."

Bulldog looked up through the bars of his strange prison to see a tall man in a loose Oriental robe of silk. With him were two others—one was Hamish, and the other, a sour-faced old man, was undoubtedly Old Tam, the recluse.

"We must obtain a better look at you," continued the impassive Chinaman. "A man who can escape from my first protective trap, and elude the hungry jaws of my guardians, is a man of great ingenuity and courage. Yes, we must become better acquainted."

He gave orders to his two companions. They thrust their hands through the bars, and soon secured Bulldog's gun; for, hampered as he was, the cage pressing closely down upon him, he had found it impossible to use the weapon. Then a catch was touched, and the trap was removed. But not before ropes had been tied round Bulldog's ankles.

Now other ropes were passed round his wrists, with his hands behind his back. In the same silky voice, the Chinaman gave instructions for the prisoner to be taken within. They passed through a low doorway into an atmosphere which was tropical in its heat—a moist, oppressive air which beat down heavily.

The room which they entered was purely Oriental, for there were no tables or chairs, but a nicely polished floor and many soft cushions and low stools. The walls and ceiling were of rich lacquer-work, and quaint, softly glowing lamps hung from the ceiling. Bulldog Hamilton saw that his captor was a middle-aged Chinaman with a yellow, clean-shaven face. His eyes contained a malignancy which was like that of a snake.

"So you are Mr. Buldger Hamilton?" he asked blandly. "Spandd! I, my good friend, am quite unknown to you, but it is only common politeness to introduce myself. I am Dr. Wu Changfoo—at your service."

Bulldog looked him straight in the eye.

"You can cut out the trimmings!" he said bluntly. "You've got young McRoss here, and I don't doubt that your motives are completely crooked."

"A man who says plain things in a plain way is a man after my own heart," said Dr. Wu Changfoo. "Yes, my friend, the boy is here. See! There is one other, too."

He moved leisurely to one of the walls, where rich curtains hung in graceful folds. At the touch of a cord, two curtains were drawn aside. Bulldog Hamilton saw two iron-barred doors, and behind, twin cells of such restricted size that the occupants could obtain no comfort or rest. One was Alan McRoss; the other, a pale, haggard, hairy man whose eyes burned feverishly—yet with a fixed and dogged determination.

"I see," said Bulldog grimly. "Sir John McRoss and his son."

"You are not surprised?" inquired the Chinaman.

"When I learned that Sir John had met his death whilst fishing in the loch, I drew my own conclusions," replied the Adventurer. "I was told that Sir John's boat had been overturned in a squall—that it was found floating bottom upwards—that his body was never recovered. Why should I be surprised to find him here?"

It was Alan who spoke the next words.

"Heaven's curse on me, Mr. Hamilton, for bringing you into this death trap!" cried the lad remorsefully. "I had seen one or two suspicious movements on the island, and I believe Hamish—the traitor!—knew of my suspicions. I was hoping that you would not come when I fell into this devil's hands."

"Then you were foolish," retorted Bulldog. "For I am here, boy, and I shall help you."

"You are an optimist, I perceive, Mr. Hamilton," said Dr. Wu Changfoo, with a soft laugh. "Let me assure you that within half-an-hour you will be dead."

"Tell me this," said Bulldog sternly. "What possible object can you have in keeping Sir John McRoss on this island?"

"A private matter between myself and Sir John, I can assure you," replied the impassive Chinaman. "My grandfather and his both lived in the Straits Settlements many years ago. Both founded great and flourishing tea plantations. Who has not heard of McRoss Brand Tea? In harmony our ancestors lived. They died; they were succeeded by their sons. My father, incurring the enmity of Sir John's father, was disgraced and sent back to China; his estates were confiscated."

"Yes, because your treacherous father grew opium, and sent it out to the world in his tea chests!" exclaimed Sir John fiercely.

"The reason does not matter," continued the Chinaman. "My family was dishonoured; my father died in abject disgrace. I devoted myself to science, to learning—but always with the view of exacting justice. And I find that the present representative of the McRoss family is a man with an abhorrence of the tropics. Once Sir John visited his tea plantations—but never again. The climate, the conditions, stifled him, and he fled back to this cold, unfriendly Scotland. By duplicating tropical conditions on this little island, so close to Ross-trevor Towers, I saw my opportunity. With Old Tam in my pay, and a spy within the Towers, the rest was easy. And here, in conditions he loathes, Sir John will remain—until he signs certain papers granting me full ownership of my august father's plantations."

"It is torture—slow, horrible torture!" cried Alan. "And Changfoo tortures my father in other ways. He places him within snapping reach of the alligators, he loosens scorpions and other vile creatures in his cell. There is a terrible python—"

"Why, yes," interrupted Dr. Wu Changfoo. "I had almost forgotten. It is nearly time for the python's supper. Mr. Hamilton, you are choicey come. I must introduce you to this pet of mine."

The Oriental's calm malevolence was hideous. His meaning was all too clear.

"Come, my friends," said the Chinaman, turning to his paid henchmen. "We will take Mr. Hamilton to see my beautiful clock."

Hamish and Old Tam obeyed. Bulldog Hamilton was carried into a curious circular room which was bare of all furniture. Suspended from the ceiling was a quaintly designed clock, with enormous hour and minute hands.

"Excellent," said Dr. Wu Changfoo. "The time is exactly twelve minutes past eight. You have seven or eight minutes to live, my friend. The rope, Hamish!"

A stout rope was passed under Bulldog's armpits. A small loop at the other end was slipped over the outer extremity of the clock's minute hand. The rope was now fairly taut. Changfoo remained alone, for he had dismissed his assistants.

"This, Mr. Hamilton," he said, "should interest you."

He pulled a lever, and, standing on the threshold, saw the floor slide completely away. As it passed from beneath Bulldog's feet, the latter was left suspended over a deep circular pit. And above him the clock was ticking loudly and ominously.

What held Bulldog's attention, however, was the gigantic python which lay coiled at the pit's bottom. The snake was the most monstrous the Adventurer had ever seen. One glance upwards Bulldog took—and he fully understood. Never in his career had he encountered such a cunning, diabolical method of torture.

For as the clock ticked, so the minute hand would reach the quarter-past, and then descend below the horizontal. Before the hand had reached twenty past, the rope would slip off, hurling Bulldog down to the cruel, waiting coils of that hungry giant reptile!

Bulldog's Last Request.

"INGENIOUS, is it not?" asked Dr. Wu Changfoo. "His silky voice full of evil relish. The clock ticks, my friend—and each tick brings you nearer to your doom. For ten minutes you will live a hundred deaths in advance. Thus do I rid myself of my enemies."

"If you are the son of your father," replied Bulldog calmly, "then I can well understand why he was dishonoured."

Dr. Wu Changfoo's eyes glinted like living fire.

"For that insult to my ancestors alone I would kill you," he said, his voice throbbing with fury. "And now I will leave you to yourself—so that you may employ your last minutes to the best advantage. Perhaps there is one last request you would wish me to grant?"

"You are most thoughtful," replied Bulldog, his own calmness a perfect match for the other's. "Yes, Dr. Wu. If you would grant me a smoke I should deem it a favour."

"With pleasure," replied the Chinaman. "I have here a fragrant Oriental cigarette—"

"I should prefer my own pipe—if the trouble of filling it is not too much for you," interrupted Bulldog ironically. "My pipe is my greatest friend."

The Chinaman was impressed by his victim's iron
(Continued on page 10.)

YOUR EDITOR INTRODUCES

THE CORSAIR RAIDERS!

200, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

MY DEAR CHUMS,

My morning mailbag is stuffed to the neck these days with letters of congratulation on the grand stories and features I'm having the good luck to secure for you. Well, chaps, I can tell you right now there are even more wonderful surprises in store for you all. For many moons I have been planning and you who have been such loyal chums—my regular readers—will be the first to share in the good things.

Exactly what form they will take it is too soon to reveal this week—but I may say they concern the free gifts for which the *B.M.* is famous. Now watch out for further news.

A truly terrific treat pops out of my bag of story humdingers for you next week. An entirely new yarn featuring new characters in a colourful and compelling setting. Chums—you simply must not miss

The Corsair Raiders!

Pirates! Who hasn't been thrilled by the many yarns of these gay rogues of the Main which the *B.M.* has published in the past? But next week's story goes one better than anything we have ever had before. It features the Corsairs of the Mediterranean. These black-faced freebooters were descended from the Moors and for centuries they harried merchantmen on high seas. Their leader, at the time of our yarn, is the mightiest scoundrel of them all—Nasir-ed-Din. But when Nasir captures Sir William Tregellis, a Merchant of India, he little dreams he is setting a whole hornets' nest about his dusky ears. For Sir William's son Val, who is the boy hero of this wonder yarn, swears revenge. With the aid of a crew of the Moors' galley slaves he forms the little band whose name and fame as the Corsair Raiders

The Thrill of the Year in Next Week's Brand New Long Complete Epic Tale of the Corsairs of the Mediterranean Main. Don't miss this treat, chums.

is shortly to ring to the four corners of the Mediterranean Main. Yes, chums, you'll like the Corsair Raiders. They are as strange a company as ever sailed the seas. In Leatherface and Tyburn Tim, the author of this magnificent new series has created characters who will live for ever in your minds. Great fellows every one. And their daring deeds are bound to thrill you as no story heroes have ever done before. Get ready then to meet and greet The Corsair Raiders in next week's number of the Red Wonder Mag.

Prizes for Amateur Sleuths.

How are you enjoying the exploits of The Football Carnera? A wow of a footer yarn isn't it? Have you guessed who is the man Billy seeks among the Rovers? I offered a fountain pen to the sender of the first letter I receive telling me who he is and why. Well, chaps, to give more of you a chance I am increasing the offer to six pens—all gold-nibbed and guaranteed the goods! Send your letters to me as soon as you like.

Readers' Own Page.

Entries have poured in for this feature and as soon as the *B.M.* technical artist has made diagrams from the rough sketches my handymen chums sent with their articles I will print the most suitable ones in the *Mag.*

A Thunderbolt Falls on the Western Front!

That is the striking title of the next episode of the Red Devils' battle of wits with Kummel and the bogus Major Rush. Excitement reaches white heat in these thrilling chapters, and when Johnny discovers the plans of the enemy to destroy Paris—well, things happen fast as film flickers.

Next week our expert will give you full details of a simple electric battery which you can make to work the electro magnet described this week. It will be followed by an electric motor, Working Telegraph Set, etc., etc. Look out for these fascinating hints for the darker nights.

The Runaway of the Remove.

More fun with the Boys of St. Giddy's and their mysterious secret society next week. Dick Bannister is, of course, the runaway. His efforts to prove his innocence will keep you in tucks of mirth.

And more fun is provided by the Crew of the Happy Haddock.

A Windfall—An How!

describes how the comical Chink cook of the Haddock becomes a Chinese mandarin. But yellow plotters plan to prevent An How from reaching China and inheriting his uncle's wealth. And when Chinamen decide to do for anybody—well, they do it pretty thoroughly!

Football fans will welcome another story featuring the Tin-Can Trojans whose exploits were so popular with you all last season. Don't miss the Cannibal Footballers, then, next week, and look out for more grand news on the page of

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MANDARIN'S ISLAND

(Continued from page 8.)

ourage. With a mocking smile he produced the big bowled briar and filled it with tobacco. Leaning forward, holding securely to the door post, he thrust the mouthpiece between Bulldog's teeth—and then applied a light. Bulldog puffed contentedly, and nodded his thanks.

"Lest you should have hopes that you can swing and avoid the python's coils, let me point out that any violent movement on your part would only hasten your end," said the Chinaman. "The rope will easily slip from the clock-hand if you attempt to swing. Farewell, my friend. You are a man of sterling courage."

With that grudging tribute, Dr. Wu Changfoo backed through the doorway, and with a click a panelled door slid into position. Bulldog Hamilton was alone—alone with his pipe and that vile thing which waited below.

Despite his terrible position, however, a bright, eager light leapt into the Adventurer's eyes. Deliberately, he clamped his teeth harder on the pipe's mouthpiece, drawing it more firmly into his strong jaws. Suddenly, there was the faintest of clicks, and from the lower part of the briar's great bowl a gleaming prong of steel shot forth. A knife—with an edge keener than that of a razor—a knife of tempered steel and of incredible strength!

Bulldog Hamilton chuckled. By requesting a last smoke he had taken the one step which might turn the tables on the torturing Chinaman!

With the pipe gripped between his teeth, he bent his head as low as possible, twisting his arms round from the rear in a manner which would have done credit to any contortionist. He was just able to reach the ropes with the knife-blade. Two strong slashes, and his hands were free. Within five seconds his ankle ropes were cut, too.

Hand over hand he pulled himself up the thicker rope which suspended him from the clock hand. He gripped the hand itself, released the rope, and then leapt nimbly to the narrow sill of the door. There was just sufficient room for him to stand, carefully balanced.

His movements had attracted the attention of the python, which was rearing its great head up, its eyes gleaming luminous and baleful.

"Yes, old chap, you may well glare and hiss," murmured Bulldog. "You'll get no supper to-night—or any other night."

Swish! He sent a coil of rope shooting downwards; the end dropped neatly over the snake's head, and was pulled instantly tight. With a quick movement, Bulldog had flung the other end of the rope over the strong beam which held the clock. He now exerted all his great strength, and the snake was jerked upwards for half its length.

* * * * *

DR. WU CHANGFOO, squatting impassively on silken cushions, glanced at a lacquered time-piece.

"Twenty-three minutes past the hour," he said tonelessly. "Your friend, Mr. Hamilton, is no more." He sighed. "A pity that such a brave man should pass. I have great respect for all brave men."

The Chinaman rose from his cushions, and with leisurely footsteps he passed out of the room and went down a short passage. At a finger's touch a panel shot back—and there, in full view, hung suspended the writhing, contorting coils of the python. The deadly creature was in its last death struggles.

With hissing breath, Dr. Wu Changfoo stared about him. He had left Bulldog Hamilton suspended from that rope. And now, in some magical fashion,

the tables had been turned—the positions reversed. It was the python which hung suspended! And Bulldog himself? He had vanished as though into thin air.

"A million demons!" screamed the Chinaman, his control completely gone.

Crash! Something black and bulky hurtled down from the darkness above the clock beam. It was Bulldog Hamilton, and he judged his leap so that he landed with his two feet fairly and squarely on Dr. Wu Changfoo's shoulders. So terrific was the impact that the Chinaman lost his balance and fell, shrieking, to the pit's bottom. Bulldog managed to clutch at the door post, and check his fall.

"You were rash, Dr. Wu, in granting my last request," said Bulldog coolly. "It was your one mistake."

The Adventurer prepared to leap down, for he intended to deal drastically with his enemy. But he was saved the trouble!

As the Chinaman staggered to his feet, the great python gave a dying convulsive contortion. One of its massive coils struck against Dr. Wu Changfoo and sent him hurtling with terrific force against the brick side of the pit. It was as though he had been hit by a battering ram. Then, as he rebounded, stunned, the snake's coils caught him in their terrible grip. The coils contracted, and Bulldog Hamilton felt sickened. . . . He heard the ominous crunching of bones. . . .

When it was possible to recover the remains, both Dr. Wu Changfoo and the python were dead. Bulldog had no trouble with Hamish or Old Tam; they surrendered without a struggle. And that night Ross-trevor Castle regained both its young master and its old master.

Something new in yarns next week, chaps. A gripping old-time yarn of the Corsairs, the Pirates of the Mediterranean Main. You simply must not miss this rollicking, thrilling yarn of the High Seas.

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BOYS' MAGAZINE LEAGUE COUPON.

Boys' Magazine, 7/10/33.

A WIZARD WITH BOTH FEET! THAT'S SAMMY, THE SEVENTEEN STONE GOAL-SHOOTER, WHO STARS IN THIS SCINTILLATING SOCCER TALE.



THE BOY WHO JOINED A FOOTER TEAM TO SOLVE A RIDDLE: WHO STOLE THE RAJAH'S STONE?

A Football Tale with Mystery and Thrills Mixed.

By JOHN HUNTER.

desk he had found a note in the jeweller's writing: *Billy for you alone. Branston Rovers. One man. Find him.*

Following that, things happened swiftly. Billy was kidnapped by a sinister body of men calling themselves the Brotherhood of the Bear. Only Sammy's timely arrival saved Billy from a terrible death.

As they were escaping, they glimpsed a man hiding in the grounds of the house. It was Steel, outside-left of the Rovers.

By his arrangement they met him later on an old house-boat and he was frightened of his life.

"It's you I want to talk to Sanders," he said. "I want to warn you. You're interfering with something too big for you. The Brotherhood of the Bear..." he broke off. "I can smell fire."

The house-boat was, indeed, alight, but they were freed by a mysterious black-cloaked man. As they stood on the bank, however, the stranger appeared on a horse and kidnapped Steel.

As he passed, something dropped at Billy's feet. It was a black metal figure of a bear.

BILLY picked up the little figure and stared at it in the light of the torch. The thunder of the horse's hoofs had died away. The horseman had switched off the towing path and struck across grassland, carrying Steel with him.

The burning houseboat was still blazing furiously, but the lock-keeper was not in sight anywhere.

SEVENTEEN stone of bone and muscle; a kick like a cannon-shot; the speed of an express.

That was Sammy Gantry, who was to become known to thousands of fans as the Football Carnera.

There was a double reason for Sammy's joining Branston Rovers with his orphan chum, Billy Sanders. Among the Rovers was a man—a man whom Billy sought for the key to the most amazing mystery of modern times.

And this was the manner of it. On a night of darkness and shadows the two lads returned to the home of Tom Sanders, Billy's uncle and a well-known gem-setter, to find the jeweller missing. Later it was discovered that a quarter of a million pounds' worth of emeralds, that Uncle Tom was to have set for the Rajah of Kilshahnistan, had also vanished.

The finger of suspicion pointed to Uncle Tom himself. But Billy knew better. For on his uncle's

They afterwards found he had previously been attacked and bound and gagged so that he should not interfere.

Both Billy and Sammy gazed curiously at the little image of the black bear. It was beautifully cast and extremely lifelike—a bear standing on its hind legs, its forepaws extended. On one side of it a number was stamped—twenty-five.

At that moment there was a terrific hissing noise and sudden and complete darkness came down on them. The houseboat had sunk against the lock gates, which, fortunately, had not had time to catch fire themselves.

Billy and Sammy decided to go home. They overlooked searching for the lock-keeper.

Who was their rescuer? He had come out of the unknown. He had been black clothed, masked, gloved. But that he was their friend was beyond all doubt.

"There's one thing," said Billy, "and that is I'm going to try and find that emerald on the footer ground to-morrow morning. Though I don't suppose we shall have any luck.

He was right! The next day they went to the ground and thoroughly explored the touchlines and the ground near them. They failed to find the emerald. It was, indeed, never found. It had been ground deep into the earth by flying boots, and only a complete and careful raking over of the whole surface might have yielded it up.

They informed the police of Steel's disappearance, and the manner of it. The police warned them not to communicate with any newspaper, while they themselves started an intensive search for the missing footballer. They also impounded the little figure of the bear with the number twenty-five on its side.

Just about that time a new force entered the field. The Rajah of Kilshahnistan got tired of waiting for the British police to accomplish what he considered he would have seen finished in twenty-four hours in Kilshahnistan, and he set to work himself.

He had his own methods. He wanted

not only his emeralds, but the heads of the men who had taken them.

He issued his orders.

A Game of Strategy.

NEWCASTLE UNITED came to Branston. They were not quite the United of the days of Veitch and McCracken, Shepherd and Rutherford. But the men they sent down to Branston worthily upheld the great traditions of the Tynesiders. They played clever and clean football. They played it with enthusiasm. They never knew when they were beaten, and they were generous losers.

Their visit packed the ground, for the Maggies remain one of the biggest drawing powers in British football. Besides, the Rovers were rejuvenated, and people came miles to watch Sammy put through his cannon shots.

The United were away at the top of the table, running hard on the heels of the Villa and the Arsenal, and just ahead of West Bromwich Albion on goal average. Every point was precious to them, and they were out to win if they could.

Mr. Trant had a word or two with the Rovers before they took the field. The United, he said, had a cast iron defence, and their centre-forward was a dangerous goalgetter. They were the main points to be remembered on the field that afternoon. Steel, of course, was not playing, and his place was filled by a reserve, a local youngster named Harraway. He was very fast indeed, a veritable Joe Hulme on the left wing, without the international's marvellous ball control at speed.

The teams came out and lined up, Sammy towering between the two forward lines like a lighthouse. Harraway was nervous. It was an ordeal for a raw youngster to be opposed in his first big game

by the famous United. He fidgeted about on the chalk until the whistle went, and Sammy, with a side tap, set his right wing moving.

Andrews secured it, tricked the half and found the back challenging. He slung it right across the field.

Harraway sprinted. He was like lightning, and the crowd snatched its breath as it saw him

take off. He reached the ball, but he fumbled it, and a fierce tackle from the half smothered him. He should have got away, but that fumble had cost him a precious second, and a second is a long time in the Big League.

Throw-in, bobbing heads, the ball flicked to Gunson at centre-half for the Rovers. He was cool and deliberate; he drew a man and he sent a long raking pass up his right wing.

The pass was intercepted, and the United got going. There was some clever work away on their left. They had Murch, the Rovers' right half in difficulties. He was left behind. Tom Holloway stabbed in with a swift tackle. He was beaten by a split second and with about an inch to spare—the right kind of football.

The leather was in the middle. Gunson tried to smother the pass. Pivot had it, slid it forward, took



CHOKING CORDS.—The men of Mahmet Singh came upon Billy and Sammy suddenly from behind. Round the throats of each was whipped a silken cord which was drawn tight.

it with his instep. Billy flung himself sideways, flat to the grass. The ball hit his hands and went round the post.

Corner kick. The men lined the goalmouth while the crowd was cheering the save. It came in from the right, dropping a yard in front of the crossbar. Billy jumped and got his fists under it, and out it went to left half Rance. Rance did not hesitate.

Dribbling in one's own penalty area with the dangerous Newcastle attack swarming close was inviting disaster. He put a nice, low, daisy-cutting pass up his left wing.

It was a model pass. All Harraway had to do

The crowd was yelling its thousands of heads off. Sammy was, as usual, grinning sheepishly, as though he had done something slightly reprehensible. Harraway, his hand pumped by Rance, was blushing furiously, and his eyes were shining. He had "made" the goal by that instant backward pass, and it was what he needed to give him all the confidence in the world.



A SPOT SHOT.—The ball was spotted and the forward shot. Billy launched himself at the leather swerving away from him, shoulder high. Could he save that penalty shot?

was to turn and run towards the Newcastle goal, the ball travelling on ahead of him. The boy certainly was fast.

This time he got the ball under control. He kicked past the half and raced on. Sammy was lumbering up midfield level with him like a locomotive.

On went Harraway, electric in his speed. Back was trying to smother him. He hesitated just a moment. In that instant he saw what to do and he did it cleverly.

He chopped the ball inside, and backwards, right along the grass, a downfield oblique pass that shot clean across Sammy's track in midfield.

Sammy loosed himself at it. It was for all the world as though a door had been opened and a huge bull had been catapulted into the open.

In vain the centre-half tried to stop him; in vain the left back came across to cover.

Sammy hit the leather from outside the area, and he hit it good and hard. Keeper went up and sideways for the left-hand corner of this goal. But it was a rising ball all the way, travelling at terrific speed, the most unstoppable shot a keeper can have to deal with.

Miraculously the goalie just touched it, but not with sufficient strength; and it was banging the rigging, and rolling down to the back of the net, as he fell against the side post—beaten.

The United were off once more, tricky, fast and dangerous, bearing down on the Rovers' goal. A breast high pass across the goalmouth, Tom Holloway trying to intercept, hands flung wide. A nasty bounce, and it hit his right hand and dropped at his feet. Whistle. Penalty. . .

It was a rule with the Rovers, as it is with a certain very famous League team, that there should be no mass protests to the referee. Tom Holloway spoke quietly to the official, pointing out that it was an accident; but that gentleman refused to listen. He was that kind.

The ball was spotted. Billy crouched in his goalmouth. The player standing over the ball looked terribly close to him. The ball was immense. Behind the kicker the other players lined up, tense and expectant.

Whistle! Billy saw the leather coming, swerving away from him, shoulder high. He jumped like a cat, launching himself in the air. He got both hands to the ball and fell flat, and as they rushed he threw it away.

The crowd's cheering was like loosed thunder. Somebody, in all that melee, booted into touch near the corner flag. The danger was past. Billy had done what every goalkeeper hopes and likes to do—saved a penalty shot, and a well directed one at that.

The throw-in was cleared. The Rovers right wing broke away, but a goal-kick resulted. The match was fought hard now in midfield with the United having slightly the better of the exchanges.

At half-time the score was 1—0 in favour of the Rovers.

Some revision was made in tactics during the

interval. Save for that electric burst of Harraway's, and Sammy's characteristic goal, the Rovers' attack had made little impression on a defence which had nothing whatsoever to learn in the art of positioning.

The slender lead had to be clung to. The two points had to remain in Branston.

So when they kicked off for the second period, Sammy instantly dropped back, while Gunson went even further back.

Thus the road down the middle was effectually barred. It was a variation of the three back game which had wrought such a revolution in football tactics. Gunson, as the centre-half, was the third back, but actually he had a replace centre-half in Sammy.

It was on Sammy that the attacks constantly broke, so that those behind him could kick clear. Sammy was no great football strategist, and he made no pretence at opening up the game for his side; but he was like a rock in the middle so far as the other attack went, and it smashed itself against him time and again.

Meanwhile, Gunson, Tom Holloway, and Taffley were playing a deliberately considered game. Stray passes came through to them as the halves in front of them broke the Newcastle rushes. And each time, unless so hampered as to render it impossible, they sent those stray passes up their left wing to where the feet and now confident Harraway waited.

Time and again those passes went astray. Time and again the watchful half, concentrating on the danger, defeated Harraway.

The United realised the strategy of the Rovers, and they took precautions against it.

And then the trap was sprung!

Sammy baulked an intricate midfield movement. The ball went sliding through to Gunson. Gunson gathered it, ran forward, steadied himself and slung it . . . up his right wing!

Andrews was on it like a hawk. They had looked for it to go to the left. True, Andrews had only a fraction of time in which to take advantage of the unexpected; but Andrews was old in the football sense, clever, tricky, and with a good turn of speed.

He cut right in. The back hampered him. He chopped over the ball, stopped dead, slewed round; had the back beaten. It was clever and tricky, and all done on a square foot of grass.

The goal was in front of Andrews, and the keeper was advancing. Andrews was utterly unfurried, cool as ice, his piece of straw—that he always chewed—sticking out of his mouth steadily.

He did not shoot. He raced on. Keeper stooped. Andrews was round him, dribbling as daintily as a ballet dancer. He just walked the ball into an empty net and quietly turned to walk back down the field—still unfurried.

Two up and fifteen minutes to go. Now the United stirred themselves for a last great effort; but it was unavailing.

In vain the black and white stripes surged round the Rovers' goal. In vain they tried long shots, close rushes, quick passing. The defence was hanging on grimly. It was giving not a foot of ground nor a chance at the ball. The tacking was fierce and strong, though clean and safe.

At last the whistle went in a long sustained blast and the crowd let itself go.

The Rovers were winning matches. They were beating teams which, a week or two earlier, would have walked through them. They were becoming a football power, and the two fellows who had worked the transformation were Sammy and Billy . . . whom the Rajah of Kilshahnistan had already decided were better dead.

THIS decision of the Rajah of Kilshahnistan, let it be said at once, had no possible logic behind it. To kill Sammy and Billy would not assist him to the recovery of his precious emeralds; but he had that way with him. If anybody disagreed with him or displeased him in Kilshahnistan he had that person's head removed with the least possible dispatch. Billy was related to the man who had lost the emeralds, and had probably lost his life at the same time, and Sammy was his friend.

The Rajah intended a gesture of frightfulness.

You will observe him giving his orders—a gross mass of quivering flesh sunk deep in a great eastern chair in the marvellous mansion he had rented near London. This place, which once was the home of a ducal family whose title had ceased to exist, he had converted into an Indian Palace. What mattered it to him if he intended to stay there only six months? Money was nothing.

Of course, the emeralds meant no real monetary loss to him. It was his pride that was hurt. Somebody had dared to steal the property of the Rajah of Kilshahnistan.

He sat in the ballroom of the mansion. It was no longer a ballroom. It was like a page torn clean out of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments. In its middle a fountain tinkled with perfumed water. Its floor was tessellated in gay colours. Curtains draped mysterious doorways. The walls were hung with Hindu tapestries depicting the chase and all manner of other things.

The Rajah sat on a great throne-like divan. There were sweetmeats in golden plates all about him, and aromatic coffee steaming at his elbow. A hubble-bubble pipe was laid aside, that his fingers, smothered with gems, might be free to pick up the daintiest of the sweetmeats.

The air was charged with artificially produced heat. Near the main doorway stood a gigantic Nubian, nearly seven feet tall, naked to the waist, a bronze and magnificent statue, ready and willing to obey every word of the monstrous fat creature who could throw him on to the hooks if he wished—even in England.

Down by the Nubian's side, fastened to him by a chain that hooked to a steel collar and was clamped to the Nubian's left wrist by a steel band, a cheetah crouched, spotted, fierce, feline. Now and again it flattened its ears and snarled, its distant amber eyes lit by the unquenchable glare of the wild. Beyond the ballroom, the vast conservatory, which once had been the pride of the old ducal family, was filled with Indian plants and through it a newly constructed, clear and running stream of water drifted, shot with goldfish, and with water lilies—floating upon its placid surface.

It was difficult to imagine that London was less than fifty miles away. One would expect to look out and see the rice-fields of India, or the Himalayas in the dim distance, with the jungle close at hand.

Before the Rajah stood Ali Khat, sleek and mysterious, eminently trusted, more dangerous than a king cobra. The Rajah pattered to him in the Kilshah tongue.

"You will seek out these two kickers of a ball. You will take them secretly. You will present their heads to me on the Chargers of The Dead, within seven suns."

Ali Khat bowed low. They had the Chargers of the Dead with them in England—two great golden platters, the execution chargers of Kilshahnistan, on which the heads of malefactors and others had been shown to the ruler from time immemorial.

"As you command, Star of the Night," he said.

(Continued on page 16.)

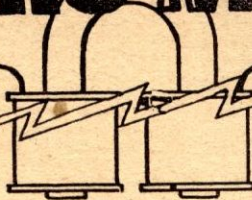
ANOTHER FASCINATING PAGE FOR HANDYMEN AND MODEL MAKERS.

BY OUR EXPERT.

MAKE YOUR OWN ELECTRO MAGNET

Mighty Power of Humming Dynamos

Here's how to make one from Simple Materials!



THERE are so many jolly good working models you can build, if you have a decent electro-magnet, that we think you'd better make one now. We have one or two small motors in mind, which will be quite easy to make, and those we'll tell you of later. The magnet's the thing, so let's to it.

Wire will be wanted first of all. For almost any electric model work, double cotton-covered copper wire, number 24 is as good as anything. It isn't expensive; you can get a sixpenny reel of it from the nearest wireless shop. Don't be persuaded to buy silk-covered; it certainly looks better, but it costs more.

Next you'll want a triangular file, if you haven't already got one. You know the store where they don't charge more than sixpence for anything? Well, there's a triangular file there for you—cost about threepence. Buy one, it's useful.

Finally, we shall want half an old poker. It should be made of round iron rod about $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch in diameter, and you'll have to make it red hot part of the way along and bend it (against the bars of the grate) double. See diagram I. for sizes and details. Now cut off the horse-shoe part with the file, and trim the cut ends nicely square, slightly bevelling the sharp edges all round. Thus we have the "core."

Cut four discs of thick cardboard $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter—or, if your poker wasn't $\frac{3}{8}$ inch, a little

more than three times the diameter of the rod used. Bore them out to fit tightly on the ends of your magnet core. They can be glued in place, as shown in diagram II.

Start your winding now—no, you must first glue a strip of paper round the iron core between the discs. Good stuff for this job is that glued packing tape they use so much for packing purposes instead of string.

Now get ahead with the winding. Leave a couple of inches free and wind tightly, pushing each coil close up to its neighbour. And *don't hurry!* When you have completed one layer, it's a good idea to pour some melted candle wax over it.

Carry on with the second layer; wax that, and then the third, and so on, giving a coat of wax each time. Add layers until you've filled up the depth of the discs on one side. Keep a tally of the number of layers, as you must have the same number on the other side; actually, you should have exactly the same total of turns.

Now cross over on to the other side, and start winding in the opposite direction.

Look at diagram III. to see how it must be done. Carry on as before, and when it is completed, secure the free end of the wire in a small hole bored through the cardboard disc. Giving this a spot of glue.

There's your electro-magnet, and you'll be surprised to see what a pull it has got when a flash-lamp battery is hooked up to the ends of the wires. Best results come from a good battery which will give a steady current. Next week we'll tell you how to make a powerful jam-jar battery which will stand up to any experiments. Hooked up to your electro-magnet, it will pull the nails out of your shoes—perhaps!

Don't let the coils of your magnet get too hot; they will if you keep the current flowing too long. By the way, if the iron rod, from which you made the case, is not an old poker, the horseshoe should be put into the fire and left there all night. This will thoroughly soften it so that it will be able to throw off its magnetism when the current is switched out of the coils.

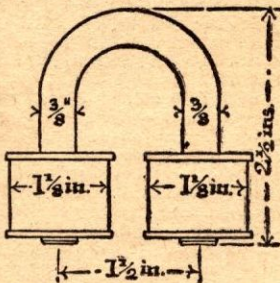


Diagram I showing the measurements for the iron "core" of your magnet.

Cardboard Discs in Place

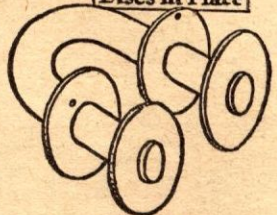


Diagram II.

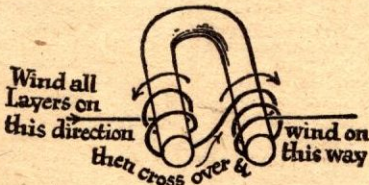


Diagram III.

THE FOOTBALL CARNERA

(Continued from page 14.)

The podgy brown hand with its glittering array of diamonds, rubies, emeralds and pearls, waved indolently.

"And there is this gathering of evil men. The Brotherhood of the Bear. You will seek it out. You will discover who commands it, and you will lower him to the snakes, head foremost."

"As you command, Star of the Night."

"It is finished," said the Rajah. He selected a choice piece of Turkish delight and stuffed it into his thick-lipped mouth. Ali Khat backed out, bowing as he went. The cheetah snarled and spat like a great cat. The Rajah clapped his hands. Soft music drifted into the great apartment.

Ali Khat hastened. He was a slim person and he wore a suit which had been cut in Savile Row. The Rajah, of course, when at home, wore his Eastern robes.

Ali had a good deal to think about. It was all very well for the Rajah to talk of lowering a certain man to the snakes, but that man had to be identified and found.

The Rajah kept, in the vast grounds of the old mansion, what was reputed to be a private zoo. It was, in truth, a collection of fierce and dreadful animals. Among this collection was a wide, eight feet deep, sanded enclosure where the snakes slept and gorged and lay like speckled death . . . waiting.

Ali, truly, was disturbed. The Rajah was powerful; but the British Raj was all-powerful. It had a knack of sending two-engined bombers zooming across the brazen skies of India for the punishment of ruling gentlemen who slew their subjects because they happened to have a headache that morning. Also it would dispatch a battalion of white-faced soldiers drawn from what Ali conceived to be the slums of Great Britain, and these white-faced soldiers would actually hurl from his throne, with their plebeian hands, so high and mighty a person as the Rajah of Kilshahistan.

Ali dreaded the day when a cold-eyed white man in a spotless drill suit and carrying only a riding-whip, would stand before the Rajah and tell him his day was done.

But Ali had his orders and he got to work. He decided that first and foremost he would collect the two kickers of the ball.

He sent for Mahmet Singh, and to him he talked. Mahmet Singh controlled a unique body of the Rajah's servants. Each and every one of them was a direct descendant of thuggee; which means that each and every one of them was an expert strangler. Mahmet Singh set off for Branston.

Dusky Desperadoes.

BILLY and Sammy had put their heads together more than once in the matter of Steel. They now realised that the footballer had been within his limits, an honest man embroiled in some desperate and dreadful enterprise against his will.

He was certainly not the man connected with the Rovers of whom Uncle Tom Sanders had written before his vanishment. That was somebody else—somebody as yet hidden from their sight.

It was Billy who got the idea. He decided to go to London and visit a big newspaper office. A friend of his had got a job there when they both left school, and Billy thought he might help them.

Billy and Sammy came down to Fleet Street and a narrow street behind that famous thoroughfare, and they looked up Billy's pal, who was a very junior reporter on a great and famous daily. Like all newspaper men, he was only too willing to lend

a helping hand to anybody, and they went through the files of the paper, which was an old-established one.

The files yielded nothing, so far as they could see; so they turned to the library. The library was the finest in all the newspaper world. It was a wonderfully complete record of facts, events and lives.

They came upon this in the index: *Bear, Brotherhood of*. They turned it up.

There was only a small reference to what they wanted, but it was of assistance to them. It ran like this.

Bear, Brotherhood of.

A small and obscure secret friendly society on the usual lines, conducting harmless ceremonies with various secret signs and passwords. Objects: mutual benefit in times of sickness, unemployment, and distress. Originally founded, so far as can be traced, by a Russian, Boris Slavski, believed killed in Moscow in 1919. Slavski lived in England from 1910 until 1918, and during that time founded the Brotherhood. Object of his return to Russia unknown; Progress in the Brotherhood was through five degrees. The fifth degree represented the installation of the Great Bear, or Commander of the Order. Only one Lodge was ever established, and this ceased to meet after 1919. Various horrific penalties were threatened to any member exposing the secrets of the Order or seceding from it. This applies to other Orders, however, and these penalties were recognised as harmless parts of the accepted ritual, never to be put into force. So far as is now known, the Brotherhood of the Bear no longer exists.

Sammy and Billy walked down to the Thames Embankment.

"Well," said Sammy, "what do you think of that?"

Billy reflected. "There's one thing certain, and that is that the Brotherhood of the Bear really does exist. It has ceased to be a friendly organisation; and it has become a dangerous secret society controlled by ruthless men."

Billy paused. "And there's something else. No mention is made there of what must have been the accumulated funds of the Society. Where did they go after Nineteen-Nineteen? What has happened to them during these fourteen years?"

Sammy whistled softly. "You're right." His eyes lighted. "And . . . Steel was a member. Of course he was, and that's what he was afraid of. Those penalties, which seemed like play-acting when he took his oath of membership, became real threats."

Billy's face was grave. He realised that what Sammy said must be true, and he was wondering about his uncle . . . who had done so much business in Russia. . . . Suppose he, too, were a member of the Brotherhood of the Bear!

Behind them, as they strolled along unsuspecting, Mahmet Singh issued various instructions.

The two lads came to the Temple Gardens, and since it was just before lunch-time the Gardens were practically deserted. The men of Mahmet Singh, experts all in these affairs, came upon Billy and Sammy suddenly from behind, and even Sammy, tackled by three of them, had no chance from the first.

Round the throat of each was whipped a cord of silk that tightened and blotted out the sunshine; They were dragged down and carried swiftly.

The half-strangled and unconscious lads were tossed into the car and it shot off like a racer, heading for the fringes of London and beyond, making straight for the place of the snakes, for that execution sword of Kilshahistan and the golden chargers of Death.

A new and a terrible danger threatens Billy and Sammy. How can they thwart this fearful peril? Full-of-action thrills in next week's smashing episodes.

STILTY, THE WILD WEST WONDER! WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SNAKEBITE CITY GETS A NEW KIND OF SHERIFF. THRILLS AND LAUGHS!



Leaning over on his stilts the Twenty-six Foot Sheriff Dropped the Bag of Pepper Down the Chimney. Those Badlads got the Shock of their Lives!

Stilty's New Job.

"SAY, Stilty," Joe Short groaned in a hollow voice. "I wonder if we'll get a hand-out in this burg."

If someone don't soon ask me to tear a herring with him, I'll be a dead and desiccated corpse."

Stilty Saunders grinned unsympathetically.

"You've got an appetite that would make any self-respecting hippopotamus blush with shame," he said. "Why, you ate enough pork and beans for half-a dozen people not three hours ago."

Joe eyed his chum reproachfully.

"Say," he protested. "That wasn't no more'n a snack. I'm that empty now I can feel them beans rattling in my alimentary system, same as if they was jumping beans."

Stilty laughed outright.

"Snakebite looks a fair-sized town," he said, nodding to the collection of wooden shanties which they were approaching. "So we ought to do fairly well there."

Joe was a natural pessimist, and he shook his head mournfully.

"All I hope," he said, "is that none of the cow-punchers object to our show and start shooting, 'cos I ain't hankering to die yet." As he finished speaking his lantern-jawed face grew as long as a week of wet Sundays.

Stilty Saunders and Joe Short had been on tour with a travelling circus and menagerie. At San Rafael, near the Mexican border, however, the manager had bolted with all the cash, leaving the company stranded. Since then Stilty and Joe had been tramping back east, and they had earned a meagre living by giving impromptu shows en routé. Joe was a juggler, while Stilty did a double turn.

He walked on a pair of twenty-foot stilts, at the same time doing tricks with a lariat, that made the most expert cowboy sit up and rub his eyes.

As they neared the outskirts of the straggling township of Snakebite, Stilty screwed together the sections of his stilts and mounted them. Then he entered the cattle town, twirling his lariat, whilst Joe Short walked behind him juggling with half-a-dozen coloured balls and clubs. In a short while a crowd began to collect, and followed them, shouting good-humoured chaff and applause. By the time they reached the centre of the town half the population of Snakebite had collected, and the rest were arriving.

Stilty spun a "crinoline" and jumped through it on his stilts, at which clever feat the audience roared its whole-hearted applause. Then, while Stilty stood firm, Joe Short swarmed up the stilts, and hoisted himself on to his chum's shoulders, there to continue his juggling.

From his elevated position he could see right over the surrounding buildings, and he let out a sudden gasp of surprise. He had caught sight of a Mexican, with a sombrero pulled low over his eyes, sliding stealthily round the corner of a wooden shanty close to the sheriff's office. In his hand the Mex. held a six-gun, which he raised to take careful aim at the back window of the sheriff's office. In a flash of intuition, Joe Short guessed that he was witnessing a dastardly attempt to shoot the sheriff through the back window of his office. And Joe acted like lightning.

Whizzzzip! The half-a-dozen wooden balls left his hand like shots from a machine-gun. His juggling practice stood him in good stead now, for every one of the missiles smote the would-be assassin in the

face. The Mexican staggered under this novel fusillade and dropped his gun, throwing up his hands to protect his face. He quickly recovered, however, and leapt into the saddle of a horse which had been hidden behind the tumble-down shanty.

As he rode away Stilty saw him; and at the same moment Joe started yelling like a madman.

"Hey! Stop that guy!" he bellowed. "He tried to bump off the sheriff! Stop him!"

Stilty's profession had made him quick-witted, and he took in the situation in a split second.

"Drop off, Joe, and I'll get him," he snapped.

Joe Short threw himself backwards off his partner's shoulders and whirled through the air in a double somersault, to land lightly on his feet. Next moment Stilty was striding at an amazing speed on his long stilts after the fleeing desperado.

The Mexican was unable to gallop his horse flat out through the narrow side-streets, and Stilty rapidly overhauled him until he was near enough to use his lariat. Whirling it round his head, he let fly. The noose snaked through the air and dropped neatly over the Mexican's shoulders. At the same instant Stilty planted his stilts firmly, wide apart, and threw back his weight on the rope. The lariat twanged taut as the horse galloped on, and the fugitive was plucked clean out of the saddle. He crashed to the dusty road, and lay there writhing and winded.

By the time the greaser recovered and staggered to his feet the angry crowd of punchers had swarmed around.

"It's José Pablo!" roared a lean cow-puncher, who sported a pair of lank, black moustaches.

"String him up! Lynch him!" The cow-waddies took up the cry fiercely, eagerly, and they surged forward to seize the fearful, cringing Mexican.

Suddenly the back door of the sheriff's office crashed open, and a burly, grizzle-haired black-bearded man, wearing a wide sun-hat, and a long, black coat, dashed out.

"Say, boys!" he roared above the din, "S' long as I'm judge heah even a greaser gets a fair trial afore we hang him. And, anyhow, what's all the racket about?"

Joe explained, and Judge McGinty thrust his enormous black beard into the shivering Mexican's face.

"Say!" he boomed. "Did that prairie rat, Marco Estrella, send yuh heah tah bump me off?"

The Mexican eringed. "*Si, señor,*" he whined, "*Dios Mio,* I deed not weesh to do eet! But Estrella, 'eem ver' bad hombre, and 'eem . . ."

"Can the soft stuff, yuh yellin'-livered skunk!" the judge broke in gruffly. "Yuh can shoot yuhr spiel at the trial. Now, boys, run him intuh the lock-up. The court ain't sittin' until to-morrow."

The wretched prisoner was hustled into the town gaol, still loudly protesting that he had not wished to assassinate McGinty.

"Who is this Marco Estrella?" Stilty asked the judge, when the Mexican was safe behind cell bars.

The judge's weather-beaten face grew very grim, and his beard positively bristled as he fiercely tilted it up into the youngster's face.

"Estrella's a real bad hombre," he said. "And when he ain't rustlin' cattle, or holdin' up a loco, he's bustin' intuh lonely ranch houses and shootin' up the owner. But, say! Seems I owe yuh boys my life, an' I ain't thanked yuh yet. Put it there!"

He thrust out a huge, horny paw, and squeezed their fingers in such a vice-like grip Joe's eyes watered.

"Come into my office," the judge resumed. "Maybe I can put up a proposition tuh yuh."

He led them into his untidy little office, where,

having settled himself comfortably in a chair, with his feet resting on the desk, he gave the chums a bit of local history.

"That dirty skunk Estrella has given a dose of lead pizenin' tuh the last three sheriffs," he said; "And he's made the job so all-fired unhealthy there's no citizen willing to undertake the duties of sheriff or deputy."

"Why don't you round him up?" Stilty asked, a puzzled frown on his face.

"Huh!" McGinty grunted. "That's easier said than done. Estrella and his gang have their hide-out at the top of the Ghost mesa, and there ain't no one but them as knows how to get up there. The top of the mesa rises sheer as a wall for the last hundred feet or so, and there must be some secret way up."

"Can't you make this fellow José show you the secret way up?" Stilty suggested; but the judge shook his head.

"He won't speak," he said. "He'll hang first! All Estrella's men are like that. They fear him worse'n death or the devil, and nothing will make 'em betray him."

He leaned back in moody silence while he started to carve himself a generous slab of chewing tobacco. Suddenly he stopped and looked keenly at Stilty.

"I got'n idea," he said. "S'pose I swear yuh two boys in as sheriff and deputy? Yuh're gosh-durned smart and don't jest use yuhr heads for hat-racks. Yuh'll be paid forty bucks a month and yuh'll have yuhr residence heah. Now what d'yuh say?"

"Done!" snapped Stilty, promptly.

At that Joe heaved a huge sigh.

"All right," he groaned. "I knew we was gonna have bad luck in this town, as soon as I saw that piebald hoss."

Stilty's Ruse.

"JOE, I've got an idea," said Stilty Saunders.

"Wossat?" Joe Short answered sleepily.

"Stilty and Joe had been sworn in as sheriff and deputy sheriff respectively, and had celebrated by dining with the judge in a ramshackle hotel. After that McGinty had shown them round their office, finally leaving them there to transact some business of his own. Since then Stilty had been thinking hard, while Joe Short had been lolling on a long form in a state of coma.

"Wake up, horse-face," Stilty said, impatiently, and jabbed his chum in the ribs.

"Huh! Oooh!" Joe grunted, and blinked reproachfully. "I was only thinking. I always think better with my eyes shut," he added as an afterthought.

"Well, stop thinking so hard," Stilty told him severely, "and pin your ears well back and listen to me. I've got a plan for finding that secret way to the top of the Ghost mesa. I'm going to borrow a horse from McGinty, and ride out to the mesa as soon as it's dark. You'll give me an hour's start; then you'll toddle into the Mexican's cell, as if you've come to see that everything is safe before turning in for the night. But when you go out you'll forget to lock the door behind you."

"Hey?" Joe gasped, suddenly wide awake.

"You'll forget to lock the door," Stilty repeated. "You can bet the Mexican will notice it, and he'll beat it as soon as he thinks the coast is clear. And he'll make for the gang's hide-out on the Ghost mesa. I shall be on the watch for him, and I shall trail him to the top."

"Great jumping beans!" Joe gurgled. "But them greasers 'll lay for you. You can't snaffle a whole gang of them single-handed."

"I don't suppose I shall try," Stilty replied coolly.

(Continued on page 19.)

THE SHERIFF ON STILTS

(Continued from page 18.)

"I'll be content with discovering the secret way up the mesa—unless I get a sudden brain-wave to round them up. Well, I'll be moving. Remember—give me an hour's start."

With a cheery nod, he left the office, and made his way to McGinty's house, at the other end of the town. Having explained his plan, he begged the loan of a horse.

"Say!" the judge boomed, enthusiastically. "Now if that ain't the bee's knee of an idea! Sure yuh can have a hoss, Sheriff. Come along."

He led the way to the stables, and a few minutes later Stilty was riding out of Snakebite on a rangy sorrel. From the directions McGinty had given him, he had no difficulty in finding the Ghost mesa. He rode slowly, and twilight had deepened into darkness by the time he reached the foothills. He dismounted, and tethered the sorrel among some mesquite bushes, where it could not be seen. Then, shouldering his stilts he walked briskly on into the mountains.

The Ghost mesa was a colossal pile of sandstone and granite, rising perpendicularly at the end of a deep canyon. Its massive sides, with their jagged summit suggested the walls and battlements of some gargantuan castle.

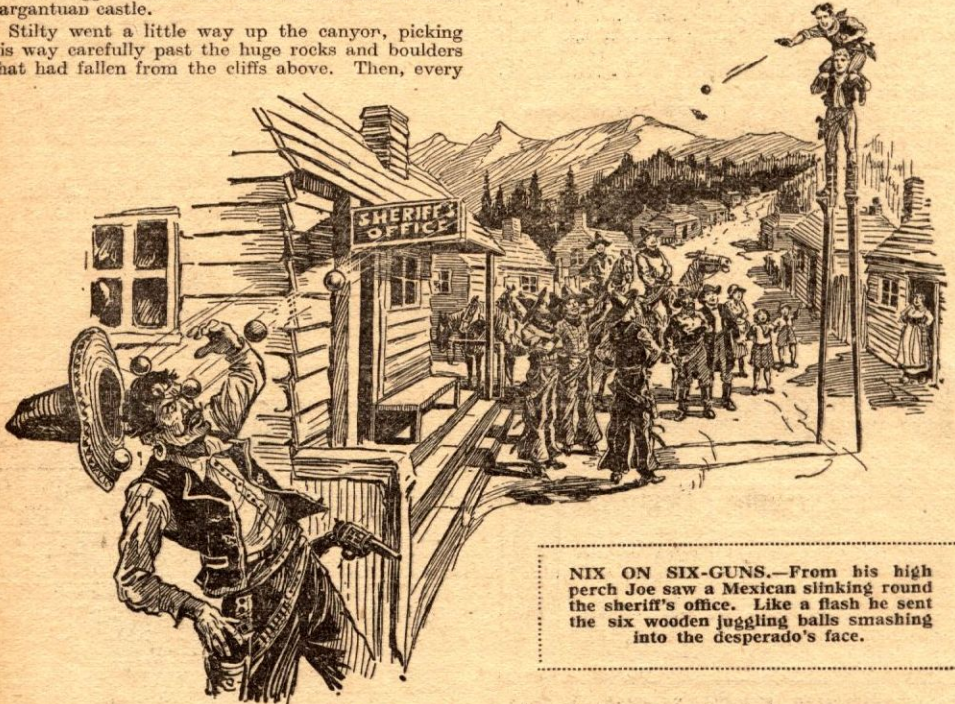
Stilty went a little way up the canyon, picking his way carefully past the huge rocks and boulders that had fallen from the cliffs above. Then, every

sheriff's hiding-place without any suspicion that he was being watched. With the stealth of a Red Indian, Stilty stole after him, slipping from boulder to boulder so that there was little chance of his being seen.

In this order they went up the canyon, till Stilty saw his unsuspecting guide ride into a thicket of junipers at the foot of a smooth cliff. Waiting a short while, Stilty stole through these thickets, and suddenly, where no one would have dreamed of looking for a path, he found a crevice in the rock just big enough for a horse to pass. Beyond was a narrow defile mounting steeply upwards.

Stilty smiled as he heard the clatter of hoofs and saw the Mexican cursing his horse for stumbling; then he followed, cautiously.

The defile opened out at last into a large amphitheatre, round which walls of rock rose to the final summit of the mesa. The amphitheatre was studded with great cedar trees, from the cover of which Stilty watched the Mexican lead his stolen horse up a zig-zag path that looked like a giant stairway cut in the wall of rock. As the man neared the top Stilty heard a challenge, and saw two other men armed with rifles silhouetted against the skyline. Then, apparently they recognised their companion,



NIX ON SIX-GUNS.—From his high perch Joe saw a Mexican slinking round the sheriff's office. Like a flash he sent the six wooden juggling balls smashing into the desperado's face.

sense on the alert for danger, he crouched behind one of the boulders and waited.

Time crept by on leaden feet, and he was just beginning to wonder whether Joe had bungled his part of the plan, when he heard a faint, far-away drumming of hoofs. Rapidly the sound drew nearer and at last a horse and rider appeared at the mouth of the canyon. Dark though it was, Stilty was tolerably sure it was the Mexican whom he had captured that afternoon.

The man turned into the canyon, passing the

for they both began talking excitedly to him, and all three ultimately vanished from sight.

Stilty leaned against the trunk of a giant cedar and pondered whether to return at once to Snakebite for a posse. In the end, however, he decided he would first find out the strength of Estrella's force. So he stole through the cedars till he was out of sight of the two sentries. He stopped to socket his stilts together and strapped them but loosely to his feet. Then he strode along the towering wall of rock that rose from the base of the natural amphitheatre, till

he found a place where the summit of the mesa fell away for fifty or sixty feet. Here he was able to reach the top of the cliff and he heaved himself nimbly up over the edge.

Unstrapping his stilts Stilty crawled to the top of the slope. He peered over the rim, gazing across the flat summit of the Ghost mesa towards a rough shanty built of cedar logs.

Red Pepper.

STILTY lay for a long time watching this shanty. Faintly on the still air he heard an excited chattering of voices, though he was too far away to distinguish the words. Of the two sentries there was no sign, for the shanty was between them and Stilty.

Success made Stilty reckless; he stealthily crawled from tree to tree until he reached a lean-to at the back of the cabin. Crouching there, he was now able to overhear what was being said inside, though he gleaned no useful information.

Suddenly he heard footsteps coming towards the shanty, and in a sudden alarm he slipped inside the lean-to. It was pitch dark inside, and Stilty stumbled over a big sack that lay, with other stores, upon the ground. It was soft and yielding, so that he made no noise in falling upon it. But almost at once he felt a sharp tickling in his nostrils. Only by squeezing his nose between his thumb and finger could he restrain a sneeze until the newcomer had entered the cabin.

But this mishap had given Stilty an idea. Cautiously he struck a wax vesta, and examined the contents of the sack. As he had suspected, it was three-parts full of the coarse, red pepper with which Mexicans season most of their food.

He shouldered the sack, and tiptoed out of the lean-to. Heaving his burden up on to the sloping roof, he fastened on his stilts and lifted the sack to the top of the roof.

Hidden behind the chimney, he peered round the corner, and saw the other sentry seated on a flat-topped rock a hundred yards away at the top of the zigzag path which came up from the amphitheatre. But his jaw jutted obstinately, and, leaning over on his stilts, he dropped the sack down the chimney.

Almost at once he heard wild howls from below, followed by curses, and screams, and violent sneezes. As Stilty had expected the sack of red pepper had burst asunder amid the fire which burned on the big, open hearth, and had gone belching out into the cabin in a cloud of choking red vapour.

Suddenly the door of the log cabin flew open, and a mob of Mexicans stampeded for the open. They were sneezing, and coughing, and gasping for breath, and the tears were streaming down their cheeks, whilst their eyes were filled with pepper which temporarily blinded them. One of them tripped and fell, and half-a-dozen of his fellows stumbled over him, to lie in a heap, groaning and gasping, and knuckling their smarting eyes. The others staggered to and fro like blind men.

The awful racket brought the sentry running towards the cabin, screaming with excitement. Stilty waited behind the lean-to until the man reached the shanty; then he fired a shot from the Colt which McGinty had loaned him, and the bullet sent the Mexican's sombrero flying.

"Reach for the sky, *hombre!*" snapped Stilty, stepping into the open.

The startled outlaw promptly dropped his rifle and raised his hands above his head.

After that the rest was easy. There were some coils of rope in the lean-to, and Stilty forced the sentry at the point of the gun to rope up his comrades, all of whom were too exhausted to offer any resistance, and could not have seen to pull a gun had they wanted to. Finally Stilty climbed down from his stilts, and roped the sentry's arms to his sides.


"Sorry I had to put that bit of pepper on your tails," he chuckled. "But I guess a pinch of salt wouldn't have been much use for catching a lot of tough guys like you. But let's get moving! And if any of you *hombres* are fidgeting on trying to make a getaway, forget it. I'm shooting first and asking questions afterwards. Now, quick march!"

Several hours later the citizens of Snakebite were astonished to see their new sheriff march through the town with a crowd of Mexican prisoners, all of whom were sniffing and sneezing as though they were sickening for the flu.

"Say!" exclaimed Buck Sayers, when Stilty had given a modest account of his adventures. "The noo sheriff is a rip-snorter, and I'm willing for to pulverise any gent who holds contrary opinions."

But Buck's fellow citizens all agreed with him and Stilty Saunders became the most popular man in Snakebite when it was known how he had busted up Marco Estrella's gang.

Get ready to welcome a bunch of old Mag. favourites next week. The Tin-Can Trojans return in a smashing yarn of the Green Arena entitled "The Cannibal Footballers."



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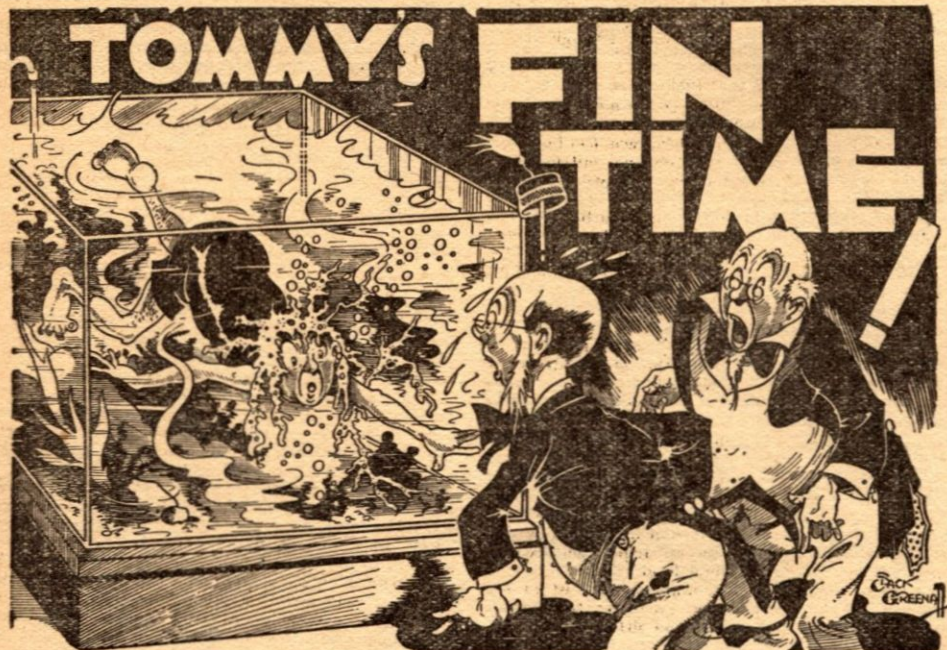
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THE CHEM-MYSTIC KID—HUMAN FISH! FUN WITH DR. HYPO'S LATEST INVENTION!



IN THE SWIM! Professor Hypo goggled at the Apparition in the tank. "G-g-goodness!" he ejaculated. "This is no merman—it's my assistant!"

"**SPLUUUU! Pof! Gulp!**" announced Tommy Pink, rising to the surface of the swimming bath and spouting forth a whale-like jet of water. "S'no use—I can't keep under more'n thirty-five seconds at the most, and that's hopeless."

He swam to the side of the bath and hauled himself out by the handrail. Tommy was very disappointed. For weeks now he had been practising under-water swimming in the fond hope that he might carry off the first prize for that event at the local swimming gala. Yet here it was the very day of the gala and Tommy but very little better than when he had first started practising!

So Tommy was very glum as he walked to his dressing-box and commenced to climb slowly into his clothes.

"I don't stand an earthly," he told himself sadly, "an' I shall probably look a proper chump coming up like some codfish with a couple of measly plates or so! Still, I've entered for it now an' there's no backing out—Ah well!"

Tommy looked at the clock hanging at one end of the little indoor swimming bath, where he had come for a practise swim before going on to business that morning. It was getting late. He hurried the final stages of his dressing, and then left the building, turning towards the National Biological Society's big lecture hall. Here Dr. Hypo, Tommy Pink's scientist employer, was due to speak that morning before a distinguished audience of scientific johnnies. It had been arranged that Tommy was to go straight

along to the lecture hall to assist Dr. Hypo with his apparatus for the lecture.

When Tommy arrived he found that Doctor Hypo didn't really need his assistance at all, so he simply donned into his white laboratory coat and took a chair at the side of the platform on which the Doctor was demonstrating.

When the lecture started, Tommy's thoughts were far away, dreaming of what might have been if he had only started training a month or two earlier. Suddenly, however, something the Doctor said attracted his attention, and to Tommy's intense surprise he found himself listening with distinct interest to Dr. Hypo's words.

"There is no need, gentlemen," Dr. Hypo was saying, "for me to tell of the recent startling developments in the study of endocrine hormones. By the treatment of various glands with such hormones, any animal organism, including man, can be altered entirely as to its growth so that it develops in an entirely different manner from the normal. Indeed, the type and quantity of the hormones in the various glands are what control the very nature of the animal. Thus, if we could isolate the responsible hormone in each case, we could give animals new characteristics indiscriminately. We could make the cat bark, for instance; and the dog say *meow*."

A titter of dignified laughter came from the audience, giving the Doctor time to get his second wind.

"Now, as everybody knows to-day," he continued, "animal species, including mankind, have developed

their particular characteristics by evolutionary changes throughout eons of time, and during that period they have acquired and lost many powers and capabilities. For instance, man's later ancestors were almost certainly arboreal, or tree-dwelling, but mankind has now practically lost that primeval nimbleness. In another instance, the ears and the semi-circular canals connecting them to the throat are undoubtedly the remains of what are known in fishes as the gills. All these things, at some time in man's evolutionary development, have been of some use to him, but have now fallen into decay through disuse. This means, no less, that the hormones controlling the activities of these organs are not now active. But they can be made active again by stimulation! And that brings me to the main object of my lecture, gentlemen."

Tommy Pink blinked, not a little puzzled but very interested.

"All life came originally from the water," Doctor Hypo was going great guns now. "Even to-day ninety per cent of the living things exist in or near water. Mankind itself cannot survive without water—or at least moisture in some form or another"—here a vision of a gingerpop floated tantalisingly before Tommy Pink. "This means that all mammals are, at root, still creatures of the water—fishes, so to speak, that have left their natural element and learned to exist by taking their necessary moisture as drink."

The Doctor paused again and took a swig of the glass of water that stood at his elbow.

"The main function of this drinking is to keep the lungs moist—it is necessary for our breathing, in fact, and what is this, indeed, but a survival of the dim days when creatures actually *breathed under water*? Nowadays they have lost that power, or rather developed a new one of breathing in air, assisted by artificially introduced moisture in the form of drink. This means, gentlemen, that the hormones controlling the water-breathing function are now inactive. As I have already pointed out, they can be revived by stimulation. I propose to demonstrate this fact to you."

From a box under the demonstrator's table, Doctor Hypo extracted a live rabbit by the ears. He beckoned to Tommy Pink to hold it for him, while he filled a hypodermic syringe with some sticky-looking serum, while he continued talking to his audience.

"Everybody knows that a rabbit cannot take a drink in the ordinary way—it has to take water in the form of moisture on the vegetable food it eats. This means that the water-breathing hormones in the rabbit are in an even higher state of decay than our own. It is for that reason that I chose this creature for demonstrating the effect of stimulation."

Meanwhile Tommy lifted a large glass tank full of water on to the table, and then the doctor inoculated the rabbit with the serum. The creature wriggled for a few seconds and then became listless. Dr. Hypo took it from Tommy and dropped it into the tank of water. Then Tommy Pink's eyes nearly popped out of his head in surprise and wonder. The rabbit was swimming backwards and forwards in the tank as happy as a tiddler in a duckpond!

"By stimulating the controlling hormones," continued the Doctor, "the rabbit has recovered the ancient faculty of breathing under water. It is inhaling water through the mouth and exhaling it through the ears, after its lungs have extracted the oxygen. You will note how the ears flap rhythmically just as do the gills of a fish."

Tommy Pink couldn't take his eyes off the amphibious bunny. It seemed miraculous! The rabbit didn't once attempt to come to the surface,

and indeed, made strenuous efforts to resist when Dr. Hypo thrust his hand into the tank to pull it out. After he had inoculated the rabbit with counter-acting serum, however, the rabbit became normal, his fur was dried by Tommy and he was bundled back in his box.

Thereafter, Doctor Hypo's lecture degenerated into a highly technical discussion on hormones in general and Tommy lost track of it entirely. He was waiting his chance to get at that hypodermic syringe and serum!

A Fishy Contest.

THE big open-air swimming bath was packed with spectators that afternoon, and gaily decorated with bunting and streamers. Alderman Gubble had graciously consented to present the prizes, and there he was amidst the usual gang of officials, spouting off speeches by the yard whenever opportunity permitted. The under-water swimming contest was the last event, and it almost proved too much for Tommy to curb his eagerness.

At last, however, the event came round. Tommy hurriedly climbed into his costume and took his place in the row of competitors, a small syringe, charged with the wonder serum, concealed in his hand.

Ten tin plates were strewn about the floor of the bath at wide intervals. The competitor who won the contest was he who could collect most of the plates at one dive, without coming to the surface. Only one attempt was allowed.

The name of the first man was called. He plunged into the bath, remained submerged for about forty seconds and then reappeared with only three plates. These were redistributed and a second contestant went in to bag five plates. Tommy watched eagerly as, one by one, his rivals made the attempt and re-emerged, gasping like leaky motor-tyres.

At last the man before Tommy was called, a big hefty fellow who looked as though he had enough wind in his lungs to fill a Zeppelin. He plunged in. Tommy clenched his teeth and jabbed the hypodermic syringe into his arm. An icy-cold shiver ran down his spine and he felt an overpowering dizziness. He shook it off, however, just as the hefty fellow re-emerged amidst a wild burst of clapping. He had collected nine plates—the most yet!

Then Tommy heard his name being called. He stepped to the edge of the bath, feeling a little unsteady; then he braced himself and plunged in. At first he felt as though his lungs were going to burst; then he realised that he was instinctively keeping his mouth shut. It needed a mighty effort of will, but at last he forced himself to open his mouth and gulp in a great draught of water.

He had a peculiar sensation as the water swirled through his lungs and oozed out through his ears.

"Gosh!" Tommy told himself gleefully, as his mouth opened and shut steadily like a fish's while his ears flapped in rhythmic sympathy. "I could stay under here for a month!"

Leisurely, he swam round the bath near the bottom and collected up the plates; then, to impress the spectators, he swam about under water for some minutes longer.

At last he decided it was time to go up again. It needed some hefty strokes, he found, to drive him to the surface, but at last his head emerged into an excited world. Attendants were rushing back and forth with lifebelts and things, the official life-saver was just preparing to dive in and save him, and the spectators were shrieking with alarm.

When they saw him emerge with all the plates, a wild burst of cheering broke out. Tommy swam to the steps and clambered out, grinning with success.

But the grin faded from his face suddenly. His

lungs seemed to catch on fire! It felt just as if he had inhaled a breath of scalding steam!

He gave a strangled, half-choked yelp, dropped the plates and plunged back into the bath.

Deep down he sank, gulping in great breaths of life-giving water. At the same time, Tommy realised the horrible truth. He could breathe like a fish under water, but, like a fish, he could not breathe in the air! And he had forgotten Doctor Hypo's counteracting serum!

"Oh, Lor'!" Tommy moaned to himself. "I must do summat. P'raps if I fill my lungs with water I can hold it until I can get back into the bath, just as I hold my breath under water until I rise to the surface of the water."

This seemed a good idea, so Tommy swam to the steps again and, just as he climbed out, filled his lungs with water. There were sighs of relief as he climbed out, holding his breath for all he was worth, and the audience settled down to cheer and clap him. A number of swimmers grabbed him and carried him shoulder-high along the side of the bath and planted him before Alderman Gubble.

"A truly incredible performance," said the Alderman, lifting a large silver cup and presenting it to Tommy. "The time you stayed under water is surely a marvel of endurance—in-deed, we began to get quite anxious about you. I have much pleasure in presenting you with the cup for under-water swimming."

Involuntarily, Tommy Pink opened his mouth to say "Thank you!" He succeeded in making a liquid kind of gurgle, and an unexpected deluge

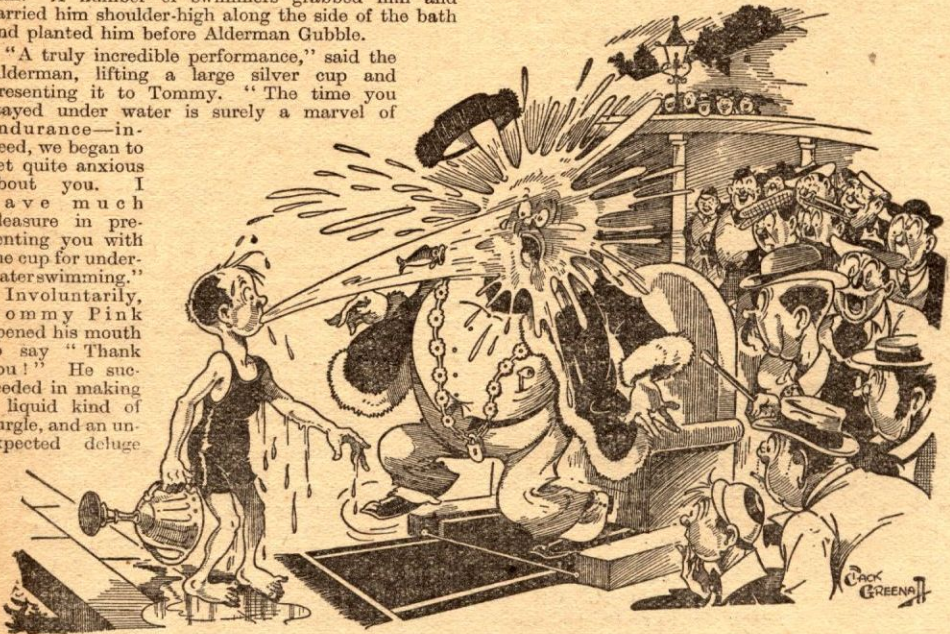
were forcibly dragged to the surface by that well-meaning gent, he would surely suffocate before they realised what was the matter with him! Time and again he managed to wriggle just out of the life-saver's grasp, and at last the man gave up his efforts. Tommy felt relieved—but not for long.

He chanced to look upwards, and to his surprise saw the surface of the water apparently descending towards him! They were draining the bath—thinking this the only way to save him from deliberately drowning himself!

Netted.

SOMETHING had to be done. Tommy filled his lungs with water and swam to the surface to signal to them to stop, but they only mistook his gestures for calls for help.

Tommy gazed round desperately, and his eyes fell on a bucket of water standing a little way from the bath's edge. It had been left there by an attendant



"MAYOR" THAN HE EXPECTED.—Tommy opened his mouth to thank the mayor for the cup, but he emitted a kind of gurgle and a terrific stream of water that deluged the mayor.

smote Alderman Gubble, for Tommy was standing directly in front of him.

"Glaa! Ouch!" said Alderman Gubble, and the audience gasped with horror to see the great man drenched in this unseemly manner.

Tommy tried to stammer an apology, but the fire got into his lungs again almost immediately. Instead, he gasped, broke through the ring of people around him and plunged back into the swimming-bath.

"Oh, Lor'!" moaned he, as he sank gracefully to the bottom. "I've gone an' torn it proper now. What on earth am I to do?"

This question was, next moment, solved for him. Above, they got anxious again about Tommy and sent down the life-saver to fish him out.

Tommy Pink dodged the man in terror, for if he

in preparation for swilling the sides after the gala. Here was a hope!

Tommy gulped another lungful of water, rushed for the side of the rapidly-emptying bath and dragged himself out. Nimbly he dodged the crowd of eager helpers who rushed towards him, grabbed the bucket, and after a swift glance to mark the exist of the swimming-bath he thrust his head into the bucket of water and rushed blindly towards the gate.

Tommy's sense of direction carried him through successfully. He took his head momentarily out to get his bearings, and then thrust it back and hurried off down the street. Passers-by stopped to gaze in amazement at sight of Tommy, dressed in a swimming-costume, rushing along in a peculiar, stooping attitude with his head buried in a bucket.

Tommy suddenly brought up against something hard with a jarring thud. The terrific shock evoked a gurgling sound from the depths of the bucket, and, involuntarily, Tommy raised his head, the bucket still perched on it. The water poured over him so that he found his head in an empty bucket, and he was gasping for breath like a stranded eel.

He dragged the homely utensil from his head, and, not wasting a glance on the lamp-post with which he had collided, he glared round frantically for some fresh source of water to save him from suffocation.

He recognised where he was immediately. That little side-street there led to the embankment and the river—there was a chance for him! A fraction of a second later, Tommy was sprinting like mad down that street, racing against that awful sense of suffocation that was overwhelming him.

He reached the embankment, leapt on to the parapet and plunged over. As he descended towards the muddy water, however, he heard someone cry: "Help! Help! Man overboard! He's tryin' to drown hisself!"

There was a strong tide running in the river and Tommy felt himself being swept along with it. He must rise to the surface immediately and try and get his bearings, so that he might know in which direction to swim. Taking one or two preliminary gulps he swam upwards again, thrust his head above the surface and looked round.

"There he is!" yelled a voice. "Grab him before he goes down for the second time."

Tommy saw a boat rushing towards him with a boathook hanging over the bows. In the nick of time he rolled over and dived again for the depths.

He swam down to the muddy bottom of the river. What on earth was he to do? He was in a worse position than in the swimming bath! The tidal river was swirling him along swiftly and Tommy knew that it emptied into the open sea not four miles further on!

"Oh lor!" Tommy thought, as the full realisation of his awful position smote him. "I shall have to spend the rest of my life as a fish an' get eaten up by a shark or summat, an' feed on tadpoles an' tiddlers an'—Oh lor! Oh gosh! Oh errr!"

"H'M," said Doctor Hypo in his laboratory, the next morning. "Mr. Green is remarkably late to-day—unlike him, I must say."

The Doctor looked again at his watch. By "Mr. Green" of course, he meant Tommy Pink—he never could remember his assistant's name.

"Well, well. I can't wait any longer," the Doc told himself at last. "I shall miss the train if I don't hurry."

At which, the learned scientist put away his watch and left the laboratory. He took a taxi to the railway station and there boarded a train to the near-by seaside town of Fiddlewater. He had been called there by a telegram that had arrived that morning from Prof. Scaley, the curator of Fiddlewater Aquarium.

Must have your expert opinion immediately on new creature added to collection (the telegram had said). Please come at once. All expenses paid.

SCALEY.

It was only about an hour's run to Fiddlewater, and Dr. Hypo found the highly excited Professor Scaley waiting for him on the platform.

"My dear Hypo," said the Aquarium curator. "A most remarkable creature! You must see it at once! It was brought in last night by some trawlermen who had been fishing off the Fiddlewater roads. They tell me they dumped this final net of fish into the hold and were clearing up, when their attention

was suddenly attracted back to the hold. They saw the mass of squirming fish suddenly heave up and an *almost human shape emerged*, but it was gasping and panting for breath, just as a landed fish does!"

"How strange," said Doctor Hypo, as Prof. Scaley hurried him towards a taxi, "how extraordinary!"

"Yes," continued the curator. "They say it was very muddy and covered with limpets and barnacles and seaweed, but still the resemblance to a human being was remarkable. The fishermen say that it swarmed frantically out of the hold, glared round and then thrust its head into a bucket of water with which they were about to swill the deck. These intelligent fishermen guessed that it could only breathe under water and they placed it in a tank and brought it to me! I've never seen anything like it, Hypo, in all my thirty years experience as a marine specialist! I am convinced that it is a genuine merman—though until now I always thought such things were fictitious! Ah—here we are. You will see for yourself now!"

Prof. Scaley hurried the wondering Doctor into the aquarium and stopped before a very large illuminated tank. Nothing was visible except the usual bits of rockery and marine plants, with which aquarium tanks are decorated.

"It is sleeping behind those rocks probably," said Prof. Scaley. "I will try and disturb it."

He tapped sharply on the glass of the tank with a coin. A powdery fog of sediment floated up as something stirred behind the rocks. Then Doctor Hypo's hat nearly shot completely off his head with surprise.

Swimming towards the front of the tank, his mouth opening and shutting like that of a giant eel and his ears wiggling in sympathy, came Tommy Pink! He was very dirty and muddy and his hair was so entwined with seaweed that it looked as if it had grown there naturally. But it was Tommy undoubted, and his face lit up with joy when he recognised the Doctor.

"G-g-g-good heavens!" said Dr. Hypo. "It's my assistant! This is no merman, Scaley! It's Mr. Green! He must have accidentally taken a dose of the hormone stimulant I was lecturing on yesterday! I must have him taken back to my laboratory at once—in this tank if possible. Poor Mr. Green! He must have had a terrible time!"

Thus was Tommy Pink saved from spending the rest of his days as a deep-sea monster. Several hours later he sat on a chair in Doctor Hypo's laboratory breathing in good clean fresh air. The antidote to the hormone stimulant had been administered and Tommy had thankfully returned to the normal.

Dr. Hypo was wagging a reproving finger at him and telling him off in no mean terms for taking the stimulant without his permission. When he had finished, Tommy grinned, his old cheerful self again.

"Anyhow, Doc., there's one thing you can't call me—an' that's a *poor fish!*"

A laugh in every line in next week's screaming fun-tale of the crew of the "Happy Haddock." "A Wind-fall—An How!" is the title to look for, chums.



RIVALS OF THE SKY—Part Two

The ACE of CRASHES

Another
Grand Tale
of the Red
Devils Air
Squadron.

Prisoners.

THE great Kummel, Germany's spy-flier, was being forced down in a Bristol two-seater that he had stolen behind the British lines.

His eyes flashed with fury in his smoke-blackened face as he crouched in the cockpit, easing back on the stick as his 'plane shrilled down, its propeller smashed.

Above him rode Johnny and Ian Chisholm—the most famous pair of flying brothers up at the Front, and the crack aces of the Red Devils squadron. Johnny was at the controls of the Bristol above. In the sky fight Kummel had stopped his engine with a bullet. But game to the last Johnny was riding his enemy down to a landing, not letting him slip from under his wings.

But they were landing in territory occupied by the Germans. Below were the camouflaged hangars and huts of a German flying field. Men in green-grey uniform were running across the field.

Johnny had to let Kummel slip from under his wings as he landed in the field below. But the young flight lieutenant dropped his own wheels smoothly to the ground barely ten yards beyond, and as they rolled to a stop he and Ian quickly scrambled out.

"We're not going to be taken prisoners of war," gritted Johnny, as he whipped out his revolver, moving stealthily under the right wing of his machine.

Squadron-Leader Ian loosened his helmet strap, and there was a tenseness lurking in his eyes, spite of his lazy grin.

"It'll mean a firing party for me, fellow," he drawled.

Johnny's eyes flickered—registered fear, for he knew that Ian had been doing some spy work of his own in Germany.

There was a great German drive on in that sector. They had almost driven a wedge through. And if they did it would open the path straight to Paris for the green-grey masses of the *Vaterland*.

The Allies were bringing up their concentrations of troops right now to stem the flood. And the German Air Arm had instructions to break through and spy out the roads crowded with British troops. The British airmen on the other hand had definite instructions to stop them—not to let a single *Bosche* 'plane through.

The two fliers, in oil-stained leathers, eyes gleaming in their begrimed faces, watched the on-coming German closely. At ten paces distance Kummel halted and saluted.

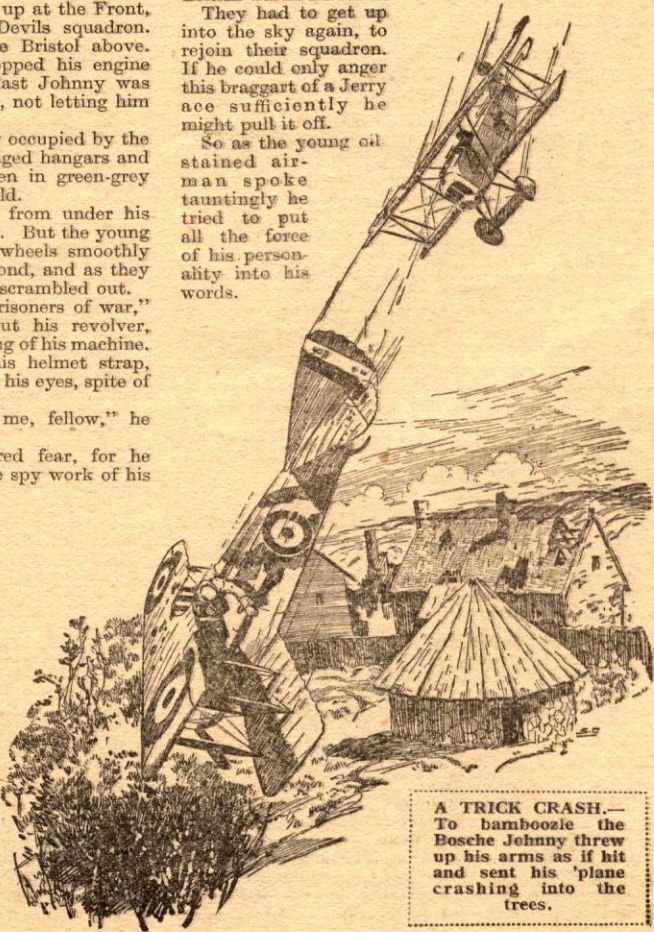
"My compliments, Lieutenant,"

he said in perfect English, addressing Johnny. "You have the honour of being the first man to bring Captain Kummel to earth. May I ask why the weapon? In the Imperial Air Force we leave such toys for the mud hogs in the trenches."

His voice was a languid, arrogant drawl. The conceit of the German ace as revealed by it was colossal. Johnny's brain worked like lightning. And now suddenly an idea, formed in the young British warbird's mind.

They had to get up into the sky again, to rejoin their squadron. If he could only anger this braggart of a Jerry ace sufficiently he might pull it off.

So as the young oil-stained airman spoke tauntingly he tried to put all the force of his personality into his words.



A TRICK CRASH.—
To bamboozle the
Bosche Johnny threw
up his arms as if hit
and sent his 'plane
crashing into the
trees.

"The Captain is very kind to compliment me," he said. "But it is nothing. I could do it again any time, with or without an observer."

He sheathed his revolver as he spoke, and a fierce joy surged up in him as he noted the effect of his speech. The spy-flier's face was suffused with a scarlet, which gave way to a deadly pallor with the violence of his rage.

"You impudent dog," he snarled. "You to beat Kapitän Kummel in a sky duel! You could never have turned that trick again in a thousand years."

Johnny whipped off his flying helmet, threw back his boyish head and laughed insolently.

"I could bring the worthy captain down twenty times a day if he were so unfortunate as to meet me that often," he said.

From the corner of his eye he and Ian could see men running across to them. But a glance at his antagonist told Johnny that already his barbs had gone far enough home.

"You—you lying swine!" the Bosche flung at him, while Ian stood by smiling, but alert. "I'll kill you for that." He advanced menacingly, but the young British warbird laughed in his face.

"If the Captain really doubted my statement, he could easily put it to the test," Johnny said coolly.

"*Lieber Gott!*" gasped the German, almost out of his mind. "You dare to challenge me to another duel in the air? So be it!"

He turned to the soldiers, who came running up.

"Swine," he raged at them. "Bring out that captured Spad and a new-type Pfalz for me," and he stalked towards the hangars.

As they walked after him, with four German soldiers carrying rifles with fixed bayonets in the rear, Squadron-Leader Ian shot his young brother a warning glance. The Pfalz that Kummel was to fly had been bothering their own British Staff Generals ever since it had entered the sky arena. It was fast, zippy; could climb and dive like Nobody's business.

And now Johnny was to fight the notorious Jerry ace, Captain Kummel, who would be at the controls of such a machine.

When they reached the flying field, the German ground crews had already wheeled out the two 'planes. As they set ignition and swung the propeller of the German ship the Mercedes engine broke into elemental harsh thunder, while the whole machine strained at the chocks like some monster eager for the kill.

Kummel turned to the wind-tanned lad in flying Teddy bears and helmet.

"At two thousand metres above this field we join battle. Raise your hand when you are ready to begin the fight. I shall take off first, and if you try to make a break for the lines—" he left the threat unfinished.

Johnny shook his head and smiled.

"I shall pass over the lines only when I have sent you plunging earthward, *Herr Kapitän!*"

But as he was about to walk to the Spad, a long, low saloon car surged up to the field. And several highly important-looking officers of the German Imperial staff climbed out. They came striding over the field towards the arrogant, keen-faced German ace.

"*Herr Kapitän,*" began one of the staff officers sternly—a grizzled General with upturned *Kaiserliche* moustaches, and white hair. "This is most irregular. A telephone message from the commanding officer of the *Jaagstaffel* summoned us here. We shall permit this duel because now your honour as an officer of the German Imperial Air Arm depends upon it. But mark you, you must not fail!"

And the pale blue eyes of the German general were suddenly icy, bitter and condemning. The next

second, however, he had turned from the discomfited Jerry ace, and these same eyes blazed at Squadron-Leader Ian.

"Arrest that man," thundered the General. "He has flown in the German Air Service"—as, indeed, Ian had for a time, pretending that his sympathies had veered to the enemy—"and he tricked us."

Johnny, about to mount the stirrup of the Spad, turned with a sharp cry to intervene. But Ian slewed his head as the soldiers closed in upon him, and he was smiling still.

"All right fellow, you fight Kummel and make your getaway. They want you in the air to lead the Red Devils squadron. I'll come out all right, you'll see."

With an inward groan Johnny mounted and swung over into the cockpit of the roaring Spad. His brother was quite right! Duty must come before all personal inclinations. And his duty was to down Kummel and get into the air at the head of the harassed Red Devils squadron.

Cloud Aces Clash.

JOHNNY watched Kummel zoom into the air; then he bent his helmeted head, listening to his engine's steady roar as he opened throttle. All set! The Spad shook and quivered.

Warily through his goggles Johnny watched the German Staff officers ushering Ian into their big car. The young pilot's brain was racing as fast as his own engine cylinders.

Those German generals could not have come far, even in the high-powered car. They had answered the field-telephone call too quickly for that.

"Going to see where they make for!" he gritted. "Ian shot as a spy! Gad, not if I know it."

The next moment, as he signalled, the ground men ducked under the wings, pulling the blocks away from the wheels. The Spad went away like a greyhound unleashed.

She skimmed and careened—the wheels bumped twice as the tail came up. Then Johnny lifted her into a power zoom and banked around, watching that big car sliding along the road as the ground fell far beneath him.

Johnny saw only one building for miles in the open countryside—an old ruined farmhouse set amidst orchards with rolling fields around.

"The car's making for that farmhouse. Got to help Ian out," he muttered.

He put the nose up in a roaring slant, pulling through damp walls of mist. Then coming out into the blue, with the clouds rolling grey beneath, he concentrated grimly on the coming sky-fight.

His altimeter told him he was at two thousand metres, or roughly 6,500 feet. And the young British air ace found Kummel droning impatiently in a wide circle.

Icy calm, the young skyrider raised his gauntleted arm. It was the signal he was ready.

For a few tense seconds high thunder was flung to the skies as the two 'planes meteored across sky at one another.

Johnny got the red and cream fuselage in his sights. And he crouched forward—seconds only to spare. Thin streaks of burning flame leapt from the staggering Vickers. Johnny saw the side of the German's pit eaten away. Then when it looked like a collision both 'planes madly split-apart from one another. Johnny had lost his target.

The Pfalz went over on its back. On top of the loop the Jerry ace crossed control, half rolled over and came stabbing back across the sky-space. His guns sent deadly grey ribbons streaking out, and Johnny plunged down through the clouds.

They were out under the clouds now. Neither in good position for a burst. For seconds the rival planes chased each other around in vertical banks. Then suddenly Johnny threw his stick over and kicked full right rudder. That brought him round right-about-face, the wings bending as he was pushed back, his brace wires straining madly.

He had got the Bosche "to rights," and his guns flamed and shook and clattered madly. He expected his petrol tank to burst.

But no! Kapitan Kummel wheeled out like a hawk in a vertical bank, his wings in tatters from that murderous sky-burst. Sheer over he flopped, throwing Johnny off the target, and went screaming, falling down-sky for two thousand feet.

But Johnny was after him. He'd get that Heinie in his sights again—get it before it flip-flopped out of that dive.

The earth lunged at them like a mighty fist. Johnny's head was numbed with the wind charge. He saw the Pfalz flip-flop—snap out of the dive. And he was glad to wrench back on his own stick and haul his shuddering plane away from spinning earth.

That Pfalz—it was good. No wonder G.H.Q. wanted to capture one. Gad! Johnny almost cried out. The German was swimming up-sky again, with engine whining like a typhoon about to burst.

Johnny went up and over in the tightest of Immelmans. And German and British aces struck at one another again with guns madly *rat-tat-tat-tatting*. But again it was Johnny who sighted better. In fact, he stopped the German's charge. Kummel frantically barrel-rolled, wheeled, and knifed down for the earth to escape, Johnny above him.

White-hot fear flooded through him as he pulled the roaring machine round. They were marching his brother Ian to execution.

Some sort of trial they may have given him—with short shrift at that. The Jerry staff officers, coming out of the farmhouse, were staring up at the sky. And as though he had been waiting to show off, Kapitan Kummel suddenly screamed across sky like some hate-inflamed eagle.

He caught Johnny off his guard. The young squadron ace was staring tensely down, as the Pfalz struck with flaming clattering guns.

Johnny cornered stick, and threw his roaring machine away from the smoke tracer. And as he heeled over and slid down sky on his left wing like a mortally wounded bird, a mad desperate plan was born in his brain.

By gad, he'd crash! It looked like he was going down shot to pieces—out of control. Well, he'd trust to luck to escape alive from the crash.

As he tore downwards, Johnny screamed and threw up his arms. Make the Bosche think he was mortally wounded. But he'd got the stick between his knees, and he went sloshing about in a wild falling leaf. Johnny knew how to bluff a crash.

But the nose was pulling, with the heavy engine.



THE FIRING SQUAD SCATTERED.—Ian tensed to meet the bullets of the firing squad, when suddenly from a near-by rain butt Johnny appeared and hurled a bomb between the soldiers and their victim.

The Britisher, glimpsing the ground some thousand feet beneath, suddenly gave a real start. Horror flooded him.

He saw the farmhouse beneath like a toy building. And, Gad! the German soldiers were marching out with a prisoner, whose hands were secured behind his back.

And at eighty feet the Spad took its head, and went shrilling down in one wild dive of horror.

Johnny cut the engine switch and crouched, pulling his leather coat with arms wrapped round his head on the crash pad. That sickening fall seemed to tear a hole in his stomach. Then the Spad ripped through the branches of trees with a grinding and crunching

roar. Johnny braced—but he was hurled about in the pit like a rag doll.

CR-RASH!

The plane struck the ground with a terrific impact, and darkness settled about Lieutenant Johnny Chisholm.

But it was only for a moment. He opened his eyes. His body was shaking like one with the palsy. But obeying the fierce dictates of his will he crawled out of the wrecked machine.

Work to do! Blazes, this was no playtime . . .

He fumbled with a handful of matches. Going to set light to his machine. So swift had been his crash-die that he doubted whether the Bosche could have told he had shut off engine at the last moment.

With shaking hand Johnny lit the bunch of matches and shoved them against the doped surface of the wings. He hoped the Bosche would believe he was trapped in the cockpit.

Instantly the oil-soaked wings flared. Johnny had spilled the contents of his petrol tank, and now he backed away hastily as the cocaded machine suddenly burst into a roaring geyser of flame.

Then the young pilot screamed deliberately. Screamed as if in fearful agony of burning—then fell silent.

He heard the sounds of pounding feet rapidly approaching the spot. Whipping up his sick senses the intrepid flying ace turned swiftly and sought cover behind the trees.

Johnny saw the Germans bursting through the trees. They stopped, staring at the flamer, then up at their own ace in the Pfalz, ripping through the clouds like some god of the heights. They smiled grimly, and the German general stroked his *moustache*.

But as Johnny crept away, he told himself there would be another meeting with Kummel, the Jerry ace.

The Firing Squad.

RUNNING stealthily, yet with all possible haste, the young ace flier sped through the orchard.

He made a complete circuit to get on the other side of the farmhouse, so that he could get up out of sight of the Germans.

As he came within view of the white walls of the farmhouse he started to crawl on hands and knees. He had no definite plan, and his heart seemed bursting with fear. If only he had a weapon of some sort!

What was that? Sound of tramping feet coming round the corner of the farmhouse! His brain reeled. They would catch him there.

Heart pounding wildly, he got to his feet and ran like a hare. His eye had lit on a large barrel standing under the corner of the eaves, to catch the rain, which dripped from the farmhouse roof. It was the only refuge in sight, and he leapt towards it. Hastily he flung his legs over the side and lowered himself until his head was below the rim. Luckily there was little water in the barrel.

Nor was he a moment too soon, for the first soldiers came tramping round the corner of the farmhouse as his head ducked below the edge of the barrel.

Twice the voice of a German officer spoke curt commands. Johnny listened with straining ears, in a torment of doubt and fear. His brother was about to be shot! And here he was a prisoner in a barrel, unable to move hand or foot.

Now he heard the voice of the German officer in charge of the firing party again.

"Do you choose to be blindfolded, Herr Kapitan Chisholm?"

"Awfully kind of you, I'm sure," drawled Ian nonchalantly. "But don't bother, please."

Johnny started keenly. His muscles contracted. For that drawing, reckless voice was quite close at hand. And that meant—that Ian must be standing against the wall quite near him.

He raised his head cautiously, inch by inch. And at what he saw he almost gasped aloud. Barely a foot away was a pair of clenched fists tightly bound together behind a khaki-clad back.

"Ian!" he whispered wildly.

If the big blond skyman was startled at his brother's voice, he showed barely a sign of it. True, the nails of his clenched hands seemed to dig deeper, his face muscles contracted till his jaw was set in a tight line.

With lips motionless he spoke from the corner of his mouth.

"Johnny, you're great, fellow! Game to make a break of it? Well, listen. Just behind you there's a window, with a piece of string hanging out—"

Johnny glanced behind and saw to his amazement that this was so. He did not know it, but the window was that of the German war generals' consultation room.

"*Achtung!*" barked the voice of the officer in charge of the firing party.

The heels of the firing squad clicked as they straightened to attention. And even then out of the corner of his mouth Ian was rapidly speaking in a low tone.

And it was an amazing story he so rapidly told. He had landed in Germany, and from a secret drawer in the Pfalz factory he had taken the plans of the wonderfully effective new Pfalz fighting plane—Germany's great new instrument for winning the war in the air.

Those plans had been taken from him again, however, and they lay on the desk in the German General's room, weighted with a *British hand grenade*.

That hand-grenade they had taken from Squadron-Leader Ian, little guessing that Ian had managed to fling out a piece of string through the window attached to the draw-pin of the bomb.

Again the sharp voice of the German General was heard to bark a command. In an agony of apprehension Johnny had managed to get hold of the string hanging out of the window, and now sharply he pulled it to him.

There was a clatter that made his flesh quiver as the bomb came out of the window into his hands—and attached to it were some papers. The plans of the Pfalz! Ian had cunningly made use of some beeswax; he himself had suggested to the German generals that the hand-grenade should be used as a paper-weight—and now his coup had carried.

With a cry Johnny seized the bomb. A cold sweat stood out on his brow as he jerked erect in the barrel, drawing the release-pin of the bomb.

"Run!" he shouted.

And as if shot from a catapult, Squadron-Leader Ian leapt away from the wall. At the same moment Johnny hurled the hand-grenade with all his might. There was a terrific explosion, a great red flower of flame.

As Johnny sprang out of the barrel a rifle cracked. The bullet *thucked* against the wall close to his head, But Johnny was running as he had never run before, round the farmhouse wall. Bullets singing past his head now with a high vicious whine. Ian ahead, still on his feet, still running. And down there by the farmhouse the big German staff car.

Johnny and Ian have won the first two rounds of their duel with Kummel. Can they win through in the final and most vital round? Don't miss next week's whirlwind yarn of these War Aces.

FUN AT
SCHOOL!

The Brotherhood of the BLACK HAND!
WHO ARE THEY?

DRAMA!
THRILLS!



Davenport's Warning.

"NOW there'll be a shindy!" Fatty Slocum of the Remove at St. Giddy's spoke these words excitedly.

In the whole of the Lower School, in fact, there was a state of suppressed excitement, and especially in the ranks of the Remove.

Johnny Gee & Co. in particular were looking unusually morose and uneasy that morning. They had every reason to be.

Dick Bannister of the Remove had been caught in Mr. Cattermole's study in the middle of the night, removing the Craven Prize Exam papers from the Housemaster's desk!

Catty, lying in wait for a further visit from the mysterious Black Hand Brotherhood, that amazing secret society that had set all St. Giddy's by the ears, had caught Dick red handed!

And—sensation upon sensation!—Dick Bannister had been clad in the black hooded robe of the Black Hand Brotherhood which revealed, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that he was mixed up with that mysterious band.

Immediately after breakfast Johnny Gee & Co. were buttonholed by Remington, the bullying prefect.

"Mr. Cattermole wants you in his study at once" he said.

Johnny Gee & Co. exchanged uneasy glances. They had expected the summons, and had made up their minds that, come what may, they would not break their inviolable oath of secrecy.

They trooped off to the Housemaster's study, to

find Mr. Cattermole awaiting them like a bird of prey ready to swoop. His narrow features were working with excitement, and his eyes glittered at the chums of the Remove as they came in.

"You are aware, Gee, that I caught Bannister in this room last night—caught him in the act of abstracting the Craven Examination papers from my desk?" he rasped.

"Yes, sir," replied the Remove captain quietly.

"He was dressed in the ridiculous garb of this—this so-called secret society!" went on Mr. Cattermole in biting tones. "It is apparent to me that Bannister was not alone in the conspiracy, and that he is attempting to shield the others who were his confederates. You would do well, Gee, to confess without further procrastination that you are the ringleader in this affair—"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can do nothing of the sort!" said Johnny Gee.

Mr. Cattermole compressed his lips, and his eyes took on a harder glitter.

"How dare you, Gee!" he rapped. "I am perfectly aware that, despite what evidence you may have concocted to the contrary, it was you and your friends here who made that outrageous assault upon me in the quadrangle!"

"I have already told you, sir, that we know nothing about it!" replied the Remove captain. "We were somewhere else at the time, as we were able to prove."

Mr. Cattermole gave a snort.

"You are telling falsehoods!" he hissed. "This is a deliberate attempt to deceive and mislead me! But you will not deny, Gee, that Bannister is a member of this—er—Black Hand Brotherhood?"

Johnny Gee looked the cantankerous Housemaster squarely in the eyes.

"I can give you an explanation of why Bannister came to this study last night, sir," he replied. "He took those exam papers to destroy them, because one of the question sheets had already been stolen, and had been copied. It wasn't fair to the rest of the Form to let the exam take place under those circumstances, and the fellow responsible for taking the exam paper couldn't be shown up, of course, without someone sneaking on him. Sneaking is barred in the Remove, sir, and Bannister was indirectly doing the right and proper thing by destroying the rest of the papers. That is the truth, sir. Bannister is innocent of any sinister motive for what he did."

Mr. Cattermole gave a harsh laugh.

"A likely story, Gee!" he sneered. "Bannister was caught red-handed at my desk! His object was not to destroy the papers, but to steal one of them so that he—and the rest of you, no doubt—would know what questions were being set and could prepare the answers. You cannot deceive me by this cleverly thought-out subterfuge! Will you tell me, Gee, who are the others concerned in this absurd Black Hand business?"

"I have nothing to tell, sir," replied Johnny Gee stubbornly.

Mr. Cattermole set his teeth hard.

"Very well," he hissed. "We shall see how long you are able to keep up this attitude of defiance! Go, rascals, and take the consequences!"

Johnny Gee & Co. left the Housemaster's study.

They exchanged serious glances when they were outside.

"Begad! Catty's on the jolly old warpath, old chappies!" observed Lord Reggie Pelham-Smith, polishing his monocle. "He's got it in for us, y'know!"

Johnny Gee nodded. "Not only for us, but for poor old Dick as well!" he said. "I wonder what Catty will do next?"

"Davenport's the cad who's responsible for us getting into this mess!" growled the Hon. Bob Vernon. "The Brotherhood haven't dealt with him yet!"

"No—but Davenport's time will come!" was Johnny Gee's grim rejoinder, and the chums hurried away as the bell rang.

There was one other fellow in the Remove that morning who had good reason to feel disturbed. He was Cecil Davenport, the millionaire's son.

When the morning lesson was over, Davenport hurried from the Form-room. He met Remington of the Sixth on the lower corridor, and he gave the prefect a bitter look.

"Come into my study, Remington," he said between his teeth. "I want to talk to you."

There was something compelling in Davenport's tone and the expression on his face. He walked into his study, and Remington followed after him.

"Well, what's wrong?" demanded the prefect surlily.

"Everything!" exclaimed Davenport, whirling round on him. "That examination paper you got for me, Remington—it's been taken!"

Remington's jaw dropped.

"Wha-a-a-at!" he ejaculated. "You don't mean—"

"Somebody came nosing in here yesterday and took it!" snarled the bouncer of the Remove. "One of Gee's crowd, of course—that confounded

secret society of theirs. They knew that I'd got hold of the question sheet and they pinched it back. I'd been making notes in the margin, so they have all the proof they want against me. Then they sent Bannister to Cattermole's room last night to pinch the rest of the papers. A new set of questions will have to be got out, of course—so that the information I had becomes valueless. That's why Bannister played that stunt in Catty's study!"

Remington drew a deep breath.

"My hat! You're right, Davenport! The thing's as plain as a pikestaff, of course. Do you—do you think those little devils know that I supplied you with that copy?"

"That I paid you ten quid to get it for me," you mean?" sneered Davenport. "I shouldn't be at all surprised. But don't you worry, Remington—you and I are going to sink or swim together in this. Gee is the most likely one to have the paper. And he must be watched. We'll think of a plan together, and—"

Davenport broke off with a gasp. Something had come whizzing through the open window at the top, to fall on the carpet almost at his feet with a dull thud. It was something wrapped in paper. Wonderingly, Davenport picked it up and unwrapped the paper. It was merely a stone, but an ejaculation of amazement and dismay broke from the dandy's lips as his gaze fell on the paper.

In the centre was a large black hand, pointing accusingly at him, and underneath was this cryptic message, drawn in large, glaring characters:

Beware the vengeance of the Black Hand!

We Will Repay!

Remington stared at this missive, his face going a shade paler.

"It's from the Black Hand Brotherhood!" he gasped. "Oh, crumbs! They're on to you then, Davenport!"

Davenport rushed to the window and glared down into the quadrangle. There were several fellows about. Pumfret & Co. of the Third were disporting themselves merrily under the elm trees. The plump form of Sammy Sloocum could be seen hovering about the door of the tuck-shop. In the distance Johnny Gee and the rest of the Co. were standing in the school gateway, talking to Sergeant Rumble. Everything appeared perfectly normal. Davenport turned from the window with a growl.

"What do you make of it, Davenport!" demanded Remington. "Can it be those little sweeps, I wonder, or—"

"The fact that Bannister was caught proves that they're mixed up in it!" snarled Davenport, crushing the paper in his hand and hurling it into the grate. "And I mean to get that copy of the question sheet back! If you let me down now, Remington, I'll see that you don't escape scot free, anyway!"

Remington gave him a hard look, and left the study. Meanwhile, Johnny Gee & Co. came indoors, and they met Marmaduke Mist in the hall. Mist, the absent-minded Removite, was staring vacantly through the window, and he gave a jump when Johnny Gee dug him in the ribs.

"Did you do that little job for us, Marmy, as you promised?" he asked.

"Er—really, my dear Gee, what little job do you mean?" asked Mist. "I—I forget, you know!"

"Better look it up in your notebook, old scout," suggested the Hon. Bob Vernon.

Mist dragged out his notebook, which was his mind and memory.

"Oh, yes, here we are!" he said. "You asked me to throw that—er—packet into Davenport's study window from the balcony. I have done so!"

"Good egg!" said Johnny, taking the notebook.

"We'll scratch out the entry with pencil—like so! Thanks awfully, Marmy. Cheerio!"

The drums of Study No. 4 strolled indoors, grinning, whilst Mist continued to stare vacantly through the window. He had already forgotten!

Catty's Bad Night.

MR. CATTERMOLE, smarting under the indignity of the attack he had suffered at the hands of the four unknown ragers the other evening, and convinced within himself that Johnny Gee & Co. were the culprits, was determined to get at the truth of the affair. And he now had only one recourse—to force the information from Dick Bannister.

As evening drew on, and the shadows began to steal into his cheerless prison, Dick Bannister heard footsteps approaching, and he sprang up from the hard bed in alarm.

The key grated in the lock, and the door of the Punishment Room opened, to admit Sergeant Rumble, Mr. Cattermole, and Remington. Mr. Cattermole was carrying a formidable-looking birch—an instrument used only on the rarest occasions at St. Giddy's. The Housemaster darted a vicious look at the prisoner.

"Bannister!" he rapped. "Do you still persist in your refusal to tell me who are your confederates in this disgraceful affair?"

"I have told you all I have to say, sir," Dick replied quietly.

"Indeed!" grated the Housemaster. "We shall see about that! Rumble—Remington, seize that boy and secure him to the bedpost!"

Sergeant Rumble hesitated a little before complying, but Remington came on with alacrity. Dick backed away, hitting out smartly at Remington, and he landed several telling blows before he was overpowered and his hands fastened to the bedpost.

"Rumble—Remington!" rasped Mr. Cattermole. "Leave the room, and do not return to-night unless you receive specific instructions from me—do you understand?"

The porter and Remington strode away, leaving Mr. Cattermole alone with his victim.

"Now, Bannister," grated the Housemaster, raising the birch aloft. "For the last time, will you confess to the names of your confederates?"

"No, sir!"

Mr. Cattermole wasted no further time. There was only one way of dealing with the stubborn junior—the birch!

But ere the first blow was struck, there came a swift rush of feet, and Mr. Cattermole felt the birch snatched from his hand and hurled across the room. He whirled round, and then uttered a startled screech.

Half-a-dozen strange forms garbed in black hooded robes had rushed into the Punishment Room and surrounded him. Mr. Cattermole reeled back against the bed, panting.

"Desist, wretched tyrant!" hissed a voice from one of the mysterious marauders. "The Brotherhood of the Black Hand have sought you out, and will deal suitably with you for maltreating one of their loyal brothers! Release Brother Bannister!"

Willing hands set Dick free, whilst Mr. Cattermole struggled vainly in the grip of the black-robed brothers who held him.

"Help! Help!" he shrieked. "Rascals, release me this instant! You shall pay—Yah!"

Catty sat down with a flop on the hard bed, in quite an undignified attitude. He was up again like a Jack-in-the-box, but too late! The six robed marauders and Dick Bannister made a prompt exit, and the door of the Punishment Room slammed noisily in Mr. Cattermole's face!

He heard the key grating in the lock, and footsteps receding swiftly along the corridor on the other side!

Mr. Cattermole smote upon the door.

"Open this door! Release me, do you hear?"

Catty tugged desperately at the handle, but the door would not budge. He wrenched and beat a wild tattoo upon it with fists and feet. But there was no response. Mr. Cattermole was hoist by his own petard!

Meanwhile the Black Hand Brothers had made a swift departure from the School House, via the back stairs, the West Wing, and the cloisters. They came to the ruined chapel, and they descended the winding



THE HOODED AVENGER.—Fatty, enjoying his stolen tuck, almost choked in alarm when a figure in a black cloak and cowl appeared before him. With a howl Fatty fled.

stone steps into the crypt. From thence ran a narrow tunnel, leading to the vaults. The leader switched on a pocket torch to light the way. Not a word was spoken, until the marauders and their rescued Brother had passed through the oak door of a certain vault.

A blue flame illumined the chamber with a mysterious glare. There were other figures likewise dressed in robes. They all raised black-gloved hands in greeting.

The Noble Arch stepped to the table in front—a kind of altar at which the blue fire burned in a brass bowl.

"Brothers of the Black Hand!" he said. "We rejoice to have with us once again our respected Brother Bannister, who fell into the enemy's clutches last night whilst performing the duty of our ancient and noble Brotherhood! Brother Bannister, let this Mystic Lodge be your refuge from now hence, until the blot cast upon your escutcheon has been removed! You will remain custodian of this abysmal lodge, and let none pass within its magic portal save those who can give the signs and passwords. Here, Brother, are food and other necessities to sustain you in your vigil. Are you afraid?"

"Rats! I mean, of course, I am not afraid, Most Noble Arch!" replied Brother Bannister cheerfully.

"Come, Brothers, we must away lest suspicion be aroused," said the Most Noble Arch. "Brother Bannister, ere we bid you good night, I have one last instruction which I charge you to carry out faithfully. In the morning, go out elsewhere, returning here only when the school is at lessons. Understand? Good!"

The Black Hand Brothers departed in swift, mysterious silence, and Dick Bannister was left alone in the vault beneath the ruined chapel.

Fatty the Fraud.

SERGEANT RUMBLE made his way ponderously up the narrow back stairs in the remote regions of School House, a part set away from the rest of the school, and regarded in awe and dread by the youthful pupils of St. Giddy's.

It was morning, the rising bell was rung, and the worthy sergeant had performed his other early matutinal duties. Now he was taking up breakfast to the lonely denizen of the Punishment Room.

Sergeant Rumble carried a little tray on which reposed a mug of cocoa, a plate of stodgy porridge and a chunk of dry bread.

There was no sound from the Punishment Room; but as Sergeant Rumble unlocked the door and opened it, he heard a queer sort of gasp within.

Then it was Sergeant Rumble's turn to gasp, staring as though at some weird and wonderful apparition.

Mr. Ernest James Cattermole, M.A., lay upon the hard, comfortless bed. Catty was fully dressed, even to his scholastic gown, and as he sat up, his mortar board became cocked at a most absurd and undignified angle over his left eye.

"G-Good 'evings!" ejaculated Sergeant Rumble, and he dropped the tray with a crash.

"Grooo-o-oogh! Rumble! Dolt!" screeched Catty. "Why didn't you come before to release me? I have been knocking and shouting all night! Yah! This is a conspiracy! I was attacked by six rascals in black robes! They released Bannister and locked me here! I—"

"No one 'eard you, sir," exclaimed Sergeant Rumble warmly. "And you gave me speshul instructions last night as 'ow nobody was to come 'ere hexcept hon your horders. So 'earing nothing, Hi kept away. Horders is horders, sir!"

Mr. Cattermole snorted something that was un-

intelligible and, gathering his gown about him, he staggered weakly away.

There was a scuffle of feet below as the hapless Housemaster came down the stairs. It was Fatty Slocum, who had followed Sergeant Rumble to pick up any tit-bits of news concerning the prisoner. And what news Fatty had to bear, as he dashed as fast as his plump little legs would carry him into the junior common room!

"I say, you chaps, what do you think?" he bawled. "Bannister's gone!"

"Eh? What?"

"Gone—vanished—bunked!" roared Fatty. "The Black Hand Brotherhood released him last night, and they locked Catty in the Punishment Room all night!"

"Gammon!"

"Pull the other leg, Fatty—it's got bells on!" said Erroll sarcastically.

Sammy Slocum's tale was quickly corroborated, however. St. Giddy's fairly buzzed with the news. The idea of Mr. Cattermole spending the night in the Punishment Room tickled the imagination of everyone.

Mr. Cattermole did not appear at call-over. The unfortunate Housemaster, succumbing to the fatigues of the night, had gone straight to bed for a few hours, after sending a telegram to Dr. Holroyd in London, calling upon him to return to St. Giddy's at once.

During the morning, Johnny Gee & Co. were once more the cynosure of all eyes. But there were several fellows at St. Giddy's who guessed that the cheery heroes of the Remove would have some sort of "get out." The rescue of Dick Bannister had been accomplished by members of the Black Hand Brotherhood, but it had still to be proved that Johnny Gee & Co. were the Black Hand Brotherhood.

George Cadman, the Remove bully and one of Johnny Gee's bitterest rivals, dearly wanted that proof to be forthcoming, so that Study No. 4 would "get it in the neck." He had made one attempt to betray the Joyous Juniors, and failed. Then he had gleaned his previous information from Fatty Slocum, and he was wondering just how much more the plump Removeite knew.

Cadman was in funds that day, and he went to the tuck-shop to change his remittance. Fatty Slocum was there, seated on an upturned ginger-beer crate at the counter, pathetically nibbling a bun.

Slocum's little round eyes opened greedily when George Cadman began to order all kinds of luscious tuck for tea. He came off the upturned ginger-beer crate and sidled up to the Form bully, which was just what Cadman wanted him to do. He knew that the tuck would act as a magnet to Fatty.

"I—I say, Cadman," said Fatty in an ingratiating manner. "Those tarts look prime. Lemme have one—I'm famished."

"Handed off!" rapped Cadman curtly, and then he lowered his voice. "But you can help yourself, Slocum, if you tell me about this secret society and how Gee and his crowd are mixed up in it."

Fatty cast a longing look at the tarts, and he fell. "All right, Cadman, I'll let you into the secret," he said, and a fat hand strayed to the plate of tarts. "The first password is 'mumbo-jumbo,' and after you've given the sign, which is to pass the black hand across your throat from left to right, you say 'abra-cadabra,' and they let you in."

"Good!" said Cadman, his eyes gleaming. "I'll remember that, Slocum. And what about the new meeting place? Do you know where that is?"

Fatty shook his head.

"Nunno! The rotters are keeping me in the dark about that," he said. "Yum-yum! These tarts are

really first chop, and—Ow! Wharrer you doing, you beast?"

"Keeping you away from the tarts!" said Cadman calmly, as he made up a bundle of all his tuck and pushed Fatty roughly against the counter. "You've eaten enough for the information you've given me, which isn't much."

The bully of the Remove strode out of the tuck-shop, leaving Fatty glowering wrathfully after him.

Sammy Slocum felt peeved—and having had his appetite whetted, so to speak, he craved for more tuck!

All at once, he gave a chuckle. An idea had occurred to him for getting the tuck. He allowed a few minutes to elapse, and then went to Study No. 11 and knocked mysteriously on the door. Cadman's gruff voice bade him enter, and he crept in—still very mysteriously.

"Shush-shush!" whispered Fatty. "I say, Cadman, I've got some information! The Black Hand Brotherhood—they're at work again! They've come—to take vengeance on Davenport! At this very moment, Cadman, they're in Davenport's study, putting him to torture, and if you chaps hurry, you'll catch 'em on the hop!"

Cadman & Co. jumped up with alacrity.

"My hat!" ejaculated Cadman eagerly.

"Come on—we'll go along there and start a shindy, and hang on to 'em till the prefects arrive!"

Cadman and his cronies crept from the room, making their way on tip-toe along to Davenport's study. Fatty Slocum gave a deep chuckle and, grabbing the parcel of tuck from the cupboard, he made off with it, vanishing along the Remove passage in the opposite direction.

Cadman & Co., meanwhile, had crept along to Davenport's study, and they halted outside. A low murmur of voices sounded within, and they looked meaningly at one another.

"Now!" muttered Cadman. "All together—and never mind the row we make. The more the better!"

Cadman & Co. made a rush at the study door, and charged it full tilt. To their amazement, the door simply flew open, and next moment they all went sprawling wildly through the wide doorway, to land in a heap inside the study.

"Yaroooogh! Yah! Oh, crumbs! Youp!"

There were two fellows in the study—Davenport and Remington. They stared in amazement at the four struggling newcomers.

"Why, what the dickens—" began Davenport. Cadman & Co. struggled to their feet and blinked sheepishly at one another.

"Yow!" groaned Cadman. "We—expected to find the Black Hand Society here. Slocum told us they were torturing you, and we thought we'd take 'em by surprise."

"Much obliged, I'm sure!" sneered Davenport. "Though perhaps you weren't thinkin' so much of my safety, as grabbin' the Black Hand Gang an' showin' up Gee's crowd—what?"

He looked hard at Cadman & Co., and a cunning gleam came into his eyes.

"We're all in together on this, I see," he remarked. "Puttin' two an' two together, I tumble now to who it was worked that rag on Cattermole the other night, an' afterwards sent him on to Starling's barn, to catch the others. A jolly good idea on your part, Cadman, an' a dashed pity it misfired at the end. But we'll jaw this thing over together, an' perhaps we can fix a way of having Gee in a proper mess by the time Cattermole starts inquiren' into things."

"YUM-yum-yum!" Sammy Slocum was enjoying himself. Seated in a lonely part of the cloisters, under one of the ancient arches, the artful dodger of the Remove wired into his stolen feed.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Fatty to himself. "I spoofed those rofters beautifully! Serves 'em right for trying to bribe me and—Oooo—we!"

Fatty almost choked himself in alarm as a gruesome



A CHEAT CAUGHT OUT.—"Got it!" murmured Davenport, as he took the paper from under the loose board. Next moment it was snatched from his hand and he turned to see Cadman holding the Craven Exam paper.

figure suddenly darted out in front of him. It was a form in a black cloak, a cowl covering its head. The figure stood before him, a black hand pointed accusingly at him.

"Thief!" hissed a blood-curdling voice from beneath the cowl. "Your wicked deeds are known to the Brotherhood of the Black Hand! Well may you tremble! I am the Avenger!"

"Oooooogh! Gerraway! Help!" bawled Fatty and, with one terrific leap he was on his feet and dashing away underneath the arches as though all the fiends imaginable were on his track.

With a soft chuckle the mysterious marauder scooped up the tuck and made off with it, vanishing in the direction of the ruined chapel.

Fatty Slocum, meanwhile, ran full tilt into a party of five fellows who were prowling there. Cadman and Co. and Davenport seized Fatty and whirled him back.

"Now, you thieving young rotter!" hissed Cadman. "Where's my tuck?"

"Ooogh! Lemme go!" wailed Fatty. "It's been stolen—by one of the Black Hand Gang! Oh, dear! After a terrible struggle, I escaped—"

"You lying little toad!" snarled Cadman. "You're trying to pull my leg again, and—"

"I don't think he is, Cadman," interposed Davenport quietly. "Slocum's yarn sounds true—up to a point. You can cut off, Slocum!"

As Slocum's plump form vanished, Davenport went on eagerly.

"The disguised prowler who just scared Slocum is Bannister, of course!" he said. "He's been hiding down here since he was let out of the Punishment Room yesterday, and he's made off with your tuck—see? Come on—we'll find him!"

The five Removites made their way into the cloisters searching for clues of Dick's whereabouts. Suddenly, Davenport clutched Cadman's arm.

"There's somebody coming!" he snapped. "Get down here, quick—and not a sound!"

Distant footsteps sounded on the ancient flagstones of the cloisters. Davenport and Cadman & Co. ducked down behind the tumbled masonry. Soon, two weird figures came to view. They wore the cowed robes of the Black Hand Brotherhood! The newcomers descended into the crypt, and were swallowed up in the darkness.

Davenport motioned to his companions to follow.

They saw the grisly prowlers halt in front of an oak door, and three knocks sounded. Then they heard a voice as the door opened slightly.

"Who seeks?"

"The Most Noble Arch and a worthy Brother of our Ancient Order!" was the reply.

"Give the password!"

"Hocus-pocus!"

Immediately, the oak door creaked open, and the robed figures passed into the vault beyond.

Davenport and Cadman & Co. crept through the darkness, and halted outside the door of the vault. From inside, deep voices sounded.

"We rejoice to hear that you are still safe and well, Brother Bannister!" they heard one of the visitors say. "In about an hour's time we shall be hauled up on the *tapis* for cross-examination, and we have ways and means to discuss, before that happens. Therefore prepare the lodge for a special meeting in half-an-hour. The password is *vigilant*. Understand?"

"All clear, Most Noble!" replied Dick Bannister.

The eavesdroppers outside darted into hiding behind the arch, as the door came open and the two visitors passed out.

"What's the lay now, Davenport?" whispered Cadman.

In low whispers Davenport gave a cunning plan. Ten minutes later, Cadman & Co. crept up to the vault door, and waited there, while Davenport walked in from the steps leading from the ruined chapel above, and gave three taps.

The door was opened a little way, and a voice asked cautiously:

"Who knocks?"

Davenport replied, in a gruff voice:

"The Most Noble Arch of our Ancient Order!"

"What is the password?"

"*Vigilant!*" muttered Davenport.

The door came open, and immediately Davenport's voice hissed out in the darkness:

"Grab him!"

Cadman & Co. made a rush, and a startled yell sounded in the doorway. Dick Bannister went down before the unexpected attack, hitting out blindly,

but he was no match for his four attackers. Dick was made secure, and his captors hid him in a dark corner of the vault. Then Davenport put on the black cowed robe, and told the others to get outside and hide.

Little did Cadman & Co. realise, however, the true depth of Davenport's cunning. Before any showing-up occurred, he must secure that exam. paper!

At last, stealthy footsteps were heard outside, and three sharp raps sounded at the door.

"Who knocks?" growled Davenport, opening the door a few inches.

"The Most Noble Arch himself, and all the worthy brothers of our Ancient Order!" was the whispered reply.

"The password!"

"*Vigilant!*"

Davenport opened the door, and admitted the black-robed Brothers. The blue flame was lit on the table, and the lodge meeting proceeded.

"Worthy Brothers, we will get to business without preamble, for there is much to discuss!" said the Noble Arch solemnly. "Word has just reached our ears that certain fatheaded duffers belonging to Earlswood School have ventured forth this afternoon, to seek us out and smash up our lodge. But the burning question of the moment is, how best to stave off Cattermole? He is bound to ask some awkward questions, but the answer to each and every one will be—silence!"

Low grunts of approval came from the assembled brothers.

"One moment, Most Noble Arch!" growled Davenport. "What about that exam. paper taken from Davenport?"

"The evidence that we hold against Davenport is safely put away!" was the Noble Arch's reply.

"The paper remains hidden in Study No. 4, underneath the loose board in the floor. We shall make use of it when the time is ripe."

The eyes behind the slits in the cowl of the supposed Brother Bannister glittered with the light of triumph. There was a sudden movement from the far corner of the vault, accompanied by strange gurgling noises.

As the black-robed Brothers rushed to the corner, Davenport ran to the door and wrenched it open. A yell burst from under the heaving bedclothes.

"Look out! Stop that rotter! It's Davenport!" Too late! Davenport was already through the door.

Crash! The heavy oak door was slammed upon them. The key turned in the lock. They heard Davenport run across the flagstones and drop the key into the crevice where it was usually kept, and then he was gone.

Found and Lost.

DAVENPORT and Cadman & Co. made their way out of the crypt, through the ruined chapel and into the cloisters.

Cadman and his cronies were chuckling in high delight.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Leslie Meeke. "Now we can fetch Cattermole straight away and have the rotters bowled out—eh?"

Davenport drew up beneath one of the cloister arches and regarded Cadman & Co. with a steady, sneering gaze.

"You can leave the handling of this business to me," he said. "I'll arrange with Remington for Catty to show up, but it won't be just yet."

"But look here, Davenport," exclaimed Cadman; "I don't see why—"

Davenport strolled away, leaving Cadman & Co. staring after him in mingled wrath and wonder.

Cadman was passing Study No. 4 a little later,

when a sudden movement inside the room caused him to draw to a halt. According to his reckoning, all the occupants of that study should be down in the vaults, locked securely in their lodge room. So Cadman bent down at the keyhole, and peeped through. What he saw fetched a gasp of amazement to his lips.

Cecil Davenport was in there. He had the carpet rolled up, and was kneeling on the floor prising up a loose board. Reaching underneath, he picked out a folded sheet of paper. So engrossed was he in looking at the paper, that Cecil Davenport did not hear the stealthy movement at the door of the study, nor was he aware of the newcomer who was creeping up softly behind him.

"Got it!" he muttered. "At last! Now——"

The paper was suddenly snatched from his hand, whilst a mocking voice behind him sounded:

"So have I got it, Davenport! My hat! A Craven exam. paper, with notes in your handwriting on the margin! Whew!"

Davenport leaped to his feet, and he whirled on Cadman, his eyes blazing with ungovernable rage.

"Give me that, Cadman!" he shouted.

"Rats!" said Cadman defiantly, thrusting the tell-tale document into his pocket. "I'm keeping this, Davenport, and if you want it back, you'll have to ask me to make terms—Oh!"

Davenport, losing his temper, hurled himself at Cadman. Next moment, the pair were fighting hammer and tongs. The steady tramp-tramp of

feet in Study No. 4 soon attracted Duncan and North of the Sixth, who were amazed to see Davenport and Cadman fighting.

"My hat! What are you young sweeps doing here!" demanded Duncan. "And what's the row about?"

Cadman drew back, an unpleasant grin on his face.

"We just happened to barge in here during the course of our scrap, Duncan, that's all!" said Cadman coolly. "Davenport thinks I've got something belonging to him, and I deny that it ever did belong to him. What do you say, Davenport? Shall we let Duncan be the judge?"

Davenport darted a look of furious rage at the Form bully.

"Never mind now," he said thickly. "I—I'll settle with you later about this, Cadman!"

"You two young rascals will take a hundred lines each for scragging," said Duncan grimly. "And if I catch you at it again, it will mean a licking. Now cut off to your own studies, both of you!"

Cadman and Davenport glared at one another, and went off. But George Cadman did not go to his own study.

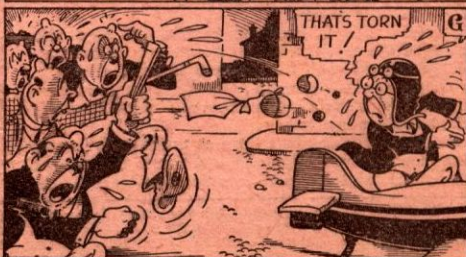
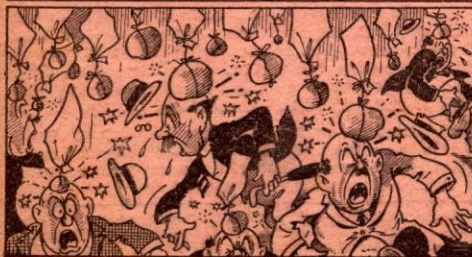
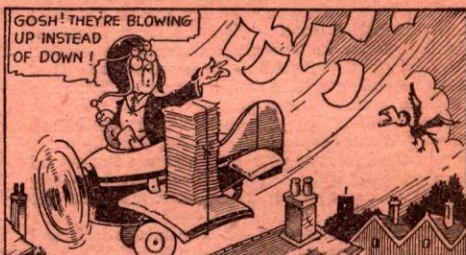
Instead, he went in search of Remington.

The Second Alibi.

"HUSH!" hissed the Most Noble Arch in a tense whisper. "There's somebody coming! Not a word, brothers!"

(Continued on next page.)

ARTLESS ALGY'S BUST-UP BRAINWAVES! Great New Comic Series.



THE QUELLING OF CATTY!

(Continued from previous page.)

The Brothers of the Black Hand listened at the door, and they heard soft voices on the other side.

"Shush-sh-sh! I think we're on the right track, kids! Those St. Giddy's worms must have come down here after they dodged us in the cloisters."

The voice was that of Tommy Rhodes, the leader of the Earlswood juniors!

"Put the light out!" whispered the Noble Arch. "Brothers, there is a chance of escape even now. If we can trick these duffers outside into opening this door, all will be well! Let us softly chant the first verse of the Black Hand Processional, to draw their attention, then keep silent and follow my cues!"

The light was extinguished and the Black Hand Brotherhood started to chant in low, weird voices through the darkness.

The Noble Arch and the Worthy Tyler, listening at the door, heard low gasps sound in the crypt outside.

"Hark!" hissed the voice of Tommy Rhodes. "The bounders are in there—churning out some potty song. We'll give 'em secret society! Let's listen to what they say."

From inside the vault, a deep-toned gong clanged!

"Brothers of the Black Hand, our mystic ceremonies are about to commence!" said a deep voice.

"Worthy Tyler, is the door fastened and secure?"

"The tyle, Most Noble Arch, is fastened and secure!"

"And where is the key to this Magic Temple?"

"The key, Most Noble Arch, is in its usual receptacle in the crevice in the wall outside!"

"Tis well!" rumbled the other voice on the other side of the locked door. "We will descend to the Lower Temple for our rites and sinister ceremonies!"

The Earlswood juniors outside heard sounds as if footsteps receding in the vault beyond. Within a few moments utter silence prevailed.

"Great pip! They're gone!" murmured Bob Nutter. "What are we going to do, Tommy?"

"Open that door, of course!" was the Earlswood leader's prompt reply. "I've found the key—my word, what a whopper! Now, carefully does the trick!"

Tommy Rhodes inserted the key in the lock and turned it slowly and softly. At last the lock fell back, and the door came open!

Greatly wondering what mysteries were to be revealed to them, Tommy Rhodes & Co. crept into the vault. No sooner were they inside, than they heard a rush of feet, they became aware of unseen figures rushing past them in the darkness, and a few moments later the door closed behind them with a terrific clang!

The Black Hand Brothers were free, and Tommy Rhodes & Co., alas!—were prisoners in the vault instead!

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear us smile, you Earlswood worms! You got us out of that nicely—and you must watch your step, because Catty's coming down soon. Good-bye-ee-eee!"

The Black Hand Brothers rushed off into the darkness of the crypt, and ten minutes later Johnny Gee & Co. appeared on the footer field at St. Giddy's. Soon they were indulging in some strenuous practice at the nets, while Wellesley and several Sixth Formers watched them approvingly.

The Joyous Juniors had been at practice for some little while, when two figures came down the School House steps and hurried across the quadrangle

towards the cloisters. They were Mr. Cattermole, now revived after his sleep, and Remington.

Cadman had got his information through at last, without laying himself open to a charge of sneaking. Catty was on the track!

Catty gave an eager exclamation as he approached the heavy oak door. Remington fished the key out of its receptacle in the wall, and it grated in the lock.

Mr. Cattermole stepped quickly into the open doorway, the torchlight flashing before him.

"Rascals! You are caught! I shall—Why, what—G-Good Heavens! Save me, Remington—Yah!"

A number of dark, active forms rushed between Mr. Cattermole's legs, ducking their heads low so as to avoid being recognised. They completely bowled Mr. Cattermole over, and as he felt himself going, he grabbed Remington, with the result that both Housemaster and prefect sat down on the cold, hard flagstones with a terrific jolt.

The torchlight fell to the flagstones, too, and broke. Catty and Remington were plunged into deep, impenetrable darkness. In the distance, they heard the sounds of scuttling feet.

Catty and Remington jumped up and groped their way to the steps.

They rushed up into the ruined chapel, and fairly tore through the cloisters into the quadrangle. Sounds of cheering from the direction of the playing-fields caught Catty's ears, and he stopped in amazement.

"Go it, Gee! Pass, Snowball! Hurrah!"

Remington heard these sounds, also, and he looked at Mr. Cattermole. Mr. Cattermole looked at Remington. Then they both started off for the playing-field.

Footer practice was in full swing at the nets, and Catty was so impetuous in his rush on to the field that he all but stopped the ball with his chest as it whizzed from the Hon. Bob Vernon's boot.

"Gee—Vernon—Pelham-Smith—Graham! You cannot deceive me by pretending to be in the midst of football!" he screeched. "You have just come from the crypt, where you have been performing some ridiculous secret society ceremony! Follow me!"

"But you must have made a mistake, sir," said Johnny Gee sweetly. "We've been on the field quite twenty minutes. Haven't we, Wellesley?"

"That is so," said the school captain, nodding.

"But I—I—don't understand!" gurgled Mr. Cattermole. "Some boys were in the crypt, and were known to have Bannister with them. They were locked in. I have just been there with Remington

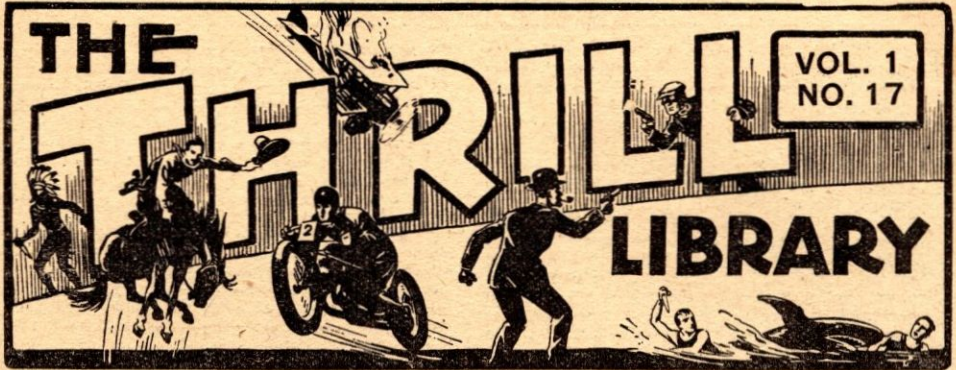
to apprehend them, but the rascals projected me off my feet and escaped. That was five minutes ago."

"Then it couldn't have been these boys, sir," said Wellesley. "I can vouch for that!"

Mr. Cattermole blinked at the Joyous Juniors. Davenport, Cadman and Remington were blinking at them, too, from different parts of the field. Another alibi! If the fellows in the crypt had not been Johnny Gee & Co., then who were they?

Mr. Cattermole gritted his teeth, and strode away. He was "saying up" many things for the heroes of the Remove, but he required a few moments in which to reason things out. For the second time when he thought he had caught them, Johnny Gee and Co. had proved an excellent alibi.

Catty thwarted again! But how can Johnny Gee & Co. clear Dick Bannister's name? Shocks and surprises in next week's long school yarn of the Boys of St. Giddy's.



SPECIAL STORY SUPPLEMENT FREE INSIDE BOYS' MAGAZINE

THE TREE OF GHOSTS



Revolt!

THROUGH the steaming African jungle a message throbbed. The drums were speaking, in the language no white man understands.

"Rise!" said the throbbing whisper of the jungle drums. "The great White King is coming! Rise and kill!"

And ten thousand savages heard—and waited . . .

A SLIM slip of a boy in shorts and topee crossed the dusty parade ground of the Chala River Residency in

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lithe strides, and the group of big Houssas squatting in the barrack shade rose with grins on their black, good-humoured faces and brought hands to red tarbooses in smart salute.

Genuine respect and affection for Hal Harker was in that act.

Son of missionary parents, slain by treacherous M'songa in his babyhood, he had spent twelve years as the adopted son of B'suru, the kindly old Olangi chief who had rescued him. When the British had taken over the territory, Captain Michael of the Houssas had found him—a jungle boy who knew no English, and had never seen a railway train or a motor-car. He had sent him to school at Sierra Leone, and now Hal was officially Commissioner Dawson's clerk at the Residency.

They had called him Hal of the Houssas, this sun-tanned, quiet-voiced boy. And these black police of West Africa worshipped him to a man.

"Ahmed," Hal questioned the bull-chested sergeant in coast Arabic. "Has the little talk-bird come yet?"

The carrier-pigeon message from Captain Michael, tax-collecting in the M'songa interior, was overdue, and the fact worried the lad more because the Commissioner had been sent to Sierra Leone with blackwater fever, leaving him alone in charge.

"No, *effendi*." The big Mohammedan wrinkled the noticeable tribal mark on his forehead. "The talk-bird has not yet—"

His words were drowned in a sudden hideous yell, and next instant a gigantic black figure, clad only in cotton trousers, bounded clean over the spiked palisade and rolled across the parade ground, kicking frantically and shrieking:

"*Yah-hoop! Yah-hooooo!* Ah's in de foils ob a pylon! Ah's bit by a aspirin! Oh, Lawdy—*whoop!*"

The startled group burst out laughing. It was Tom Tin-pan, the Americanised Kroo-boy ship's cook who had deserted a coast steamer with a bag of forty trade alarm-clocks, which, he said, he had borrowed, and had been elapped in the guardroom. He had escaped, taking his clocks and ten pairs of the Houssas' boots which he had also "borrowed."

"Get up, you chump!" laughed Hal. "That's not a python, or an asp, or any other kind of snake. It's a bit of creeper, tangled round your leg!"

"Am it?" Tom Tin-pan rose, staring owlshly. In a second he recovered his natural bounce. "Dat's what Ah thought it wuz," he declared calmly. "Ah wuz only shoutin' jist to scare dese black niggahs."

Luckily for him the "black niggahs"—the Houssas—did not understand English. Hal smiled—then the smile left his face suddenly at sight of two spears in the Kroo-boy's hand. M'songa and Umbeti war spears . . .

"Where did you get these?" he asked quickly.

"Ah borrowed 'em. Dey wuz 'bout free million niggahs in de woods, a'comin' dis way, an' Ah come back in case dey—"

But Hal, grim faced, was flinging terse orders that set the parade ground in a buzz of activity. His brain was racing. M'songa and Umbeti, tribes who hated each other, marching together through the forest. . . . Could it have anything to do with the strange rumour he had heard—

the rumour of a mysterious White King, coming to join the tribes in a great alliance?

An orderly trotted up, with startling information. M'bini, the proud, fierce M'songa chief, was at the gate seeking audience—and N'kema, the witch-doctor, was with him.

Hal thought quickly. It would never do to let them see that he was nervous of attack. Swift orders sent the armed Houssas to concealment.

The boy was lounging nonchalantly in a deck-chair on the veranda when the huge, leopard-robed M'songa chief, leaving his weapons at the gate, stalked insolently forward. Behind him came a shrunken, monkey-like figure, hideously painted and wearing a ghastly necklace of dried human hands. N'kema. . . .

"O white boy, we would speak with your master," M'bini said impudently, without greeting or salute.

"You are speaking to *your* master, O M'bini," said Hal, coldly. "And now I ask why do your people bring spears into the Chala forests?"

The answer came swift as light, and with utter unexpectedness.

"*To kill!*" shrieked N'kema, the witch-doctor—and in one lightning motion he drew a short spear from his skin robe and flung it. Ere Hal could move a muscle, the deadly point was speeding straight for his heart!

It was Tom Tin-pan who saved the boy from instant death. Peering round the end of the veranda, the giant Kroo-boy had sensed what was coming and flashed into dynamic action. Gripping two overlapping floorboards, he had put his gigantic strength into a heave that tore them from their joists. As they jerked up, flinging the deck-chair over, Hal was shot sideways—and the razor-sharp blade missed him by an inch!

Then things happened with breathless swiftness. A bullet, fired from the hip by Sergeant Ahmed, missed M'bini's head by a fraction and kicked the big brass ring from one of his ears. At the same time the clearing beyond the stockade became suddenly alive with figures leaping from the woods. N'kema's cry had been a signal, and before the concealed Houssas could spring to their posts a hundred yelling, painted savages were swarming over the stockade.

With N'kema at his heels, M'bini bounded for the stockade as the Houssas' first volley rang out, seized an axe from one of his men and raised his great voice in the battle-cry:

"M'songa! M'songa! Kill! Kill! Kill!"

Hal scrambled to his feet to see the parade ground a battlefield. Scores of blacks had got over in the first mad rush; were hacking and shrieking like devils as they fought with axe and spear against fifty Houssas with bullet and bayonet. Scores more were coming.

Instantly Hal leapt into the thick of it, twin automatics blazing, Ahmed and Tom on either side of him.

The sergeant thrust his bayonet clean through the body of a tall Umbeti whose Dahomey axe had just cut a Houssa almost in two. As Tom grabbed the axe two shrieking blacks lunged with stabbing spears at the sergeant before he could get his bayonet free. Hal sent a bullet crashing into one painted face, and the head of the other warrior was shorn from his body as the Kroo-boy swung the axe with a roar; then the

three were surging through the packed, heaving mass, wreaking destruction.

Clear to the stockade that rush carried them, but as they reached it Hal saw with despair that the battle was going badly against the defenders. A flying wedge headed by the huge M'bini was surging forward irresistibly.

"Houssas—to the barracks! Backs to the wall!" Hal's voice rang out like a bugle, and as the Houssas retreated he was racing through a lane in the mass, Ahmed and Tom at his heels. Something had to be done, quickly—or in a matter of minutes his little force would be annihilated.

Backs to the wall the dogged Houssas took their last stand. No time to reload, it was bayonets only. Encouraged by the retreat, the attackers surged like a black wave at the little band, hacking, shrieking, stabbing.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!" shrieked M'bini—then his voice was drowned in the shattering crash of an explosion. In a flash of white light the bodies of a dozen attackers in the rear flew apart as a Mills bomb exploded among them!

"Houssas—on your faces!" Hal's voice rang out from the roof, then he and Ahmed and Tom

in great bounds after the flying figure of M'bini, but the chief cleared the palisade in a frantic leap the instant before the Dahomey axe hissed down. Of five hundred picked fighting men, he was one of the bare score that escaped alive from that dreadful shambles.

"Allah has been with us, this day," panted Sergeant Ahmed, in the sudden hush that fell.

Hal was silent as he gazed upon the scene of death. He wondered grimly how many more would die ere this business was through. . . .

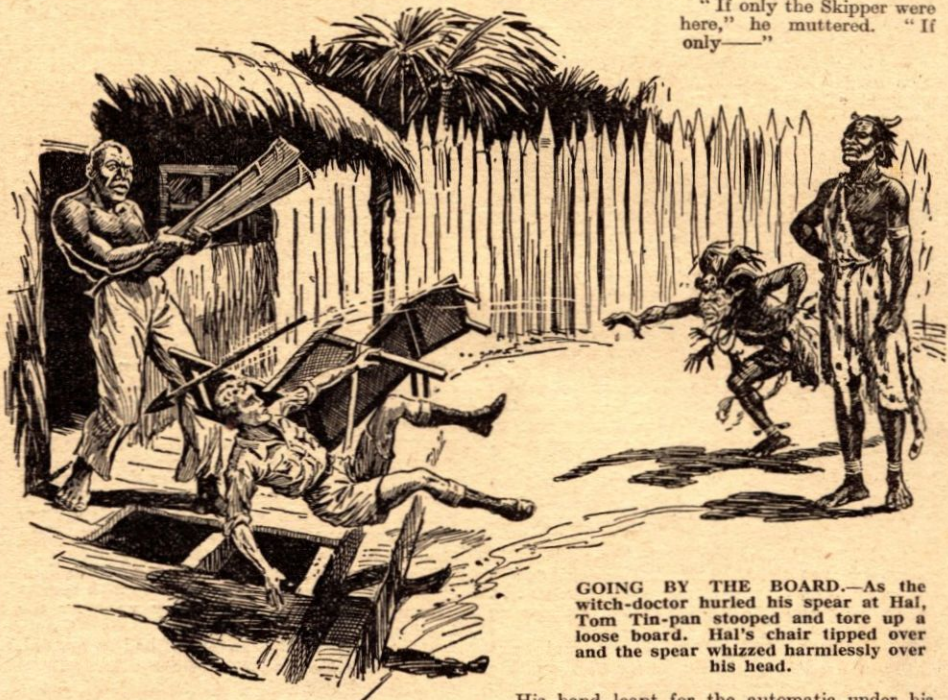
Raising the Alarm.

HAL lay sleepless, listening to the threatening throb of tom-toms out there in the forest.

Well he knew that the jungle drums were working a countless horde of blacks to a mad pitch of fury.

The dreadful responsibility of his position was agony to this boy of sixteen. Though he had doubled the guards and sent frantic pigeon messages to Sierra Leone, he knew that nothing could save the Residency if the maddened horde in the forest attacked before dawn.

"If only the Skipper were here," he muttered. "If only—"



GOING BY THE BOARD.—As the witch-doctor hurled his spear at Hal, Tom Tin-pan stooped and tore up a loose board. Hal's chair tipped over and the spear whizzed harmlessly over his head.

Tin-pan were hurling into the thick of the horde the bombs they had rushed from the magazine.

It was a move desperate to the point of suicide, but Hal was relying on the sheer bulk of the enemy to protect his men, lying down as they were, from the flying metal fragments.

Screaming, falling over the bodies of the dead, blinded and breathless with terror, the savages struggled for the palisade.

Tom Tin-pan leapt from the roof and went

His hand leapt for the automatic under his pillow as he heard a faint sound. Too late. Before he could reach it dark forms were upon him; steel hands clamped on his wrists, and a mass of wet clay was pressed on his face, gagging him and cutting off his breath. With bursting lungs he struggled frantically—then things went black.

"Bind him, slave," whispered the evil, triumphant voice of N'kema. "This night there shall be a new dweller in the Tree of Ghosts."

FLICKERING firelight gleamed on the yellow shields of a vast horde of fully five thousand savages, squatting in a semi-circle in a great clearing—and Hal Harker was bound to a tree that stood alone in the centre.

The Tree of Ghosts! The tree of dreadful sacrifices in the dark days before the British had come. And before Hal capered the ghoulish figure of N'kema, his ghastly necklace flying.

"Men of M'songa—of Umbeti!" His voice rose above the mutter of the drums. "This night comes he of whom the spirits have spoken! The King—the great White King! By my magic will I bring him to lead you against the white men, whose powers are his! Men of M'songa and Umbeti—rise and kill! *The White King comes!*"

Like a crash of thunder the words echoed from five thousand throats.

"Rise and kill! *The White King comes!*"

Then it was true! Hal felt a fury of despair. Some renegade white man was committing the unspeakable treachery of leading savages in revolt against his own kind!

"The great Ghosts of the tribes shall be with him!" shrieked N'kema. "To-night he shall sacrifice to them this white boy. Burn him with hot knives. Blind him—"

Suddenly N'kema flung something on the fire that blackened it. An instant of pitch darkness, while he chanted weirdly; then the light blazed up—and from the horde came a groan of superstitious fear.

A gigantic figure, white as a leper from head to foot, had appeared as if by magic beside him!

Actually, it had dropped from the tree during the instant of darkness, and for a moment Hal thought it was, not a renegade white man, but a huge African albino. Then with a start he saw that the lobe of one of the creature's ears was torn away—and remembered Ahmed's hip shot.

It was M'bini! His body was painted with some cunning preparation of N'kema's, and the pair were using this simple trick to fool the credulous blacks.

"The White King!" Spears crashed on shields and the sound of the tom-toms rose to maddening thunder as M'bini stepped forward and began to address the frenzied savages in a mighty voice. N'kema thrust long knives into the fire.

As the knives grew hot, suddenly the tom-toms ceased. In breathless silence M'bini drew a glowing blade from the fire and advanced on Hal with a dreadful smile.

"First, I will blind you, white boy . . ."

Slowly, steadily, the hot knife moved towards Hal's eyes. He clenched his teeth. Nearer . . . nearer still. Now he felt the heat of the glowing metal. . . .

"Now!" the White King hissed—and leapt back with a strangled gasp, as the silence of the clearing was broken by a sudden crash of hideous metallic sound. The whole horde sprang to its feet in startled fear.

Louder rang the nerve-paralysing sound, seeming to come from overhead. Above it rose a weird voice, chanting—and suddenly a painted warrior found his tongue and shrieked in superstitious terror:

"The Ghosts! *The Ghosts of the Tree!*"

Instantly the savages were running blindly, wildly for the woods. Screeching, N'kema ran with them. Ere he turned to follow, M'bini leapt

with a snarl at Hal, determined to slay the white boy.

With glaring eyes he drew back the knife—then went down with a crash as a huge black figure dropped full upon his back!

It was Tom Tin-pan, who had plunged from the tree!

Next instant he was locked in furious struggle with the chief, fighting frantically for possession of the knife. Over and over they rolled, mighty muscles cracking, great lungs gasping.

"Scissors, Tom!" Hal shrieked—and Tom Tin-pan understood. He wrapped his legs about M'bini just above the hips, and put his whole strength into terrific inward pressure.

For three seconds M'bini endured it—the terrible scissors. Then with a roar of agony he wrenched free, bounded up and fled across the clearing as Tom's hand flashed for the knife. Next moment the Kroo-boy was slashing swiftly at Hal's bonds.

"Is yo' hurt, honey?"—breathlessly.

Hal was paralysed with cramp, and he fell into the big darkie's arms. Instantly, Tom slung him over his great ebony shoulder and was racing for the trees, just as cries of fury heralded the return of the natives.

"Somebody musta told 'em dat dose spirits wuz only 'larm-clocks!" panted Tom; then he was running wildly down the path to the Residency. M'bini's shriek of "*Kill!*" ringing out behind him.

Desperately he raced, leaping tree roots, whipped by branches. But the pace, with Hal's weight, quickly told on even his great strength. Swiftly the noise of pursuit grew louder. The savages were gaining fast.

"You can't do it, Tom!" Hal gasped. "Leave me! Save yourself!"

"Not on yo' sweet life, honey!" the gallant negro panted as he ran on.

An instant later the pursuers poured round a bend on their very heels. The huge white figure of M'bini spurted. He had snatched another knife. One more leap would bring him near enough to plunge it into the Kroo-boy's back.

It was never made. As Tom hurtled round a bend in a last effort, he crashed full into red-tarbooshed figures. Sergeant Ahmed and a dozen Houssas, in search of Hal!

Crack! Crack! They fired from the hip as the oncoming M'bini flung himself aside. The men behind him ran full tilt into a point blank fire that mowed seven of them down instantly. Next moment they were in wild retreat.

The sheer surprise of the attack gave the little Houssa band a respite of which they took instant advantage. At the double they went for the Residency.

Before the startled savages had recovered, they reached the clearing; an instant later were through the gates.

"YO' see," Tom Tin-pan's face split in a grin, as a little later he was answering Hal's questions. "Yestiddy Ah cached mah 'larm-clocks in dat tree, not knowing it wuz de Goats' Tree—"

"You mean Ghost Tree?"

"Dat's it—Goats' Tree. Ah cached mah clocks in it, en' to-night Ah snakes out to git 'em back befo' dem thievin' niggahs collahs 'em. Ah'd jist shinned up de Goats' Tree when dat

whitewashed niggah shins up, too. He nebber saw me, en' Ah stays quiet while de odders marches in. Den yo' arrives—en' Ah sho' starts rackulatin' mah brains! Ah tell yoo, honey, Ah wuz sho' relieved when Ah gits de idea ob scarin' dem niggahs by settin' off de 'larm-clocks en' singin' a Goats' Song!"

"You've saved my life—twice," Hal said quietly as he shook the Kroo-boy's hand. "Perhaps some-time I'll have a chance to pay that back. Meanwhile, Tom, I want you to do something else for me."

"Anyt'ing yo' like, honey—'cept cookin'."

"I want you," Hal smiled, "to stay and help Sergeant Ahmed, here. I think M'bini will clear out of this district after these two reverses and push into Lobula country, and I'm following him. Also," Hal's voice went low, "I've got to find my skipper, Captain Michael—if he's still alive."

"Den," Tom Tin-pan stood up, "Ah goes wid yo'."

But Hal shook his head as he patted the mighty black shoulder. "No, Tom," he said grimly, "this is my job."

In his bedroom he swiftly prepared for his desperate venture, dyeing his close curls black and staining his skin. He packed in a loin-cloth

an automatic and a few other things, then in the grey light of dawn he slipped quietly over the palisade and into the dark forest.

The Crimson Demon.

ALL morning he travelled in the long, tireless jungle lope. Deserted villages told him that the people were flocking to the banner of the White King.

But in Olangi country, in B'suru's city, he found unswerving loyalty. N'kema had been here, the old chief said; had cajoled and threatened; but he had refused to join the rebels.

"Father," so Hal always addressed the old chief who had been truly a father to him, "you must send a regiment of your picked warriors to join the White King."

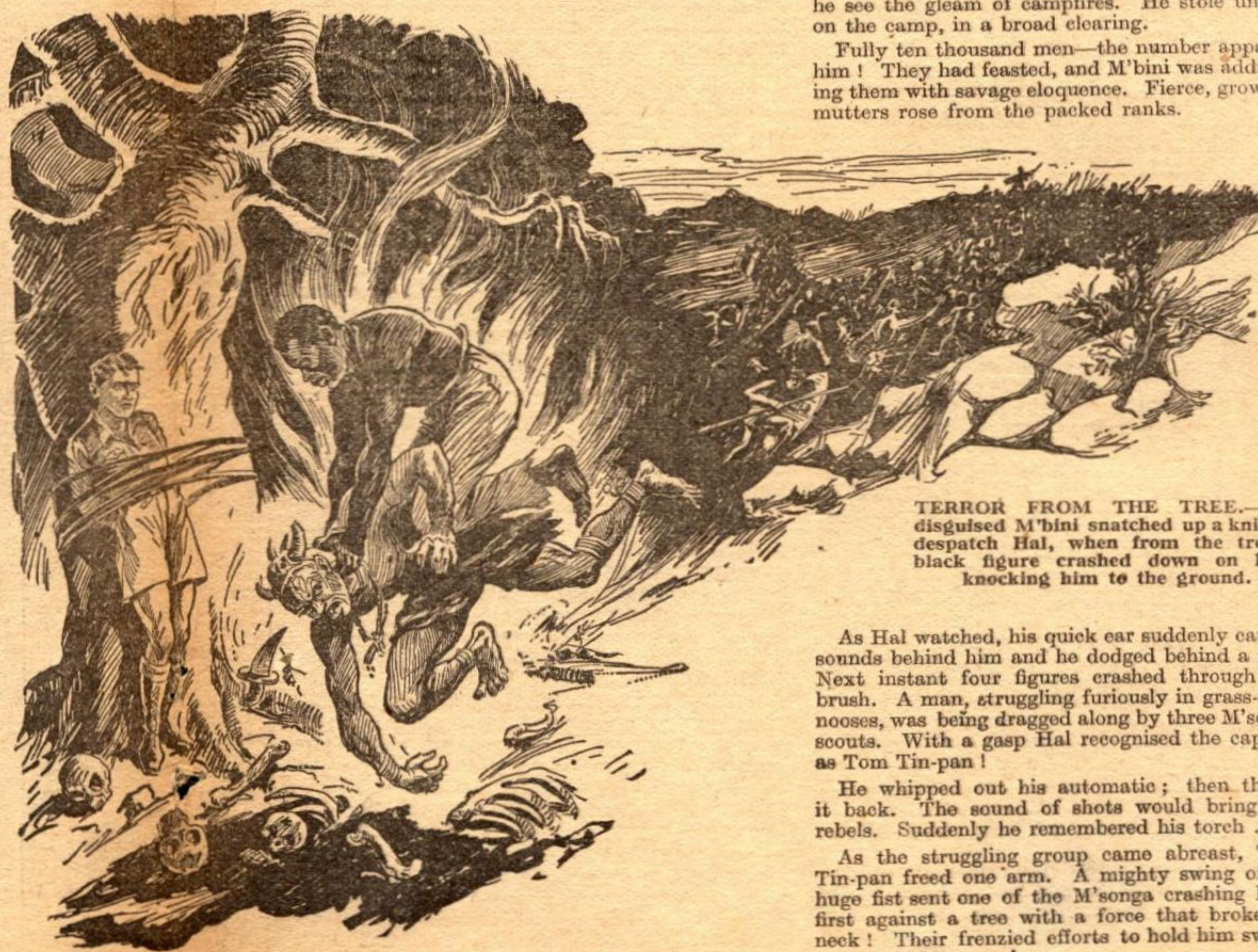
"To join the White King, my son?" B'suru repeated, amazedly.

"To pretend to join him," Hal explained quickly. "I follow him now, without a plan. When my plan is formed the men of Olangi must be there to aid me."

A meal, and he was on his way again, knowing that the old chief would send loyal fighting men swiftly on his heels. Soon he was back on the trail of M'bini's army, but not till nightfall did he see the gleam of campfires. He stole unseen on the camp, in a broad clearing.

Fully ten thousand men—the number appalled him! They had feasted, and M'bini was addressing them with savage eloquence. Fierce, growling mutters rose from the packed ranks.

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TERROR FROM THE TREE.—The disguised M'bini snatched up a knife to despatch Hal, when from the tree a black figure crashed down on him, knocking him to the ground.

As Hal watched, his quick ear suddenly caught sounds behind him and he dodged behind a tree. Next instant four figures crashed through the brush. A man, struggling furiously in grass-roped nooses, was being dragged along by three M'songa scouts. With a gasp Hal recognised the captive as Tom Tin-pan!

He whipped out his automatic; then thrust it back. The sound of shots would bring the rebels. Suddenly he remembered his torch . . .

As the struggling group came abreast, Tom Tin-pan freed one arm. A mighty swing of his huge fist sent one of the M'songa crashing head first against a tree with a force that broke his neck! Their frenzied efforts to hold him swung

the others round—and a shriek of wild supernatural terror left their lips!

There in the path stood a dreadful figure! Crimson, luminous, with ape-like body and the fearful face of some demon of hideous nightmare!

Paralysed with fear, they stood staring. Then a voice hissed something in a language they did not understand, and instantly Tom Tin-pan himself frozen with fear, recovered and went into action.

Tearing loose his other arm, he seized one of the M'songa and hurled him at the tree, cracking his skull like an eggshell. And as the third lunged with a stabbing spear the huge Kroo-boy seized his wrist, snapped his forearm like a dry stick and turned the spear into his chest.

"Quick!" The red demon vanished as Hal leapt from concealment, then he and Tom were racing through the woods, fearful lest the noise had been heard. Not till they had turned a wide curve and were on the other side of the camp, their trail cunningly covered, did they pause for breath.

"Whooh!" gasped Tom Tin-pan. "Dat wuz a narrer squeak! Say, honey—of yo' hadn't a called out Ah should hab died ob fright when Ah see dat red debbil. What was it, fo' de lubba Mike?"

Hal explained. His little torch was really a tiny magic lantern. As car headlights throw yellow circles on a curtain of fog, so it threw the weird picture on its glass upon the veil of mist which always hangs in the African jungle at night.

"Golly!" muttered Tom. "Yo' done said yo'd sabe mah bacon, sometime—en' yo' sho' done it wid dat cinematoghost!"

"How came you to be here?" Hal asked sternly.

"Ah followed yo'," said the Kroo-boy, unabashed, "t'inking mebbe yo' git yo'self into trouble."

Hal could not send the loyal fellow back, and he knew he might well have need of him. In his mind formed a daring plan . . .

A minute later there was an uproar in the clearing, and Hal's heart leapt as he saw that the Olangi regiment had arrived. Hal suddenly made up his mind to take advantage of the excitement to put his desperate plan into action.

Quickly he whispered, and Tom Tin-pan's eyes gleamed as he nodded. Then they were crawling through the bushes towards a hut hastily erected on the edge of the clearing, and which Hal guessed was for M'bini and N'kema.

Not till they had crept round from the back of the hut did they see the guard at the doorway. He saw them at the same instant and opened his mouth to shout. Tom's fist crashed into it like a battering ram, silencing his cry. Hastily they bound and gagged the senseless man with coloured cords from his shield, and hid him in the bushes. Then they slipped into the darkness of the hut—to await the coming of M'bini and N'kema.

Presently the fires and noise died down. At last they saw through the low doorway two figures approaching, and Hal gripped Tom's arm.

"You take M'bini, I'll take N'kema," he hissed.

Tense in every muscle, they waited till the huge white figure of M'bini and the shrunken one of N'kema came crouching through the doorway. Then they leapt . . .

The Men of Lobula.

ON a rocky shelf jutting from a cliff face crouched Captain Michael and half-a-dozen Houssas—all that remained of his guard. Though haggard and drawn, the captain's face was set in lines of iron resolve. The M'songa, creeping from rock to rock on the plain below, should never take them alive!

Driven at bay in the stockade surrounding M'bini's straw-thatched "palace," in M'songa city, close to the Lobula border, he and his men had fought desperately. But a flung torch had set the thatch aflame, driving the gallant little band into the open as their position became a blazing inferno.

In a desperate, fighting rush they had somehow broken through the mob; had raced for the rocks. Here on the shelf, protected against the spears from above by the overhang of the cliff and accessible only by a precipitous path, they had found a position seemingly impregnable. Though their water had given out two days ago and they were suffering agonies of thirst, Captain Michael had hoped that they would be able to hold out until help came in response to his message. He did not know that his carrier pigeon had been brought down by a M'songa arrow.

But now the defenders heard a sinister sound from below—the ring of steel on stone. The M'songa were digging at the huge boulders at the base of the cliff—undermining the shelf!

"Men, this is the end," said Captain Michael, grimly. "Fix bayonets, and follow me. We will die fighting."

"As Allah wills, lord," they gave back quietly.

But ere they could move their stiffened limbs there came a horrible shuddering of the shelf. Even as they clutched frantically for a hold, the entire mass of rock swayed outwards, and next instant they were falling through space!

Through some trick of rock formation the loosening of the first boulder at the base of the cliff had had sudden and catastrophic effect. The whole lower face of the cliff had fallen out!

Cr-aaaash! The thunderous fall of the avalanche of rock drowned the shrieks of frantically fleeing savages. Full half of them were crushed and buried beneath the hurtling downfall!

But the Houssas, their sliding fall broken by the mass of rock to which they clung, were flung clear to be instantly surrounded by the surviving M'songa. Under a rain of savage blows from knob-keries and spear hafts, they were wrenched to their feet and bound with grass ropes.

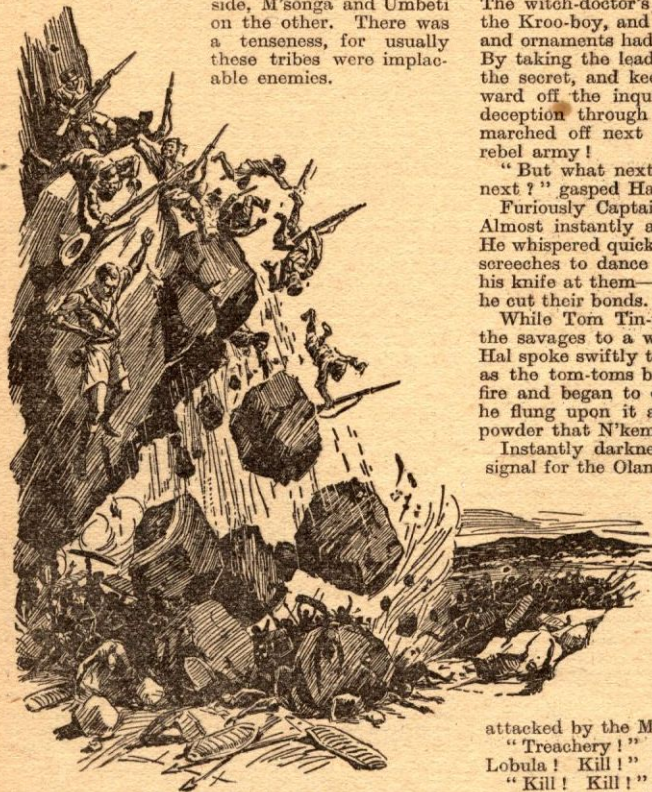
"White dog!" The leader struck Captain Michael across the face with a hippo-hide whip, cutting his flesh to the bone. "For the lives of my warriors you shall pay! This night the White King comes—and there shall be tortures that shall make you scream for death!"

"Nigger!" the Captain, with his face dripping blood, retorted in a voice that held not the faintest tremor of fear. "For the lives of my soldiers you shall pay. You shall hang from the same tree as your great White King!"

But well he knew, as he endured without a cry the savage lashing the headman gave him, that things were as black as they could be. From the shelf he had watched thousands of Lobula fighting men pouring into the city. It would mean that such an army would sweep down the Coast as not all the Houssas in Africa could deal

with. A rebellion which might take Britain years to subdue. . .

NIGHTFALL, and M'bini's army had arrived. In a great half circle about the bowl-shaped palaver place, lit by one blazing fire, squatted a vast gathering. The Lobula, fierce faces hideously scarred by tribal marks, on one side, M'songa and Umbeti on the other. There was a tenseness, for usually these tribes were implacable enemies.



THE RUSH CRUSHED.—With the loosening of the first rock the whole of the shelf, on which the Houssas were trapped, crashed down on the unprepared natives.

As the prisoners were led out and bound to stakes, Captain Michael's eyes went to the huge white figure whose thunderous voice was holding the mighty horde in fierce thrall.

A horribly painted figure came leaping into the firelight, capered before him, screeching with devilish laughter. Burning rage gripped the Captain at the thought of the evil, N'kema, the witch-doctor, had caused—for he had guessed the trick of the white paint.

"N'kema," he said through his teeth, "be sure you shall die for this."

With a fiendish snarl the ghoulish creature lunged at him with a knife, again and again. Cries of cruel delight came from the horde.

But the knife never touched the Captain. Instead, it sheared his bonds! And to his paralysed amazement, a low whisper came from the hideously painted lips.

"Groan, Skipper, groan! Pretend I'm cutting you!"

It was Hal Harker! And the "White King" was Tom Tin-pan!

Swiftly, while the amazed Captain groaned in pretended agony, the boy told how he and Tom had succeeded in overpowering—and binding M'bini and N'kema, in the hut the night before. The witch-doctor's white paint had transformed the Kroo-boy, and N'kema's own hideous marks and ornaments had been easy for Hal to assume. By taking the leader of the friendly Olangi into the secret, and keeping his men about them to ward off the inquisitive, they had carried the deception through without discovery—and had marched off next morning at the head of the rebel army!

"But what next, Skipper? What shall I do next?" gasped Hal.

Furiously Captain Michael racked his brains. Almost instantly a plan flashed into his mind. He whispered quickly, then Hal was off with wild screeches to dance before the Houssas, plunging his knife at them—and whispering to them while he cut their bonds.

While Tom Tin-pan's harangue was working, the savages to a white hot pitch of excitement, Hal spoke swiftly to the Olangi headman. Then, as the tom-toms began to throb, he leapt to the fire and began to dance grotesquely. Suddenly he flung upon it a handful of the black-smoke powder that N'kema used in his "magic."

Instantly darkness reigned—and that was the signal for the Olangi warriors.

Through the darkness hissed two hundred Olangi spears—to fall into the packed ranks of the Lobula! And there was bedlam of agonised screams, yells, roars of startled fury.

Then the fire blazed up—to show the whole mass of the Lobula on their feet, spears raised, faces demoniacal. For they believed they had been treacherously

attacked by the M'songa and Umbeti!

"Treachery!" shrieked their chief. "Kill, Lobula! Kill!"

"Kill! Kill!" shrieked the ferocious men of the north—and charged.

There was a crash like thunder as their shields met those of M'bini's men, then the whole mighty horde was locked in blind, mad battle, and the forest around rang with fierce cries.

"Quick!" cried Hal, clutching the Captain's arm, as a group of yelling Lobula came racing up the slope at them.

But Captain Michael and his men were half-dazed from thirst and fatigue. They could hardly move, and in a frenzy of desperation Hal

threw his automatic from his hip, and

instantly the battle started.

"Git 'em!" roared Tom Tin-pan—and crashed headlong with a Lobula spear in his back. . .

In the forest where the sounds of battle came faintly the little band of Olangi and weary Houssas waited. What would be the outcome? If the Lobula won, there was little fear that, tricked as they had been, they would not care further for revolt. But if the M'songa-Umbeti army emerged triumphant, the victory would further inflame their rebellious spirits.

At last the noise of battle died. Presently came sounds of men approaching through the forest. They waited, tense. And then suddenly there rang out a screeching cry—in a voice that Hal knew too well!

"N'Kema!" the boy cried. And then, as he grasped the full significance of it: "He and M'bini have got free! They've met the army!"

"By heaven——!" the Captain, grim-faced, turned and leapt through the bushes, the others at his heels.

The scene that met them, on the edge of a clearing, was utterly unexpected.

M'bini and N'kema, knowing nothing of what had transpired, had indeed met the vanguard of their army—and the rebels, who had been badly beaten by the Lobula, had greeted them in a fashion unanticipated by the scheming pair. They believed that their leaders, having brought them to these straits, had deserted them in the hour of danger—and M'bini and N'kema were in the grips of fierce hands, with spears at their throats!

"O my people——!" cried M'bini, frantically—but he got no further.

"We are not your people," snarled the Umbeti chief. "You shall find a new army in the land of ghosts, O great White King—for now you die!"

And before Captain Michael could leap to intervene, he plunged his spear deep in the painted breast of M'bini, even as a dozen blades

found the writhing body of N'kema the witch-doctor.

Then the Captain, Hal by his side and the Houssas behind him, were facing the startled savages, and ere one of them could speak or act, his commanding voice rang out.

"The White King is dead, O people, and the revolt is finished. Now there is another White King—the one I serve. Throw down your spears, in sign of submission to him!"

For one moment they hesitated, tried to meet his stern eyes. Then sullenly they obeyed.

"Thank goodness," muttered Hal, as a moment later they were watching the disgruntled, beaten army pass on. "If only poor old Tom——"

He broke off and whipped round suddenly as a great hand descended on his shoulder—and next instant he was staring in amazement at the grinning face of Tom Tin-pan!

"Yo' means po' ol' Joe, honey—anudder feller altogether," said the Kroo-boy.

"But, Tom——" Hal was gripping his hand, pumping it frantically in his joy and amazement. "The Olangi said you were dead—said you'd been speared——"

"Ah wuz, honey; but it wuz a spent spear, en' didn't no mo' den tickle. Ah tripped over a root—en' Ah stopped whah Ah wuz fo' a suttin reason . . ."

With a grin that bade fair to split his face he shook the grass bag in his hand, which tinkled musically.

"Yo see, honey; dem Lobula whate de 'Langi socked wuz wearin' a lot ob mighty nice gold bangles en t'ings—so Ah stopped to borrow 'em!" said Tom Tin-pan.

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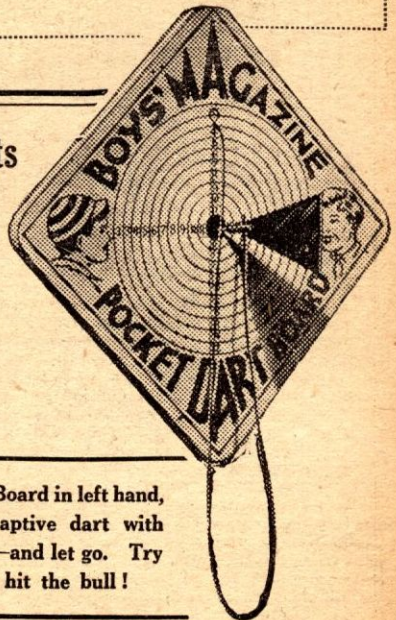
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