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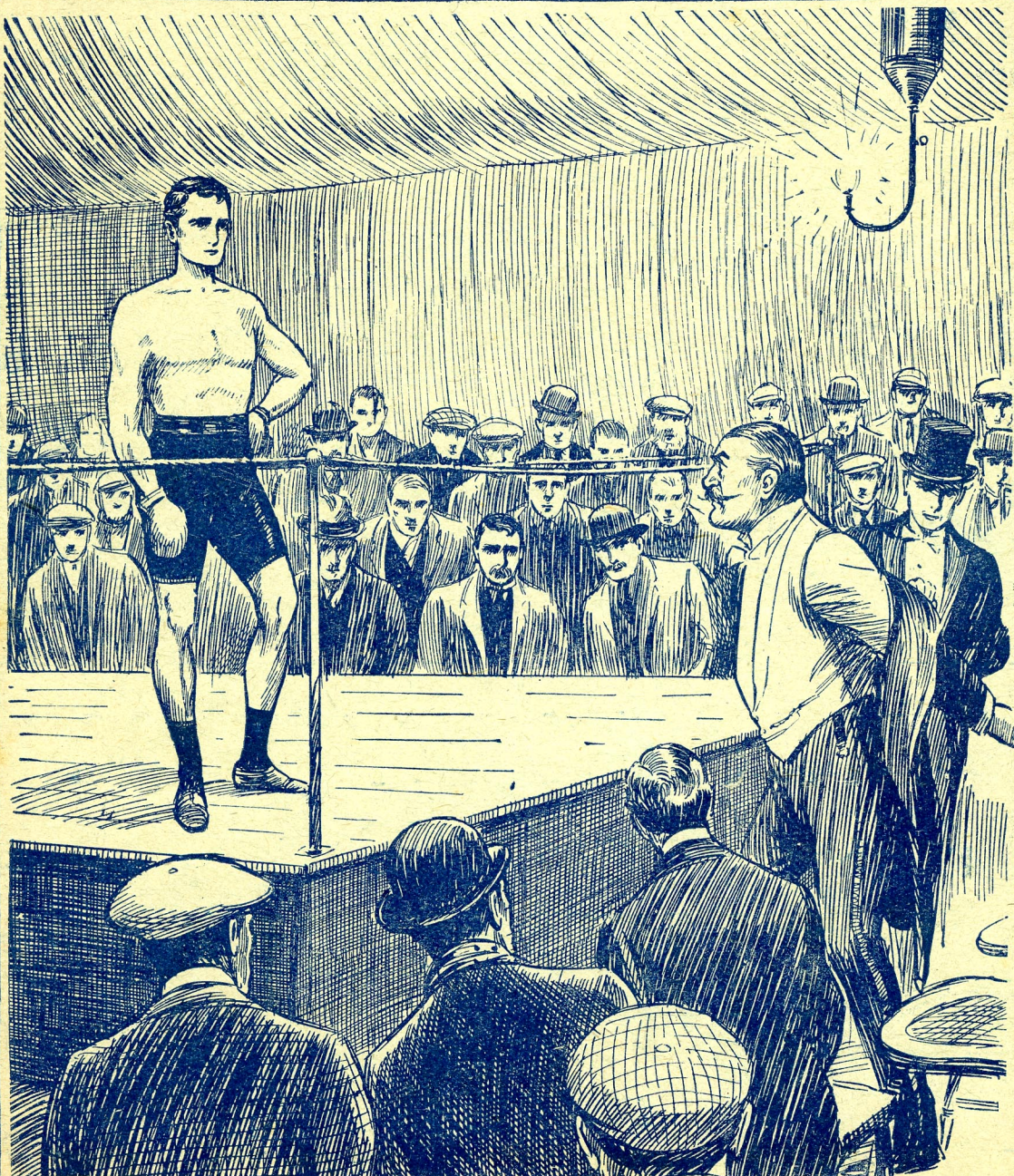
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THE
MARVEL

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TOM SAYERS'
LUCK.

By Arthur S. Hardy



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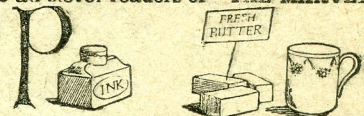


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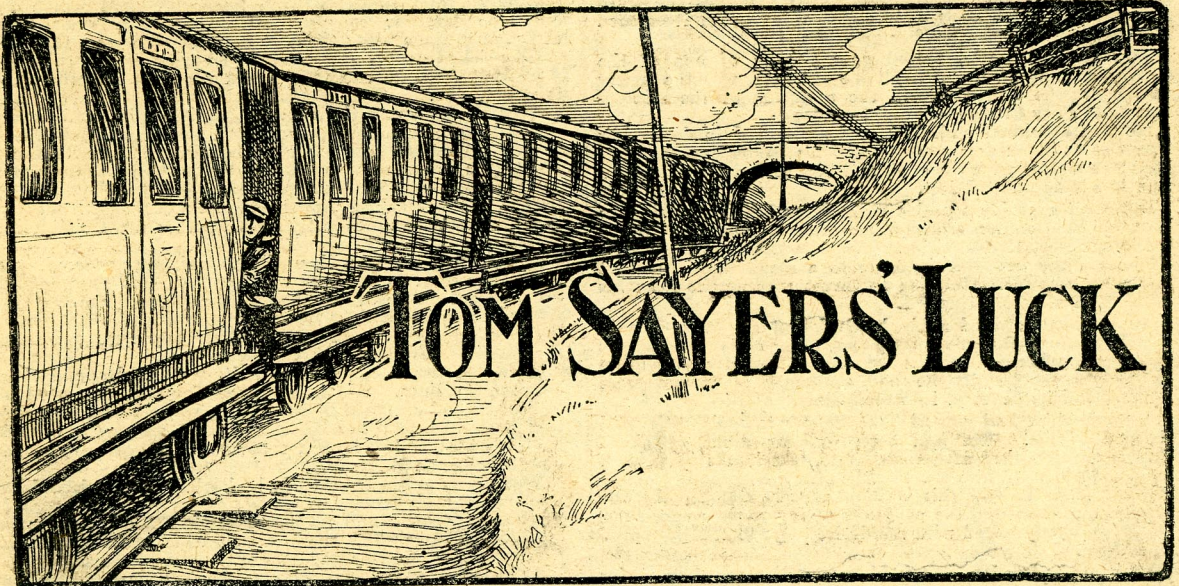
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CHAPTER I.

A Perilous Journey.

WITH a rattle, a crash, and a whirl the express train, bound from London to Winchampton, flashed through the station at Four Crosses, the great engine that drew it belching smoke from its funnel, and scattering red-hot grits upon the platform as she thundered by. The dust was sent whirling into the faces of the few passengers who were pacing up and down, as they awaited the arrival of a local train, and these when they had recovered from the shock turned to see the red tail-light of the express quickly vanishing round the bend ahead.

The passing of the express had only taken a few seconds, and in the murk the windows of the carriages had merged together until they had seemed to form one long streak of yellow light.

It would have taken a quick and educated eye to have been able to take in details, and, therefore, a sleepy-looking porter, who stood scratching his head as he looked reflectively after the vanishing train, was astonished when the station-master came running towards him with an anxious expression on his face.

"Did you look at that express, Jim?" asked the station-master, as he came up with his subordinate.

"Yes, sir," answered the man.

"Notice anything strange about it?"

"I—I don't know that I did, sir."

"What do you mean that you don't know if you did?"

"I mean it went by so quick, sir, that I hadn't much time to notice anything, sir."

"Well, I noticed something, my lad; and as you were looking at the train as well as me, I thought that you might have seen it, too. I fancied I saw a figure clinging to the buffers of one of the carriages."

The sleepy-eyed porter stared at his master in gaping astonishment.

"Well," he said slowly, "that's exactly what I thought I

saw, sir, only I couldn't believe it to be true. I thought I must be dreaming, and I was trying to wake myself up when you came along, sir."

"Ah! You fancied you saw it, too—eh? Well, two of us couldn't be mistaken. That fellow must have got on the buffer when the train was leaving London, for she hasn't stopped at any station since. They report fog there. That was how he managed to secure his position without attracting any notice, I suppose. The weather's clear ahead. The train won't stop till she reaches Winchampton. I'll telephone through, and have the fellow arrested when the express stops there."

The station-master had no cause for hurry. The express wouldn't reach Winchampton until another forty minutes had elapsed. But, all the same, he went along the platform at a run, entered his office, and rang up the telephone operator at Winchampton Junction.

He received a reply almost immediately.

"There's a man or a boy riding on the buffers of one of the carriages of the London express," he said. "Keep a lookout for him. If the train is likely to be stopped before she reaches the platform, send men along the line to secure the fellow there. There is so much risk in that kind of thing, and boys and young men who don't know any better are so prone to follow such an example that I want this fellow locked up. Understand?"

"Very good, sir!" returned the operator. "I'll ring through to the superintendent, and see that orders are issued to catch the fellow at once."

The station-master, satisfied that he had done his duty, put the receiver up on the telephone with a sigh of relief, and went out to resume his duties.

And now what of the passenger who was riding at the risk of his life on the buffer of the carriage? Had the station-master at Four Crosses been mistaken, or had his keen eyes actually espied some unfortunate individual clinging on at the risk of his life to the shaking and whirling express?

With ever-increasing speed the express from London to

Winchampton thundered over the metals. Fog had held her up for the first forty miles of her journey, and now that she had emerged into the clear atmosphere of a dark and moonless night, the driver forged her ahead with all possible speed, for there were many minutes to make up in order to bring her to a stand beside the platform at Winchampton at her appointed time.

The stoker plied his shovel until, when he opened the furnace door, the light that played upon his face made him look positively ghostly.

A great tail of smoke writhed and curled above the roofs of the carriages, and the flying sparks danced and whirled as the express thundered on. Over straight stretches of level railroad and round winding and twisting curves the train roared along, shaking, trembling, swaying, until it seemed almost a miracle she kept her grip of the rails.

And all this while, seated at the back of one of the carriages, clinging on with all his strength, was the lonely passenger who had attracted the attention of the station-master at Four Crosses.

He was begrimed with dirt, and smothered in dust. His face was as black as a sweep's, and his hands were blacker. He was numbed with the cold, and had almost lost all sensation in his hands and feet.

But with a patience and a resignation which would have been sublime under other circumstances, he clung to his perilous perch, and set himself to pass the time that must elapse ere the heavy train came to a stand in as pleasant a way as possible. He tried to thrust all thought from his mind, and almost succeeded.

By making his mind a blank, he forgot all sense of pain and discomfort, and presently as he realised that the express was nearing her destination he smiled, actually smiled, to think how successfully he had managed to escape from London and its poverty, its wretchedness, and its despair.

A mad whim had caused Tom Sayers to make this wild journey of his. He had been walking aimlessly about Euston Station that afternoon, and, with hands in pocket, he gazed gloomily into the thick fog that enshrouded everything, and as he saw this waiting express standing by the platform, and noticed the people hurrying to their carriages, he was suddenly seized with the desire to go to Winchampton with them.

Why not? London had held many disappointments for him. He had never been able to gain a regular livelihood at any trade; people wouldn't employ him because they said he was unskilled; and he fancied that he might be able to manage better elsewhere.

And so he had lounged idly about, with the cravings of hunger upon him, until he had seen the men test the wheels of the carriages, and others had walked along the roofs lighting up the lamps from the portholes above. And then he had walked to the extreme end of the platform, had slipped down on to the line, had dodged to the other side of the waiting train, had come back along the line there, crouching, so that his head could not be seen by any official upon the platform, and had seized his chance just before the train moved out to clamber up on to the buffer of a carriage, and cling on there.

At the start he prepared himself for many weird experiences and dangers, but anticipation fell far short of the real thing.

He wondered now as the train clattered along, every minute bringing her nearer and nearer to Winchampton, that he had ever managed to keep his seat for so long. He realised with a thrill of pride that had he been a lad of weaker constitution or of less resolution he would have been hurled to his death long ago, and now he knew that the worst dangers had been passed, and that a few more minutes must see him safe.

Presently, as the express swept round a curve, he saw, far away in the darkness, a glow of light which stretched across the sky like the reflection of a house on fire. He knew that this must be Winchampton, his destination. The reflection of thousands of lights formed that one big glow.

On and on swept the express, and with a loud shrieking whistle she clattered past a signal, which only a second before had changed from red to green.

On and on, trembling and swaying, seeming to revel in her power.

On and on, until the last few minutes of that long period of waiting seemed like an age, and then a great signal-box was passed, then a smaller one. They outpaced a small local train which was bound for Winchampton, too. The rows of metals broadened out. There were four, six, eight, a dozen, two dozen sets of rails now, with countless points and checks. Winchampton Junction was almost reached!

Tom Sayers uttered a sigh of relief, and began to think once more.

He roused himself from his apathy. It was necessary. He would need to have all his wits about him if he wanted

to get safely away from the clutches of the railway-station officials at Winchampton.

The pace of the express slackened. He could hear the brakes grind upon the wheels. Slower, and slower still, and the station was not reached yet.

Slower, and slower still, until Tom almost felt as if he could drop down into the six-foot way, and lie there in safety until the whole of the train had passed on. But he did not attempt this impossible feat. He knew he would have to wait, for those metal wheels move quickly, and they are remorseless when they strike a human body that happens to lie in their way.

Slower, and slower still, with a grating of the brakes here and there, and suddenly Tom heard a sound which was only too familiar to him—the shriek of a steam-organ attached to some roundabout or suchlike show at a fair.

He pricked up his ears, and as the train slowed to almost a walking pace he craned his neck round to see where this fair might be.

Over there, across the rows of shining rails, and beyond the railway embankment, he saw the booths and stalls, with pennons flying and naphtha-lamps burning, a provincial fair in all its glory, and he heard the screams of the crowding people as they took part in their good-natured horseplay, and the ring of the bell at the top of some trial-of-strength machine as some more than ordinarily-skilled person drove the pointer home.

Slower, and slower still, until the train was proceeding at little more than an ordinary walking pace, and Tom, leaning over, poked his head out beyond the edge of the carriage. As he did so he thought he saw some railway officials upon the line, and it seemed to him that they were examining the passing carriages.

Then the train came to a halt. Tom dropped down between the lines. His limbs were so numbed and his body so bruised and cramped by his staying so long in one position that he fell all of a heap, and could not rise for a moment. And when at length he did recover his self-control, he saw the train began to move.

With his heart in his mouth, he hurled himself face downward in the six-foot way, expecting every moment to be crushed to death; and he heard the carriages squeak and rumble as they passed above him. Then the roar of their passing ceased, and he got hurriedly upon his feet.

As he did so, an official, who had been looking out for him, and who fancied that Tom might take advantage of this opportunity to make his escape, uttered a shout and dashed towards him.

Tom recovered the use of his limbs in a moment. He was in danger of arrest, and he made a bolt for it, with a couple of men at his heels. Then, flashing towards him from the direction of Winchampton, he saw a train come speeding. He had barely time to get out of its way, but he did not spring backwards. He leapt forward, and in doing so placed this train between himself and his pursuers. Then, taking the risk of what other trains might happen to come along, he made a rush for the embankment, beyond which blazed the lights of the fair, clambered up this, and climbing over the fencing and barbed-wire that protected the railroad from the open ground beyond, he tumbled down, and soon gained the ranks of the crowd.

Tom Sayers had safely reached Winchampton, and he had cleverly, and with a bit of luck, escaped from the trap which the station-master at Four Crosses had laid for him.

CHAPTER 2.

All the Fun of the Fair.

AS soon as he had eluded pursuit Tom Sayers stopped and stretched himself, and then began to massage his frozen limbs. He ached all over. Seldom in the course of his rough and chequered career had he felt so miserable or so ill. He had eaten nothing since the early hours of the morning, and felt fainting for the want of food. He felt in his pockets, and discovered that he had not even a farthing.

He had accomplished his purpose in getting to Winchampton, but for the life of him as he looked round at the people who thronged, shouting and laughing, all over the fair-ground, he could not see that he was any better off.

Tom slouched along with hanging head, and hands in pockets, feeling just about done up. He felt that he would faint soon unless some good Samaritan came to his assistance.

He noticed that people stared at him in an odd kind of way, and that several of them laughed. At any other time he would have felt angry, but he was too low to resent any jeer or gibe now. He wandered past the booths and gaffs and roundabouts until he came to an almost deserted portion

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of the fair-ground, where a great number of living vans were outspanned.

Some of them, he noticed as he sauntered by, looked very cosy, with their newly-painted exteriors, bright with metal fittings, and their cosy interiors well furnished, and warmed by the light of a fire.

In some of the vans he saw the womenfolk, wives and daughters of the showmen, preparing the evening's meal.

The very thought made his mouth water.

And presently, as he wandered on, he saw a buxom woman seated on the steps of a van, with a dish set between her knees, paring some potatoes with a knife.

He walked near to her and watched her.

At first she took no notice of him, and then suddenly looking up at him, she gave vent to a scream, and let the dish drop to the ground.

Tom saw that she was frightened, and hastened to reassure her.

"It's all right, mother," he said.

She held her left hand to her beating heart.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "How you did frighten me!

What ever have you done to yourself?"

"Nothing," answered Tom.

"Nothing!" she reiterated. "Then whatever's made your face like that?"

Tom put his black hand up to his black face, and wiped it, then looked at his hand. Of course, it was no blacker than before, and he could not tell what he looked like.

"What's the matter with my face?" he asked.

"It's black—as black as if you had shoved it up a chimney," said the good woman, bustling near to him now.

"You look down on your luck, lad. If you're one of the right sort, and not a lazy good-for-nothing vagabond, you can just tell me something about yourself, and I'll see if I can do anything to help you. Mrs. Bethal has helped a good many poor people in her time."

Tom looked intently at the stout woman, and saw that she had a homely, kindly face. Good nature shone in her dark, liquid eyes. She was tremendously fat, but she must have been a very pretty girl, and he realised that he could not do better than confide in her.

"Well," he said, "I'll tell you how I came to look like this. I've travelled by the express from London to Winchampton—on a buffer—and I've only just got here, after slipping away from the officials on the railway-line, who must have been sent to arrest me."

The woman opened her mouth wide, and her eyes wider.

"Good gracious me!" she cried. "Did you ever? Poor lad—poor lad! No wonder you are in such a state! Here! Wait till I get a bit of looking-glass, and let you have a look at yourself!"

She turned and entered the van, presently bringing Tom a fragment of a broken mirror, which he took. Turning so that the light from the interior of the van lit up his face and the glass, he looked at himself, and he almost uttered a cry as he saw the begrimed and filthy face that was revealed in the looking-glass.

"No wonder I frightened you, missus," he said.

He returned her the piece of looking-glass, and she laughed.

"Here," she said, "you can't go about looking like that. You'll find a pail of water round the van there, and I'll bring you a towel and a bit of soap. You can wash yourself clean. And you won't hurt if you give your clothes a brush."

She hustled into the van again, and brought Tom out a clean towel and some soap. Tom hastened to find the pail of water, and taking off his coat and waistcoat and neckerchief, he plunged hands and head into the cold liquid, and rejoiced in the refreshing wash the good-hearted woman had provided for him. Five minutes later, Tom Sayers, with a clean and beaming face and a pair of bright, smiling eyes, returned the towel and soap to the show-woman.

She smiled as she looked at him.

"My word!" she cried. "What a change! Whoever would have believed it? You're a good-looking lad, whoever you are, and it's a kind, honest face. You won't come to any harm, my boy. Here! Wait a minute. You must be half-starved!"

She took the towel and soap into the van, and came out with a piece of bread and a wedge of cheese.

"There's no meat," she said, "until supper-time; but if you like to come back and have a bite then with my husband and me, you're welcome. I know he won't mind. Sam's rough and ready, but he'd never refuse a bit of food to a lad who's down on his luck. He's had to go without too often himself, and he knows what it means."

Tom took the food, and commenced to eat at once. He was too far gone to stand on ceremony.

"Thank you, missus," he said, the words ringing from a

grateful heart. "You've no cause to be kind to me. But I sha'n't forget it."

The show-woman took up her basin of potatoes, and began to peel them.

"You're welcome, my boy!" she said heartily. "And if you like to come back after the lights are put out on the booths, you'll find a bit of stew and some nice hot potatoes and a drop of ale waiting for you."

"Thank you!" answered Tom. "It's kind of you, missus. I'll go and have a look around now, and see if I can find anything to do. I'm tired, but a lad who's down on his luck mustn't think of that. I want to try and get some work to do."

He finished his bread-and-cheese, and feeling better already, he turned away, seeing that Mrs. Bethal had entered the van, and walked off in the direction of the fair again.

He had never seen such a crowd on a fair-ground as that which thronged about the booths and gaffs and shows on this patch of waste ground near Winchampton. You could not move along for them. Tom walked idly about, but he could not see any chance of obtaining employment there.

The showmen all seemed to be busy, and each particular show seemed to have more assistants than they wanted already.

The shouts of the showmen rang in his ears, deafening him. The scream of the steam-organs, the one fighting against the other, made a medley of discordant sounds which offended the ears. The bustle and noise was indescribable. But this is what folk like who patronise a fair, and the shrieking, screaming organs had cost their proprietors many hundreds of pounds, and the simple patrons of the fair voted them "beautiful."

Tom could see nothing likely to be of interest to him, and he had almost given up the search for a job in despair, when of a sudden he came upon a booth outside which was a platform, and here at last, with a flash of hope, he thought he might find his chance.

On the platform were two or three lads, each stripped to the waist, their bare bodies shining in the gleam of the naphtha lamps. They all wore tights, and had rubber shoes upon their feet.

They were muscular lads with brutal faces and cunning eyes. The showman in charge of the booth was clad in a shabby evening-dress suit, and wore a battered opera-hat upon his head. He was pointing with a silver-mounted walking-stick to an oil-painted canvas poster which hung outside the tent, on which were depicted two lads fighting.

There was a great crowd surrounding the booth, and some of these were already making their way towards the entrances to the tent, where two men were busy taking the money.

"Now's your time!" the showman was shouting. "Now's your time! Positively the last show to-night! Bethal's Boxing Champions! The finest exponents of glove-fighting in the world! They are open to take on all comers, gentlemen! Neither age, weight, height, nor size barred! Bethal's Boxing Champions! The cleverest glove-fighters ever seen! Now about to show, gentlemen! Walk up—walk up! The tent is almost full! The greatest success in the fair! I ought to charge a shilling to come in, instead of threepence and sixpence! Don't hesitate! The Nipper, Knuckler, Bob Cannon, and Eddy Pearce will face the biggest lads amongst you, and I'll give a five-pound note to the man who beats 'em! Come along—come along! Don't think about it twice, but come and pay your money, for the tent is nearly full!"

The showman bawled the words at the crowd in a voice that was hoarse with shouting. He was a huge man, with tremendous shoulders, a thick neck, and a jovial, red face. As Tom looked at him he realised that Bethal—surely the husband of the good woman he had already met?—must have been a dangerous man to tackle in the days gone by, when his waist had not swollen to its present expansive dimensions. The showman looked well-to-do, if one could judge from the heavy gold watch-chain he wore, and the extravagant seal that dangled from it.

Good living had robbed him of much of his past activity, and doubtless he had turned showman because he had no longer been able to hold his own with the gloves with the best.

The crowd, attracted by the sight of the young, slight, but muscular boxers, who stood with folded arms upon the platform, shivering a little in the cold night air, flocked towards the entrances of the tent. But one of them, more cautious than the rest—doubtless a man who wanted to be sure of getting his money's-worth—stepped up to the edge of the platform, and looked up at the showman.

"Ay, Mr. Bethal," he asked, "what's it going to be? Are the lads going to give a show amongst themselves, or is there anyone going to take 'em on?"

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The showman bent down.

"I don't mind telling you, sir," he said, "that my lads are going to give an exhibition. But it will be worth seeing none the less for that. You see, they've given the local rustics such a pasting—the big men and all—that I can't get anyone to come and face 'em. You see how I am situated, and if you want to help a deserving cause you'll pay your money and come in."

The man shook his head.

"Not if it's going to be exhibition sparring," he said, half-turning away.

Tom had listened to the foregoing conversation with interest. He was aching from his long and perilous journey. He was cold and hungry still, and weak—almost ill. He was not in a fit state to put the gloves on with anybody, and yet he saw a chance here of his earning a few coppers, if nothing more; and a few coppers would be worth as much gold to him just then.

He stepped forward.

"What do I get if I put the gloves on with one of your lads, sir?" Tom asked, peering up into the showman's face.

The showman looked down in surprise. He saw a lean and hungry-looking lad with a pale but determined face, standing below him, and he came to the conclusion that Tom was just the sort of youngster to put up a good show against one of his lads. A good show would draw the crowd. News of it would soon be spread abroad, and the people would come flocking to his tent in hundreds the following day, and he had not been doing so well as he might have done since the fair had opened, for he could not get anybody to face his lads, and the crowd seemed to have lost their taste for a boxing show.

"Give you, lad?" said Bethal. "Well, of course, we don't take so much a session that I can afford to give you a small fortune for your services. But I tell you what, you can have the nobbings, and if you put up a good show, when the hat is passed round you may find more in it than you'd imagine."

Tom could not pick and choose. He wanted money, desperately, badly, and he was not the kind of lad to beg, although he had risked his life by riding on the buffers of a railway train.

"I'll do it!" said Tom.

The genial red-faced showman rose to his feet, and his eyes flashed with delight.

"Gentlemen!" he cried. "Now about to commence! The finest bout ever witnessed in any boxing-booth in Winchampton. My lad Knuckler will box with a lad here who's just signified that he'd like to try his luck against my champion. This is no exhibition bout, but a real glove fight, and the price of admission is only threepence."

Here he bent down again, and looked at Tom.

"What's your name, my lad?" he asked.

"Tom Sayers," answered Tom; and the showman grinned.

"Not 'arf!" he said. "Here, my lad, you'd make your fortune if you was to join our business."

He rose to his feet again.

"Gentlemen!" he cried. "Walk up, walk up, walk up! The chance of a lifetime! My lad Knuckler is going to put the gloves on with Tom Sayers! Tom, step up on to the platform, and make you bow to the gentlemen!"

Tom, with a smile, scrambled up on to the platform, and stood erect, a fine figure of a lad clad in ill-fitting, dusty, worn-out clothes. And as the experienced men in the crowd ran their eyes over his frame, and looked at his handsome but determined boyish face, and compared it with the sallow, discontented countenance of Knuckler, they, scenting some fun, made their way in a rush to the entrances.

"Tom Sayers," cried Bethal, the showman, as he laid his hand on Tom's shoulder—"Tom Sayers, gentlemen! A worthy lad who bears a worthy name—that of the finest champion who ever entered the ring! And he's just about to show!"

The crowd, laughing and cheering, fought their way to the pay-boxes, and, as is usually the case, when the other visitors to the fair-ground saw them swarming towards the boxing-tent, they, too, wanted to get in to see the fun, and Bethal, for the first time during the fair, found that his booth was not big enough to hold those who wished to patronise him, and to his mortification he had to turn money away.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Boxing-Booth.

WHEN Showman Bethal found that no more people could possibly be crammed into his tent, he ordered two of his assistants to guard the doors. "I'm sorry, gentlemen," he cried, turning to the crowd who surrounded the tent. "I wish I could make the tent larger. But I can't; and I must disappoint you. But there will be some fine boxing to-morrow, and there will be room for you all then. This is positively the last show to-night."

He motioned to Tom to follow him.

"You look a likely lad," he said, with a side glance at Tom. "That was not half an artful wheeze, saying you was Tom Sayers! It's not filled my tent for me, and you'll find Bethal grateful. Now, just you slip into the tent here, and undress. Got any tights?"

"No," answered Tom.

"Well, you'll find a spare pair hanging about somewhere. Slip 'em on, strip to the waist, and join us in the tent as soon as you can. It don't do to keep the crowd waiting."

Tom found the three boxers who had been standing on the platform, inside the dressing-room, which was just a bit of the tent screened off from the rest, and these looked him over as he entered. Knuckler, the lad who had been deputed to box with Tom, was the heaviest of the three—and the ugliest, too—and as he looked at him, Tom caught a flash of Knuckler's savage eyes which boded him no good. "You just slip your things off as sharp as you can, Tom," said the boxer, with a grin, "and I'll soon knock the Sayers out of you!"

Tom returned no answer, but began to undress himself. And when at last he stood bared to the waist, and in his tights, which he had pulled on as if he had been used to wearing them before, Knuckler opened his eyes.

Well he might, for instead of the lean-and-hungry, half-starved-looking wretch he had expected to see, he found Tom a well-built, fairly well-nourished lad, whose thick neck and wonderful shoulders spoke of tremendous physical strength and latent power.

Tom was a splendidly-built lad, and as hard as iron about the abdomen. He had a long reach for his height, and looked far heavier than his ten stone, or thereabouts.

Knuckler set his jaw out viciously.

"Think you can box, I dessay?" he said, with a contemptuous leer.

"Not much," answered Tom; "and I am weak and ill. Still, I dare say I may manage to put up a show against you."

"It won't pay you to last out the six rounds," said Knuckler. "If you do, I'll kill you!"

Here the showman poked his head in from outside.

"Now, come along, me lads," he said. "I've been entertaining the audience with some pleasant patter, but they won't wait all day."

Knuckler went out and made his bow, amidst the ironical cheers of the crowd, who never expected to see anything but third-rate boxing there. Tom followed him, and the Nipper—a bantam-weight—plucked him by the arm.

"I say, Tom," he said, "I like the look of you. You be careful of the Knuckler. He can be a bit vicious at times, and he's up to all sorts of nasty tricks."

"All right," said Tom, with a faint smile, "and thank you. I dare say I can take care of myself."

The audience, who had seen the seedy-looking lad standing on the platform outside the boxing-booth, were ill-prepared for the sight of Tom as he made his way into the roped ring, clad in a pair of faded, claret-coloured tights. Here they saw a fine figure of a lad, who looked for all the world like a boxing champion. They compared his trim and well-built frame with Knuckler's knotty torso, and decided in Tom's favour.

There could not be much in it in regard to weight, although Tom looked a bit the heavier. But if there was any advantage in condition, Tom had it.

Knuckler was a bit too big about the stomach, as if he were too fond of his glass of beer. But then the Knuckler was clever, and would have a tremendous pull that way.

"Now, get to busines, my lads!" said the showman, Eddy Pearce, addressing himself to a man wearing trousers and a sweater. "You take the time!"

"Ready, sir!" said the man in the sweater, who was pressed into the service whenever a heavy-weight boxer was required.

"Then set to work!" roared Bethal. "Gentlemen! Tom Sayers, red; Knuckler, my champion, blue! A fair field and no favour, and may the best lad win!"

"Time!" called the assistant, and Knuckler, advancing on Tom with a rush, and refusing to shake hands, aimed a blow at Tom's head which would have settled the bout then

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TWO GRAND LONG, COMPLETE STORIES.

and there if it had landed home. Could it be that Knuckler funkled the contest? It almost looked like it, seeing the treacherous way in which he went to work. But Tom was not to be caught napping by so old a trick as that, and, by merely shifting his head, he let the blow go harmlessly over his shoulder, whilst, bringing up his right hand from his side with a sweep, he caught Knuckler full under the jaw, and sent the fellow reeling backward with a blow that fairly shook the other up.

Bethal knew every move in the game. The way Tom shaped; the way he dodged that blow, which would have knocked a novice out, and the manner in which he hit upwards, convinced the showman that Tom was an old hand at this game, and he already foresaw a tough time for Knuckler. He didn't want Knuckler to lose—not that it would be bad for his show, for the news that one of his champions had been beaten would bring others flocking to the tent to see a repetition of the novelty—but because he was short-handed, and Knuckler, after a knock-out, would be almost useless; for he knew the lad would take to the drink and refuse to do his work next day.

"Now, then, pull yourself together, Knuckler!" cried the showman. And, hearing the warning voice, Knuckler recovered his balance and manoeuvred cautiously round Tom.

The ring was a very small one. Bethal had it built so because it forced the novices who faced his lads to stand up to their work, and, at close quarters, they had usually not a thousand to one chance against his "lot." Tom was aware of this, and so, instead of shifting uneasily, getting flurried, and laying himself open to Knuckler's attack, he stood his ground in the centre of the ring, his hands up on guard, and waited for Knuckler to come at him.

Tom's blow had hurt. Knuckler was a coward at heart. He began to feel afraid of Tom. The audience noticed it. They began to jeer at him.

"Go on, Knuckler!" roared Bethal. "What cher afraid of?"

Knuckler knew that warning voice. Bethal was getting angry. With a grunt he went in at Tom—feinting, dodging, and hitting with lightning-like rapidity. He was clever—so clever that Tom, despite his fine defence, felt two or three of Knuckler's blows land home. But they hadn't much sting behind them, and Tom, for his part, was busy.

Knuckler was a lad who might have won a world's championship if his heart had been all right, and if he had paid due attention to his training. At various times he had figured in glove-fights for big purses and huge side-stakes, and at one time he had been the idol of the boxing-world. But his temperament was all wrong. He could not take a beating. And he was slack and lax. He would never go into the ring fit, and consequently, although he had often been all over his opponents on points, he had never been able to hit hard enough to win a battle on a knock-out, and often had succumbed to a heavy blow when he had had a bout at his mercy.

This failing of his, together with intemperance, had brought him as low as we find him.

Tom was altogether a different class of lad. He had been forced since boyhood to use his fists to protect himself, and in his younger days he had been forced to submit to many a hiding. His school had been a rough one. He had early learnt the value of a hard hit and a true one, and he had schooled himself to time his blows so that body, shoulders, arms and legs acted together in perfect unison in their delivery.

He never flinched from punishment, and his frame was as hard as iron. His heart was as strong as a lion's, and, when "up against it," to use a slang expression which should be easily understood, he husbanded his resources and used his brains, never giving up the struggle, and always fighting for the the one end he had in view—victory.

And so as Knuckler, full of fight and fury, rushed him now—dancing about like a wild dervish, flourishing his arms and legs, and hitting with lightning speed—Tom stood up to him; did not trouble whether he placed himself open for a blow or not, and looked all the time for an opportunity of landing one which would take a bit of the conceit out of his antagonist.

Knuckler rushed Tom to the ropes, but Tom dodged him cleverly and went back to the centre of the ring, and, as Knuckler came in at him Tom dropped his hands. They had been boxing for close on two minutes, and many blows had been given and taken on both sides. Knuckler had landed more often, maybe, but Tom's hits had had the most "beef" behind them. As Knuckler saw Tom with his hands down now, he hesitated. He knew it was a ruse to get him to come in; but, at the same time, he—Knuckler—was so quick that he felt sure he could hit his man and dodge back out of danger in a trice.

The audience were laughing to see the show Tom was

making, and they urged Knuckler to go in and hit him. Knuckler obeyed the summons, and Tom let the blow land on the solar plexus. Tom's body was like a board there, and he withstood a blow which would have knocked Knuckler senseless. In return, as Knuckler's head came forward, Tom sent in a slashing hit which flung Knuckler off his feet as if he had been shot, and down upon the boards with a whack the boxer fell.

He lay there dazed, wondering what had struck him; with his head hanging limply and his gloves touching the floor. He was beaten—knocked out. Nothing could save him, for it wanted considerably more than ten seconds to time. But Bethal made a sign to his assistant and time-keeper, and the man, looking at his watch, bawled: "Time!"

It was the only thing that could have saved Knuckler. The Nipper and Cannon rushed into the ring and carried Knuckler out, pouring the contents of half a pail of water over his head; ramming the neck of a bottle into his mouth, and then jerking him back upon his wooden chair whilst they towelled him and did their best to bring him round.

"Brutal sport!" I hear some of my readers say. Well, have it that way if you like, but it is not boxing that brutalises. Tom Sayers was none the worse for the dozens of bouts and fights he had been through. On the contrary, he was a better lad for it; a more honest lad for it; a more self-reliant lad for it, and to the end of his life boxing was going to do him good.

With Knuckler it was different. Knuckler was a weak, peevish, brute of a lad—an animal, drinking, foul-mouthed lad. But boxing had not made him that. He was like that long before he took to boxing for a living, and he would be like it—and worse, maybe—long after he had abandoned boxing as a means of livelihood. Knuckler would never have been anything else but a young thief, a young waster, even had he never known the feel of a boxing-glove.

Boxing would never debase or brutalise a gentleman. No, it is the man who debases the sport—not the sport which debases the man.

Well, they got Knuckler into some sort of shape by the time the second round was called—which was nearly half a minute longer than the regulation interval, just to give Knuckler a chance of complete recovery—and the young ruffian came towards Tom with the light of battle in his eyes, and a feeling of revenge burning in his heart.

Tom entered on the second round with alacrity. He was tired in body and mind, but he knew he had to go through with this performance, and he thrust all thoughts of fatigue on one side.

He forced Knuckler back, and landed one-two on the face, and then landed a terrific jab in the middle of the fellow's back.

Knuckler's face went green, and he uttered a grunt. Then, starting in at Tom, he got in a vicious punch below the belt, which made Tom squirm in agony.

"Foul!" shouted someone in the audience, standing up; and shouting, as he pointed towards the ring: "Turn that lad out!"

Bethal noticed the foul, and he stored it up against Knuckler. He always ordered these lads to fight fair, and he expected them to do it. But he realised that Tom was a long way the better lad, and he let it pass now, for he thought it best to ignore it.

Knuckler rushed at Tom to follow up his advantage, and Tom, almost falling in his agony, turned swiftly from him, thrusting out his thigh.

It was a clever ruse, and Knuckler, in his impetuosity, ran on to Tom, missed him, and was thrown as clean a cross-buttock as ever you saw, whilst the audience cheered themselves hoarse. They had seen Knuckler deliver that foul blow, and the sight of his clever discomfiture appeased them a little. Knuckler remained down full nine seconds, then got up and dodged across the ring. Tom, writhing in agony still, hung on to the ropes. Knuckler looked at him with blazing eyes, and then, thinking that he had got Tom at his mercy, he rushed at him and attempted to strike him on his unguarded face.

Knuckler meant to win the battle out of hand. But Tom had something left, and, letting go of the ropes, he struck upward with his right, swinging all the strength he had into the blow, and Knuckler, running on to Tom's closed glove, caught the blow full in the face.

The resounding thud echoed through the tent, and back went Knuckler's head with a jerk, whilst his feet shot into the air and he was flung backwards by the force of the blow almost to the opposite ropes. He fell all of a heap.

The Nipper scrambled through the ropes, looking at Tom in awe.

"You've bin and killed him!" he cried.

Indeed, it seemed as if Knuckler might be killed outright.

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It was a terrible blow, and the fellow lay motionless where he had fallen.

Bethal, the showman, rushed to his side and met the men as they bore the senseless form out. One look, and his experienced eyes told him that all was well. Knuckler was knocked out, but his heart was beating firmly and he would be all right in a minute or two.

"It's all right, gents!" said the showman, turning towards the audience. "Knuckler's all right!"

Instantly a sigh of relief went up, followed by a rousing cheer, and a dozen enthusiasts pressed forward to shake Tom's gloved hand. The lad was pale, but triumphant.

"Gentlemen," said Bethal, taking off his opera-hat, "my lad's bin licked! But I don't mind, for I've never seen a chap stand up to his man as Tom Sayers did here to-night. If you don't mind, you'll oblige me by putting something in the hat for the boy."

There was a ready response. Coppers began to shower into the hat, with here and there a little piece of silver, and, by the time the tent was cleared and the delighted crowd were making their way homeward, talking over the many incidents in an amazing battle as they went, Bethal had a handful of coins to give to Tom.

He parted with them with a hearty goodwill.

"There you are, my lad," he said; "and I'm glad to hand them to you, for you've jolly well earned them. And now, just you come along with me and have a bit of supper with me and the missus. I want to have a talk with you."

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Finds Employment.

"MORNING, Tom!" said Sam Bethal cheerily, as Tom crawled from underneath the caravan where he had passed the night asleep upon some warm sacking and covered with a blanket which the good folks had given him. "How'd yer sleep last night?"

Tom blinked his eyes, for the morning sunlight was strong, and he was not fully awake yet.

"Very well, sir," he said, "thank you! I didn't take much notice of where I was, or anything else. The van protected me from the rain that fell, and I was so thoroughly done up that I never woke once after my eyes had closed till just now."

"Well," said the showman, rubbing his chin as he eyed Tom up and down, "I must say yer do look a bit the better for it! Your eyes are bright this morning, and your cheeks have got some colour in 'em, which they didn't have last night. Get you round the van, my boy, and have a sluice in the cold water you've got there, which I brought up from the stream. That'll pull you together, and in less than no time the missus will have the breakfast ready."

Tom took his wash, and, sure enough, when he returned with a smiling face, there was stout Mrs. Bethal pouring hot water from the kettle into the big china tea-pot, whilst cups and saucers were laid on the small and narrow table inside the van, and some nicely-cooked rashers of bacon, some fried eggs and hot toast were all ready for consumption.

Tom was hustled into the van by the sturdy and burly showman.

"Now, my lad," he cried, "none of your shyness! You're one of the family until we chuck you out! You had a bit of our supper last night, and you're going to have breakfast with us this morning! How's the appetite?"

How? What need for Tom to say? He was at all times a hearty eater, and enjoyed the soundest of health, despite his manifold troubles and trials. Bethal himself could put away rations for three or four, and his wife was a tidy trencherwoman.

The breakfast was quickly disposed of, and there were no drains in the cups and no waste on the plates. And, breakfast eaten, Mrs. Bethal handed a morning paper, which had been brought to them through the kindness of a fellow-showman, to her spouse.

"There you are!" she cried. "Out you go, and don't you bother me no more until it's dinner-time! I shall have enough to do to clear up after you, one way and another!"

The showman grinned, and winked at Tom.

"Don't you take no notice of my old woman, Tom Sayers," he said. "Her bark is allus worse than her bite. She's got her funny ways, but she's the best little woman in the wide, wide world."

With this, he bundled Tom outside. He sat himself down on the steps of the van.

"Read, Tom?" he queried, looking at Tom doubtfully.

"Yes," answered Tom.

"Who taught yer?"

"I taught myself. I didn't attend any Board schools, or night schools either," answered Tom. "I had to gain my learning the best way I could; but I managed somehow."

"Write, too?"

Tom nodded.

"That's more'n I can do," answered the showman ruefully. "And if I hadn't a business head, and weren't good at figures, goodness knows where I'd have been by this time. But it's not learning exactly as gets you on, Tom. You want to have a business head. As for writing, my old woman keeps the accounts for me, and saves me a lot of trouble. She's all round useful, she is."

He relaxed into silence, and buried his head in the morning newspaper, and after a while, seeing Tom seated silent and thoughtful by his side, he tore the newspaper into halves, and handed one half to Tom.

"There, my lad," he cried, "you read the news, and I'll scan the advertisements. I can get more than enough amusement out of reading them."

It was quite a long while since Tom had enjoyed the luxury of a newspaper, and he became so absorbed in what he was reading, that he became oblivious of everything that was going on around him. The showman Bethal remained silent, too, digesting his breakfast. But at length he crumpled up his advertisement pages, slung them into the caravan, and turned to Tom.

"Now, my lad," he said, "after recreation, comes business. I've kept you by me because I reckon we can be useful to each other. You can be useful to me, and I can be useful to you."

"You mean you want me to box in the booth?" said Tom.

The showman slapped Tom on the shoulder.

"My lad," he said, "that's exactly what I do mean. You see, it's this way. I'm short of lads. The Nipper, Cannon, and Knuckler, are all right so far as they go, but they can't go on for ever—and Eddy Pearce is a bit too old. At times we get some rare rough handfuls in the tent, and when one of the little uns is up against a chap twice his size, and a bloke what can hit, too, there's trouble, and sometimes they gets so knocked about that I have difficulty in getting 'em up to the scratch again. Now, you'd have no cause to fear anybody."

"I don't quite see why," said Tom, with a smile.

"Well, I do, my lad. Knuckler's bin going a bit steady of late, for him, and he was in better condition when he met you last night, than he was in his big fight with Rayner. And yet you just did what you liked with him, and you'd done that big train ride you told me of, and were half starved as well."

"And supposing I did consent to box for you, for a bit," said Tom, "what do I get out of it?"

Bethal laughed.

"Dash my buttons!" he roared. "That's what I like! A rare business lad! One who hits the nail bang on the head, and no hank about it! Well, it's this way, Tom. I finds the tent, the lighting, the tights, the boxing-gloves, and the rest of the paraphernalia, the printing, and the men to take the money, and look after the ring, etcetera, and you and the other boys—you does the fighting. Sometimes we takes a fair amount of money at the doors, sometimes we don't. That goes to me; and you boys—well, I feed you, or make you an allowance for food, and you shake the nobbings—that is to say, the money that is collected in the tent after the show. You share that—share and share alike, and I may as well tell you that often the nobbings is more than is paid for entrance—at least, it is when you've put up a good bout."

"There's no fixed salary?" said Tom, with twinkling eyes. "The pay is on the sliding scale?"

"Just so," said Sam Bethal. "Now, come to the point, my lad; will you join us?"

"I'll think it over," answered Tom.

The showman opened his mouth to try and persuade Tom further, but at that moment the Nipper, one of the boxers, came round the side of the van, and touched his cap to his employer.

"Morning, boss!" he said.

"Why, Nipper," said Sam Bethal, "what brings you here? You're a bit early, ain't yer, or are yer so keen on training, that you've left your comfortable bed a bit earlier than usual?"

The Nipper grinned, and what a grin he had! His mouth stretched almost from ear to ear.

"It warn't no training, governor," he replied, "only I thought I'd better come and tell yer."

"Tell me what?" said the showman, his brows clouding instantly. "What's up? Something gone wrong with the show, young un?"

"Knuckler says he won't box for you no more," said the Nipper. "So there's only three on us left, and I'm blowed if Eddy Pearce, Bob Cannon, and me are going to take on

everybody as likes to take us on at catch weights. We're going to resign."

"Resign!" roared the showman, standing up, and clenching his fists. "Did I hear you say 'resign,' you young villain? Here, wait until I get hold of you!"

He made a leap to the ground, but the Nipper had dodged away in a moment, and stood grinning at the showman from a safe distance.

"What's come to Knuckler?" roared Bethal.

"He's hurt at the licking he got last night," said the Nipper. "He went on the drink when the show was over, and this morning he said he meant getting blind. I'm afraid you won't find him much use to you, governor, and you must own that it leaves us a bit short-handed, and Eddy Pearce isn't as young as he used to be, and though he's clever, he's not keen on being knocked about by the heavy weights."

"Well," cried the showman, "what of it? We're going to be stronger to-day than ever we've been, my lad. I've got a buddin' champion joining us. Tom Sayers is going to help the show, aren't you, Tom? There! What do you say now, Nipper?"

The funny-looking little pugilist flashed a keen look at Tom.

"Morning, Sayers!" he said. "Is what Bethal says, straight? Are you going to box in the booth?"

"I hadn't definitely decided," answered Tom.

"But you are going to, straight?"

"Of course he is!" said Bethal. "And he'll be a mug if he don't. I'm going to make his name for him."

"Well, all right," said Tom, giving in. "I didn't want to take to my fists unless I could help it. But I've hurt Knuckler, and been the cause of Mr. Bethal losing him, and so I suppose I must take his place."

The Nipper threw his greasy cap into the air, and caught it as it fell.

"Hooray!" he cried. "All right, then, Mr. Bethal. I'll stay on, and I'll go and tell the others. And as for you, Tom, you take my advice. You keep your eyes open, for Knuckler's a nasty customer when he's roused, and when he's got the drink in him. If he bears you've taken his place with Bethal, after knocking him out, he'll never rest until he's had his revenge."

The showman looked serious.

"The Nipper's about right, my lad," he said.

Tom smiled.

"Oh," he said, "I'm not afraid of a hundred such as he! Knuckler can do what he pleases, Mr. Bethal, but if he'll take my advice, he'll leave me alone, for I, too, have a habit of being nasty if anybody does me a bad turn. So the best thing he can do is to forget all about the licking he got, and let me alone."

CHAPTER 5.

John Thurloe and a Swell Party.

THERE were very few people on the fair-ground in the morning, but in the afternoon they began to flock to the booths, and the big circus tent, which occupied the best pitch of all, was early thronged with an eager audience.

Sam Bethal, the showman, wouldn't attempt a show in the morning. He didn't intend to have his lads knocked about for a paltry pence, he declared.

"No, Tom," he said, "just you rest so as to be fit to take on any of these chaps who may care to challenge you this afternoon, and this evening. I expect a big crowd after what happened last night. And I'm not going to show for nothing."

In the afternoon business brightened up, and six exhibitions were given, Tom easily thrashing a raw lot of a lad who fancied he could use the gloves a bit, and the Nipper, Eddy Pearce, and Bob Cannon taking on the others. Then came the welcome tea interval, and a rest. And in the evening, when the lamps were lit, and the steam organs played, and the fun of the fair waxed fast and furious, Sam Bethal had his four lads on the platform outside his booth, and invited all and sundry to come in and have a try at 'em.

"There they are, gentlemen!" he cried, indicating the four with a wave of the hand. "Sam Bethal's champions, four of the finest lads that ever donned tights or gloves! The Nipper, Eddy Pearce, Bob Cannon, and last and not least, Tom Sayers, champion of champions!"

The name attracted attention. People who would otherwise have passed the boxing-booth by without so much as a glance, paused in their walk, and came nearer. They looked at the four lads, of whom old Eddy Pearce was the biggest and heaviest man, and they were amazed at the sight of young Tom's physical development, and handsome, boyish face.

One or two thought they would like to take the rise out of

him, and challenged him. One of them was sent flat to the floor in less than half a round, never to rise again until Pearce and the Nipper removed him. He had insulted Tom when they faced one another with gloves on hand, and Tom had paid him for it.

Sam Bethal's face was shining bright with enthusiasm as he saw what a success his show was that night. The news of the bout between Tom Sayers and Knuckler had got round, as Bethal had expected it would, and when the people who flocked to the fair-ground heard that Tom Sayers was now boxing in the show, they were eager to pay their money, and flocked to see Tom give an exhibition bout with the gloves.

Sam Bethal turned money away.

At half-past nine that night, as Bethal was loudly decanting upon the merits of Tom Sayers, and roaring Tom's name forth with all the power of his by no means weak lungs, a party of eight or nine young swells in evening-dress, who had turned out of the circus tent a little while before, came near to listen.

Sam's patter evidently amused them, for after listening for a minute or so, they laughingly surged towards one of the entrances. Tom looked at them with some curiosity.

The man who appeared to be the leading spirit amongst them was a heavily-built red-faced man of about forty years of age. He looked a sporting man all over—as differentiated from a sportsman—and Tom, who had considerable knowledge of the world, and who had seen most types of human beings, at once wrote him down as a heavy-drinking, heavy-betting, and generally reckless and good-for-nothing character. He had his arm linked with that of a younger man—a youth, in fact—of about twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, a good-looking, but weak sort of creature, who, although protesting, allowed himself to be drawn toward the entrance of the tent without attempting to resist. He was a fair-haired youth with blue eyes, and pink cheeks, a backboneless, feeble character, thought Tom.

The rest of the party were somewhat of an age, with the exception of a big fellow who towered head and shoulders above the others, and who, if his width of shoulder were any indication, possessed the strength of a hercules.

Most of them had been drinking a little, Tom noticed, and they shouted and jested with one another as they pushed people out of the way and made for the tent.

Sam Bethal went on with his patter.

And presently a man who seemed to be watching the party of swells, a somewhat distinguished-looking and clean-shaven man, who was clad in a suit of tweeds, and wore a crush hat upon his head, moved forward and paused in front of the platform. And as he heard Bethal refer to Tom Sayers, he looked upward, and his eyes meeting Tom's, he started, smiled, and made a sign. Tom was astonished, as well he might have been. He recognised the man in a moment. The man in the tweed suit was John Thurloe, the detective.

What could he be doing down there? wondered Tom. And how strange a fate it was that had thrown him once more in touch with John Thurloe, who had on more than one occasion, been kind to him, and whom he had first met under most dramatic circumstances in the slums of the East End of London.

John Thurloe motioned to Tom to come forward, and the lad, walking to the edge of the platform, bent down.

"Well, Tom," said the detective, looking into the boy's face with a friendly smile, "I never thought to see you here at the Winchampton Fair. How long have you been down here? I did not see you amongst Bethal's crowd on Monday."

"Neither was I, sir," answered Tom. "I came down yesterday, riding on the buffers of a London express."

Thurloe smiled.

"H'm!" he said. "I heard about that, although I never guessed you were the lad. When I was at police headquarters this morning, the superintendent spoke to me about it—said the railway authorities had complained to him about it. They wanted me to take the matter up in their interests, but I had other fish to fry, and begged to be excused. Tom, I have a ticklish job on hand."

"Yes, sir?" said Tom.

"You saw that party of well-dressed men who went into the tent just now?"

Tom nodded.

"Well, that fair-haired young fool has just come into a fortune of over £80,000, left him by his father, who died about six months ago. He is fresh from college, has no knowledge of the world, and is as weak as water. The rest of the gang are trying to rob him of his money. They are a bad lot, and that red-faced fellow is the ringleader. I have been engaged in the young fellow's interests by an old school chum of his. But the vultures have got a tight hold, and I shall have to be very careful how I set about the work. It won't be an easy task to save him. His name is Forbes, and his friend's name is Hardress. Hardress is a

real good chap, but the young fool hasn't got enough sense to listen to him, and prefers the company of that red-faced villain, Drake, who is robbing him right and left. Forbes is in bad hands, but I'll save him if I can, Tom."

Tom's face saddened.

"It's the old story, sir," he said, "I know. I've met men begging in the streets of Whitechapel who have been educated at the University. They come into a fortune and run through it, and when all is lost they can't give up the drink. Their education never helps 'em, sir; and, in fact, they are all the more helpless because of it, and the rough fellows despise them and bully them. That fair-haired chap don't look a bad sort, but he's like a baby."

"You've hit it, Tom!" said the detective. "I'm going inside to keep an eye on them. I'll see you in there."

"You will, sir," said Tom, smiling, "but not in the ring, I hope, for I've had enough sparring for to-day, and I'm stiff all over."

John Thurloe made for the tent, and Sam Bethal, who had watched Tom in amazement as he saw him speaking to the well-dressed man, stooped and plucked the lad by the ear.

"Inside, Tom, my lad!" he said. "There's work for you to do. Eddy Pearce has just come out to say one of them gents that went in just now wants to have the gloves on with Tom Sayers. They're all a pretty big-built lot, and some of them gentlemen amateurs can't half hit. You'll have to keep your eyes peeled this time, or there will be trouble."

Tom found that the Nipper, Bob Cannon, and Pearce had already gone inside the tent, and he stepped down off the platform and went with Sam round to the back.

"Who's your pal?" asked the showman, as they entered the dressing-room. "He looked a bit professional."

"He is a bit professional," said Tom, with a laugh. "So much so that I dare say there are a few people on the fair ground here to-day wouldn't care to make his acquaintance. His name is John Thurloe, and he was recently attached to the staff of Scotland Yard."

"Phew!" whistled Sam Bethal, casting a side glance of astonishment at Tom. "You must have been in some warm corners in your time, Tom, to have become acquainted with such as him."

"I have," answered Tom; "but I have retained his friendship, Sam."

"Which," said the showman heartily, "says a good deal for your honesty, my lad."

The audience, which packed the tent to suffocation, were stamping and clamouring now for the show to begin, and Sam Bethal led Tom into the tent, where the lad's appearance was received with a shout of delight. In the front row of seats Tom saw the party in evening-dress. They were laughing and talking together, and the red-faced man, whom Tom took to be Drake, was laying down the law to the fair-haired youth who sat by his side. In the row of seats behind them sat John Thurloe, apparently paying no attention to the antics and conversation of the swell party, but in reality drinking in every word, and watching Drake as a cat watches a mouse.

The big fellow whom Tom had noticed before was leaning back in his chair with his legs crossed, and was smoking a huge cigar.

He was looking at Drake with a smile.

Eddy Pearce turned to Sam Bethal, and carried on a conversation with him for a few moments in whispers. Then Sam drew himself erect, with a piece of paper on which was a pencilled note in his hand.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it was my intention to provide you with a scientific exhibition spar between two of my bonny lads, but at the last moment a challenge has come from a member of the audience. A gentleman, who wishes his name to remain a secret, has challenged Tom Sayers to a sparring match. The contests are limited to six rounds. They are fought under the Marquis of Queensberry's rules, although the ring, as you see, is a good deal smaller than twenty-four feet square. We extend the boxing to six two minute rounds, with one minute intervals. Now, as my lad is quite ready, if the gentleman will walk on to the stage and enter the ring, I shall be obliged, as it will take us a little while to get the gloves on him, and prepare him for the encounter."

Tom stood with his arms folded, listening, and keeping his eyes on the group of well-dressed men, and wondering all the while which one of them he was to have the privilege of knocking about. They all looked formidable opponents, with the exception of the fair-haired youth Forbes.

Tom knew that he would be giving a lot away in weight, and he foresaw one of the stiffest bouts it had ever been his privilege to fight.

Then up on to the raised stage stepped, of all people in

the world, the man Drake whom John Thurloe was keeping his eyes on. Tom fairly gasped.

Drake had in the interim been telling Forbes what he was going to do with Tom Sayers. He stood grinning down at the lad he was doing his best to ruin, and winked, whilst the fair-haired youth applauded him wildly.

Drake divested himself of his coat, vest, shirt, and under-vest, until his burly form appeared naked to the waist. He removed the braces from his evening-dress trousers, and borrowing a belt from Sam Bethal, wound it about his waist and pulled it tight. Then he asked for the gloves. Before him Tom saw a man of forty, who must have weighed close upon fourteen stone, a thick-set, muscular specimen of a man, who indulged in every kind of excess with impunity, and still possessed enormous strength. His biceps were big, as was his neck and chest. He was corpulent, but in very good condition considering; and Tom, knowing the type of man, guessed that he could box a bit, too. Such men as he usually can. And when he saw Drake hold out his hands for Sam to fasten on the gloves, Tom realised that he was an old hand at the game.

Tom looked down at John Thurloe, and he saw the detective's eyes fixed on his with a glance of inquiry. Thurloe was asking Tom with that look if he believed himself capable of holding out against the powerful sporting man. Tom answered the question with a glance of assurance, and John Thurloe leant back in his chair with a sigh of relief.

Eddy Pearce fastened on Tom's gloves for him.

"Tom," he said, "you've got a rare handful here. I tried to get the man to box me, but he wouldn't. He said he wished to have a go at Tom Sayers, and there was an end of it. I know the man. I've seen him on many a race-course. He's a terrible hard hitter, and has knocked many a man out in his time. But you stand up to him, and hit him hard, and if you can only once draw blood from his face, you'll have him cowed. Keep your head, and don't give him a chance to land home, for he'll hurt you if he does."

Tom nodded, keeping his eyes on the man he had to face all the while. Drake seemed very pleased with himself, and from the flush on his cheeks Tom knew that the man had been drinking. That would make him go at high pressure for a bit, but would tire him in the end. It would also render Drake over-confident, and Tom could tell that the swell looked upon the bout as being as good as won.

Drake clambered into the ring.

"Now, then, Sayers," he said, "come along, my lad, and let me see what you are made of."

Drake smiled down at his fair-haired young victim, who was gazing up at him with all the rapture of hero-worship. Tom set his lips, and his eyes flashed. He remembered what John Thurloe had said, and he made up his mind that Forbes's hero-worship should receive a big shock before he had done with Drake, if he could have his way.

And as Tom looked down at the audience he saw a manly-looking fellow who was seated at the end of the row of swells turn and exchange meaning glances with Thurloe. That must be Forbes's friend and old college chum Hardress, thought Tom.

Tom now stepped lightly into the ring, and at once seated himself on the chair which Sam had placed ready for him. Drake stood erect and smiling in the centre, waiting till Tom should feel disposed to tackle him. There was such a tremendous difference between the heights, weights, and sizes of the two principals, that the audience swayed in their excitement. Tom Sayers seemed doomed to defeat.

"All right, my lad?" asked Sam Bethal anxiously.

"Yes," said Tom; "let's get it over."

"They're all ready, gentlemen," said Sam, taking the chair out of the ring and knitting his brows in anxiety, for he never expected anything but a victory for the man Drake.

Eddy Pearce looked at Tom, and on a sign called "Time!" Drake, with a smile, walked round Tom, and held out his gloved hand.

Tom looked him right in the eyes.

"No," he said, "I only shake hands with a gentleman."

CHAPTER 6.

Tom Beats the Swell.

DRAKE started, his eyes flashed, and he rapped out an oath. What did Tom Sayers mean? From red the man's face went livid. He ground his teeth, and literally shook with rage. Tom understood the symptoms, and congratulated himself on having made the remark. He had robbed Drake of his self-command, and a man is not half such a dangerous opponent when he has once lost his temper.

"You shall pay for that, my lad," said the swell.

Tom, calm, and covered at all points, stood watching his opponent like a cat. He was trying to find out what he

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had to fight. Drake's style was good, but Tom noticed that, like most amateur pugilists, his defence did not seem too strong. He left himself uncovered.

Yet Tom did not go in and hit. He did not intend to leave the man an opening, if he could help it, for Thurloe and Sam and now Eddy Pearce had warned him against the man.

Drake was literally boiling over with rage. "I've heard a lot about you," he cried tauntingly, "why don't you come in and fight?"

Tom made no reply, but swung cautiously round the ring, watching his antagonist's eyes.

At last Drake could stand it no longer, and at Tom he came, hitting out with terrific force, and at length closing with the lad and trying close half-arm work, in which he expected to get Tom at a big disadvantage. He drove Tom back by sheer weight; but in a moment old Sam was in the ring.

He gripped Drake by the shoulders, and tried to force him away, whilst Tom, as fair as you please, held his gloved hands aloft to show that it was not he who was clinching.

"That will do, sir!" said Sam. "Box fair, or I shall withdraw my man. No clinching. You know it's not allowed. You ought to be ashamed of yourself trying to beat the lad that way."

Drake, with a wild cry, aimed a blow at Sam, which the old boxer dodged. Then Tom pushed the showman aside.

"All right, sir," he said, "I'm not afraid of him. You leave him to me."

Meanwhile the audience was in a state of uproar. Cat-calling, hissing, and yelling, they hurled their abuse at the "gentleman," and a shout of "Bravo, Tom Sayers!" rang out.

Sam backed out under the ropes, and Drake rushed at Tom. Tom stood his ground as firm as a rock, with his feet planted on the floor of the ring as if they were rooted there. As the man came in at him Tom judged his hit. He had the opening; Drake had left himself unguarded. He thought of nothing else but beating the boy, and he fancied he could do it with ease.

John Thurloe, the detective, realised what a chance it was for Tom, and he stood erect holding his breath in his excitement. Sam Bethal's heart almost ceased to beat. The fair-haired youth stood up, waving his opera-hat, as he fancied his hero had as good as beaten Tom. Eddy Pearce gripped the Nipper round the throat, half strangling him in his excitement.

"Tom's got him!" he shrieked. And the next moment Tom's right came up with that dreadful swing of his. The boy seemed to lurch his whole self into the hit, and it went home on the point with the force of a battering-ram.

Down went the burly, red-faced swell flat on the boards, and he lay there with his arms extended, his head hanging limply, one knee raised in the air, and the other leg extended to its full length, motionless, knocked out as cleanly as ever man had been in the history of the ring.

The effect of that tremendous blow was electrical. Tom Sayers himself was astounded at the result. The boy knew that he could hit, but never in any of his fights had he hit a man like that. But then never had he stood up against anybody he hated as he hated this man, whom John Thurloe had declared was trying to ruin the weak but amiable-looking youth who sat in the tent below.

Tom knew very well that it was vanity which had induced Drake to face him. Drake had wished to score at his expense, to give Forbes some extra cause for hero-worship. He had intended to take a rise out of Tom, and did not scruple to make use of his extra weight, height, and size.

And Tom when he hit the man had not cared whether he killed him or not. How could he be expected to stand on ceremony? Human nature is human nature, and Tom was neither stronger nor weaker than the rest of us.

But as he saw Drake lying there, with his red face gone pale and his eyes closed, he feared for a moment that the worst might really have happened.

Sam Bethal, after flinging his hat into the air, stared at the fallen Drake with eyes that were wide open in horror. Then he scrambled in under the ropes, and Eddy Pearce joined him.

"Water, Nipper!" said Sam. The bantam weight passed him a pail, and Sam dashed its contents down on Drake's pale face. Then he knelt beside him, and tried to restore animation.

The audience did not care a rap what had happened to Drake. They had seen Tom Sayers beat him in miraculous fashion, after Drake had attempted to fight foully, and they stood cheering and cheering like madmen, whilst Tom, as he looked down, saw John Thurloe exchange a handshake with the man whom he knew must be Forbes's friend.

Forbes, the fair-haired youth, had turned pale, and he

stood trembling on his feet gazing anxiously towards the ring. The rest of Drake's friends were astounded. Drake had a terrible reputation as a bully and a fighting man, and there was not one amongst them would have cared to face him as Tom had done.

A couple of minutes passed, and then Drake opened his eyes.

"Give me some brandy," he muttered. Eddy Pearce had a flask of the liquid in his pocket. He kept it in case of need. He passed it to the swell, who poured half the contents of the flask down his throat.

Drake scrambled up, assisted by Sam. "Get out of the way!" he growled. "I don't want you hanging, staring about me. I'm not a curiosity. Leave me alone, hang you!"

Sam Bethal gave him a withering glance. "Some men were never born grateful," he muttered. "I wish I'd let you lay there."

"What's happened?" asked Drake of one of his friends who came scrambling up to him.

"Oh, you were knocked out!" was the reply.

"A chance blow," growled Drake, seeing a hundred different colours darting before his eyes, and feeling very sick—"A chance blow. It would never happen again once in a hundred times. I had the little beast at my mercy. Did you ever see such luck?"

The other smiled. "It's had the wrong kind of effect on Forbes," he whispered in a tone of warning. "You nearly over-reached yourself that time, Drake. You were too clever. I told you to let well alone. These boxing fellows are pretty hot stuff. They have to be. Look at what they have to go through. Another such hiding, and you might find your influence over young Forbes gone altogether, and good-bye to the pigeon we're plucking."

Drake nodded.

"Yes," he said. "But it's rotten hard luck, all the same. A thousand to one chance came off for the other side. Help me into my things, old man, and let us get away from here."

Sam Bethal was taking round the hat on behalf of Tom, and the coins were showering into it. Tom, none the worse for the encounter, and smiling to think how he had advanced Thurloe's cause, for there was a look of disgust and disappointment on Forbes's young but dissipated countenance, had drawn on his sweater and taken off his gloves. He was receiving the congratulations of the Nipper and Bob Cannon, who were smiling as they gripped him by the hand, and smacked him on the back.

Drake got into his evening-dress things again, and looking pale, and puffed about the face, which had swollen badly from the effects of Tom's blows, he stepped down from the stage, and joined his friends below. They made their way towards the exit in the wake of the laughing crowd, some of whom turned to jeer at Drake.

He was too far gone, too depressed to resent it, although at another time he would have made them pay for it.

"However did it happen?" asked Forbes, frowning as he looked at his supposed friend. "I thought you had never been beaten in a boxing contest, Drake?"

"Neither have I been," answered Drake. "You see, Forbes, we never take luck into consideration. Sometimes it fights for us, sometimes on the other side. It was against me just now. I was going in to deliver the knock-out, when I slipped and fell right on the boy's glove as he hit up. If I had not slipped you would have seen something entirely different."

"H'm!" murmured Forbes doubtfully.

John Thurloe, pressing behind them, overheard the

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conversation, and he smiled, for he realised that Drake's influence over the lad was weakening.

"But, Forbes," said Drake, smiling with an effort, "I don't intend to let the matter rest there. I'm going to have my revenge on that boy."

"How?" asked Forbes, gazing at Drake in astonishment.

"Listen," answered Drake, "and I'll tell you."

He put his lips to Forbes's ear, and though he strained his hearing to the uttermost, John Thurloe could not hear what he was saying. But when he had finished, Forbes linked his arm with Drake's, and smiled at him in the old hero-worshipping way.

"What do you think of the plan?" asked Drake, with a grin.

"Capital, capital!" answered the lad. "I want to see it carried out at once!"

CHAPTER 7. The Ambush.

ON the night of his arrival at Winchampton, Tom Sayers had slept on the Fair ground, lying upon some sacks which Sam Bethal had placed beneath his caravan, with a blanket over him to protect his body from the cold, and he had managed well enough. But he had no desire to take the risk a second time, and there was no occasion, for he had taken enough money during the day as his share of the nobbings to permit of him securing a decent lodging in the town. And so the night after his unmerciful pasting of Drake, tired out by his exertions in the boxing booth—and he had faced many likely lads that day—in the last show had been given he said good-night to Sam, and walked off townwards in company with the Nipper, Bob Cannon, and Eddy Pearce.

They saw the last lights of the fair put out, and wandered on through the deserted streets, which possessed a weird character all their own at that hour of the night, with the electric lights burning and not a soul to be seen.

Winchampton was a pretty town. Most of it had been newly-built, and very little of the old original town remained. It had been planned on neat and trim lines, and the townsfolk were jealously proud of it. The roads were kept scrupulously clean, and not even a bit of paper was allowed to remain for long upon the ground.

Trees had been planted freely, and there were open spaces, and plots of green grass to add a beauty to the place it would otherwise not have possessed.

The lodgings in which the boxers lived were in the poorer part of the town, a good mile and a half's walk from the Fair ground. They had to cross the river to get to it, and they swung along, silent and tired, for their muscles ached, and they were all four ready to drop with sleep.

Of a sudden Bob Cannon, a dull but good-natured fellow of the loafer type, not that he was really lazy, but because he was not clever enough to learn a trade, caught Tom Sayers by the arm.

"Tom," he said, "look across the road. Who's that walking in the shadder there?"

Tom looked, and saw the figure of a man, with his head bowed and his shoulders bent, and his hands in his pockets, slouching along with heavy, uncertain steps.

"I don't know," he answered. "He looks like some homeless vagabond, and he's evidently had too much to drink."

"It's Knuckler," said Bob Cannon. "I recognised him in the light of the lamp just now. He was looking down the road as if he were watching for someone. Perhaps he's bin on the look-out for you, Tom; but he's made a mistake, 'cos he's not found you alone. And even if you were I don't suppose you'd be afraid of him."

Tom smiled serenely.

"I don't suppose I should be," he said.

Tom watched that slouching, staggering figure until Knuckler reached the corner of the street, and turned it. And then he, in common with the others, heard a low, sharp, shrill whistle, which rang out as clearly as if it had been blown upon an instrument.

"That's a signal from Knuckler," said the Nipper, opening his eyes. "I know it was him that whistled, 'cos I've heard him do it before. I wonder what the game is? There can't be any plot against you, Tom. Knuckler would never get anybody in Winchampton to help him injure you."

"We'll soon see," said Eddy Pearce, quickening his tired steps. They reached the corner of the street, and looked intently along it. They saw Knuckler slouching along unsteadily as before; but save for the presence of a motor-car which stood by the kerbside, the street was deserted.

"That's all right," said Bob Cannon, relieved. "Knuckler must have whistled to keep hisself company."

They kept on their way, and as they drew near to the waiting motor-car, they noticed that it was a magnificent, high-powered vehicle, and that four or five men were seated in it. These stepped out as Tom and his party came along, laughing and talking to one another. They seemed very merry, and were smoking big cigars. Bob Cannon reckoned in a moment that one or two of them had had too much to drink.

One of them swung round to the head of the bonnet of the car, whirled the handle round, and started the engines. The others stood facing the houses, and looking at the four boxers as they came near.

Attracted by the unusual magnificence of the car, the four boxers stopped when they reached it, and Bob Cannon went forward to watch the man manoeuvring with the starting-handle. The Nipper, with his eyes heavy with sleep, had his hands in his pockets. Eddy Pearce grumbled loudly at the luck of things.

"Why should them iccfs have a thing like that?" he said, turning to Tom. "and you and me, Tom, sometimes haven't even a copper to get a bite of bread. You and me ain't done nothing to deserve our fate, any more than these toffs have. It's the luck of birth, that's what it is. I mean to turn Socialist. I wants my share of the good things."

He turned his eyes on one of the men who stood with the collar of his motor-coat turned up to protect his throat. Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, Tom," he said, "it's the party that fought you in the ring the other night. It's that gang of swells who came in to do you down."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, ere two of the well-dressed men advanced towards Tom.

"Now!" said Drake, for he was the man with the heavy motor-coat.

No sooner was the signal given than Eddy Pearce found himself violently tripped up, and fell heavily to the pavement. Bob Cannon was sent reeling into the road, the Nipper was shoved forcibly out of the way, and two huge men pounced on Tom Sayers before he had time to lift a hand to defend himself, a rug was thrown over his head, he was picked up bodily, kick how he might, carried into the car, and held forcibly there, whilst the driver of the car sprang to his feet, and Drake called to the others, who were engaged in a fistic encounter with the Nipper, Bob Cannon, and Eddy Pearce, who had risen angrily to their feet, to come away and get into the car. They scrambled in anyhow, with the enraged boxers hitting at them right and left. The driver started the car, it was whirled round, and disappeared down the road in a flash, leaving the Nipper sprawling full length on his stomach, and the other two gazing in open-mouthed wonderment at the vanishing tail light as it grew smaller and smaller.

"Well, I'm dashed!" cried Bob Cannon, aghast. "Did you ever see anything like that in your life? It was a plot, then, and Knuckler was in it. What's their little game? Why have they kidnapped Tom? He'll be a rough handful to some of them. They can't kill him, and they can't eat him. What do they want him for? I know that man, and I'm going to put the police on their track without a second's delay."

"It's the coolest thing I ever saw!" gasped Eddy Pearce.

The Nipper picked himself up ruefully from the road, and felt his damaged nose, from which the blood was beginning to stream.

"Blow me!" he gasped. "If that don't take the biscuit. But what they're after beats me. Let's go and find the police."

He scrambled on to the pavement, and at that moment they all three heard a firm step close by.

"There's no need to do that," said a firm and musical voice. "I saw all that happened, although I was too far away to render any assistance. But I'm going to follow them."

Eddy Pearce saw a good-looking, clean-shaven man standing before him, and he noticed that there was something professional in the fellow's appearance.

"You speak with authority, sir," he said politely; "though I don't know who you are."

"My name is John Thurloe, and I am a detective," answered the other, with a smile. "The party in the motor-car is from Welby Hall, some ten miles away from here. I don't know what they intend to do with Tom Sayers, but I'm going to follow them and see."

"You'll be a bit late, sir, if you're going to walk it," said Bob Cannon, flashing a look at Thurloe.

"As you say," answered Thurloe blandly. "But I know the way, and I intend to ride. Ah! Here comes a man on a bicycle."

Bob Cannon looked, and saw the light of a bicycle-lamp approaching them in the centre of the road. The cyclist was

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pedalling at a brisk pace, and would have gone by had not Thurloe stepped into the road, barred his way, and held up his hand.

The rider, who turned out to be a postman making his round of the pillar-boxes, with a bag thrown over his shoulder, slowed up and dismounted.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, looking at the four suspiciously.

"I want to borrow the use of your bicycle," said Thurloe. "I am a police officer, and I wish to follow a motor-car to Welby Hall. It is an urgent case. I shall be obliged if you'll be good enough to lend me yours."

"That's all jolly fine!" grumbled the postman. "But what about me? And how am I to know whether you're speaking the truth?"

"My name is Thurloe," answered the detective. "I am known to the police here. You can report the case at once. You know where I have gone to. These men here, Pearce, Bob Cannon, and the Nipper are boxing at Sam Bethal's booth on the Fair ground at Winchampton. You know where to find them. I am bound for Welby Hall. I don't want to steal your bicycle. Here, I'll give you a security for its safe return."

And he hauled a gold watch out of his pocket, and proceeded to take it from off his chain.

The postman was convinced.

"No, don't trouble, sir," he said. "Take the bicycle, and welcome. I've nearly finished my round. It won't take me more than an extra five minutes. And may I ask why you're following that party? I know Mr. Forbes and Mr. Drake, sir. Drake's a bad lot."

"Well, I'm after him!" said Thurloe, with a meaning smile. "And I don't think he will trouble Mr. Forbes much longer. I mean to break up that partnership to-night. As for the reason why I'm following them, they've seized Tom Sayers, who was boxing with these men at Bethal's booth, and forcibly taken him with them."

The postman literally pushed the bicycle towards Thurloe at that.

"Here, take the machine, sir!" he said. "And don't waste no time. I heard about the way that boy pated Mr. Drake. They mean to play him a dirty trick. Quick, sir! The car'll easy beat you for pace. You'll not get there a moment too soon."

John Thurloe turned his socks up over his trousers, felt the reach from the pedals, and finding it about to his liking, he wished the party good-night, and pedalled off in the direction in which the car vanished as fast as he could go.

Neither of the boxers moved until the detective had vanished out of sight, and then joining forces with the postman, tired as they were, they insisted on accompanying him for the remainder of his round, whilst they explained to him what a fine fellow Tom Sayers was, and how he was a cut right above the other professional boxing champions at his weight, and must one day inevitably become champion of England, if not of the world.

CHAPTER 8. At Welby Hall.

TO say that Tom was astonished to find himself suddenly seized and dragged into the waiting motor-car without his being able to move so much as a hand to defend himself, gives but an inadequate idea of his state of mind. He tried to struggle, but he felt that rug which enshrouded his head and shoulders relentlessly pulled taut, and his legs were firmly held and quickly tied with rope, when he was once in the car. His arms were forcibly drawn to his side, and a rope passed about them, and then the shawl was removed. Tom was trussed up like a turkey, and he saw the red and grinning face of Drake smiling at him.

"You'll keep quiet, my lad, if you take my advice," said Drake. "You'll do yourself no good by raising your voice, and we don't mean to stop for anybody. We don't intend you any real harm, only I mean to have my revenge for that licking you gave me. I've got a man at Welby Hall I think is good enough for you, and you shall have the chance of fighting for your freedom."

Tom said nothing. He fully realised the futility of shouting for help. What help could be afforded him at that hour of the night? Even if the cry happened to be heard by a policeman patrolling his beat, he would only just have time to flash a look at the whirling car, and then it would be gone.

No. Tom remained quiet, wondering what on earth was to be the end of this adventure, and through the night the car flashed with its heavy freight of passengers, most of whom were laughing and talking wildly as the vehicle whirled along.

The road was downhill for most part of the way to Welby, the surface was excellent, and there was no traffic about. The atmosphere was clear, and, undisturbed by a speed-limit, the chauffeur drove the car madly along, so that the ten miles or thereabouts which separated Welby Hall from Winchampton were covered at lightning speed.

Tom felt drowsy, and closed his eyes in sleep. He thought it just as well to store up every ounce of energy he possessed for the ordeal which he knew must await him.

At last through a pair of handsome gates the car turned, and flashed along a drive to the door of a fine old house, whose windows were bright with lights.

The car had reached the house in which the ne'er-do-well young spendthrift Forbes lived; and seemingly they did not go to bed here, for lights were burning in nearly every room in the house, and the sound of wild laughter came from the interior.

Drake's friends were doing their best to ruin Forbes in the shortest possible space of time.

"Here, wake up, my boy!" cried Drake, shaking Tom fiercely by the shoulder.

Tom opened his eyes, and noticed the fine house, gay with light.

"Help me lift him out, some of you!" said Drake.

Tom was caught up as if he were a piece of merchandise, and carried bodily out of the car, and up the broad flight of steps to the door of the Hall.

Then the big man Tom had noticed in the boxing-booth came out, grinning all over his sinister face. Forbes stood by his side, pale, with wildly-flashing eyes, and a look of desperation about him. His constitution was not strong enough to stand the constant strain he put upon it, and of all those who had foregathered merry-making in his fine old home, he was the least fit to stand the racket.

"Ah!" he said thickly. "You've got him, then?"

"Yes," answered Drake, with an oath; "we've got him! And I tell you what, Forbes, Tom Sayers is going to have a chance to show what stuff he really is made of."

Drake closed the Hall door, and one of the others locked and bolted it. Then one of them untied the ropes which were cutting into Tom's limbs. Tom stood upon his feet, and shook himself. He said never a word, but he did not appear to be in the least afraid. He looked at the crowd of men in evening-dress who came thronging into the hall, shouting and talking at the pitch of their voices, and amongst them he saw Hardress, Forbes's friend, the man who knew John Thurloe, the one man of all those gathered at Welby Hall who really meant to deal honestly by the unlucky Forbes.

Hardress stood with his arms folded, and his face wore a gloomy expression as if he disapproved of everything. He alone seemed to be really sober of all that rascally gang. And as Tom looked at him he fancied he saw a gleam of friendliness in the gentleman's eyes. Then Hardress crossed to Forbes, and caught him by the arm.

"Forbes," he said, in a tense whisper, which Tom could just catch, "stop this foolery! After all, you are master here, and not these fellows. Order your servants to put the lights out. Order your guests to go to bed. Act the strong part. Be a man. This farce has already gone on long enough. They mean to ruin you—they are ruining you as fast as they know how. Even the big fortune your father left you will soon be dissipated if you go on in this mad fashion. Tell Tom Sayers he is free to go. It's a black-guardly outrage to bring the boy here."

Forbes listened, and his pale face assumed a frightened expression.

"I daren't!" he cried. "I can't! Besides, Drake and the others wouldn't listen. I can't do it! They'd burn my house down about my ears if I did. They've got me in their power, and they know it!"

"Will you let me act for you? I'll take the risk!" said Hardress desperately.

"No, no!" cried Forbes, shaking the other's arm away. "It's no use you talking, Hardress. Besides, I'm not particularly grateful to you! You can mind your own business!"

Having repudiated Hardress, a fit of frenzy suddenly seized him.

"Come on!" he cried. "Drag Tom Sayers into the dining-room! The tables are all cleared away. Let him fight Mangham there. I want to see the contest, and I've got a hundred pounds on with you, Drake!"

The villain nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I'll make it five hundred if you like, Forbes!"

"No, no!" answered the other. "One hundred will do!"

The crowd of men hemmed Tom Sayers in, and they forced him along the magnificent mosaic flooring of the hall into a huge dining-room, which abutted on to it. The servants of the Hall looked on with sad and disapproving

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eyes. Things were coming to a pretty pass in that fine and sedate old mansion, which had been the home of propriety during the late Mr. William Forbes's lifetime.

Hardress drew near to Tom.

"Sayers," he said, "keep a stiff upper lip. You are in a tight corner. There are such a set of blackguards here that there is no knowing what they will do. But you've got a friend in me. I won't let them go too far if I can help it."

One of the men closed the door. Drake turned with a grin to Tom.

"Sayers," he said, "you knocked me out the other night. It was a stroke of luck, I admit, but you did it. But I'm going to have my own back. You're going to have the gloves on with Mangham there. See if you can beat him."

Mangham was a huge fellow, who towered over six feet in height, and who was built in proportion, and he was smiling at Sayers.

The fellow looked as big a blackguard as the others. A pretty fine set of friends Forbes had made, to be sure, thought Tom as he looked around at them. Why, the Nipper and Bob Cannon and Eddy Pearce and good old Sam Bethal, rough men all though they were, were worth a thousand such as these overdressed vagabonds.

Mangham came forward.

"We've been kept waiting for you, my lad," he said; "and we all want to go to bed sometime to-night. You've got to box me. We'll have no ropes. And, no matter whether you lick me or I lick you, there'll be a collection made for you when the fight is over, so that you won't suffer, Sayers. Now, make haste and get your things off. I'm anxious to begin. My blood's stagnant. I want my circulation stirring up."

"Bravo, Mangham!" roared the others in a chorus.

Tom Sayers set his lips.

"I don't intend to fight!" he said. "I've been dragged here against my own free will, and not one of you can make me do anything I don't wish to do!"

"You won't box?" said Drake, turning fiercely on Tom.

"You'd better box, my boy, or it will be the worse for you!"

"All right!" he cried. "If I must, I must! Give me the gloves!"

CHAPTER 9.

Tom's Grit—And an Unexpected Denouement

A ROAR of delight went up from the group of well-dressed scoundrels who thronged the room. Hardress, pale with indignation, bit his lip as he realised that it would be worse than useless for him to interfere.

He had seen Tom make his plucky fight against Drake, but Mangham, a bigger and altogether more powerful man, seemed to be an opponent of another stamp. He towered head and shoulders above Tom. He seemed to be twice Tom's breadth, and more than twice Tom's weight. He had a tremendous reach, and powerful arms and thighs. His condition was not of the best, but a man of his type can play ducks and drakes with his constitution without any effect apparently for years.

One of the fellows tied a pair of boxing-gloves on Tom's wrists, whilst another slipped some of the lad's things off, so that he would be able to move about more freely. Mangham simply took off his coat and waistcoat, and rolled up the sleeves of his dress-shirt.

Then, almost before Tom had time to realise what had happened, he was pushed forward, and found himself standing in the centre of a rich pile carpet, face to face with his towering enemy, whilst the excited guests at Welby Hall gathered round, giving them just sufficient room to manoeuvre in and no more.

Round and about Tom shifted, moving with incredible rapidity, and Mangham grew angry. He hated to be made a fool of, and he realised by the delighted laughter of his pals that Tom Sayers was fairly fooling him.

"Close in!" he panted. "Make the ring smaller! Give me a chance of hitting him!"

The only satisfaction he received was a howl of laughter.

Then Tom, grown daring, and meaning to take his revenge in full upon this man, stepped in quite close, and impudently held out his face for the other to hit. With an exclamation of rage, Mangham dashed his left fist at Tom's head, but only to find that Tom's head was not there. The lad had shifted it as the blow came, and Mangham's forearm went past his neck, grazing the shoulder and making it smart. And in reply Tom swung in a terrific counter, timing the blow with his usual skill, and Mangham reeled backwards. A spot of carmine could be seen upon his livid cheek, and he uttered a howl of agony as the blow stung.

Tom did not let the opportunity slip. He dashed in at the big fellow with the ferocity of a tiger. He rained blows

upon him so quickly that Mangham, in his unsettled state, was utterly unable to defend himself, and to the consternation and dumbfounded amazement of that gang of well-dressed scoundrels, down went Mangham to the floor, holding up his gloved hands, his face battered and bruised, and his dress-shirt crumpled and stained.

Tom Sayers had eaten his frugal supper, and digested it long ago. Mangham, blown out with a big dinner and copious draughts of champagne, was in such a state that he panted for breath as he lay upon the ground. As cool as a cucumber, Tom Sayers stood there, with his jaw set and his eyes flashing, waiting for the big man to come along.

"I'm waiting, sir," he said. "I've only just begun with you as yet."

By all the rules of boxing Mangham was defeated. He had remained longer than the customary ten seconds. He signed to some of them to help him, and Drake, whose face was distorted with rage, put his strong hands beneath the fellow's arms, and helped him up to his feet.

"You muff!" he said. "Are you going to let that baby beat you?"

"No!" howled Mangham, recovering, and reeling towards Tom.

But before they could fight again there was a sudden outcry from the hall, the door was burst open, and into the room sprang John Thurloe, the detective.

He looked round him quickly, taking in the position of affairs at a glance, and as he saw Tom Sayers standing erect and uninjured, he smiled.

A tired and astonished manservant stood at the door, not knowing what to do. The household had been startled a minute or so before by the violent ringing of the door bell, and one of the servants, more daring than the rest, had unbolted and unlocked the door. Then Thurloe had forced his way in.

"I am a detective," he explained to the astounded manservant. "I am here to save your master from the hands of the villains who are trying to ruin him. Let me pass!"

The servant had stood aside, and then Thurloe had quickly made his way to the door of the room in which Mangham was boxing Sayers, and had forced it open, and rushed through.

Drake turned and looked at him with a pair of blazing eyes.

"Who the dickens is this?" he cried, glancing uneasily at Forbes. "How's this fellow come here? What does this mean, Forbes? Is this another joke?"

Forbes looked at Thurloe.

"No," he said. "I don't know the man. I did not invite him here. He's an intruder. I don't know how he's managed to get in, or what his business is."

John Thurloe walked straight into the centre of the room, whilst the men in evening-dress looked uneasily at one another.

"My name is John Thurloe," he cried. "I am a detective. I was asked to protect Mr. Forbes by his old friend, Mr. Hardress here, and ever since I came to Winchampton I have been trying to find out how I can lay you, Drake, by the heels."

The red-faced scoundrel trembled; but he began to bluff.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed, but it was a laugh with a mirthless ring in it. "That's a good joke! An officer of Scotland Yard—eh? Perhaps you will have the goodness to show us your authority?"

"I can do that," answered John Thurloe easily.

"This is an outrage—an unwarrantable liberty on your part, Hardress!" spluttered the unfortunate Forbes. "You will have the goodness to leave my house before to-morrow morning, and take this hired bloodhound with you!"

John Thurloe smiled.

"Not so fast, if you please, Mr. Forbes," he said, fumbling in the pocket of his coat. "May I ask you a question?"

Forbes paused irresolutely.

Hardress caught him by the arm.

"Yes, Forbes," he said. "Remember your whole future depends upon your actions now. Let Thurloe have his way."

"May I ask, then," said the detective, "whether you have ever given or paid over cheques—open cheques—to Drake, and to Mangham and others since they have been staying with you?"

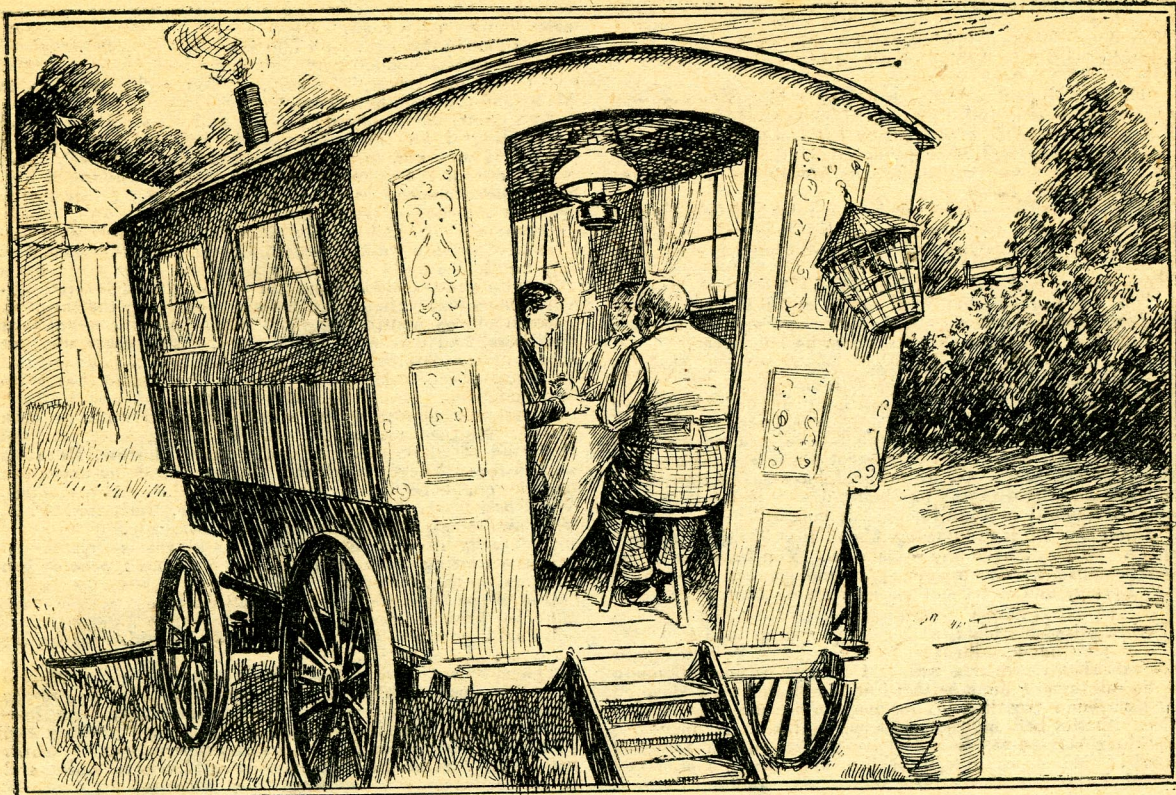
"Yes," said Forbes, trembling, "I have. For money I lost at cards, and other debts."

"There is one here," cried Thurloe, holding out a cheque to the trembling owner of Welby Hall. "It is drawn for one thousand pounds, and dated yesterday. Is that yours?"

The young fellow's cheeks blanched.

"No, by gad!" he cried. "It's a forgery!"

"There are others in my possession which I got from the



Tom Sayers helped to quickly dispose of the showman's breakfast.

bank," said Thurloe, with a smile. "I had a long conversation with your bank-manager this morning. It is a careless thing to do to leave cheque-books lying about where any light-fingered gentry can lay their hands on them; and such specious scoundrels as you have around you now, sir, are the very sort to make the most of the opportunity."

Drake moved towards the door. But he did not get very far upon his way. With the spring of a panther John Thurloe was on him. There was a wrenching down of his arms, the click of a pair of handcuffs as the snap caught home, and the chagrined and snarling villain was a prisoner.

"You've got the arch-scoundrel, at any rate," said John Thurloe, as he heard some of the others making for the door. "And that is some consolation."

Forbes stood in the centre of the room, hanging his head, thunder-stricken by the dramatic turn events had taken. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes, and he fingered the forged cheque which John Thurloe had handed to him in a nervous, halting way.

Drake, finding that the game was up, settled into a dignified and dogged silence. He did not mean to help the prosecution in any way, and he blamed himself for a fool for not getting away with the money he had already robbed Forbes of, instead of waiting to clean his victim's exchequer dry.

He stood regarding Forbes with a glance of utter contempt, and there was a cynical smile on his lips.

"You're a poor fool, Forbes," he said, "or you would have seen through me long ago; and wouldn't have waited for a friend like that blockhead Hardress to save you!"

Forbes hung his golden head, ashamed. Then he suddenly braced himself together. Standing erect, and showing more resolution than Hardress had seen in him for a very long time, he approached John Thurloe.

"Release him from his handcuffs!" he cried,

"But, sir—" protested the detective.

"Release him!" cried Forbes firmly. "I shall not prosecute! I have regarded Drake as my friend; but I see he was my enemy. Still, I will not prosecute."

Drake's eyes flashed with triumph.

"But," Forbes went on, "he must return to me the money he has robbed me of—every penny of it! Only on those conditions will I let him go!"

"There's the thousand pounds I got yesterday," said Drake. "You can have that. But what other sums of money I have got from you are already spent. They don't amount to more than five hundred pounds in all; and Mangham and the other johnnies haven't taken a thousand pounds altogether, although we did look forward to one big coup."

Forbes turned from him in disgust.

"Return me the thousand pounds," he said; "I will forego the rest."

"It's in the travelling-trunk in my bed-room," said Drake. "You can have it, Forbes, and welcome. I'll leave it out for you."

Forbes made a sign to Thurloe to undo the handcuffs, and the detective reluctantly enough took out the key and released Drake.

The man looked at his wrists, where the mark of the handcuffs could be seen against the white flesh.

"By George!" he cried. "That's the closest shave I've had for years! I thought I was a clever man, Forbes, and that your chum Hardress was a fool. I underestimated his worth. Though dull and slow, he was a bit too smart for me. Well, I'll give you a parting word of advice: Stick to him. He'll be of great service to you. If you intend to act the strong part, you'd better make a clean change over soon, for you're weak as water just now, and a prey to any smart man who may care to rob you. Au revoir! Hope we shall have the pleasure of another meeting in the near future."

He turned and looked at Tom Sayers.

"Tom," he said, with a broad smile, "you're another I underestimated. You don't know your worth, wasting your time and your talents in Sam Bethal's booth. You can earn a championship and a fortune if you care to enter the ring. You're the most remarkable natural fighter I've ever seen!"

And now he looked at John Thurloe.

"Thurloe," he said, "I've often heard of you as a smart officer, but I've never met you before. I trust I shall never have the pleasure of meeting you again. You nearly scored this time. Good-night!"

And, bracing his square shoulders, he walked quietly towards the door through which the rest of Forbes's guests had hurried with all speed the moment Thurloe revealed his identity, their one object being to get away from Welby

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Hall before they came under the notice of the astute officer of the law.

The door slammed behind Drake, and as he jingled the handcuffs which he held, John Thurloe turned ruefully to Forbes.

"That's a dangerous scoundrel," he said. "He's as cool as they make 'em, and prepared to go to any length in his villainy. He doesn't care a straw for penal servitude, and would leave the dock after conviction with a jest upon his lips. He's prepared to go to any length in his villainy. I'm sorry you let him go."

Forbes seemed as one stunned. He remained standing in the centre of the disordered room, his face pale, his eyes clouded, his features drawn. He had been hard hit that night.

Tom Sayers had quietly taken off the boxing-gloves, and put on his ragged coat and collar and his neckerchief. Hardress, grim and triumphant, was standing by Thurloe's side, looking at Forbes—Forbes whom he had saved.

Forbes at length pulled himself together, and when he spoke again his voice was hoarse with emotion.

"Hardress," he said, "what can I say to you? At college you were my best friend—the only real friend, in fact, I have ever had; and here, although I have insulted you, and made you look small in the eyes of those scoundrels who have just left, you stood by me and have saved me—saved me when I realised that I was being drawn to my ruin, and hadn't the moral courage to stay my course."

"Don't let us say anything about that," said Hardress kindly. "It's all over and done with. You have dismissed those scamps who were ruining you, and you can go straight now, Forbes, and carve out an honourable future for yourself."

Forbes raised his head, and drew in a deep breath.

"Do you know, Hardress," he said, "a week ago I realised what those men were? I always believed them to be the cleverest, the most brilliant, and the most devoted friends a man ever had. They never gave me time to consider. At the brilliant banquets we had here I thought it was their cleverness, and not my money, which achieved success. When we played bridge, and I was mercilessly rooked, I thought it was their clever play and my dullness which was the cause. But my eyes are open now. I have done with them—done with the old life. Now that they have gone, and they know me and I know them, I sha'n't be troubled by them again, and I'll forsake the old life and begin afresh. I feel I have the courage and the power to do so now—thanks to you.

"And you, Thurloe," said Forbes, turning to the detective, who stood impatiently looking towards the door through which Drake had passed, as if he would like to go after the man and re-arrest him, "you will stay here with me, and be my guest for a time? I shall be glad of your company."

"Impossible, sir," answered Thurloe firmly. "Since this case is at an end I must take the morning express to London, and report at headquarters. There is enough for me to do there. But all the same, sir, I don't mean to leave your roof until the last of those gentry have departed; and as soon as they have gone I'm off to Winchampton."

"You'll stay till the morning, at least?" said Forbes.

"Well, yes. It's a long tramp, and I don't want to trouble your man about a motor-car," answered Thurloe. "I'll stay here till the morning."

"A firebrand which will frighten the guests away," muttered Hardress grimly.

"And you, Tom Sayers," Forbes went on, turning to Tom, who stood, his eyes heavy with sleep now, swaying on his feet, and dreading that ten-mile tramp back to Winchampton, "what can I say to you? I was the means of your being brought here. Although I despised myself for it, I gave my consent. I ask your pardon—humbly ask your pardon. I was a cad. Will you forgive me and shake hands?"

Tom looked at the fair-haired young man in amazement. He hesitated, then gripped the extended palm. Forbes shook Tom's hand warmly.

"That's a real grip!" said Tom, with a smile. "Nothing wrong with you now, sir. You're all right. I don't think you'll be taken in again by such a gang of sharps as that." And he jerked his head towards the door.

"And now," he added, "I'll say good-night, sir. I must get back to Winchampton. I haven't had a wink of sleep; and I was up early, and Sam Bethal makes a start in the mornin'."

"That you sha'n't go back to-night!" said Forbes warmly. "I had something to do with your being brought here, and I intend to offer you a comfortable bed to sleep in, and in the morning my chauffeur can drive you back as early as you like, and certainly in time to travel with your

caravan. Or if the worse comes to the worse, my man can catch it up on the road."

Sam looked doubtfully at Thurloe.

The detective nodded, and smiled.

"That's the ticket," he said. "You and I will go to Winchampton together, Tom."

And now they heard Drake and the others come scrambling down the stairs. Early hour of the morning though it was, and far as they would have to travel, there wasn't one of the whole gang, now that he was found out, who wished to spend another minute more than was necessary beneath the roof of Welby Hall.

Some of them had hastily changed from their evening-dress clothes into walking suits. Others had not changed at all, but had simply put heavy overcoats over their dress things to protect them from the night air. The Hall servants came staggering down the stairs carrying the luggage.

Some of the guests, the most successful of the gang of swindlers, had motor-cars with them, either their own, or hired, or even stolen, maybe, and there was a sufficiency of room in these vehicles to convey the whole party to Winchampton. Mangham, with his face cut and bruised, and wearing plaster on his cheeks, came downstairs with Drake. Neither looked toward the dining-room, on the threshold of which stood Tom and John Thurloe, Hardress and Forbes. They passed out through the door, and from outside could be heard the throbbing of motor-engines. Word had been sent round to the garage, the servants had been awakened, and the cars hastily got ready.

The party of swindlers, forgers, and thieves clambered into the waiting vehicles, and one by one these were driven off towards the big gates.

One of the servants closed the hall door.

Forbes breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness they've all gone!" he said.

The sun was shining brilliantly when Tom Sayers and John Thurloe arrived on the fair-ground at Winchampton in Forbes' best motor-car the following morning. The fair-ground was in a state of ferment. Men were stacking and packing the booths and shows on caravans ready to take the road. They could be seen rushing wildly here and there, and already some horse-drawn vans were toiling over the flat, open space of ground towards the road.

Shouts and cries could be heard on every hand. Forbes, who sat behind the steering-wheel, drove his motor-car on to the ground, and made his way to the spot where the boxing-booth had stood the night before.

They arrived in time to see the Nipper, Bob Cannon, Eddy Pearce and Showman Bethal dump the last board upon the travelling truck.

Sam Bethal turned as he heard the motor-car stop. Then he opened his mouth and his eyes wide.

"Why, dash my buttons, Tom," he cried, "I give you up, thinking you'd given me the slip, and blessed if you don't arrive on the ground like a blessed millionaire in a swell motor-car!"

Tom, with a grin, jumped down.

"Can I help?" he asked.

"Help!" cried Sam Bethal. "Why, we're just going to haul all taut, and put up the tarpaulins, and then hey for the road! We'll be on the way in five minutes!"

"Good-bye, sir!" said Tom, turning to Forbes, who shook him by the hand.

"Good-bye," said Forbes fervently, "and good luck!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Thurloe! Good-bye, Mr. Hardress!" called Tom.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Tom!" said Thurloe, pressing Tom's hand. "We shall meet again soon, I trust, and don't forget, I prophesy a great future for you!"

Tom smiled. There was more handshaking, and more fervent good-byes. Then the motor-car was turned about, and Thurloe was driven off to the station.

Sam Bethal clapped Tom on the shoulder.

"After what Nipper and the others told me, I thought you was late up last night, Tom," he said, "and yet you are right as a trivet. Now sling yourself on to the van, and off we go!"

Five minutes later the living caravan, and the lorry bearing the tent, and its fittings were being hauled slowly along the dusty road by the lean and hungry-looking horses that drew them. They were en route for another fair.

And curses and other violent epithets followed them, for Knuckler, hardly yet recovered from a hard drinking bout overnight, wandering aimlessly along the road, with his hands in his trouser-pockets, saw them, recognised Tom, and sent his anathemas flying after them.

They didn't hurt; I doubt if they were even heard.

THE END.

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CHAPTER I.

A Cry for Help—In the Rushing Waters—A Terrible Ordeal—The Huron Chief—A Camp Fire in the Hotel.

JACK, Sam, and Pete had been over to New Brighton. It was rather early in the year for such a visit; but the day was beautifully fine, and, as circumstances were fairly comfortable with them, they had enjoyed themselves immensely, and were now on the Liverpool landing-stage.

The tide was flowing up the Mersey, and as they were ascending the sloping bridge from the landing-stage, now slowly rising on the great pontoons from the depths beneath, they heard a hoarse cry for help.

Then they saw a man in front of them dart towards the side rail, and gaze down the narrow space between the floating bridge and the massive stone wall. The next moment he leapt the barrier, and disappeared from their view, but they heard a distant plunge.

Jack, Sam, and Pete sprang forward to the spot. Pete looked over at the part where they were, and far below he saw two men struggling in the water, while the tide was sweeping them beneath the great pontoons.

"I dunno what it is," growled Pete, vaulting over; "but help is needed here."

Swiftly he lowered himself by the ironwork beneath the floating bridge. To have dived down the narrow space would have been almost certain death; for, even had he not struck against the massive wall, he must have struck the ironwork of the bridge. All the same, he was soon in the water, for he dropped the last twenty feet or so.

Then a few swift strokes brought him to the struggling men, and in the gloom he grasped one of them.

"Keep back, Jack and Sammy!" roared Pete. "We'm got him safe. Too many cooks spoil de broth."

"Hold that arm!" exclaimed the stranger. "He struggles, and the tide runs strong."

"Right you are, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "And it seems to run in all directions, 'scept de right one."

"Still, we have him safe, and shall save his life."

"True enough again, unless de tide sucks us down beneath dese pontoons. Mind your noddle, dere. Hi, golly, we'm under! Nunno, we ain't."

"This way. He has ceased to struggle, which is good. How the water rushes and foams! 'Tis like a whirlpool—and fierce. Yet we shall save him."

"If we can breast dis tide; oderwise, we shall be sucked under dose bars ob iron. It all depends on dat; and I don't tink we can do it wid dis burden."

"Then we shall not do it without him. Let us try."

They turned, and struck out with all their strength. Both were magnificent swimmers, but the tide was rushing with its full force among the great pontoons. Their task was a hopeless one, and they knew it, though neither of the gallant swimmers thought of releasing their hold on the drowning man. They might have saved their own lives had they done so, but each retained his grip on the helpless man.

Then the surging waters sucked them down, and they heard a loud roar in their aching brains, while there was a fearful pressure on their breasts.

At last they rose above the surface, but now they were in blackness. It seemed as though blindness had suddenly come upon them.

And the drowning man was still in their grasp.

"Are you all right, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"Yes; but I cannot see."

"De same remarks apply to dis child. Do you tink de man is dead?"

"I know not. He is so still. But——"

"M'yes! We shall hold him up, and de tide don't seem to be so swift just here. Do you know what I tink has happened?"

"I do not."

"Why, dat we are beneath de landing-stage. Dat de Mersey is in front ob us, and Liverpool behind us."

"Liverpool is where I am staying."

"Den you'm a mighty lucky man, 'cos in de water is where I am staying, and it ain't so mighty hot as it might be. I wish we had a little more light on de subject. It ain't at all pleasant to be drowned in de dark!"

Their position was a very dreadful one, because they knew not which way to turn for life.

Pete had the idea that they must be beneath the landing-stage; and if that were the case, it would be just possible, by diving, to get into the river. But the serious part about the matter was, that he had not the slightest idea in which direction the river lay; and the man whom they were striving to save was in such a state of collapse that to dive with him would probably prove fatal.

"Listen to dis, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "I dunno who you are, and I dunno who dis man is, but it seems to me dat you'm a brave man."

"There is no bravery in swimming."

"P'raps not—unless you happen to be swimming amongst a lot ob sharks or Asiatic crocs."

"I know them not."

"Golly! You know dem not—eh? Bery well, don't make deir acquaintance. We sha'n't get sharks here, old hoss. Only plenty ob water, and 'nuff blackness to make a full year ob nights widout de moon power. But I was just tinkin dat we may be able to keep in dis position for some time to come."

"There can be no doubt. We both swim well."

"Bery well, let's keep on doing it, 'cos dere are two men above us who will use deir brains to rescue us. De fact dat dey obeyed my orders, and didn't come in after us, and make matters worse, proves dat. 'Nuff said. All tings come to de man who waits, as Wagglepeare says. I dunno weder he had had any experience like dis, but 'spect he knew. All de same, we will take his advice, and wait."

And as they waited in the darkness, they could hear the wash of the waters round the vast pontoons as the tide came rolling in. And all the time, the man whose life they were striving to save lay as one lifeless on the black waters.

At last, in the intense darkness, a yellow light appeared, and a hollow voice echoed round the place.

"All right, old hoss!" cried Pete. "We'm here, and you are in nice, comfortable time. Wait a bit. We will swim up to you."

A trapdoor in the landing-stage had been raised, and a man had hung a lantern through. The unconscious man was dragged out first, then Pete, for his companion absolutely refused to go before him.

Now the mysterious stranger was drawn up, and the crowd that had congregated gazed at him in wonder.

He was a good six feet in height, and his body was erect and perfectly formed. At first sight he looked almost slimly built, but his shoulders were broad, and his chest very deep. He appeared to be all muscle and sinew.

His face was dark bronze, his hair black, and slightly wavy; his features perfect in their regularity. It was a strikingly handsome face, and perhaps its chief beauty lay in the eyes, which were nearly black, and of wonderful brilliancy.

"The man is not dead!" he exclaimed, fixing his dark eyes on the unconscious man's face. "He will regain his senses presently. It is good. Take these coins for your trouble, my man, and see that he is looked after. What is your name?"

"Pete!" answered that worthy, to whom the question was put.

"So? And are these your friends?"

"You'm guessed first time. We free are Jack, Sam, and Pete; and dis is my dog Rory, a most amazing dog."

"Yes; he is a fine animal!" exclaimed the young fellow, stroking Rory's head. "Why do these women stare so?"

"Must be admiring my beauty," observed Pete, winking at Jack.

"It is strange. Well, follow me, Jack, Sam, and Pete. I would wish to speak with you. I like brave men, and it seems to me you are such. I have spoken."

Then the stranger appeared to glide away, not once turning to see whether the comrades were following him or not.

"I reckon I know where he comes from," exclaimed Sam.

"Sort ob gipsy, Sammy?"

"Not he. Come along. We will learn more about him."

"I don't think I ever saw such a handsome face!" exclaimed Jack. "His eyes are simply magnificent!"

"Myes! He's got strength, too, if I ain't mistaken," said Pete. "Wonder where he is leading us? De fact dat Rory likes him proves dat he's all right."

"Does it?" exclaimed Jack, smiling. "I seem to have a recollection where Rory was mistaken in a man's character."

"De rule is for him not to be mistaken. Dere must be exceptions to all rules. Golly! I'm rader wet, too."

"It is a peculiarity of water," said Sam. "It will make you wet if you jump into it."

"Wonder how you discovered dat, Sammy? Still, dat young mañ don't seem to know his way, judging by de manner-in which he is gazing at de houses. Hi! He will get run ober if he crosses de road like dat."

The stranger had stepped into the broad street, and now he glided across it utterly regardless of the traffic. The drivers howled at him, and reined in their horses, while he caused two teams to stop, and their drivers to use very indifferent language; but he glided on, as though uncon-

scious of the many reproaches that greeted him, and the comrades followed, laughing.

At last he stopped at a private hotel, and, with a wave of his arm, motioned to Jack, Sam, and Pete to follow him in. Entering the coffee-room, he glanced round, to make sure that no one was there; then he motioned to the comrades to be seated, while he sank back into an easy chair, much to the detriment of the velvet, for water was streaming from his clothes.

For some moments he fixed his brilliant eyes on the comrades, and remained silent; then he spoke in a soft, musical voice.

"I am Ira, the Huron Chief; the great chief is my father. Across the ocean, far away in the west, where the sun sinks down each night, lies my home. The white man calls that vast tract of territory his, but he knows that it is my father's, and one day will be mine. 'Tis there that I was born, and there I hope to die. But my people shall live in peace with the white men; my warriors shall never more use spear or arrow against them. The great chief has said it. His son will enforce his command."

"For from the white man we have gained much good, albeit some harm. All I know is due to your missionary, for whom I would lay down my life if need be! To you I may seem ignorant; with my people I am accounted wise; for that good missionary has taught me from childhood, and has been as a second father to me. 'Twas his desire that I should journey here, to learn things that may be of service to my people. If I speak much of myself, it is that you may know me before I offer you my friendship."

"I reckon we know your country, Ira," said Sam. "Like you, I have lived most of my life in the forests, and my friends here have travelled far."

"It is good, and as Eagle Eye could have wished."

"Who is Eagle Eye, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"I am"

"Tought you said your name was Ira?"

"Ira—the Watchful—or Eagle Eye. 'Tis the same in our language."

"So you have come to study the people and customs of this country, Ira?" inquired Jack.

"It is so; and there are many things that have already surprised me, although I am only just arrived. Perhaps you can enlighten me?"

"Well, had you not better change your clothes first? And what about you, Pete?"

"Dey will dry by dis fire."

"Yes," exclaimed Ira. "We will heap on more fuel. I do not like these clothes, yet the missionary told me I must wear them here."

"Yah, yah, yah!"

"Why does my friend laugh?"

"Was only tinkin, Ira, dat you would cause a good deal ob observation in Liverpool if you went about in your war-paint—specially amongst de fair sex. Golly, golly! It would be worse dan crossing roads any day ob de week."

The fire was already very large, but Ira emptied the contents of the scuttle on it. Even that did not appear to satisfy him.

"Stay!" he exclaimed. "I must see to my horse, which is in the stables. I brought it over because I could not leave it even with my people. He allows no one to tend him but I. There is much wood outside, already cut. I will bring it in, then we will have our meal. You, my friends, will stay here for the night. Can that be so?"

"Yes," answered Jack.

"It is good. I shall return shortly."

Then with that silent gliding step, only seen in the true savage warrior, Ira left the room.

"I dunno 'bout dis, boys," exclaimed Pete. "It seems to me dat we hab dropped across rader a queer friend. Ira, or Eagle Eye, may be all right as far as his name goes, but I hab an idea dat he will get us into trouble before he has done. He seems to expect to get his own way, and dat what de Huron chief orders must be done."

"I reckon you are about right, Pete, for once in your life," said Sam. "I tell you what it is, Jack, Pete is bad enough in a city. If we take on Ira we shall have our hands full."

Jack was of the same opinion, and this opinion became a conviction when in about a quarter of an hour's time Ira returned with a sack of logs over his shoulder.

"Now we will make up our fire," he observed, ramming away at the huge one he had already made. He got a quantity of the blazing coal into the fender, then he flung on log after log, and Pete lay back in his chair and howled with laughter.

Ira was perfectly serious. He did not appear to understand why Pete and the comrades were laughing. The fire blazed up, and the flames scorched the mantelpiece, while

clouds of wood smoke entered the room. So did two customers. They were both very big men, and one of them, whom the other addressed as Colonel Vane, was of good appearance. The other looked like a prizefighter in his best clothes, and yet they appeared to be on friendly terms.

"I tell you it's a walk-over, Colonel Vane!" exclaimed the rough-looking man, as he came along the hall.

"Well, mind it is Janson," replied the colonel, entering the room. "You will net a cool— Well, I'm hanged!"

The astonished man stopped, and gazed in dismay at the extraordinary fire, which was spluttering pieces of red-hot wood all over the carpet, and filling the room with smoke.

"Why, you silly fool!" growled Janson. "Have you insured your hotel?"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "I tought someone would notice dat fire."

"Bust me! Notice it, you black beast! Why, I've a good mind to shove you on it."

"Dog of a white man," cried Ira, leaping to his feet, and glaring at Janson so fiercely that he actually took a step backwards, "dare you insult my friend?"

"Well, there's a pretty pair of you, that's all I've got to say," growled Janson. "You must be a couple of raving maniacs to build a fire like that. It's making the fender red-hot, and if it don't make the house red-hot, I shall be surprised. I'm mighty certain old Schmidt won't like it."

Schmidt was the proprietor of the hotel.

"It matters not," said Ira, in his loftiest manner. "My comrades' clothes are wet. They must be dried. I have spoken!"

"Oh, you have, have you!" cried Janson. "Well, see you here, I'm going to speak now. If a beastly furniner and a skunk of a nigger thinks to come here playing the fool with me, I'll fust of all put my fists in their jaws, and then stuff 'em on that fire. Now I've spoken, and I've said what I mean."

"Dogs!" cried Ira, glaring at the pair. "You shall be taught your places! Go!"

Janson took one step forward, then lashed out with his left; but the young chief ducked, and twice he landed in his adversary's face; then, rushing in, he seized him round the body, and lifting him in the air, hurled him at the gallant colonel with a force that sent him sprawling to the ground, while Janson dropped upon him.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Seems to me dat missionary has taught you a good lot one way and anoder, Ira. Yah, yah, yah! If you'm going to hab a walk-over wid your opponent, Janson, you won't hab one wid Ira de Huron chief. Yah, yah, yah! Scuse me for laughing at you, but you hab had a nasty fall, and de same remarks apply to you, colonel, my poor old hoss."

Now, Janson was really a prizefighter. He did not always confine himself to his noble profession; still, he made a good bit at it—so did Colonel Vane—by proxy.

Sometimes Janson had to lose—at others win—and he was always ready to oblige either way, if he could in the latter; and he could generally win because he could stand such a lot of knocking about.

All the same, he had had enough of Ira, and fondly imagining that he would have an easier task with Pete, he leapt to his feet, and rushed in in a manner that a professional should not have done.

Pete guarded the blow with his right, and there was a thud as Pete's left landed in Janson's chest, while that worthy landed in the chest of the waiter, who was just bringing in drinks hot and strong, that the colonel had ordered.

Waiter, tray, and Janson went to the floor with a crash. Pete had landed on the spot, a fact that Janson noticed, for when he sat up he was gasping. Colonel Vane stepped to the bell, and kept his finger on the "push"; but it was quite superfluous, for Schmidt had heard that frightful crash, and came waddling up as fast as a man of rotundity and eighteen stone well could, and then he gazed around, and yelled out low German. He was not a violent man as a rule, although somewhat excitable, as many of his race are.

Now he simply danced about and howled, and as he did so he put his heel on the fallen waiter's hand.

This was more than the waiter could bear. It is true that Schmidt soon danced off his hand again, but eighteen stone gives impact to a heel. The waiter wanted vengeance on someone, so seizing the tray he brought it down on the top of Janson's head with a force that bent the tray. And then the waiter fled. He knew that Janson was a prizefighter, and much preferred his fighting with other people.

Ira remained absolutely calm and passive. A sleeping infant could not have looked calmer. The comrades howled with laughter, but Ira never so much as smiled.

"Oh, you teufil of a man!" howled the excited German, shaking his fist at the young Huron chief. "Vhy vas I

ever born such a fool as to allow savage warriors to enter my premises? Du meine Gute! Shust look at tat fire! Ach Himmel! Ve shall be burnt to cinders!"

"You need not go near the fire," observed Ira.

"Prut! But te fire shall come near me, ain't it? Do you tink tat you are in te middle of your forests tat you can light a fire like tat in my sitting-rooms, ain't it? Do you tink my carpets want to haf live cinders spluttering over tem? Do you suppose my guests vant to be knocked down?"

"Go! You annoy me!" said Ira, with a lordly wave of his arm.

"Ach, but you annoy me ten times worse, you teufil of a man, and—"

That was all Schmidt said. Ira advanced on him with a flashing light in his eyes that boded no good, and Schmidt, not being a raving maniac—although now raving badly—fled.

"See here, young man," cried Colonel Vane, advancing on Ira, "I will make you answer for this!"

"It is well," answered Ira. "I have tomahawks upstairs, or spears and knives, if you prefer. Follow me, and we will settle the matter there."

Vane looked as though he felt sorry he had spoken. To fight a Huron chief with tomahawks was quite out of the question. To fight him with knives or spears was also unacceptable. Colonel Vane, although a military man, did not care for anything like that. He was pretty good with his fists; but, somehow, even a combat with them did not appeal to him. He muttered something about not fighting with his inferiors, and then a great surprise occurred to all concerned.

Janson had risen to his feet, but even he did not appear to be at all inclined to take on the young chief. There was a momentary silence, and then came the great surprise.

CHAPTER 2.

Schmidt's Extraordinary Friendship—The Mystery Explained—What Pete Wrapped His Tobacco in—Jack's Chaff.

JACK and Sam were seated in their chairs, shaking with laughter. Pete and Ira stood side by side, in case of a fresh attack.

Then Schmidt rushed into the room. He did not bring a shot-gun, nor yet a coke-hammer. He just came unarmed, and seizing the young chief's hand with one of his, grasped Pete's hand with the other.

"Ach, my comrades," he cried, "may I be forgiven for te vords I used against you! Ach, but you are noble men! I adore you!"

Then his words were drowned by Jack and Sam's roars of laughter, for Rory, under the erroneous impression that a skirt-dance was about to be performed, and remembering all his master's instructions, rose on his hind legs, and went waltzing round like a self-satisfied parrot.

"Du meine Gute, to dog is dancing a jig!" gasped Schmidt. "But my dear friends, how can I tank you? How to show my gratitude? Oh, boys, boys, vat should I be mitout you?"

Then the old man sank into Pete's chair, and taking off his gold-rimmed glasses, wiped his tearful eyes.

"Dat's all right, old hoss," said Pete. "Eagle Eye and dis child don't mind doing de same ting again, if you will send up some more guests and waiters. It doesn't matter how many, 'cos I can see by de disgraceful way Jack and Sammy are laughing dat dey would like to chip in, at de—Hi, golly! What's de matter wid de old hoss now?"

"Prut!" yelled Schmidt, leaping to his feet. "I'm as vet as water, ain't it?"

"Yah, yah, yah! I 'spects dat's de dampness from my clothes," said Pete.

"Donner und blitzen! I shall get lumbago und sciatica und all te rest of it. Still, vat of tat? Ach, I vish tat fire vould burn less brightly. Tere are too many sparks for my liking. Well, well! Ira is a great chief, und his comrade is as great. Do not tell me. I know, ain't it? My boy, my boy! Oh, my Fritz, vat should te poor old couple do mitout him? Und such a son! So clever, und such a steady man!"

"But we ain't done anyting to him, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete.

"Yes! He tells me so just this minute. He ven I rushed out tis minute ago, he came in, und he told me all. Te floating bridge! Te pontoons! See! He is an engineer. It vas his duty to examine tem, and in doing so he fell. You two came to his rescue. He caught sight of te young chief's face, und having vonce seen it in tis hotel, never could forget such a beautiful face! Never! Could I forget such noble action? Never! My friends for life! Vat has happened in tis hotel is past and gone—at least, I hope tat fire vill not go furter. No tanks tat I can offer shall

express my gratitude for having saved my boy's life, und tink also of his mother's feelings. Such conduct is sublime! I must get rid of tis damp."

Then Schmidt was about to leave the room, but the irate colonel grabbed him by the collar, and held him.

"You stupid German brute," cried Vane, "do you think that I am going to allow a nigger and a savage to knock me down?"

"Let bygones be forgotten, sair. I bear no malice."

"Who do you suppose cares for you, you old fool!" snarled the colonel. "I am thinking of myself. I have been assaulted. Be hanged if I am having a lout of a prize-fighter flung at my head by a dirty savage. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for allowing the brutes to enter your hotel!"

"Such is my business, sair, und I have no shame in t matter, only great joy tat it occurred."

"What!" howled the colonel. "You dare to tell me that you are glad I have been knocked down by a dirty—"

"I was referring to my son. He would have been drowned."

"And I should say that would be the very best thing that could happen if the brute is anything like his father!" snarled Vane, shaking him furiously.

"Now, let de old hoss go," said Pete, stepping forwards. "I'm rader pleased wid his action, and I ain't allowing you to bully him. If you feel like seeking retaliation, just you start on me, or Jack or Sammy if you prefer it. We ain't at all particular which one you choose."

"You dirty dog," snarled Vane, releasing his hold, though he was far too wise to attack Pete after the blows he had seen him deliver. "I have a good mind to flog you within an inch of your life!"

"Well, I don't mind you doing dat, my dear old hoss; but I don't want you to bully de landlord, 'cos he couldn't possibly help what has occurred."

"He could kick you out of his house, instead of taking the parts of such utter blackguards."

"Well, you can't expect all de people to be as respectable as your friend Janson. Den again, how could say, Jack be anything like you? Don't you see, Jack is a gentleman by birth and nature, and as you ain't eider, it stands to reason dat he couldn't be like you. I tink if I was you, I would take Janson away before he gets hurt. You'm perfectly safe yourself, 'cos you ain't at all de sort ob man to enter into a fight, unless it was wid someone as old and fat as Schmidt."

"You insulting black beast! Do you want me to knock you down?"

"Nunno! I would rader you knocked down Jack or Sammy; but as I hab already told you, I don't consider you at all de sort ob man to knock anoder down. You might bluster a little, and try to frighten dem dat way, but you would be afraid to come to blows unless you could possibly help it. 'Nuff said! You make me tired. Go away!"

"I'll soon see about this!" roared the colonel, striding from the room, followed by the great Janson.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "I must say de man is funny! But look here, Ira, your camp-fire is making a mighty smoke; and it's making de mantelpiece 'bout red-hot, too."

"No matter," murmured Ira, whose large eyes wore a thoughtful expression now. "What a strange people you are! Mr. Santly, the missionary, told me that it is wrong to fight. He has taught me that from boyhood. Then he taught me how to fight with my fists, while the Great Chief taught me how to fight with weapons. The missionary wanted me to come to this country to see how peaceful it is, and yet I see much fighting. I know Mr. Santly always speaks the truth, for which reason the country must have changed since he left it."

"Yah, yah, yah! I spect Santly had many a fight at school, Ira!"

"Then if a good man like him can fight, why is it wrong for a bad one like me?"

"Eh? I spect dat's one for Sammy to answer. But suppose we ram some ob dis fire under de grate, 'cos dere's a cracking sound wid dat mantelpiece. I don't tink de marble likes de heat."

Pete got the fire down a little, then they all lighted their pipes and chatted about the Wild West, and Ira's flashing eyes showed how he longed for the excitement of the chase.

"Golly! What's dis coming in?" exclaimed Pete, as a man of about five-and-thirty entered the room.

He was of medium height, and fair, with a light beard cut to a point, and a moustache brushed upwards in a very fierce manner. He spoke English very well, but with a German accent.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "I am Fritz Schmidt—the man whose life you so nobly saved. I recognised the young

chief's face before I went under for the last time, as I expected. Of the rest I know nothing except what I have been told. My father, who indeed is a most worthy man, although somewhat irritable when matters do not go right, has expressed some of his gratitude. Oh, gentlemen, how can I express mine?"

Fritz leant his arm on the mantelpiece, and clasped his brow.

"I am an engineer, and it was my duty to— Yowrow—woohoo! Donner und blitzen! Murder!"

Then Fritz nearly upset Pete as he dashed wildly round the room, clasping his right arm with his left hand.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Got a kink ob rheumatism, old hoss?"

"Perdition! I'm scalded with burns!" The fact is the marble mantelpiece was nearly red-hot, and when Fritz leant his arm on it, it quite spoilt the pathos of his expression of gratitude.

"Well, neber mind, old hoss," exclaimed Pete. "De fact is, Ira lighted rader a large fire. Now, dere's no need for you to say any more. Ira was only too pleased to be ob service to you."

"But my mother says that your clothes must be dried, and if you will place them outside your doors to-night that shall be attended to."

"All right. We will see to dat."

"Let food be served up," ordered Ira, waving him out of the room. "Now, comrades, I like you. Will you travel about your country with me?"

"Well, Ira, if we do we must not spend too much money," said Jack. "You see—"

"I pay for all. What is money? A few precious stones—I have many—will obtain all the gold that we require; besides, I have some gold."

"That may be; but we could not accompany you on those conditions," said Jack. "We have saved a little money, and if my comrades are willing, we will accompany you till that money has gone; but each will pay his share of the expenses."

"I care not. If you choose to have it so, let it be," said Ira. "For my part, I would like you to come back to my country with me, and then you should have a reception worthy of you."

"Well, we will talk dat matter ober," said Pete, rummaging in his pockets. "You ain't collared my tobacco, hab you, Jack?"

"No. It is far more likely that you have collared mine."

"I dunno. Seems dat I hab lost or mislaid it, unless I smoked it. Why dis is all right! I kept dis little reserve in case ob accidents. It has got mighty wet; still, we can dry it by de fire."

Pete had got half an ounce of tobacco screwed up in a piece of paper, and he placed it in the fender to dry.

"I had quite forgotten dat I had dat tobacco. Must hab been in my pocket for about a year. Must hab been mighty dry before it got so wet. Neber mind, it will do for smoking purposes just directly. I won't put it too close to Ira's patent fire, 'cos it is a pity to waste good tobacco. You can depend on it, Jack, dat was bought when we had plenty ob money, so it is bound to be de bery best. Just lend me your pouch till dat little lot gets dry enough to smoke wid comfort."

Jack did so, and Pete filled his pipe, then sat by the fire till he steamed. Some men would have been frightened of catching cold, but Pete was too hard to be troubled with ailments of that sort.

With half-closed eyes, he listened to Ira's somewhat poetical language concerning the Huron territory. Jack and Sam were far more attentive listeners, for Ira's dark, beautiful face changed in expression with his every thought.

Now his eyes would flash and his face grow stern as he spoke of the tribal wars. Then, when he spoke of the good old missionary who had taught him so much, a gentle expression came into those dark eyes, and his voice grew low and musical.

"Just hand me dat tobacco, Jack," growled Pete, who was three-parts asleep.

"My eyes!" gasped Jack, as he picked the packet up.

"Got a waterfall in dem, Jack?" inquired Pete.

"I suppose you mean a cataract?" growled Jack. "No, I have got nothing like that. But I should think you had when you wrapped that tobacco up."

"Didn't I do it up carefully, Jack?"

"Very carefully! You have wrapped up twopenn'orth of tobacco in a thousand-pound banknote!"

"Eh?"

"Quite so!"

"You seem bery stupid, Jack."

"Not so stupid as you, you black beauty, when you wrapped up that tobacco. Just look at that, Sam!"

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"THE HURON CHIEF."

A Grand Tale of Jack, Sam and Pete. By S. Clarke Hook.

AND

"THE CLIFF MYSTERY."

A Splendid, Complete Story of Tom Sawyer. By Arthur S. Hardy.

TWO GRAND LONG COMPLETE STORIES.

Jack tossed the tobacco to the floor, and handed Sam the paper in which it had been wrapped. It was a banknote for a thousand pounds!

"I must say you'm mighty wasteful, Jack!" exclaimed Pete, scooping up the tobacco.

"I shall never attain to your wastefulness."

"Well, of all the silly tricks, I reckon this is the worst!" cried Sam. "You must be bereft of your senses, Pete!"

"Eh?"
"A thousand pounds!" gasped Jack. "And we—we— Well, it is rather funny when you come to think of it! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys, is dat really so?" murmured Pete, dropping the precious tobacco to the floor again.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam. "Oh, you silly coon!"

"It's worse dan dat, Sammy," groaned Pete—"it's a lot worse dan dat! I wish dat note was a piece ob waste paper, as I must hab thought when I wrapped de tobacco up. I dunno, boys, how you are going to forgib dis!"

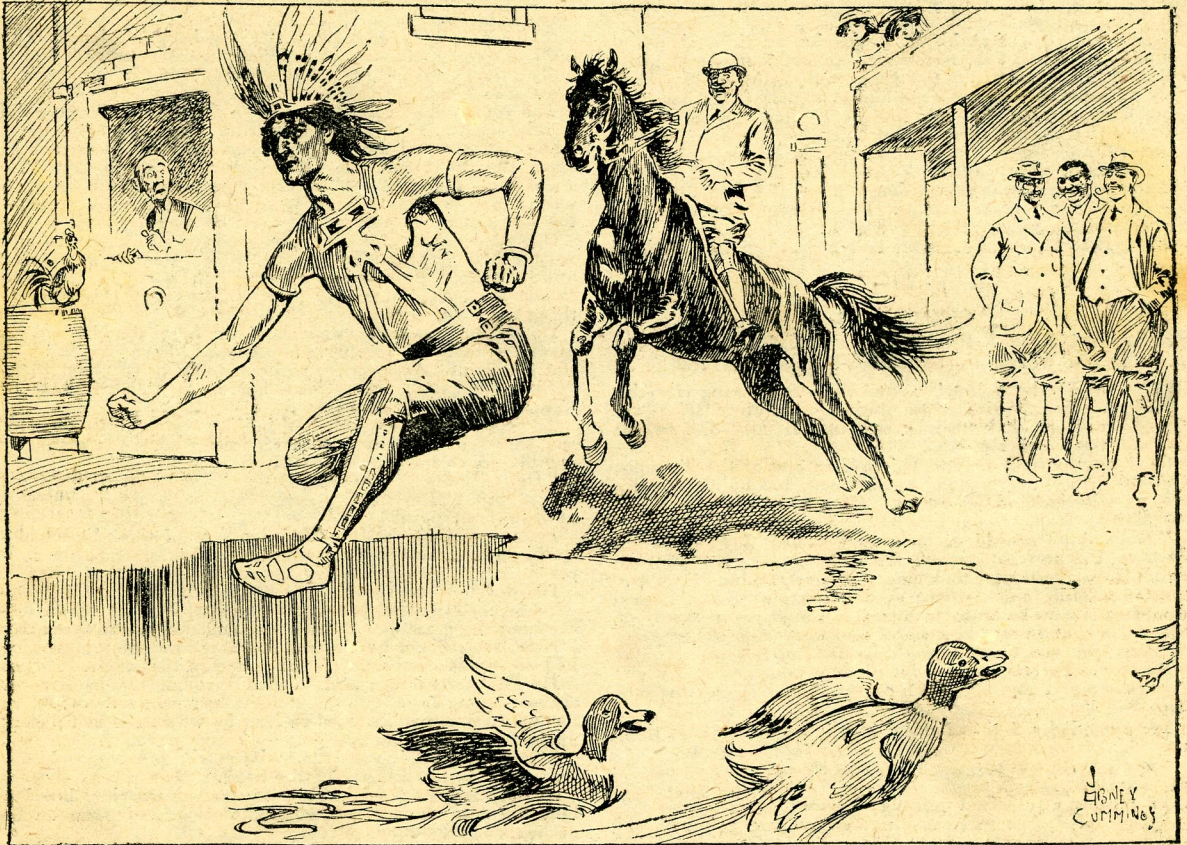
"Rats!" growled Sam. "We got over those times, and proved ourselves men and comrades. Consider, Pete, that we have roamed this world, and have had far more of its goods than we deserve. We have had great happiness together, and some hard times. Well, we fought those hard times, and conquered them, as men, who are worthy of the name, should do."

"Dere was no need for dose hard times. I brought dem to you wid half an ounce of tobacco. It's too mighty awful to tink dat you were starving—and you were mighty near to it, boys; too mighty near for any degree ob comfort—to tink dat you were starving, when I had a thousand pounds in my pocket!"

"Well, what about you?" laughed Jack.

"I ought to hab starved, Jack! Open de door! I don't seem to hab de heart to burst it!"

"Oh, you silly nigger!" cried Jack. "Don't you see, Pete, that it is easy for three men to be good friends in prosperity. But the friendship is tested when adversity



Ira took a short run, and doubling up his legs like a stag, cleared the pond without any apparent effort; while Firefly did the same, rising to the leap so easily that his rider scarcely moved in the saddle.

"Rats! We are glad!" cried Sam.
"I'm going to bed, boys—I'm going to bed. Dis is too mighty awful! Good-night!"

"Here, come back, you silly owl!" laughed Sam; while Jack darted forward, turned the key, and placed it in his pocket.

"Now, what's the matter with you, you black image?" laughed Jack.

"Boys, I know you will forgib dis ting," said Pete, with an earnestness that he seldom showed, though there is not a doubt that he often feels it. "Dat's what makes it hard for me to speak. If you were to say 'Git!' in de American language, which Sammy speaks to perfection, den it would—well, it would be what I deserve. Dere's nuffin' to be said, boys, and so I will say it in a few words—"

"But if there is nothing to be said, you owl, why say it?" laughed Jack.

"Don't joke about it, Jack. I remember how you and Sammy hab been near starvation—and Rory, too. I remember de fearful times when we hab—"

comes. Now, I take it that we have tested that friendship in adversity."

"Eh? Say dat again, Jack. I wasn't listening."

"Oh, yes you were," laughed Jack. "You heard every word I said. Now, there's the key. Go and digest those words if you like; but there's nothing in the whole affair. Here, take your thousand pounds."

"I'll neber touch it. It's yours and Sammy's."

"Well, it's ours," exclaimed Jack, "and that comes to the same thing. Be off with you, you owl! Ha, ha, ha! 'Scuse me laughing at you, Pete, but you'm really too funny for words. Yah, yah, yah! 'Nuff said!"

"I don't tink de note could hab been a distinct one," growled Pete.

"Ha, ha, ha! No. Decidedly not! We will suppose that it was faintly printed. Isn't it lucky you didn't light your pipe with it?"

"Of course, a thousand pounds isn't much," said Sam. "Then again, it is quite right to be careful with tobacco. You haven't got any cough-drops, or anything like that

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wrapped up in a few more thousand-pound notes, have you, Pete?"

"I s'pect I ain't heard de last ob dis, eider!" growled Pete.

"Certainly not!" said Jack. "It would not be right if we omitted to praise you for your care of best tobacco. Good-night, Pete! Sure you won't have the thousand-pound note to light your candle with?"

"Oh, you get out ob it, Jack! You know you'm mighty careless yourself sometimes."

"Well, I won't go so far as that; but I know I'm not careful enough to wrap two ounces of stale tobacco in a thousand-pound banknote, and then to take such extra special care of the result as to stuff it in one of my pockets, and forget all about it. Ha, ha, ha! Mind when you get to bed that you don't tuck yourself up somewhere and forget in the morning where you put yourself. I think we had better tie a string to you for safety."

"Well, you can joke about it if you like, boys. Still, I must say dat it was mighty hard on you, seeing all de trouble was my fault in just forgetting for de time being dat I had de note."

"But how can that bit of paper be worth a thousand pounds?" inquired Ira, who could not make it out at all.

Jack explained matters to him as well as he could. Then they all went to bed, and Pete had just turned in when Sam tapped at the door to ask him if he had got any more tobacco. Then Jack came to ask if he had a small piece of paper suitable for wrapping up some cigars.

"All right, you beauties!" murmured Pete. "You wait till to-morrow morning, and den you see if I don't gib you a surprise one way or anoder. I shall insult Ira to see if he can tink ob a play to gib you a startler."

After that Pete turned over, and fell asleep till break of day.

CHAPTER 3.

Pete's Plot Proves Pitiful—A Frightful Fiasco—Pete in His Warpaint—Queenie—Raising the Veil.

EARLY the following morning Pete rang for his clothes, which were brought up by Billy, the waiter; and when Pete had partially dressed, he went to Ira's room.

That worthy had wrapped himself in one of the blankets, and was peacefully sleeping on the floor, but he leapt to his feet as Pete entered the room.

"Ah, my friend, I am glad that you are come!"

"Well, dat's all right; but you see, Ira, I want to gib Jack and Sammy a sort ob friendly scare. It will take deir minds off dat mislaid note. I was tinkin if we two dressed as full-blown chiefs in deir warpaint, and rushed into de room wid our tomahawks, it would cause a sort ob commotion, and make a general and agreeable surprise for de pair. Do you tink dat could be fixed up?"

"It can. Follow me, and I will show you the room where I have some of my things. I prefer that dress to this one. This way."

Ira ascended a flight of stairs to a large attic where there was an extraordinary assortment of Indian weapons.

"Golly! Should say dey must hab charged you excess for all dat little lot ob luggage. Now, do you tink you could turn me into a full-sized fighting warrior?"

"Certainly! We will consider that we are going on the warpath, and that we have fierce foes to contend with. Leave the matter to me. Take off those clothes."

"Eh?"

"I have the necessary paints here, my friend—even I have the plumes that I myself have worn when on the warpath."

"I was tinkin weder it wouldn't be better to put de paint on ober de clothes."

"How could that be? You would not resemble a warrior."

"P'raps you may be right; all de same—well, it don't follow dat we need bof go downstairs. You can go down in your war-paint, and den lead dem up dis way. 'Nuff said."

For the next hour Ira was very busy. He had already transformed Pete, who stood shivering in a very scanty attire, while he watched the young chief prepare himself for the pretended fray.

"Yah, yah, yah! You look mighty fine, Eagle Eye!" exclaimed Pete. "I dunno dat I would care to tackle you if I met you in de forest. Tink I would leave dat job to Jack or Sammy. Now, dis is de tomahawk, is it? And you hab got yours? Well, I tink we'm a bery fair-sized pair ob warriors. De idea is for you to dash into de breakfast-room, and utter your warcry, den you can see what sort ob effect it has on de people."

"My friend will come, too?"

"Well, you see, Ira, dere might be ladies dere."

"But you are not frightened of squaws?"

"Nunno! I ain't exactly afraid ob dem, only don't you see, I ain't quite accustomed to dis attire, and I'm inclined to tink dey wouldn't be eider. Dere's not enough ob it to get accustomed to."

"We can see."

"M'yes! Ob course, we can do all dat; but den again so can dey. If I had a great coat and a tall hat, say, I tink I should feel more at home. Hark! Dere goes de breakfast-gong."

Ira had turned his head slightly sideways. He was not listening to the gong, but to the clatter of hoofs in the stable-yard, and his dark eyes flashed as he strode towards the window. Then, flinging it up, he gazed into the yard beneath.

Pete also looked, and he saw a magnificent jet-black horse being led from the stable by Colonel Vane, while Janson was standing by watching.

"'Tis my horse, Firely!" cried Ira, quivering with passion, and gripping his tomahawk more tightly. "Does he dare to mount the Huron Chief's horse? By the sun's fierce light, then he shall die!"

"Hie, golly!" gasped Pete. "Come back, old hoss! You ain't allowed to tomahawk colonels in dis country! Golly, golly! Ain't dis mighty awful? Still, ladies or no ladies, I must stop him!"

The young chief was darting down the stairs to avenge the deadly insult. Pete leapt after him, then, to his horror, when they reached the hall, Pete saw several ladies about to enter the breakfast-room, and when Ira dashed down the stairs, uttering his fierce warcry, with Pete making a good second, and howling at the top of his voice for him to stop, the way those ladies shrieked was appalling.

One exceedingly stout lady dropped into Jack's arms, and very nearly knocked him down, while a stout gentleman quite knocked Sam down as he made a sudden dash to escape from the infuriated chief, whose warcry was something to be remembered.

Ira did not know the way about the hotel, but he had an excellent idea of locality. He dashed down the kitchen stairs and into the kitchen, while Pete followed about three yards behind him; then, to his horror, he found himself in the presence of the servants.

The cook dropped a kettle of boiling water on the hearth, and shrieked at the top of her voice, which was distinctly audible above the other shrieks.

"Golly, golly!" groaned Pete. "Why did I play dis fool's game? I'm mighty certain some ob dose girls will notice my warpaint."

Pete sprang forwards, seized a corner of the white tablecloth, and, having sent the servants' breakfast into the fire-place, he wrapped himself in the cloth.

Ira did not see the back door, but he saw the kitchen window, and with a few swift blows of his tomahawk, he shattered the glass and framework, and then leapt through.

Now, the colonel both heard and saw him coming, and he had no intention of waiting for a man in that excited state.

He fled across the yard, darted through the back door, thence through the scullery and kitchen, while the cook, in her wild excitement, hurled the kettle, which she had picked up, at his head.

Strange to say, it was true to its mark, and caught him a fearful crack at the back of the head.

Pete sprang in front of the infuriated warrior, but Ira bounded into the air, and cleared Pete's head, then on he dashed, so did Colonel Vane.

That terrified man was now howling at the top of his voice. He had certainly got a start, but not nearly such a long one as he would have desired. He dashed into the breakfast-room where all the ladies were assembled, then round and round the table, while Ira dashed after him.

The cloth was dragged off, and the smash of crockery was terrific. Then Ira leapt the table, and gripped the howling man at the back of the neck, while Pete gripped Ira's up-raised arm.

"Go away, my dears!" panted Pete, making desperate attempts to wrap the cloth around his body with one hand, while he held Ira's right wrist with the other. "Look here, Ira, it ain't lawful to tomahawk a man in dis country."

"Why did he fake my horse?"

"Stop him!" howled Vane. "I did not know it was his horse. I only selected the best. He will murder me!"

"You ain't going to strike an unarmed man, Ira!" exclaimed Pete.

"You speak well, my friend!" cried Ira. "I will not strike him!"

"Don't you let him go!" howled Colonel Vane.

"Oh, yes, I shall, old hoss!" answered Pete, releasing the infuriated chief's arm. "What Ira promises he performs. I know what sort ob man he is! Buzz off to your boudoirs, my dears!"

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"Dog!" cried Ira, shaking the terrified colonel till his teeth rattled. "If you ever dare to touch my horse again, you shall look your last upon the rising sun; Eagle Eye, the Huron Chief, allows no such liberties to be taken with his horse! Go! I have spoken!"

Vane obeyed. He went half across the room, and banged his head against the wall, then he dropped to the floor, and if ever a man looked frightened, it was he.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded a lady, standing in the doorway. She was of vast proportions, and most elaborately dressed in bright green satin, while she wore enough jewellery to have stocked a shop.

Pete uttered a yell, and bolted behind the curtains; then he gazed at the lady in awe.

His war-painted face, with its horrified expression, caused Jack and Sam to roar with laughter.

"Madam!" roared Colonel Vane, who knew the lady. She was Herr Schmidt's wife, and Fritz's mother, although she really did not look as old as that. Her name was Queenie—at least, that is what her husband always called her, although it was scarcely an appropriate name. "I have been grossly insulted, and—"

"Colonel Vane," cried Queenie, drawing up her Titanic form, and gazing at him much as she did at her husband, when he tried to evade purchasing more jewellery for her. "I am surprised!"

Queenie was English.

"Go away, my dear," groaned Pete, "and take de oder ladies wid you!"

"I shall do no such thing, Pete," said Queenie. "You are rumpling those curtains. Come away from them."

Queenie was a lady who liked to be obeyed, and she generally was obeyed; but Pete was not going to obey her now.

"I'd rader not, my dear. You see, I'm in my warpaint. Golly, golly! Do stop your laughter, Jack and Sammy! You are making me so nervous dat I don't know what I'm doing."

"You are hiding behind the curtains, Pete!" roared Jack. "Ha, ha, ha! I think, madam, Pete should come forth and show us a war dance."

"This is no joking matter," said Queenie.

"Quite true, my dear!" groaned Pete. "It's de most serious matter dat I hab eber taken part in. I tink I must hab been fermented. I wish I was in de wild west wid de kangaroos and lions rushing round me!"

"I do not blame you, Pete," said Queenie, "but—"

"Den go away and blame your husband, my dear, and take de oder ladies wid you while I rush upstairs."

"You are at liberty to leave the room now, if you wish."

"Eh, my dear!"

"You can go upstairs."

"Golly, golly! I wish I was on a desert island, and all de fireflies had put out deir lights! Shoo! Go away, my dear! I bite! I'm raving mad, and dangerous!"

"You are spoiling my curtains, Pete," said Queenie.

"Ain't dis mighty awful?" groaned Pete.

Ira merely looked surprised. He did not understand it at all. He was perfectly at home in his warpaint, but Pete was not, and his painted face, with the huge plume in his hair, peeping round the curtains caused Jack and Sam to howl with laughter. The only thing that troubled Jack and Sam was the frightful amount of damage done. They knew that Pete was bad enough by himself, but they were wondering what would be the result if he and Ira got together playing at wild Indians.

Pete was watching his opportunity. Queenie had proved her portly form from the doorway, and he determined to make a rush for it.

Gathering his tablecloth closely around himself, he dashed forwards; but, alas, his feet caught in the curtains, which were ripped from the pole, and Pete sprawled to the ground. He was up in a second, and dashed towards the door, but Queenie recognised her kitchen tablecloth, and, grabbing it, wrenched it from his back; then up the stairs he dashed, and Queenie burst into screams of laughter as she watched him.

Then Queenie re-entered the room, and gazed at the young chief.

"Ira, chief of the Huron nation," she exclaimed, "I thank you from my heart for your noble action! It is one that I shall ever remember."

Then the good lady left the room, and her guests, not knowing the circumstances of the case, were simply astounded at her extraordinary words.

"Dog!" cried Ira, turning to the colonel. "Never you dare to touch my horse again! It would be safer far were you to strike me, and that would be very dangerous! You are a coward! Were you a brave man, I would fight you with any weapons that you chose to name! I have spoken!"

Then Ira glided from the room.

"What a beautiful face!" exclaimed one of the ladies.

"Beautiful, madam!" hooted the colonel. "You astound me when you call a savage beautiful! Personally, I think it is the most hideous face I have ever seen!"

"Indeed, Colonel Vane, you could not have noticed him!" exclaimed the lady. "His features are perfect."

"And his eyes!" exclaimed another lady. "Did you notice his wonderful eyes, my dear?"

"Indeed, I did! Who could help noticing them? I am very glad that he has not hurt you, Colonel Vane. I hope he did not terrify you very much."

"Terrify me, madam! Terrify me! A savage!"

"I beg your pardon, colonel. I made sure that you were frightened. Indeed, it is nothing to be ashamed of, for he did look very terrific; but I do not think one with those glorious eyes could be cruel. I fancy he was only trying to frighten you, and I am glad he did not succeed—as you tell us."

Perhaps it was as well that Billy, the waiter, entered the room at that moment to clear away the wreckage; and by the time he had finished, and brought up breakfast, Pete and Ira made their appearance, this time, needless to say, dressed in their ordinary clothes.

Previous to this little incident, Colonel Vane had been rather a hero in the ladies' eyes, but now his sun had set.

Ira and Pete, when Queenie told the ladies what had happened, were the first heroes, while Jack and Sam shared in the admiration.

One old gentleman appeared to be greatly annoyed at the attention his wife and daughter gave to the handsome young chief, and he muttered something to Vane about niggers and savages that was not at all complimentary.

As for Ira, he was quite at home, and he chatted with the ladies as though he had mixed in their society for years, while Pete was all politeness.

The breakfast was quite a success from the ladies' and the comrades' point of view; then, when the ladies left the room, and Vane was about to follow, Ira stepped in front of him.

"Do you desire to meet me with weapons?" demanded the young chief.

"I—er—think there has been a mistake!" growled Vane, not desiring anything of the sort. "I told Schmidt that I required a mount to-day, and the idiot told me to select my horse. I naturally chose the best, not knowing it was yours."

"No one rides Firefly but the Huron chief," said Ira coldly. "You could not ride him."

"Absurd! You don't know what you are talking about, young man."

"Dog, I do!" cried Ira fiercely. "You have insulted me by daring to mount my horse; now you shall try to ride him. Come!"

"You don't understand my position, fellow. I am Colonel Vane, and I—I—"

"Come, you cowardly dog! You have boasted, and have insulted my friends, now you shall obey me. If you do not come of your own free will, I will drag you from this room, and you shall learn how terrible is the wrath of the Huron Chief."

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "I'm inclined to tink from de splash ob dat wrath dat I hab seen dat you had better go, old hoss. After all, if you'm anything ob a rider, you ought not to be afraid ob mounting a horse. Dere's a good-sized yard at de back, and you can't come to much harm in a place like dat. Why, here comes de landlady! See here, my dear, do you tink de colonel need be afraid to ride Ira's horse?"

"Of course not!" answered Queenie. "He is a dear, gentle creature. He took some lumps of sugar quite gently from my fingers. I would ride him myself."

"Queenie! You sha'l not, and I say it," cried Schmidt, hurrying along the hall. "I command you not to do it. Do you tink I wish to be a widow? Prut! I vill allow no such thing. My child, in tis respect you shall obey me."

"Golly, golly! Look at his child!" murmured Pete. "I'm mighty certain she can't be so far short ob his weight, and it would be downright cruelty to Firefly to put Queenie on his back. It would be de last ton ob coals dat breaks de householder's heart."

"Why, I used to ride when a girl!" exclaimed Queenie.

"You are older somewhat, and far viser now, my Queenie," said Schmidt, "and you are far more beautiful. I cannot let you run te risk."

"You old silly!" laughed Queenie, placing her hand on his shoulder. "Of course, I shall obey you; but the colonel is a magnificent rider, he has often told me so. We ladies will come and watch him from the drawing-room window."

Then, with a glance of admiration at Ira, Queenie tripped up the stairs, as lightly as circumstances would permit.

"Bring the boastful dog this way, Pete," ordered Ira, with that lordly wave of his arm; "he shall make his words good."

"See, your horse is in te loose box," exclaimed Schmidt, "and he vill not let my man get near him to put te bars up, and so ve have closed te stable doors, und hoped for te best."

"It is good," answered Ira, leading the way to the yard. "No harm will come."

"Vill you bring your horse?"

"I will call him," answered Ira, uttering a peculiar wailing cry.

Suddenly there was a loud crash, and the stable door flew outwards with a force that threatened to smash it from its hinges; then Firefly came out, and galloped up to his young master.

He was a truly magnificent horse. He stood about sixteen hands, and was perfectly formed. His mane and tail were long and flowing, as Nature had intended, the tail not having been docked. Although the jet black was shaded to dark brown in places, there was not a white hair about him, and this slight shading from intense black to deepest brown showed off his beautiful form to perfection.

He allowed Pete to stroke him, and seemed to like the notice taken, for he arched his neck proudly.

"I tink dat is de finest horse I hab eber seen, Ira," said Pete, "and I hab been brought up wid horses."

"I should have thought you had been brought up with pigs," snarled Vane.

"Nunno, old hoss; you had not de honour ob my acquaintance when you were young. Still, if you were de worst ob de litter, you can't blame de oders for dat fact. Dere's always one miserable pig in a big litter."

"I see you have taken the liberty of bridling and saddling my horse," exclaimed Ira. "Very well; now mount and ride him."

CHAPTER 4.

Vane Gets Rather More than His Heart's Desire—A Rough Five Minutes—Firefly Shows His Spirit—A Nasty Cropper—Laughter.

COLONEL VANE looked up at the drawing-room window, and saw not only Queenie there, but also all the ladies who were staying at the hotel.

To show the white feather before them was out of the question; besides, he had the conviction that Ira would not allow him any option in the matter.

"Of course I can ride the horse!" he said, mounting; and Firefly was so remarkably quiet that it seemed as though a little child might have ridden him without the slightest danger.

There was a grim smile now on Ira's handsome face. He walked to the end of the yard, where some white ducks were enjoying themselves in a small and particularly filthy-looking pond. The water gave the impression that it would have made very decent writing ink.

The pond was about twenty feet in diameter. Ira took a short run, and doubling up his legs like a stag, cleared it without any apparent effort; while Firefly did the same, and he rose to the leap so easily that Colonel Vane scarcely moved in the saddle.

Now Ira shouted something in his native dialect to the well-trained horse, and took the leap back; but Firefly remained where he was, and as his master stood on the opposite side of the pond, the horse commenced to plunge and rear in the most furious manner.

For an instant he remained still, then he lashed out, and he rose so high on his forelegs that it appeared as though he were about to turn head over heels into the pond.

It was more than Vane had bargained for. He took a forward dive, and plunged headfirst into the black water, scattering mud and ducks in all directions.

"Yah, yah, yah!" howled Pete, as the colonel's head rose above the surface, and his face was so black with mire that his best friend would have failed to recognise him. "Golly, golly! Ain't you made yourself in a mighty mess dis time, old hoss. Yah, yah, yah! 'Scuse me laughing at you. You will need a shovel to get dat mud off, I'm tinkin'."

"Fury!" howled Vane, rising to his feet. Then he glanced up at the window, and if there was anything that could have increased his passion, it was the shrieks of laughter from the ladies stationed there.

"De man must hab been playing to de gallery dat time," shouted Pete. "My poor old hoss, you hab succeeded to your heart's content. Yah, yah, yah! You hab not only amused de ladies, but you hab made dis child smile. Yah, yah, yah! I must say a show like dis was worf a shilling entrance fee."

"You hound of a nigger!" roared the colonel, struggling from the miry pond. "If you dare to laugh at me, I will knock you down!"

"But how can I help laughing at you, when you do such funny tings, old hoss. I naturally tought when you dived

into dat pond like dat dat you were doing it to make us laugh, and as far as I can see you appear to hab succeeded. If you didn't want to go into de pond, you ought to hab sat on de horse's back, and not hab taken a flying leap at de pond. All de same, I 'spect you wanted to go in just to amuse us, didn't you, old hoss?"

"You stupid scoundrel of a nigger!" snarled Vane, shaking his fist in Pete's face, though he did not dare to strike him. "If I have any more of your impertinence, I will pitch you into the filthy hole."

"Den I shall take good care not to gib you de impertinence; all de same, I'm disappointed dat you didn't do it on purpose, 'cos it seems to hab pleased de ladies immensely. You can hear dem laughing at you if you listen. Say, old hoss, I tink you had better wipe yourself on de doormat before you enter de hotel, 'cos you will make a mighty mess walking frough de kitchen."

"He's not coming through my kitchen!" declared the cook, slamming and bolting the door; then she stood at the smashed window with a poker in her hand.

"Open this door!" roared Vane, kicking at it furiously.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," declared the cook. "You can go round the front way, if you like, because I don't have to clean the hall, but you are not coming through my kitchen."

"You stupid, senseless creature! How can I go through the street like this?"

"I don't know, and I don't care, but you are not coming through my kitchen like it, and so I tell you."

"I'll have you dismissed if you don't open that door."

"You can try if you like, but open the door I will not."

"Yah, yah, yah! Dere's anoder warrior wants to come into your kitchen in his war-paint, my dear," shouted Pete.

"You might mop him down a bit, and den let him pass."

"You black beast!" snarled Vane.

"I ain't much blacker dan you are now, old hoss," retorted Pete; "and if you was to ask my private opinion, I should say you were a lot more beastly, wid all dat sloppiness on you. You don't smell as sweet as a bunch ob violets, eider. If I was you, I would get de ostler to frow a few pails ob water ober me, else take anoder dive into de duck-pond, to see if dat would clean you in any way."

Now all this conversation was distinctly audible to Queenie. She did not want to lose Vane as a customer, although he did owe her considerably more than she or her husband cared for; but she had no intention of having her stair carpets ruined, and so she ran to the front door, and having locked it, pocketed the key, while she gave the servants strict orders not to answer the bell.

Finding the cook quite obdurate, Vane made a rush for the front door, and as he did so he heard roars of laughter.

The passers-by stopped to gaze in wonder at him, then they burst into roars of laughter, and as he turned his fury on them they laughed the more.

He rang violently at the bell, and kicked at the door, but neither had the slightest effect, and within three minutes he had collected a vast crowd, which was rapidly increasing.

The comrades got through the kitchen window, after which the cook closed the shutters.

"He's got to dry before he comes through my kitchen," she declared. "I only cleaned it this morning, and I am not going to clean it again. I'm downright certain the mistress won't let him in at the front door, to trample that black mud all over her carpets. There, what did I tell you? He's ringing now, and he can ring and ring, but he won't get in."

The cook was perfectly right. The unfortunate Vane rushed once more into the yard, and took refuge in the stables, where the comrades went to interview him.

"Look here, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "de only ting dat I can see is for you to send for your clothes, and dress in here, after you hab had a few buckets ob water frown ober you."

"I'll have a bitter vengeance for this."

"You dog, you wanted to ride my horse!" exclaimed Ira.

"Well, now you have done so, and I hope you liked it."

"You fiend of a savage, I would like to have the horse-

whipping of you!"

"Ah, then you shall!" retorted Ira. "Wait till you are dressed in clean clothes, and then you shall execute your threat; and I will also have a horse-whip, and when you have got tired of that I will throw you into the pond again. The Chief of the Hurons submits to insult from no man."

"All this is your doing," cried Vane, climbing down a little.

"You shall find I will do more than that to the man who insults me or my friends. Wait till you are dressed in clean clothes, and then after we have had a meeting with horse-whips you shall go into the pond again."

"I suppose you forget—or never knew—that there is a law in this land to stop such conduct."

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AND

"THE CLIFF MYSTERY."

A Splendid, Complete Story of Tom Sayers, By Arthur S. Hardy

TWO GRAND LONG COMPLETE STORIES,

"Then it is a pity that the law does not stop your conduct. What care I for your laws! I make my own in my own territory, and they apply to all alike. I shall punish you for your insolence."

"As a matter of fact, I have said nothing insolent to you. It would be impossible for a gentleman in my position to do so."

"Your position! What is your position? What do I care for it? I will make you grovel at my feet. Do you think I will allow a dog like you to strike my friends and to come into my room and insult all there as you please? If so, you are greatly mistaken, as you will presently find out."

"Do you want me to give you in custody for assault?" demanded Vane, in the hope of frightening the young chief; but it was without effect. Ira was not to be intimidated. He declared that he would pitch Vane into the pond again directly he was dressed in clean clothes.

"Look here, old boss," exclaimed Pete, addressing the wretched colonel, "de best ting for you to do is to tell Ira dat you are sorry for your conduct, and den perhaps he will let you off de rest ob your punishment."

"Of course, I spoke in anger," muttered Vane, thinking Pete's advice was wise. "What I have suffered is enough to make any man lose his temper."

"Should say it would be a mighty good job if you lost yours, old boss!" retorted Pete. "De sooner a temper like dat is lost de better it will be, 'cos is ain't de slightest use to any one. Is Ira to consider dat you are sorry for your behaviour?"

"I consider I have been shamefully treated!" snarled Vane, shivering with the cold.

"M'yes. But you don't consider dat yours was de fault in de first place. You remember de insulting manner in which you behaved when you came into de room on de first occasion? Den again, you seem to forget dat you struck us. As for taking Ira's horse, dat I rader tink was a sort ob error ob judgment on your part; and falling into de duck-pond was anoder little error; but to talk about horse-whipping Eagle Eye is a little too stupid, 'cos you must know dat you would no more dare to do it dan you would dare to try it on wid any ob de oders ob us. Now, Vane, my poor, muddy old boss, you hab de chance ob getting clean clothes and keeping dem clean, and saving yourself a horsewhipping, but you will hab to express sorrow to de chief, and also to his horse. Dat is a mighty intelligent horse, and I feel sure his feelings are hurt, but—"

"Not so badly as his feelings will be hurt if he does not apologise," came a deep voice, apparently from Firefly, who was now looking over the bars of his loose-box. Of course, it was a little bit of Pete's ventriloquism.

Ira's dark eyes opened wide as they were fixed on his horse. He knew nothing about ventriloquism, and the voice certainly appeared to come from Firefly—besides, he had never heard such a deep voice as that.

"Golly!" gasped Pete, fixing his eyes on the horse, and pretending to look terrified. "Take me away, someone—dere's too much magic flying 'bout dis place!"

"You stupid nigger!" came that hoarse voice—no pun intended. "My master came here to learn English customs. I came to learn English language, and kick colonels."

"Look here, Firefly," exclaimed Pete, in his natural voice, "you'm gibing me shocks to de cistern wid your talking. A horse ain't got de right to talk. Now den, Vane, are you going to apologise to Ira, or are you going to take anoder ducking? You hab your choice."

"I am not the style of man to be intimidated by threats and stupid tricks," snarled Vane, though he had not the slightest idea who had supplied the horse's voice. "At the same time, I certainly spoke in anger, and I regret any words of mine that caused annoyance to Ira."

"Good!" exclaimed the young chief, still gazing at his horse. "The matter shall end there for the present. But, as surely as the sun shall rise, I know that it will not end there. I know that man. He will seek vengeance, and he shall find it; but it will be my vengeance. I have spoken."

"So have I!" came a deep voice from Firefly.

"Bust me!" gasped the ostler.

"Let that dog's clothes be fetched!" ordered Ira, waving his arm. "You can let him wash himself in a bucket. Come, my friends!"

Queenie admitted them by the front door, and Pete explained what had happened.

"Well, he can come in when he's clean," observed Queenie; "but he's not going to trample over my carpets in that filthy state."

"Quite right, my dear," said Pete. "I can quite understand dat such a beautiful girl as you—"

"Oh, Pete, don't!" exclaimed Queenie, glancing at Jack and Sam. "Such compliments touch my heart! You forget how you nearly broke it when you appeared before me in your war-paint. Have pity on a susceptible and

beautiful girl, who is nearly old enough to be your grand-mother. Are you going to lunch in your war-paint, dear?"

Then Queenie actually winked at Jack and Sam, and fled, without waiting for Pete's reply.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack. "It won't come off this time, Pete! Queenie is one too many for you! I'm glad she admires you in your war-paint, too. I must say you looked nice. There was something natural in your get-up. Don't you think so, Sam?"

"Most decidedly; though personally I prefer the European style, with more wampum about it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Quite so! Though, no doubt, Pete was going on the lines of his friend Wagglepeare when he remarked that beauty unadorned looks remarkably well in war-paint."

"Wagglepeare neber said anything so stupid, Jack!" growled Pete.

"Well, words to that effect. You don't always quote him correctly. I liked your white robe!"

"The effect was like a transformation-scene when Queenie removed it," observed Sam. "I did not know which to admire most—his plume, or his wampum. Which struck you as more artistic, Jack?"

"The plume, decidedly. There was rather too much of it, it is true, but then Pete made up for it by having too little of the wampum. Ha, ha, ha! To see that wampum going upstairs was too funny for words!"

Pete seated himself in the hall chair and puffed at his pipe, looking the picture of dejection. Indian dress might be all right in the forests of the Wild West, but he knew perfectly well that it was out of place in a drawing-room.

It was not until evening, when the ladies came down in evening-dress that Pete brightened up at all.

"Well, boys," exclaimed Pete that night, when they were smoking their pipes alone in the coffee-room; for the ladies were in the drawing-room, and the other gentleman were with them. "I hab had some shocks to my cistern to-day, and rader tink dat a short trip to-morrow would show Ira some ob de peculiarities ob de country. Now, I rader like New Brighton for de purpose, and if you are ob de same opinion we will take him dere and show him de Red Noses."

"I have seen some to-night in this hotel," observed Ira.

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat's not bad! Vane's gets a bit inflamed after his first bottle!"

"But the white men tell me that drink is a curse. Fire-water should never be consumed."

"M'yes, and dey ain't far wrong, except in de strictest moderation."

"Then why do they consume it?" inquired Ira.

"Eh?"

"Why do they drink the stuff, and teach us we should not?"

"Why do you tink dey do dat now, Sammy?"

"No, you don't, you beauty! You can deal with the argument yourself."

"Sammy would like me to gib you de answer to dat question to-morrow morning, Ira."

"Then they tell me it is wrong to fight—yet I saw guns in your fort when my vessel passed."

"Sort ob protection."

"You never use those guns to take more land when you want it?"

"Nunno. Dey use anoder sort."

"I cannot understand it," exclaimed Ira, who was really seeking for information. "You speak of the care of children. You never saw a Huron child in need of food. Here I see them starving. Is that civilisation? If you come with me, I can point out hundreds of children in rags—and so thin that surely they must be hungry. Yet there is food and wealth in your land. You tell me that a piece of paper represents one thousand pounds, and that is much gold. You tell me that gold can be exchanged for food. Then why should little children go hungry. And I think there are hungry squaws—they look so."

"Queenie doesn't," growled Pete.

"That is what I cannot understand. Some are glittering with jewels. In my land, you do not see it; nor is there a squaw who would let the little-child of another squaw go hungry. Why is it worse for warriors to fight and kill each other, than for men and women to live in peace and let men and women and little children starve, when those men and women have more than they require. The food we left to-night would feed many little children. Why is it not given to them?"

"I ain't got de heart to answer your questions, Ira," growled Pete. "Little children should neber be hungry in dis country, or in any oder country."

"We hunt and-bring in game, and all share it. No one goes hungry unless all do. Now, you have more food in the shops than is used. Why do your women and children go hungry, and what is the use of your sending your missionaries

to us to teach us what is right, when you do so much wrong? Is it worse to kill a warrior in fair fight than to let a little child starve to death? How dare your great chiefs and your great people live in every luxury, when little children starve. Then your Government! Why do they not see that there is no starving child in all the country?"

"You don't quite understand de matter, Ira; I can see dat plainly," growled Pete. "We hab de workhouse, and oder institutions like dat, and we gib five shillings a week to old people ober seventy, 'cos—"

"By the light of the rising sun, I do not understand!" cried Ira, rising to his feet. "In my country the old people should be looked after and fed, but if I found one of my warriors who did not find food for his little children, my tomahawk should cleave his brain, and those children should be cared for by others, who would feed them."

"But supposing your warrior had not the power to find food?" inquired Jack.

"Then I would make others find it for him."

"You want all to be equal?" asked Sam.

"Equal? How can the warrior be equal to his Great Chief, or equal to the other chiefs? No. I want women and little children to be fed, and if this land were mine it should be so. Can't you see that if you starve your children they will grow up into puny warriors? In their youth the harm comes to them—in their manhood the harm must come to you. What is the use of telling me that some parents cannot find food for their children. There are others who can, and it should be found. Come what may, no child should go hungry. What is the use or honour of all your hoarded gold when your children are starving. A man will get his food by some means in all countries, if he knows he must. A child cannot. Then it is the duty of the men to find that food, and to see that not one little one goes hungry. I have spoken."

Then Ira waved his arm around in his lordly way and left the room, and they saw him no more that night.

CHAPTER 5.

The Stolen Horse—Ira's Anger—The Comrades Give Good Advice—Sam's Plot Proves Effective—On the Trail.

PETE was the first up the following morning, but when he went to the young chief's room, he found him dressing.

"Dat's right, Ira!" exclaimed Pete. "I'm glad to see dat you're such an early riser! You neber can get Jack and Sammy up in decent time dis season ob de year. Dey don't like de cold."

"I want to exercise Firefly," answered Ira. "He did not have any exercise on the vessel, and has had very little since we landed."

"I tought he seemed rader fresh when de colonel tried to mount him. Yah, yah, yah! Couldn't tink where de man was going to. I dunno weder de ostler will be up yet; but dat doesn't matter, 'cos Firefly has got a way of opening closed doors."

The man was just coming down when they reached the yard. He unlocked the door, for Firefly had merely smashed the latch, and then he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

The loose-box was empty—Firefly had gone!

Not a muscle of Ira's face changed, but when he fixed his brilliant eyes on the ostler there was such a fierce light in them that the man stepped back and looked about, as though in search of something to defend himself with.

Ira's voice was also calm, but there was no mistaking the expression in his eyes.

"My horse," he said; "where is my horse?"

"Bust me if I know!" gasped the man. "He was here safe enough at eleven o'clock last night, the same as the other horses—'cos I had a last look round, and then I locked the door. I sleep in the room above, but I never heard a sound all night—no, not so much as a horse moving!"

"You know not where Firefly is?" demanded Ira.

"I know no more than Adam."

"Send for him—I will question him."

"Bless you, he's been dead years and years ago!"

"Dog, take care how you answer me. If you have lied to me, your life is not safe. That horse shall be found."

"I'm most afraid he has been stolen, Ira," said Pete. "I feel sure dis man knows nuffin 'bout de matter—at least, as far as you can feel sure 'bout de matter."

"I don't know a word about it," declared the ostler. "I wouldn't have had anything happen to him for anythink. I liked that hoss—he was so gentle. Besides, see how he flung that brute of a colonel."

"Now, dat's where it comes in," said Pete. "Dis door

was certainly locked dis morning, and it would almost look as dough de thief knew his way about dis place. I suppose it would not hab been a difficult matter to fit anoder key?"

"That's true enough," exclaimed the ostler. "It was not much of a lock."

"What's your name?" demanded Pete.

"Bob. As true as I'm standing here I don't know a word about the matter. I hope as the chief will believe that, 'cos the horse was left in my charge, and I promised him to look after it well. He knows I did that as regards his food."

"It is true," said Ira. "Has anyone been in the yard this morning?"

"Not to my knowledge. I've only jest come down."

"Stay!" exclaimed Ira, leaving the stables; and then he went down on his hands and knees, and examined the ground.

"What's he doing of?" whispered Bob.

"Searching for de trail," answered Pete. "And I rader tink he will find it."

"It's a bad job," exclaimed Bob—"a rare bad job!"

"I'm tinkin it will be for de man who stole dat horse, if eber Ira comes across him. You see, Bob, he don't understand our customs, and he seems to tink dat a bad crime needs correction wid de tomahawk. But here he comes."

"The horse has been taken out this morning," declared Ira. "The man who took him wore heavy boots with big nails in them. Come, Pete. First, let me look at your boots, Bob."

Bob turned up his foot, and Ira gravely shook his head.

"His foot is larger than yours. Do you know a man with large feet who would be likely to steal the horse?"

"Well, there's a many men with larger feet than mine," said Bob. "You see, I ain't anything like a big man. I don't know as I can think of anyone who would be likely to steal the hoss, or even to know that it was here. No one would be likely to come after one of our horses, 'cos they ain't of any particular value. It seems to me that it must have been someone as knew the hoss was here, and there's only the people in the hotel. There ain't been no strangers about, and I ain't mentioned the hoss to anyone, 'cos I ain't been out. I should have spoke about him, of course, because there ain't a doubt that he's a wonderful animal; but it so happens that I ain't seen anyone."

To all this Ira listened without a word; then he ordered Bob to open the yard gates, and now he searched the road.

It would have puzzled a white man to have found that trail at all, but Ira was able to trace it as far as the street, and he declared that they had turned to the right; but there were so many other hoof marks there that it was impossible to trace it further.

"See here, Ira," exclaimed Pete, "you may be sure dat we free will do all dat is possible to be done to get dat horse back."

"It will make you my friends for life," said the young chief. "Listen. I have vast lands, and there is much value on them. The furs of the wild beasts bring money to my people. I value Firefly beyond all those lands. To part with him would be as parting with my life. Ask what reward—"

"Shoo! Don't speak ob dat, Ira! We are sorry for you. I know what it would be if I was to lose Rory, and I say we are sorry, 'cos I know Jack and Sammy will be just as

I am Homeless Hector.



See this week's CHIPS

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"THE HURON CHIEF."
A G. and Dale of Jack, Sam and Pete. By S. Clarke Hook.

AND

"THE CLIFF MYSTERY."
A Splendid, Complete Story of Tom Sayers, By Arthur S. Hardy.

TWO GRAND LONG COMPLETE STORIES.

sorry for you as I am. Not only dat, but we shall be sorry for Firefly for lots ob reasons. Well, we would no more take a reward dan you would hab taken one for saving Fritz's life. Now, de first ting to be done is to insult Jack and Sammy."

"Why should we do that? They know nothing about it, and have been friends to me."

"Eh? I rader tink I got de wrong word dat time. I meant consult dem. Sammy has got a way ob putting tings togeder so dat dey often come out right in de whole. I don't tell him so, for fear dat he might get conceited. But we will go to their room now, and see if we can learn anyting ob de mystery."

Jack and Sam slept in a double-bedded-room, and they were fast asleep when Pete and Ira entered; but they soon woke, and listened earnestly to what Pete had to tell them.

"I reckon we will get dressed while we are listening to the rest," said Sam. "There's no time to be lost, if I can make the matter out aright. Go on, Pete."

"Dere ain't much more to tell, except dat de man had large feet wid nails in dem."

"Nails in his feet! Do you mean toenails?"

"Nunno, Sammy. Don't be so mighty senseless. I said he had nails in his boots."

"No, you didn't. You said he had nails in his feet; but if it was my case I would do this, Ira. I would keep a watch on Colonel Vane."

"You think—"

"Now, don't go too fast. What we have got to do is to get your horse back, and it won't help matters to jump to conclusions. Suppose that Vane wanted vengeance on you."

"If I see his boots I shall know."

"No, you won't. All you would discover would be that it was not he who stole your horse. He isn't at all the sort of man to take all that risk, but he might have incited someone else to do it, and that party might have worn the large boots with the nails in his feet, as Pete puts it. Well, there are a few other thousand people in Liverpool who have large feet, with nails in their boots, and it stands to reason that if Vane has had a hand in it for the sake of vengeance, and perhaps even profit—for the value of your horse is very great—it stands to reason, I say, that Vane will meet his accomplice to-day. Now, if you can only follow him up without him knowing, you are likely to find his accomplice. The rest would be easy."

"Good! And then—"

"Now, see here, Ira," said Sam sternly, "you must bear in mind that there is a law in this land to punish deeds such as that. The man who stole your horse would be sent to prison, and he would not have a very happy time of it there. You must not take that law into your own hands, otherwise if you killed the thief the law would surely take your life as well, and you would have made your journey in vain. They would not give you time to learn all our customs, some of which, I admit, must seem peculiar to you. On the other hand, the law would give you every facility to capture the miscreant, and when he was once captured he would be punished according to his crime."

"It is good. I will consider your words; but surely the man should die."

"The law decides what is to be done to him—not you. There is just one other thing. Vane may be innocent of the crime as we are. He may know nothing about it; but if he does know, the surest way to track him down is not to let him know that we suspect him. It is not necessary for you to be friendly with him, because you never have been; but what you have got to try to do is to treat him just as you did before, and just as though nothing had happened."

"My friend's words are wise, and I will be guided by them."

"That's right, Ira," said Jack. "The best plan will be for you and Pete to keep the closest watch over Vane's movements. Should he go out you must follow him without letting him know, if you can manage it. For the rest Sam and I will put the matter in the hands of the police. An exact description of the horse, and there are none like him, will be telegraphed all over the country, and it will be almost impossible for the thief to escape."

"You will need gold to do this, and—"

"No. It will not cost one penny. The law will take the matter in hand for you—that is, the police. Rest assured they will discover your horse, and return him to you. There will be nothing to pay."

"That is a good custom," mused Ira. "Still, I must try to find the horse myself. I cannot leave that work entirely to others."

"We shall say nothing about suspecting Vane," answered Jack. "I believe Sam is likely to be right, and that it is an act of vengeance. Vane would know that the surest way

of having vengeance on you would be through inju—would be by stealing your horse."

Jack had nearly said what he feared, and that was that the horse might be injured, but he did not want to cause Ira more anxiety, and apparently the young chief did not comprehend what he was going to say.

Jack took the precaution of cautioning Schmidt concerning the matter, and then he went in to breakfast.

There was not the slightest sign about Vane that he was implicated in the matter. He was sullen during the meal, but, then, the ladies had annoyed him by laughing at him, and they annoyed him more by making inquiries as to whether he had suffered any ill-effects from his ducking, though they did not put it in those words.

During the meal it commenced to rain heavily, while there was a fog which promised to get worse as the day wore on. Vane went into the reading-room, and smoked cigars, while Pete and the young chief followed him and smoked their pipes. There was nothing to excite his suspicions in this, because it was such a miserable day that no man would be likely to go out unless compelled.

Not a word was spoken all day concerning the missing horse. Pete and Ira merely spoke about hunting in the Wild West, and sometimes when the young chief was narrating some of his experiences, Vane would cease reading, and listen to the story, though he pretended to be still reading.

"De man is a clever actor, or else he ain't guilty," said Pete, when they went to prepare for dinner that evening.

"Now, I hab got an idea dat he won't go out while we are in de place, so de best ting for us to do is to go out directly after dinner. Dere's a little public-house close by, and we can keep watch from de window. Dis fog is all in our favour, and it seems as dough Jack and Sammy ain't going to return yet. As soon as we hab finished de meal we will pretend dat we are going to meet dem—say on de landing-stage. See?"

Ira nodded. He was beginning to get disheartened. It seemed to him that while he was waiting that something might happen to his horse, and he spoke of these fears to Pete.

"It ain't at all likely dat dey are going to hurt a valuable horse like dat," said Pete. "Dere's a man who would be quite willing to help Vane wid de job, for a consideration, and dat's Janson, so if he comes to dis hotel to-night while we are keeping watch ober de way, why we will come back immediately. Now for dinner, and den we will leave Rory in Billy's charge, and see if we can track dat colonel down. I don't believe de man is any more ob a colonel dan I am, all de same."

The dinner went off all right, and the ladies chatted with the handsome young chief, and appeared to be deeply interested in his conversation.

No one would have imagined by his manner that he was anxious to get away from the table, but Pete noticed that he scarcely touched the food.

"I was tinkin, Ira," exclaimed Pete, just as the meal was finished, "dat we sha'n't hab much time to spare if we are to meet Jack and Sammy on de landing-stage. Dey want you to see what de theatre is like, so we can go straight dere, and get back here at half-past eleven to-night. I wonder if dese ladies would excuse us, if we started now, 'cos it would be a pity to miss dem."

"It is not at all a nice night to go out," said one of the ladies, smiling at the young chief. "I fear Ira will form a very bad opinion of our climate."

"The rain matters little," he answered, without returning the smile, for it was seldom that Ira smiled. "I am accustomed to all sorts of weathers. Shall we start?"

They left the room together, and Pete noticed that the young chief took a riding-whip from the hall-stand as he passed.

Pete led the way across the street, and he explained to the landlord of the public-house that they were waiting for someone, then he ordered something to drink.

Ira did not touch his drink. He was looking through the window which faced the street, and for about a quarter of an hour he stood there motionless. At last he stepped back.

"He is coming along on the other side," he murmured. "He is alone."

"Den he won't be for long," answered Pete. "Dere ain't many people about. P'r'aps you will be able to follow him by de sound ob his footsteps, dough we shall see him as he passes under de lamps."

The fog was now so dense that the comrades had no easy task before them, but as Vane passed the lamps they saw him look round once or twice, as though to see if he were being followed.

"Ira," whispered Pete, as Vane proceeded down some of

the slums, "I believe we'm on de right trail. Dat man wouldn't come down dese dirty streets unless he had dirty work to do."

"Sam is wise!"

"M'yes! Sammy gets some good ideas; and he can follow a trail almost as well as you could. Den, again, he's de most wonderful shot I eber met. Dere's lots ob points about Sammy. Now den, Vane has turned down dat narrow street, but we will still keep dis side ob de road, 'cos he won't be able to see us behind dat lamp."

They watched him walk some thirty yards along the narrow street, and then he turned into an alley.

"Watch him from de opposite side of de street, Ira," said Pete. "You will get dere silently. He won't be able to see you from down de alley."

The young chief glided swiftly onwards, and even Pete could not hear the sound of his footsteps.

CHAPTER 6.

Run to Earth—How Ira Learnt His Horse's Fate—The Double Chastisement—Firefly is Saved.

PETE followed leisurely, and about a minute elapsed before he reached Ira's side.

"He entered that door at the end," whispered Ira. "You cannot see it now, but I saw it when the door was opened by a man who had a light in his hand."

"Well, dat's all right, Ira. Dere don't appear to be any oder inhabited houses in dis alley, and it seems dat we ought to be able to oberhear a little ob deir conversation. What we hab to do is to keep watch for a light, 'cos—Golly! Dere it is in de upper window. Bery well. Now, dere's only one gas-lamp in dis alley, and I'm going to take de liberty ob turning dat out, so dat dey won't see us listening." "Nuff said."

Pete climbed the lamppost, and turned off the gas-tap; then, descending, approached the building at the end of the alley.

"Now, listen to me, Ira. If you stand on my shoulders, and let me hold your ankles, I can balance you easily, and de chances are you will be able to listen to dem."

Pete knelt on the pavement by the front wall of the miserable building, and Ira stepped lightly on his shoulders; then Pete rose, and the young chief stood so motionless and erect that he had no need to balance himself against the wall, Pete being well accustomed to that sort of work.

Ira's head reached the window-sill of the upper window, and Pete had little doubt that he would be able to catch some words of the conversation within the room, and that it would have reference to the stolen horse.

Nearly ten minutes elapsed, and then Ira made a sign that he wanted to come down, while Pete gradually sank on his knees.

"Sam was right," he whispered. "My horse is in some shed at the back. That demon, Vane, wants him killed. Janson—who is the other man—wants to sell him."

"Bery well!" exclaimed Pete, pulling out his knife. "I rader tink I can force back de catch ob dis window, and den we shall hab anoder sort ob catch. You tink de horse is all right, Ira?"

"Yes, at present. Vane wants to kill him to-night."

"Gently does it. I don't tink dey will hab heard dat slight noise. Now den, climb frough, and come up de stairs as quietly as possible."

Some of the stairs creaked slightly, and as Pete reached the door of the room where the light was, the voices ceased; then he opened the door, and entered, followed by Ira.

"It's a nice sort ob ebening, don't you tink so, Vane?" said Pete. "Rader foggy. Still, you can't hab eberying you like in dis world. You will notice dat presently."

"What are you doing here?" gasped Vane.

"Well, you see it is raining, and bery foggy, so we hab sought shelter. Funny ting dat we should find it in exactly de same house as you hab, ain't it?"

"This 'ere is my house," cried Janson, in a blustering manner, "and if you don't get out of it, I'll kick you out! Mind, I'm a prizefighter, and I could knock the pair of you silly in one round if I wanted to. All tne same, I ain't going to hurt you if—"

"Now, dat's mighty kind ob you, old hoss," said Pete. "So dis is your house, is it? I must say I don't much admire de furniture, and dere's rader more dirt about de place dan I care for. Howber we will oberlook dat as we ain't going to stay here bery long."

"What do you want?" demanded Vane. He had turned deathly white, but he steadied his voice with a great effort.

"I was tinking dat I would like to see a certain shed at de back ob your mansion, Janson."

"I ain't got no shed."

"Look at dat, now! Bery well, we will look at de one you ain't got."

"Well, go and look if you don't believe me!"

"M'yes! I tink dat would be rader more satisfactory; but, if it is all de same to you, we would rader you came wid us."

"Then we ain't coming; and, see you here, the sooner you clear out of this the safer you will be! You will drive me too far, if you ain't careful. If you think I'm going to allow a nigger and a savage to enter my house and dictate to me, why, you are mistook!"

"You see, Janson, we hab an idea dat you hab stolen Ira's horse, and dat Vane planned de robbery. Now, according to de law, dat would be rader a serious matter, and one dat you would be punished for severely. Ira, not quite understanding our laws, has de feeling dat he would like to gib you a little preliminary punishment, and I notice dat he has brought a riding-whip. He did not tell me weder it was for dat purpose or not, still, it would be a useful sort ob ting to punish you wid. After dat is ober, we will come and see de horse, and if he is all right, den all de oder punishment you will receive is a few years' hard labour. Dat will do you bof good, seeing dat de chances are you hab neber done any hard labour in your lives."

"We know nothing about your horse!" declared Vane. "You lying dog!" cried Ira. "I myself heard you talking about it! You wanted to maim it, and—"

"Then if you know—"

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Pete, springing forwards, and grasping his wrist as he drew a revolver. "We don't want you to be banged. Kindly hand me dat revolver. Tank you! I dunno weder you hab got anoder one, Janson; but if you hab it will be sort ob safer for you not to use it, 'cos I aim mighty straight, and a bullet frough de arm hurts. If you hab any doubts on de subject, draw your revolver."

"I ain't got one. How are you going to settle this matter, Vane?"

"You can have your horse, Ira," said Vane. "All we wanted to do was to give you a scare. We had no intention of harming it."

"You lying dog! I heard your words!"

"Well, if you are determined to quarrel, I cannot help it. The horse has come to no harm. I will show you where he is."

"You think to escape my vengeance!" retorted Ira. "You would try to make your escape, but I would surely track you down. As it is, you are not going to escape me. My friends have enabled me to recover my horse, and from your conversation, I am ready to believe that, so far, he has come to no harm. But, from that conversation, I also know how vile you are, and how you would have injured him."

"There is one thing you have to be thankful for, you dogs, and that is that we came in time to stop your horrible action; for had you harmed Firefly, all the laws of your land would not have saved you—no, not even if my life had paid the forfeit. I shall say no more to such creatures, except that you are now about to receive some of your punishment. Pete, will you prevent Vane leaving the room?"

"Dere ain't de slightest difficulty 'bout dat," answered Pete, locking the door. "He wouldn't be able to leabe wid me here, anyhow. Howber, we may as well be on de safe side and lock de door."

"If you come nigh me I'll fell you, like the savage brute you are!" cried Janson, glaring at the young chief.

Ira made no reply, but suddenly he darted forwards, and the two blows that the ruffian delivered passed over Ira's head, for he had ducked downwards, and, gripping the miscreant round the body, tossed him over his head.

Janson sprawled, face forwards, to the floor, and before he could rise, Ira gripped him by the back of the neck; then, kneeling on one of his arms, he lashed him till his howls awoke the echoes.

There is no doubt that Janson deserved a severe thrashing, and he got it that night. Ira's strength was very great, and he used it to its utmost extent. Janson was sobbing with pain before he released him, and he still lay on the grimy floor, writhing and moaning, while tears streamed down his cheeks.

"That is part of your punishment," said Ira. "If you say one word I will make it greater. Are you sorry for your deed?"

"Hoohoo! You've taken every bit of skin off my back!"

"No, I haven't, your miserable coward; but I will do so, if you do not express your sorrow."

"I'm very sorry," groaned Janson, struggling to his feet, and wiping the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand. "If you heard the conversation, you will know that I wasn't going to hurt the horse."

"That is so. You were going to sell it. Vane was going to maim it, and I am going to punish him directly."

"Ira," groaned Vane, who was trembling with dread, "have mercy! Only spare me. Hand me over to the police if you will, but do not strike me. That man is used to

suffering. I am not. Have pity. Do anything but strike me. If the pain has made him howl and weep, think what the agony would be to me."

"Exactly the same as to him!" retorted Ira; "and you are far more guilty! Dog, but for you he would not have thought of the villainy. I am inclined to allow the pain he has suffered to be all the punishment he shall receive, if my true friend Pete thinks with me. No doubt the man is a great scoundrel, but he did not want to injure my horse."

"Because he wanted to get the money by selling it."
"No! I heard him say that he liked horses, and did not want to injure mine just to spite me. You cannot alter that with all your lying. And you insisted that it should be maimed, otherwise you would not pay him the money you had promised for his vile deed. What do you think, Pete? I have spoken truly."

"I should be inclined to let Janson off," said Pete. "Yah, yah, yah! De man took his flogging as well as could be expected, and we will hope dat it has done him some sort ob good. You see, Ira, he is an ignorant sort ob brute, so dere is some excuse for him. Dere's no excuse for Vane. A man like dat is dangerous, and it is my impression dat all de flogging in de world would do him no good. I should lock him up!"

"Neither will that do him good," said Ira. "When he comes out of prison he would do the same again. It is not only the theft, but he wanted to injure Firefly because he had thrown him. He would have made that beautiful animal suffer agony. I heard him say so. Now, that is too disgraceful, because the horse only obeyed his master's orders. The fault was mine, if there were any fault. Yet this miserable, cringing cur feared to attack me. He wanted to have vengeance on a dumb animal. Ah, Pete, when I think of that, the man's life is in danger!"

"Ira, have mercy!" gasped Vane, sinking on his knees as the young chief approached him. "I could not bear the pain. Punish me in any manner you like. Send me to prison. Disgrace me in the eyes of the world, but do not lash me. It would be my death!"

"Pete," exclaimed Ira, "you have done me the greatest service a man could have done, for I love my horse dearly! How ought I to act? I would not like to appear brutal in your eyes."

"De man must be punished. If a child does a wrong ting, it is punished, so must a man be. Dere are some tings dat bring deir own punishment, dere are oders dat require it to be administered. I should punish dat man."

"Well, if you ask it, I will let him off some of the punishment, and not send him to prison."

"Bery well. I tink dat would meet de justice ob de case. I believe dat he only stole de horse to hab vengeance on it and on you, derefore a flogging would probably meet de justice ob de case."

"No, no!" cried Vane, clasping his hands. "Send me to prison! Do your worst in that respect!"

"I s'pect you would be able to wriggle out ob dat little lot," said Pete. "You might eben be able to get off wid a fine. If it was my case, Ira, I should flog him, and let him off de rest. It ain't fair dat Janson should hab all de punishment, seeing dat dere ain't de slightest doubt Vane concocted de scheme."

"Good! He shall be flogged!" cried Ira, seizing him by the collar.

Colonel Vane, as he called himself, though without any right to that title, shrieked for mercy before a blow descended on his back. He did not make the slightest attempt to resist, as Janson had done, but his howls and shrieks had no effect on the feelings of the young Huron chief, unless it was to making the thrashing more severe, for Ira hated a coward.

There is not the slightest doubt that Vane received the worst flogging he had ever had in his life, and it was a wonder that his yells were not heard by the police.

"Come!" exclaimed Ira at last, leaving the miscreant writhing on the floor. "That man so enrages me that he is not safe in my company. We shall find the horse."

Pete took the lamp, leaving the two wretches in the dark, and at the back of the building they found Firefly in a shed.

The beautiful horse appeared to be none the worse for his captivity, and he greeted his young master in the most affectionate manner.

There was a doorway in the back wall, through which they led the horse, and, with some little difficulty, they found their way back to the hotel, where they found Jack and Sam.

The following morning Jack informed the police that the horse had been recovered; but he gave them no information, and so the matter ended there.

This is how Ira, the Huron chief, became acquainted with the comrades, and of his wild adventures with them there is more to be narrated.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete tale of Jack, Sam and Pete next Wednesday, entitled "The Huron Chief." Order in advance. Price 1d.)

GRAND SCHOOL TALE.

REDCASTLE & CO.

A School Tale of the Adventures of the Chums of Austin Towers.

By DAVID GOODWIN.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Mr. Algernon Chitterlow, aged twenty-one and always beautifully dressed and scented, hates his stepbrother, Dalton Redcastle, a young Britisher blessed with a decidedly mischievous—though open and cheery—nature. After much persuasion from Algernon, Colonel Redcastle decides to send his son to Austin Towers—a school kept by a certain Dr. Quilter, a man known far and wide as a boy-tamer. Consequently, Dalton is packed off, and put on his promise that he will deliver himself at Austin Towers.

On his way to Dr. Quilter's, Dalton meets Edward Stanley Vere Montague, and Thomas Dodd—two lads after his own heart—also bound for Austin Towers. The three arrive at the school, but are not impressed by their new companions. Rogers, a bully, and his cronies, take a violent dislike to Redcastle and Co., and the two factions frequently come to blows.

In order to supplement their pocket-money, the three chums, wearing black masks, set up a boxing-booth at Westbury Fair. A ragged tramp, who has been assisting the boys, informs them that they will have to pay tribute to a certain dishonest police-inspector, named Sowerby, of Westbury.

"He won't get anything out of us!" said Dalton. "But, by gum, look at Monty's placards!"
(Now go on with the story.)

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.

The placards were fine, there was no doubt about that. Montague had painted them on great sheets of black American cloth with white paint, and they smothered the front of the booth. The biggest read as follows:

THE MASKED BOXERS!

Greatest Marvel of the Age!

KISH AND KOSH, THE BOY LIGHT-WEIGHTS!

Come and See Real Science! Hit Hard, Hit Fair, and Keep on Hitting!

DARBY DAGO, THE JUVENILE PUG!

Challenges All the World at Ten Stone and Under Eighteen!

Come and Sample His Lightning Left-Handers!
Entrance—Fourpence. Reserves—Sixpence.

"Now then, Tired Tim," said Montague, as the three boys emerged from the dressing-room, in belts, gymnasium shorts, and snow-white satin vests, their eyes twinkling through the black silk masks, "out with that tooter of yours, and we'll start a procession that'll draw the gay and giddy throng!"

In single file, with Tired Tim in the middle, the boys sauntered through the Fair. To a stirring march, which the red-whiskered tramp blared on the key-bugle, they swung round about, and in and out, among the crowds.

Everybody turned to gape at them, and when presently they swung round and back towards the marquee many began to follow. Tired of the rest of the shows, the crowd caught on to this new sensation. The followers grew from dozens to hundreds, and, after leading them round, Montague brought his cavalcade to the big tent, and Dalton and Tommy dived inside.

The mob, jostling for places, read the great placards with interest; and as Tired Tim struck up "The Roast Beef of Old England," Montague rang a huge bell, and shouted lustily:

"Walk up, every Briton in whose forty-two-inch bosom throbs the love of sport! The grand old game, played as it ought to be played! The Masked Boxers, the wonder of the age! Plank down your fourpences, and come in your thousands!"

And, as the bugle tooted its stirring notes, the crowd, always eager for novelty, swarmed down upon the tent, and positively struggled for places.

"Oh, mother, come and kiss your darling boy!" murmured Tommy, as the crowd surged up. "Look at 'em! Who says we haven't hit the public taste?"

Both Dalton and Tommy, though possessed of cheek enough for six, were for a moment rather startled at the mob their show had raised.

"The old marquee won't hold 'em!" said Dalton. "Never mind, the more the merrier. Hope they won't rush the door, though!"

"The brawny arm of Tired Tim will dissuade 'em!"

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"THE HURON CHIEF."

A Grand Tale of Jack, Sam and Pete. By S. Clarke Hook.

AND

"THE CLIFF MYSTERY."

A Splendid, Complete Story of Tom Sayers. By Arthur S. Hardy.

TWO GRAND LONG, COMPLETE STORIES,

said Tommy. "You go an' finish gettin' the ring ready, and I'll help Monty rake in the boodle!"

The first customers were pressing at the entrance, and the coppers were beginning to rain into the big biscuit-tin that served as a till. Montague, looking very gay in his silk vest and gymnasium shorts, with a scarlet belt, passed the people in one by one as they paid, and he could hardly keep pace with the crowd who wanted places.

"Hi, hi, hi!" shouted Montague, rattling the tin. "Pour up in your myriads, sportsmen of England! Get your four-pences ready! Absolutely no free list! Dooks, lords, and Royalty, collar the front seats for sixpence, an' get the finest view of the Marvellous Masked Boxers!"

"Show your phiz, cocky!" shouted several of the crowd. "Let's see wot we're payin' for!"

"E's got no face behind that bit o' black silk!" cried one in the background. "Only a dab o' dough, with two gooseberries stuck in it!"

"Wot's the mask for, cully?"

"I don't want to dazzle you with my fatal beauty, or I'd take it off!" returned Montague loudly. "Now then, my giddy wag, go an' ask your mother for twopence, and plank it down like a man! Down with it! A sixpenny seat? I thank your highness! Walk in front of the ropes, and take your choice!"

And, while "The Roast Beef of Old England" still brayed its thrilling notes from Tired Tim's bugle, the people poured in, till the biscuit-box was bursting with coin, and the marquee was full to overflowing.

While the tent was filling to its utmost capacity, Dalton had set everything in order, and was now in the screened-off dressing-room, which had another small entrance, leading through the back of the tent. He was busy chalking the soles of the shoes his chums were to wear in the ring, when the flap of the back entrance was pulled aside, and a visitor walked in, without so much as a by-your-leave.

He was a big, pale-faced, club-nosed man in pepper-and-salt tweeds, and a bowler hat; but his boots were decidedly Government in appearance.

"Hallo!" said Dalton. "Has anyone given you a card for a private view? Who asked you to waltz in here?"

"Do you know who I am?" said the stranger, in an impressive voice.

"I'm no good at riddles," said Dalton. "If you aren't the Missing Link, I give it up! Are you?"

The big stranger took a step nearer to him.

"You'd better be careful," he said ominously. "Where's your licence?"

"What?"

"Your licence to run this show!" said the man.

"Who are you getting at? Do you think I'm a chump? Licence to shove up a marquee at a fair!"

"Do you know that you're sailin' very close to the law?" said the new-comer, with a grave face. "This prize-fight of yours will get you into serious trouble. It may be my duty to stop this show, and arrest you!"

"Rats!" said Dalton. "'Tisn't a prize-fight, it's a private boxing-match, with full-sized gloves. We're all right, so you needn't worry about us, old bottle-nose! What do we want a licence for? Who's to give us one?"

The stranger coughed into his white worsted glove.

"I can, if you like," he said softly. "It will cost you ten shillings, and then you'll be quite safe from any trouble with the police."

Dalton looked the man up and down, from his bowler hat to his Scotland Yard boots.

"Hallo," he thought, "this is the beauty in plain clothes, referred to by Tired Tim as Pinky Ponk, or some such name, who isn't above making a bit on his own. He can boil his pink satin tie before he gets a halfpenny out of me!"

"You'll find it cheapest," added the man meaningly, fingering his waistcoat-pocket.

"Oh, shall I? Well, you've struck the wrong box, old chap!" said Dalton. "I haven't any money, so I can't give it you; and I wouldn't, if I could, so put that in your pipe and puff it!"

"I don't think you understand who I am!" said the stranger, frowning. "Shall I show you my badge?"

"Don't trouble; your boots are quite enough!" returned Dalton. "And now, right-about face, and find somebody else to diddle! You're only wasting your time here!"

"Very good!" said the plain-clothes man, with an ugly look, as he left the tent. "You'll be sorry for this, my young bantam!"

"Phew!" said Dalton, tightening up his belt. "There are wrong 'uns even among the copper tribe, it seems, though I've always found 'em decent fellows enough till now."

"Hurry up, Dolly!" said Montague, suddenly appearing in the dressing-room, and speaking loudly to make himself heard above the din from the tent itself. "The show's due

to begin, an' we want you to make the first speech, and then keep the door, while Tommy and I get to work in the ring."

"Half a tick," said Dalton; "just listen to this first."

He told his chum briefly what had happened.

"That's a rum 'un," said Montague thoughtfully. "I'd have been rather inclined to let him have the half-sovereign out of the receipts; we've taken quite three quid!"

"Not much! I'm not going to be blackmailed for nothing!" retorted Dalton.

"Well, I expect it's all right; but a row with the police'd be awkward. I suppose he was only bluffing? We're doin' nothing wrong, that's certain. Let it rip. Come on."

There was no doubt about the show being a success as far as the "gate" went. The tent was packed like a sardine-box, and it was only through the narrow alley-way, roped off round the side, that Dalton could reach the entrance.

A shower of rough chaff and cat-calls came from the audience, as Montague and Tommy, in fighting kit, their black masks firmly fixed on, mounted the platform. Tired Tim blew a blast on his bugle, and Dalton, shouting for order, managed to restore silence.

"Gentlemen and admirers of the Noble Art," he yelled. "the Masked Boxers will now proceed to give you your money's worth, so hold your breath, and get ready for a treat! The first item on our programme will be a match fought to a finish, between Kish and Kosh the two finest under-age professors of boxing in England!"

The crowd roared approval, and urged the speaker to "put 'em up!" Dalton took a quick survey of the audience to find somebody suited to his purpose, and saw among them a big, burly, jolly-looking man, with side-whiskers, whom he knew to be Martin Smith, the well-to-do horse-breeder. On the other side was a keen, sharp-faced man, a good deal younger, and very neatly dressed, whom everybody knew as Mr. Vernon Grant, a popular young footballer, who played for the Westbury team in the League matches.

"Order!" roared Dalton. "To prove that everything is fair and above-board, we intend to ask members of the audience to officiate at this match. I see two well-known gentlemen, whom you all know to be good sportsmen and true, present among you. I ask them to do us the honour to act as timekeeper and referee. Mr. Martin Smith and Mr. Vernon Grant."

"Hear, hear, hear!" shouted the crowd.

Dalton then called up two cheery youths, whom he knew to belong to the Uxley village team, although, of course, they did not recognise him, to act as seconds, at which they were hugely pleased. And then, leaving the platform, Dalton went down to the door to keep guard with Tired Tim, and Tommy and Montague stepped into the ring.

They looked very workmanlike certainly, and there was no doubt they meant business. This was the critical time, and Dalton watched a little anxiously. Crowds are fickle things, and if the audience suddenly began to imagine they had paid their money to see nothing but a boys' pummelling-match, there would be trouble. There was hardly a sound in the tent, and everybody was looking on critically as the two Masked Boxers shook hands.

"Time!" called the referee.

(An extra long instalment next Wednesday.)

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YOUR EDITOR.

P.S.—I shall probably have something to say to you next week about a new Competition. Cash Prizes.

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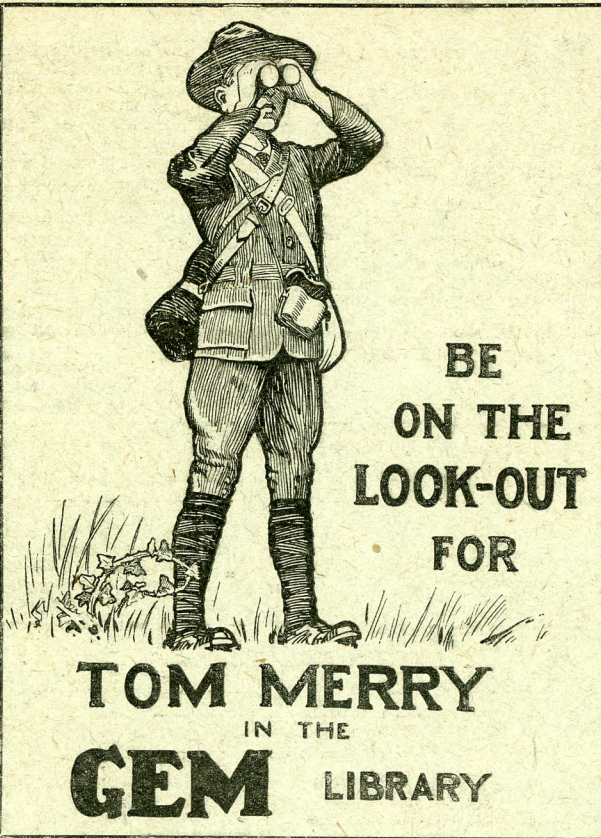
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