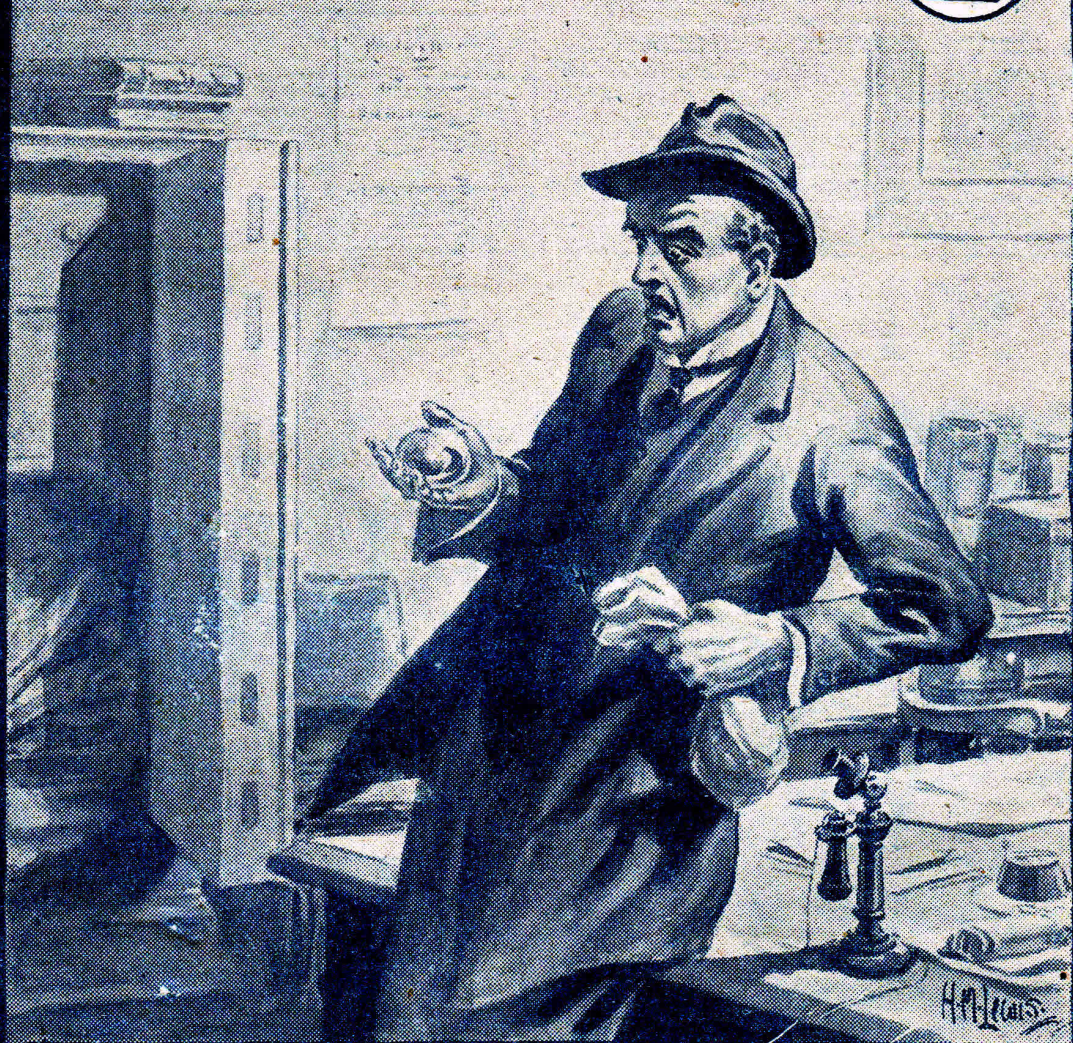


STORY OF GEORGE MARSDEN PLUMMER

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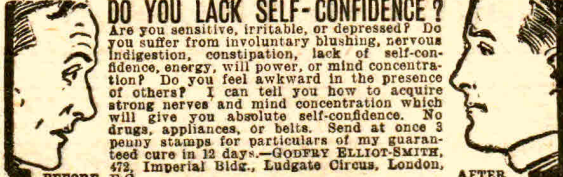
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THE DOUBLE DIAMOND.

A Splendid Story of Detective Adventure, introducing **GEORGE MARSDEN PLUMMER, the Notorious Crook.**

It was Plummer who stood now in the hot cellar, the receiver at his ear. His lips were a little parted, showing his white, even teeth. In his eyes were the agate-green glow which showed that he was excited.

CHAPTER 1.

A Tale of New York—The Smuggler—A Fight.

CAPTAIN PETER TELLER, head of the New York police department, whose business it is to suppress smuggling, shifted his black cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, and grinned. It was a habit of the big blonde man to smile, but the curve of his lips never hid the firmness of the jaw from a close observer. And those who knew him, petty criminals, and criminals of a higher grade, all spoke of him as a power to be reckoned with. If there was a grain of fear in him no one had ever seen it, and there were plenty to vouch for his pluck.

Captain Peter Teller looked round the crowded room of the New York cafe before he turned his rather light-blue eyes once more to the face of his companion. The latter was a very fat man, greasy of countenance, and possessed of a dark skin that bagged heavily under the eyes. His lips were large and loose, showing elaborately filled gold teeth when they were parted. He was in evening-dress, as the other man was, but his diamond shirt-studs and rings proclaimed the fact that his obvious wealth could not make him a gentleman.

Captain Peter Teller was well-known to many of the people in the room, but he was no better known than Louis Veldman, his companion. Louis Veldman had made at least one fortune in Wall Street, but he had made other fortunes, too, not even in the doubtfully honest manner of the Stock Exchange. A pork-packing business had landed him close upon a million, and he had sold out before a much-needed inquiry had revealed the horrible methods upon which the place was run, and with the consequence that it had had to close down. There were also stories of a partnership with a notorious firm of moneylenders that had ruined more than one gilded youth. Not that Louis Veldman's name had ever been definitely attached to it except by rumour. The nearest definite coupling of his name with the business was when his life had been attempted by a young man who had run through a fortune.

That is all that we need write with regard to the past of the two men, as it is their present that concerns us intimately.

Captain Peter Teller smiled into the more than usually greasy face of his companion, noting the nervous twitching of the lips, and the manner in which the man's dark eyes glanced continually about the room.

"What have you got to be frightened about?" the detective demanded.

Louis Veldman started, saw that his cigar had gone out, and struck a match with fingers that shook badly.

Illustrated by H. M. LEWIS.

"Is it wise that we should be seen together here?" he asked in return.

"Why?" the detective drawled.

Louis Veldman bent closer to Peter Teller, and mopped his face with his serviette. There were times when a half-blind man could not have mistaken him for a gentleman.

"You know the rumour that is in the papers," he urged—"the rumour which concerns a great diamond that is supposed to have been found in South Africa."

"Exactly," Peter Teller agreed. "The rumour goes further than that. It gives the name of Nicol Penrane as the finder of the stone, and the information that he intends to try and smuggle it into New York." The detective rolled his cigar to the other corner of his mouth. "Nicol Penrane is known to have been a partner of yours at one time."

Louis Veldman seemed to sweat more than ever, and he seemed more painfully conscious than ever of all the people about.

"At one time," he said huskily. "I had to break the partnership—Penrane was a crook."

Captain Peter Teller laughed in the soft tone that many criminals had learnt to dread.

"Say," he drawled, "don't you reckon you might cut all that part of the business out? I guess it don't matter a rap what you have been, the ticket is the thing that you're doing right now. Don't talk about rumours, you know as well as I do that Penrane is bringing the diamond to you. What price you are to get for it is nothing to do with me, though I'll bet that the Russian Grand Duke who has been after the diamond is in New York right now."

Louis Veldman parted his lips to speak, but he had no chance of going further.

"See here," Captain Peter Teller went on, "Nicol Penrane's your partner as much now as he ever was. He knows that you're the boy to get the full sack of dollars for the diamond, and he's wise that you can fix him for getting safe through. He knows me of old, and he'd be a decent man if he'd have kept straight."

The detective sighed as if he were the most virtuous man in the world instead of one of the crooks who hid his infamy behind a mask of officialdom.

"That's just it," Veldman said in his low, shaking voice. "If you're seen with me, people will talk. They will say that the rumour is correct, that I am here buying you."

The blood rose slowly into the detective's full cheeks, his teeth clenched hard on his cigar, and his eyes narrowed down

until there were only twin small grey lights, hard and bright as polished steel, showing from between the lids.

"You are safe to be seen with me," Peter Teller said at last. "It will convince everyone that there is nothing between us, and if there is anyone foolish enough to suggest anything else—" Once more the cigar was shifted across the man's mouth, though his teeth never seemed to lose their grip on it. "I tell you that there is not a man or woman here I could not send to Sing Sing to-morrow."

Louis Veldman shuddered. He was working hand-in-hand with the chief of police—at a price—but he knew that at any moment that same helping hand might be drawn away to be turned against him.

"Yes," he agreed hastily; "but are you sure no one can overhear us here?"

The smile came back to Peter Teller's lips, and he bent forward across the table.

"You will observe that this table forms a kind of island surrounded by bare floor, my friend," he answered. "You will also observe that the waiters do not pass this way unless I signal to them. I guess there's no chance about that. The boss here knows when he's on a good thing, free of Tammany blackmail and all, and he studies me."

The detective bent further across the table, his fingers playing carelessly with the flowers that stood in the bowl in the centre of the table.

"See here," he drawled; "I'll just run over our plan again."

"Speak low," Louis Veldman whispered, but neither he nor Peter Teller could know that there was one man able to follow their conversation, even though it was carried on in a tone no louder than a clear whisper.

It certainly seemed impossible that the two men could be overheard, yet beneath the floor was a man who could hear every word, and who listened greedily, his right ear pressed to a kind of telephone-receiver. All about the man were casks and bins full of dusty bottles, for the place was a part of the wine-cellars of the famous New York restaurant—the part that lay directly beneath the table at which Captain Peter Teller and Mr. Louis Veldman were sitting.

The man was tall—that could be observed even as he stood with his shoulders hunched up, the dust of the cellars thick on his overalls. He was stout, too, or appeared to be, and his face was a deep dull red. His hair, what there was of it, for the man was bald from the ears upward, was red, too.

Most men in New York could have told you that this individual was Pat Leary, once lift-boy, and now in charge of the most noted cellars in New York. Millionaires had bid for his services, but Pat Leary had remained faithful to his old love, so that the patrons of the restaurant could still rely upon the wine or spirits that they ordered being in perfect condition. Not for one day had Pat Leary been known to have been away from his trust, yet, if the truth were known, he was away now, and had been for close upon a week, though it is only fair to say that it was by no desire of his own. A man scarcely hankers to be bound and gagged, a prisoner in his own room, fed at intervals by the man who had become his double, and who enforced silence by the aid of an ugly-looking automatic-pistol that he held in the manner of a man well used to such a weapon.

It was at the times when he was fed that Pat Leary more than once noticed the curious agate-green light that came into his captor's eyes when he was impatient or imagined that his captive was about to cry out.

Pat Leary noticed the change in the eyes as he lay stiff and suffering in the heat that was gripping New York. He had never seen eyes like it before, and he certainly never wished to see any like them again. Inwardly he cursed the man who had shammed illness, and been taken into Pat Leary's bachelor rooms, for there the man had turned upon him, stunned him with one blow, and after that—well, all that Pat Leary knew was that he had recovered consciousness with a splitting pain in his head, and a sudden belief that he was dead.

The belief was understandable, for over Pat Leary was bending the living double of himself, red hair and all. It was then, for the first time, that Pat Leary noticed the curious green light in his double's eyes, noticed it when the man spoke to him triumphantly, and he knew that he was not dead; but he did not know that the man who bent over him was George Marsden Plummer, aristocrat by birth, ex-detective of Scotland Yard, and master-criminal by profession and instinct, for the criminal strain that had been lying dormant for generations had come out strongly in him.

It was Plummer who stood now in the hot cellar, a bottle of brandy near to his left hand, the receiver in his right. His lips were a little parted, showing his even, white teeth. In his eyes was the agate-green glow which showed that he was excited.

Plummer knew much of Captain Peter Teller; in fact, he

owed him a grudge of long standing, and he hoped to pay it back now. His scheme had come to him one night when he was dining in the restaurant, and had learnt that a certain table—he had wanted it himself—was invariably reserved for Captain Peter Teller. The information had at first merely annoyed him, then his definite plan had come to him, and he had acted without hesitation. The capture of Pat Leary had been almost painfully simple; to break into the restaurant, without leaving a sign behind, and make the rest of his arrangements had been almost equally so.

Now Plummer stood with his ear at the telephone that enabled him to hear everything that was said by Captain Peter Teller and Louis Veldman, and he had heard enough to make his heart beat faster than usual. Already he knew the tale of the great diamond that was supposed to be on its way to New York, knew it and envied the possessor of the stone as he envied all men of wealth.

The master-criminal had lost no word of the opening conversation, and, fortunately for him, the bell had not gone for any special wine, and the most customary ones were taken from the cellars before the arrival of the guests.

Plummer had heard all about the diamond, all, that is, but the last details of the scheme that Captain Peter Teller and Louis Veldman had formed.

"See here, I'll just run over our plan again." Those were the last words that Plummer had heard Teller utter, followed by Veldman's warning injunction:

"Speak low!"

Plummer lifted the bottle of spirits without moving his head, and drank from it greedily, then he let the bottle crash to the ground, for the conversation had started again, and it was Captain Peter Teller who spoke.

"This is the plan in short," he said. "We shall allow Nicol Penrane to land. The reason we shall give to the police will be that we were afraid that Penrane might have hidden the diamond in one of the thousand-and-one hiding-places to be found aboard ship. Penrane will make an attempt to escape—that is the reason why I would not let you tell him that part of our plan. He will have to be roughly handled, but he will have to put up with that."

"It will not be the first time," Louis Veldman said coolly, for he was notoriously only his own hide that he cared about.

Plummer took another quick drink during the interval in the conversation, and at that moment any one of the countless detectives who were always waiting for news of him would have known him, for his eyes had never been a more vivid agate-green.

The master-criminal's fingers tightened on the receiver as the conversation was continued.

"We shall take him to the station," Captain Peter Teller continued. "The diamond will, of course, be found on him, and he will be locked up."

"And the diamond?" Louis Veldman asked.

"I guess that will go into my safe."

Plummer chuckled. It was not so very long ago that he had been in the private room of Captain Teller, and, as a matter of fact, it was sheer luck that he had been allowed to leave a free man. Incidentally, the time that he had lost there had caused him to fail in a scheme that should have brought him a large sum of money, and he had not forgotten the fact. Also, he had spent five minutes alone in that same room, and in that time he had contrived to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the outside of the safe. Five minutes is not long, and a knowledge of the outside of a safe may not appear to the average person to be of value, but that was far from being the case with the master-criminal. Plummer had long since divided safes up into three varieties—easy; fairly difficult—the type that required thinking about—and difficult. The last class included safes that could not be opened save by the aid of gas.

Captain Peter Teller's safe, strange though it may seem, came under the first class.

"I shall have a man guarding my office all night." The words came over the wire in the voice of Captain Teller, and Plummer also heard the laugh that followed. It was the laugh that puzzled him, though not nearly so much as the words that followed:

"It will not be until to-morrow"—Plummer held his breath, the words were uttered in such a low tone—"that the public will know—"

Plummer plainly heard the warning hiss that came from Louis Veldman, and he swore softly as the wire remained dumb, save for the hum of general conversation that came from the room above. Every tone of it annoyed him, for there was only one voice that he wanted to hear, and that remained strangely dumb.

Five minutes, ten minutes passed, without a sound from Captain Peter Teller or Mr. Louis Veldman, and when a sound did come it was not the one that the master-criminal wanted to hear.

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

"We may as well clear out of here," Captain Peter Teller drawled. "The boat is due in at one in the morning, and I want some sleep before that. I struck it hard at poker last night, and I guess it wasn't worth wasting a night's sleep to win a couple of hundred dollars. I could have put the dollars on to you."

Once more the laugh of the New York detective travelled down to Plummer, he heard the scraping of chairs being pushed back, he was listening so intently, and he knew that his men had gone from the table. Still, he clung on for some minutes before putting the receiver down, and he might not have done so then had there not been a call for a special old liqueur. The master-criminal carried out the order mechanically, cursing under his breath as he did so, then he

Plummer moved cautiously down a passage, listening all the time, for there was always the chance that there might be someone about. However, he reached, without interference, the side-door that Pat Leary had used for so many years, slipped out, and pulled the door to behind him.

The master-criminal pulled out his watch, and glanced at it. It was half-past twelve. In half an hour or so Nicol Penrane would be landing, if the vessel arrived in time.

The great liner had arrived pretty well to time, and, despite the hour and the fact that rain had commenced to fall, there was a big crowd to watch the passengers land. There were the usual people there to welcome relatives and friends, and added to that was a larger crowd, men and women, who had come there for a far different reason.



It was Plummer who leapt out of the crowd, dodged the savage blow that Nicol Penrane aimed at him, then closed, though it seemed impossible that he could have a chance against so big a man.

picked up his bottle of spirits, and had a long drink before seating himself to think over what he had heard.

What was it that the public was to be told? That was the question, and Plummer tried hard to answer it. What was there about the diamond that both Captain Peter Teller and Louis Veldman were willing to make public knowledge?

The master-criminal sat there puzzling his brain; and now and again refreshing himself from the bottle until it was empty and he had to open another. The only outward effect that the spirit had upon him was to make his eyes more vividly green. That, and the manner in which he bit his nails, showed how much he was agitated.

Time went on steadily, and it was the absolute absence of sound from above that at last roused Plummer. He glanced at his watch, saw that it was past midnight, and leapt to his feet. He had not solved the problem that he had been puzzling over, and there was no time to worry further about it. He had got to make sure that Nicol Penrane was arrested, and after that all he could do would be to carry out the plan that he had already formed.

From behind one of the wine-bins the master-criminal produced a suit of clothes, and slipped it on rapidly. Next, he set to work with his make-up case, and in a very few minutes his appearance was utterly changed. He became the typical, rather pallid-faced American, shaven neck and all.

They were the people whose curiosity had been aroused by the rumours in the newspapers—the rumours that had almost been presented to the public as facts.

Close to the spot where the passengers were bound to land stood a group of a dozen big men, and more might have been seen scattered about in the crowd. Apart from being big men, they all possessed the same hard, determined jaw, and the same type of keen yet restless eyes.

With the first group was a man known to practically all present, for he was no other than Captain Peter Teller, chief of a certain section of the police. They knew why he was there, too, and the name of Nicol Penrane was passed in a whisper from mouth to mouth. Nicol Penrane was known, too, chiefly through the newspapers, to the public. For the past few days they had been full of so-called details with regard to the man who had once been Louis Veldman's partner. There were tales of strange and daring adventures, some of which he shared with a man who, although going unnamed, no one could fail to pick out as Louis Veldman. There were tales, all the details of which, according to the imaginative editors, were not fit even to be published in New York—and that is saying a good deal. In only one detail were all the papers in accord and absolutely correct, and that was when they stated that Nicol Penrane was one of the biggest adventurers who had ever lived.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

Alleged portraits also appeared of the man, but they were of the smudgy and mixed variety. Again, in their description of the man they were correct in one particular. They all described him as being big and powerful beyond the average, and had, in consequence, confidently predicted that the police would not make their arrest without a struggle. It was largely because of that that the sensation-loving crowd had gathered, watching for any big man who came ashore.

There was one man standing not far from Captain Peter Teller and his men who did not appear to take any particular interest in the scene—in fact, the apparently indifferent manner in which he stood there might have made one wonder why he was there at all. True, he glanced now and again towards Teller and his men, but so casually that they did not notice it. Yet Teller would have given something to have known that the ordinary-looking American was George Marsden Plummer, the master-criminal, who was wanted in New York, just as he was wanted in many other cities in the world.

Plummer was waiting with a heart that beat a little unsteadily, for he could not help imagining himself in the place of Nicol Penrane. There had been more than one time when he had stepped ashore with fear gripping at his heart, more than one time when in every fellow-passenger or lounge on the quay he had seen a possible Sexton Blake.

The first tender came surging towards the quay, and in the uncertain light of early dawn there was a flickering of white handkerchiefs both on the quay and aboard the tender, though it must have been impossible to recognise the faces of friends. They were there somewhere, and that was enough.

And somewhere among the passengers was Nicol Penrane, the man who was trying to smuggle into New York a diamond of great price. As soon as the passengers landed from the first tender there might be a fight between the men who represented the law and the solitary man who represented adventure of the most daring type.

There was more than the usual air of excitement about the crowd as the tender came alongside the quay. Captain Peter Teller and his men moved a little forward. The detectives mingling with the crowd became suddenly more alert, and Plummer, still showing no outward signs of excitement, moved forward, too.

Men and women came hurrying on to the quay. A grey-haired old woman sobbed quietly on the shoulder of the big, brawny son who had come to welcome her into the New World. Then the thing happened for which the majority of the crowd was waiting.

A man of unusual build, his clean-shaven face bronzed by much exposure to all weathers, came briskly on to the quay, and stepped quickly towards the nearest waiting taxi. Apparently he had no care in the world, for he smiled like a man who is glad to be back in his old familiar surroundings.

Then, suddenly as the fall of a thunderbolt, the whole bearing of the man changed. As he looked round carelessly his eyes fell upon Captain Peter Teller, and in a moment the change had taken place. All the cool indifference vanished from the man's face, the slight smile left his lips, and they set in a grim, hard line. Those who stood near by saw the change, knew that the man was Nicol Penrane, and waited breathlessly for the storm of his resistance to burst.

Captain Peter Teller stepped quickly forward, his men close behind him, as cool as if a mere lad had to be arrested instead of a desperate man who had no idea that his capture was just part of a scheme arranged by his own partner.

Nicol Penrane did not wait to be attacked, for in his adventurous career he had learnt that it is the man who gets in the first blow who stands the best chance of victory.

Straight as an arrow Penrane leapt at Captain Teller, at the same time wrenching a life-preserver from his pocket and whirling it upwards, just as a woman in the crowd screamed.

Captain Teller saw the blow coming, but he was too late to prevent it getting home. With a nasty thud it landed on his head, sending him stunned to the ground; then Nicol Penrane was in the midst of the detectives who had come to arrest him. All were old hands at the game, but, for once, the man they wanted nearly slipped through their hands.

Two more men went down under crashing blows from the life-preserver, and the silence of the crowd broke into a roar of excitement cut through by the shrill shrieks of women who had come there for sensation and were being treated to more of it than they had bargained for.

Nicol Penrane towered above everything, still as a statue for a moment after he had felled the men; then, leaping once more into amazing life, flinging his whole weight on to the crowd and fairly cleaving his way through it. Men who would have knocked you down if you had called them cowards bundled hurriedly out of the way of this living whirlwind, getting in the way of the other police who were trying to

go to the assistance of their fallen comrades. It looked as if Nicol Penrane would at least have a run for his freedom.

But such was not to be the case. It was Plummer who leapt out of the crowd, dodged the savage blow that Nicol Penrane aimed at him, then closed, though it seemed impossible that he could have a chance against so big a man.

Then a thing happened that neither the crowd nor the police expected to see. They saw Nicol Penrane raise his right hand to strike again; then he was lying on the ground, his arms locked, so that he could not move, by Plummer, who grinned down wickedly into his face until the police, led by Captain Peter Teller, who was grinning grimly through the blood on his face, came up. In a minute Nicol Penrane was a prisoner.

The latter allowed himself to be jerked to his feet, and he grinned sneeringly into the face of the chief of police.

"Say, captain," he drawled, "I guess you wouldn't have got me alone! Sure, it's an amateur had to help you!"

A savage expression crossed Captain Peter Teller's face. For one thing, his head hurt him badly; and, for another, he knew that the newspapers would be full of the scene. True, both he and Louis Veldman had wanted a scene, but he had not bargained for as much as this. He looked round sharply to find the man who had laid Penrane low, and was not sorry when he could not find him to thank him.

"Put the prisoner in the car!" he ordered savagely. "And next time you come out with me just freeze on to the fact that you're paid to get a move on you. Hustle!"

From the edge of the crowd Plummer watched Nicol Penrane taken away, and the sight made him smile, for on Penrane was the great diamond from South Africa, and he meant to have it that night.

CHAPTER 2.

Plummer Finds the Diamond—And Leaves It—A Villain's Deserts—The End.

CAPTAIN PETER TELLER turned the key in the lock of the safe in his private room, smiled affably to himself, then moved to the table and pushed the knob of the electric bell that was let into it. In a few seconds the summons was answered by a man

well over six feet in height, abnormally broad, and with a face that had not a trace of gentleness in it.

As a matter of fact, the man's looks did not belie his character, for Mike Cassidy, member of the New York detective force, had a reputation for strength and savage pluck that held good even in the worst parts of the Bowery, where there are plenty of tough joints to be found.

"Mike," Captain Peter Teller said shortly, the smile gone from his lips, "you will be on guard over this room to-night. You understand that no one is to enter it under any circumstances?"

Mike Cassidy bent his right arm, and the huge bicep muscles showed plainly through the cloth of his coat.

"They will not, sor," he answered. "If it's the diamond you're after me guardin', captain, it's as safe as if it'd stopped in South Africa."

Captain Peter Teller nodded, picked up his hat, and moved towards the door. The next minute he had gone out into the street, and Mike Cassidy, having fished out from his pocket a long black cigar, lit it, and seated himself on a chair outside the door of the room, his great body seeming to fill the narrow passage.

"Look after the diamond, is it!" he muttered, with a chuckle. "Sure, it's not the whole of the crooks in Sing Sing, not mentionin' them as ought to be there, what'll lift it while Mike Cassidy's on guard!"

In the meantime, Captain Peter Teller had hurried away through the comparatively deserted streets, for even the crowd that had followed Nicol Penrane and his captors to the station had dispersed, seeing no hope of further sensation before the dawn broke.

A side-turning swallowed the man up, and as it did so another man stepped out of a narrow turning that ran practically along the side of the station. And the remarkable part about it was that if he was not Captain Peter Teller, he was his living double. In height, and walk; and build, it was the head of the detective force, yet the latter had just disappeared into the side-turning over the way, and it was impossible that he could have doubled round in time to be where this other man stood.

In short, it was impossible that the man could be Captain Peter Teller, and of a certainty he was not the man, for the double of the chief of police was no other than Plummer, master-criminal, and the man who had checked Nicol Penrane's bolt for liberty when for the moment the latter had got the better of the detectives sent to arrest him on the charge of smuggling.

Plummer hesitated just long enough to make sure that he had the street to himself, then he moved with the utmost coolness towards the entrance to the station. As a matter of fact, there was every reason why he should be confident. He knew, apart from conceit, that his make-up was absolutely perfect, for in the course of his career he had had many opportunities of studying Captain Peter Teller and his mannerisms.

Apart from that, he knew that the diamond was reposing in a safe, the opening of which would trouble him very little, and so he was confident that in half an hour at the very most the diamond that was worth a fortune would be in his possession, and that he would be amply repaid for the hours that he had spent in the stifling atmosphere of the restaurant wine cellars.

Without the slightest hesitation Plummer walked into the station, nodded casually to the man on guard at the entrance, and passed on to the passage at the end of which was the private room of Captain Peter Teller.

Even when he saw Mike Cassidy on guard before the door he was not in the least taken back, for he had reckoned that some precaution of the kind would be taken. Incidentally, it made his task more simple, as the man would see that he was not interrupted while he was at work.

"Sure, but you're back soon, sor," Mike Cassidy observed, rising leisurely to his feet, and making no effort to remove the cigar from between his teeth. "You'll be after forgettin' something?"

"I reckon you're right, Mike," Plummer answered carelessly, his fingers on the handle of the door. "There are a couple of letters that I must write at once, so see that I am not disturbed."

"Heaven help the man phwat tries, sor!" Cassidy assured his supposed chief.

And Plummer passed into the room, and closed and locked the door behind him.

The next minute the electric light was blazing, and, with a smile on his lips, the master-criminal crossed over to the safe that stood against the wall. From his pocket he drew a very

small case, that contained very small steel instruments; but, small though the latter were, any expert crook could have told you that they were capable of doing a mighty lot in the way of safe-breaking in the hands of an expert man.

Plummer did not hesitate, for though he believed that he had the rest of the night before him, he was taking no risks of being disturbed. He bent over the lock of the safe to examine it once more, and as he did so the green light of triumph was in his eyes.

With certain fingers the master-criminal selected a small, jointed steel instrument from the case, carefully adjusted the end of it, and inserted it gently into the lock. For a few seconds he attempted to turn it; then he drew it out, and once more adjusted the end, frowning a little as the instrument once more failed to act on the lock. The third time, however, he was more successful; there was a slight click, and it was with a smile of supreme confidence that Plummer gripped the two handles of the safe, and turned them away from each other.

The door of the safe was open, and Plummer, cool man though he naturally was, showed something of the excitement of the moment. The fingers of his right hand shook a little as he thrust them into the safe, and his face was moist with sweat that showed through the paint that disguised it. He had no need to look for the thing that he sought, for his eyes alighted at once on a washleather bag that lay among the litter of papers and documents with which the safe was filled.

Slowly, as if he was almost afraid of it, the master-criminal drew the bag from the safe, and carried it right under the glare of the powerful electric light that hung from the ceiling.

His fingers still shook as he unfastened the string about the mouth of the bag, but there was a smile of triumph on his lips as he dropped into the palm of his right hand an article as big as a turkey's egg, and almost exactly that shape.

In appearance it was not unlike a ball of glass worn smooth

(Continued on page 26.)



Even when he saw Mike Cassidy on guard before the door he was not in the least taken back, for he had reckoned that some precaution of the kind would be taken.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

Splendid Story of the Old Slave Traffic Days!

THE CORSAIR CAPTAIN

By CHAS. HAMILTON.

This popular author needs no introduction to my chums. His works are well known the world over. This story is no exception to the rule of his general excellence—in fact, I will go so far as to say it is one of his very best.

Illustrated by Willis Reading.



CHAPTER 1.

The Sea Queen and Her Captain—A Sail in Sight.

IN a small bay not many miles north of Loango, on the West Coast of Africa, a schooner rode at anchor.

It was midday, and the rays of a tropical sun beat down pitilessly upon the ocean and the sandy shore.

A faint breeze ruffled the surface of the ocean, and raised clouds of dust on the beach. Further inland a mist hung over the landscape, caused by the fetid exhalations of the swamps and marshes that abounded near the Majana River, which emptied into the little bay.

On the stern of the schooner the name "Sea Queen" was neatly painted.

She was a trim little barque of about two hundred tons burden, and built regardless of expense. Her hull was low, and her masts taper, her sails white, and her decks the same.

She was painted tastefully—the masts black, the bulwarks green, with a thin red streak just above the water-line.

A beautiful vessel she was, yet she was engaged in the worst of all traffics—the odious slave-trade. No vessel was better known to the cruisers on the station than the Sea Queen. Many times had she been chased by British ships, but the wonderful speed of the schooner and the skill of her commander enabled her to show a clean pair of heels to her pursuers.

Captain Carandel, of the Sea Queen, was a Spaniard—a tall, dark, lithe fellow of about thirty-five, vigorous and muscular withal. He sat in his cabin in company with his first officer, engaged in conversation. His attire was that of a Spanish naval officer. His jacket was velvet, adorned with an abundance of gold lace; a sash of crimson silk encircled his waist, and in it a long knife and a pair of pistols were thrust; a silver-hilted sword hung by his side, and report said that the slaver was not loth to use it when occasion offered. For rumour had it that Captain Carandel combined the trade of a pirate with that of a slaver whenever it happened to serve his turn.

Of the Sea Queen's captain some strange stories were told. It was said by some that he had been an officer in the Spanish Navy, and had been dismissed for some fault, and had then turned pirate and slaver.

Whatever his past, it was certain that he was now an unscrupulous adventurer, and his vessel was dreaded by all the traders on the coast.

But what of him with whom the captain talked? The second in command of the Sea Queen was a Portuguese—a dark-skinned, black-eyed fellow, lithe and sinewy, with black hair and brows. His name was Antonio Baricas.

"Baricas," exclaimed Captain Carandel suddenly, looking across the table at his lieutenant, who sat opposite him sipping a glass of sparkling Madeira, "I do not half like this conduct of old Gumbo!"

"What is the matter, captain?" asked the Portuguese lieutenant.

"Read this," replied Carandel, passing a paper over to Baricas; "it was brought by the nigger runner who came on board ten minutes ago."

Antonio Baricas glanced over the paper, and grinned as he

read it. It was a note from King Gumbo, one of the potentates of the Congo River country, chief of a powerful tribe, and one of the biggest slave-dealers on the coast.

It was the special boast of this dusky monarch that he could speak and write English, and the note was in that language. It ran as follows:

"To Captain Candle. Kum to the town; I hav kargo of blak ivory reddy four yew. Ther is kno danjer of cruisers at present."

"What do you think of it, Antonio?" asked the commander of the Sea Queen, when the lieutenant had finished perusing the note.

"I think his sable Majesty has invented a new style of spelling," answered Baricas.

"Yes," said Carandel, laughing; "he prides himself upon his English. But what do you think of his conduct in inviting us to his village to fetch the slaves?"

"Why, that's all right, I think. He says he has a good cargo ready, and—"

"But hitherto he has always sent the slaves down the river in canoes," said the captain, interrupting the lieutenant.

"Why should he want us to go to his place this time?"

"Not knowing, can't say. He can't mean to try any tricks, do you think?"

"He's a sly old rascal; as treacherous as a wolf!" declared the Spaniard. "He would be glad to murder us all, if he thought he could gain anything by it. I don't trust him."

"But it's to his interest to keep in with us," urged the lieutenant; "he has nothing to gain by playing us false, that I can see."

"There's no telling," replied Captain Carandel, shaking his head in a doubtful sort of way. "He would betray us to the cruisers if he could gain anything by doing so."

"I am sure of that," assented the lieutenant; "but whatever reward he could get would be small, and he would lose the profit he makes on his trade with us."

"He says there is no danger of falling in with cruisers," the captain remarked, in a thoughtful sort of way.

"That is true, in my opinion," replied Baricas.

"The schooner that chased us the other day, after the affair with the brig, must be somewhere about," said Captain Carandel.

"The Little Wounder, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I don't think she can be near here," the Portuguese said.

"Why not?"

"Why, I don't think her commander could follow on our track so easily as to find out our retreat."

"Perhaps so. But we'll have to be very careful, you know, with our fair captive on board."

"I think Gumbo means to act honestly," said the Portuguese, after a pause.

"Yes; he has never given us any reason to doubt him yet," the captain observed reflectively. "But these blacks are very slippery customers."

"True," replied Antonio Baricas, with a smile that had a hidden meaning; "they are sometimes very treacherous."

"I want to get away from this locality as soon as I can,"

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

Captain Carandel went on, with a troubled look. "There is in this region a foe of mine who is seeking my life."

"Who is that, captain?"

"An old enemy," replied Carandel evasively.

"If you distrust old Gumbo you can take a strong party with you when you go for the 'black ivory,'" suggested Baricas.

"Yes, I can do that, of course; and if the old rascal tries any trickery we can give him a lesson."

"Yes, that would be easy."

"But we must avoid conflicts with the niggers as much as we can," said the captain. "If we get to fighting the native chiefs our trade will be ruined."

Just then a shout on deck interrupted the conversation.

"A sail in sight!" was the cry that came down the hatchway.

"A sail!" exclaimed Captain Carandel, as he rose from his seat and ascended the companion.

There were some high cliffs at the entrance to the bay, which concealed any vessel anchored inside from the outer ocean. The look-out at the masthead could see over the rocks out on the sea. The gleam of a white sail just rising above the horizon had caused his shout.

"Confound the luck!" exclaimed Captain Carandel, as he went on deck. "Ten to one it is a cruiser!"

"Very likely it's the Little Wonder, sir," observed the second mate of the Sea Queen, a long, raw-boned Yankee, rejoicing in the name of Hardin.

"How could she have found her way here?" exclaimed the captain.

"Mebbe that cussed deserter guided her here," suggested Hardin.

"Jack Travers, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"It's possible!" the slaver assented, scowling.

"I feel certain of it, captain," declared Hardin. "I know he'd do it, if he could, to get square with you and to get the reward offered by the Admiralty for information regarding the slaver Sea Queen."

"It's possible!" said Carandel, with a darkening brow. "If I find that is so, and I ever have the good fortune to meet him again, he will wish he had never been born!"

"Shall we slip out to sea, captain?" asked Antonio Baricas, who had come on deck.

"No," was the reply; "there's no wind, and we couldn't escape."

"The craft is heading for this bay, sir!" sang out the man with the telescope in the maintop.

"Can you make her out now?"

"Yes, sir; a schooner, with all sails set!"

"What flag?"

"I can't see. She's coming on fast, and bringing the breeze with her."

"A cursed cruiser, for certain!" exclaimed the commander, with an oath. "There will be a stiff breeze from the sea soon, and if we run out we shall come to grief on the sand-banks."

"What shall we do, then, sir?"

"Run up the river."

"And hide until the cruiser departs?"

"Yes."

"Unless she takes a fancy to send her boats up the river," suggested the American.

"If she does we'll have to fight," continued Captain Carandel. "Now, man the boats, and hoist the anchor. Look alive, men!"

The sailors now all swarmed on deck. The number of men for such a small craft was remarkable. Full eighty men were there, when twenty or thirty would have been ample.

They were of a dozen different nations, although Spaniards and lascars predominated. All were armed to the teeth. Their sashes were full of knives and pistols, and each man wore a cutlass. Two boats were lowered, manned, and attached by strong hawsers to the Sea Queen. The anchor was raised; then the men bent to their oars, and began to tow the schooner into the little river that emptied into the bay.

CHAPTER 2.

The Little Wonder—The Brig and the Slaver—The Chase—Jack Travers' Story.

BOWLING along over the blue waters of the sunny Gulf of Guinea before a ten-knot breeze was a vessel which will play a prominent part in our story. She was a schooner, and almost a counterpart of the Sea Queen. On her quarter could be seen the name, "Little Wonder," in neatly-painted letters. She was well-armed for a vessel of her size, carrying a long brass thirty-pounder amidships, fixed upon a pivot, so that it could be turned in any direction, and on each side of her white deck

a row of six twelve-pounders. Around her masts were racks containing muskets, cutlasses, and boarding-pikes, all polished till they shone like silver.

On the quarter-deck, seated on a camp-stool, was a young man reading a newspaper. Herbert Somers, commander of the schooner, was dressed in the usual uniform of a lieutenant of the British Navy. Although only about twenty-two years of age, he had already attained that rank. He had belonged to the frigate Cleopatra, and had been selected to command the Little Wonder on account of his well-known skill in seamanship and his knowledge of the African coast. The depredations committed by the Sea Queen among the shipping had induced the authorities at Sierra Leone to send several ships in search of her. The Little Wonder was one of them.

Herbert Somers had spent five years on the station, and was intimately acquainted with all the rivers, bays, and inlets on the coast from the Gaboon to the Congo. Although youthful, he had distinguished himself several times by his coolness and courage, and so he came to be entrusted with the command of the Little Wonder.

Near Somers sat Harry Estcourt, a youth of about seventeen, a middy belonging to Somers' ship. He was engaged in the task of peeling an orange, when suddenly he jumped up and dropped it on the deck.

"A gun, by Jove!" he cried excitedly.

Lieutenant Somers rose hastily, and threw down the newspaper he had been reading, for, echoing faintly over the water, came that deep, sullen boom that can never be mistaken for anything save the report of a heavy gun.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. "What can that be?"

"A gun, sir," said Harry, with a grin.

"I know that, my lad." Then, placing his hands to his mouth, he hailed the look-out. "Ho, the masthead!" he shouted.

"Ay, ay, sir!" came back the reply.

"Any sail in sight?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Where?"

"There's two, sir. Just sighted them between us and the Island of Annabon."

"How far away?"

"Four miles, I think, sir."

"Why didn't you see them before?" the officer shouted.

"Was looking towards the coast, sir!"

"The fool has been asleep!" muttered the lieutenant savagely. "Harry, fetch me my glass—quick!"

"Yes, sir." And Estcourt ran down into the little cabin for the telescope.

Another cannon-shot was heard a minute later.

As soon as the middy returned Herbert took the glass and viewed the two ships. They could be easily seen from the deck, and would have been noticed before but for the dark, rocky island in the background.

"A schooner and a brig," muttered Herbert, as he surveyed the strange craft.

The state of affairs could easily be seen. The brig was a clumsy-looking old tub, and the schooner was a clipper—no other, in fact, than the Sea Queen. The latter was attacking the brig, and the reports which had startled the men of the Little Wonder came from her long guns.

The brig was now close to the cliffs of the Isle of Annabon, and the Sea Queen was about a mile from her. The Little Wonder was three or four miles from the slaver, all three vessels being in a line. Every eye on board the Sea Queen was bent upon the brig, and so they had not noticed the approach of the Government vessel.

"By Jupiter! I believe that schooner is the Sea Queen—the vessel I am looking for," thought Herbert Somers. "I am told she is an almost exact counterpart of my vessel, and that schooner certainly fits the description."

"Clap on all sail!" he cried, turning to the seamen. "I believe that is the Sea Queen. At any rate, she is a pirate, and if we capture her it will be prize-money in your pockets." The sailors gave a cheer, and worked with a will.

Every stitch of canvas that would draw was set, and the Little Wonder fairly flew through the yielding water.

"Beat to quarters!" commanded the lieutenant.

Arms were served out to the sailors, and men took their places at the guns.

Meanwhile, the cannonade continued. The Sea Queen was armed with a long thirty-pounder like the one aboard the Wonder, and she was using it with effect. Every shot that was fired was skillfully aimed, and struck right into the unfortunate brig. Several shots had struck her between wind and water, and the contest could have had but one ending had not the Little Wonder appeared upon the scene. Indeed, the crew of the brig were not making any resistance, for their ship was not armed; but they made efforts to escape the pirate schooner.

"We'll just take a hand in this little game," muttered Herbert Somers.

"Load the Long Tom!" he called out.

And the gunner, Nathaniel Daly, hastened to obey.

Taking up his speaking-trumpet, Herbert hailed the Sea Queen, which was by this time only a mile or so distant.

"Schooner, ahoy!"

The British seamen could see the sudden confusion on board the Sea Queen as the voice of the young lieutenant rang out clear and distinct across the calm water. Herbert again took up his telescope and scanned the slaver vessel. He saw men run out on the yards, and saw the sails bent. The slaver-pirate ceased her attack upon the merchant brig, and began to glide through the water at a spanking rate. No answer was made to Herbert's hail.

"Make chase!" said the officer.

And the Little Wonder went tearing along in the track of the Sea Queen.

Then suddenly a man leaped over the taffrail of the latter vessel, splashed into the sea, and commenced to swim towards the Government cruiser. A volley of bullets followed him into the water, and he appeared to be hit, for he sank below the surface.

"What can that be?" exclaimed Herbert.

"Looks like a prisoner escaping, sir," replied the midshipman, Harry Estcourt.

"We'll pick him up, at any rate," observed the young commander.

In a few minutes the Little Wonder reached the spot where the man had sunk, and she was quickly thrown up into the wind. Then a boat was dropped, Harry sprang in with half a dozen men, and a search was made for the supposed wounded man. In a few minutes his head appeared beside the boat.

"Lend me a hand!" he said.

Harry seized him by the collar and dragged him into the boat. In a few minutes he was taken aboard the Little Wonder.

"Are you wounded?" Herbert asked him.

"No, sir."

"You sank when the volley was fired?"

"I knew they would fire, that was why I sank," explained the man, who was a big, broad-shouldered British sailor.

"I see. You are one of the crew, I presume?"

"You are mistaken, sir," answered the man quickly. "Do you know what that vessel is?"

"A slaver."

"Yes, and worse. She is a pirate when her captain can hoist the black flag with safety!" continued the man.

"Who is her captain?"

"A Spaniard. His name is Carandel."

"Then that schooner is the Sea Queen?"

"Yes; that is her name."

"Brig signalling, sir," interrupted the boatswain just then.

Herbert glanced towards the merchant vessel, and his brow darkened.

"Sinking; come to our aid!" he made out.

The young officer glanced towards the Sea Queen. If he went to the brig he would be compelled to relinquish the chase.

"Give her a shot!" he said to Daly.

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the gunner.

And the boom of the thirty-pounder echoed across the waters. The ball splashed into the water half a mile to the windward of the slaver.

The gunner looked at Somers inquiringly.

The officer nodded in answer to the unspoken question. Again the gun was loaded. The old gunner dwelt long on his aim; he carefully sighted the piece. Again the roar of the cannon broke on the air.

The leaden messenger struck the starboard bulwark of the Sea Queen, smashed through the planks, skipped over the deck, killing two men in its passage, and then rolled into the scuppers—spent. A couple of feet more to leeward and it would have settled the mainmast. But it was impossible to do more. The merchant ship was frantically signalling for aid. Reluctantly the young officer turned the head of his schooner back towards the island; before long he was on board the brig. He found that she was the *Pretty Mary*, of Bristol, bound for Fernando Po with Government stores. She was badly knocked about by the shot of the slaver, and it took Herbert and his crew several hours to aid the brig's crew to repair her sufficiently to enable her to resume her voyage. Although chafing with anxiety to go in chase of Captain Carandel and his schooner, Herbert could not refuse to stay and help the disabled craft. It was nightfall before the Little Wonder left the brig.

Then Herbert Somers had the man who had escaped from the Sea Queen sent into his cabin.

"What is your name, my man?" he asked.

"Jack Travers," was the reply.

"What are you?"

"A man, sir."

PLUCK.—No. 587.

"I don't mean that," said Herbert, with a smile. "I mean, what occupation do you follow?"

"I am a sailor, sir."

"Not one of the slavers?"

"No, sir. I was captured by them."

"When?"

"Three months ago, sir."

"Where?"

"The Sea Queen attacked our ship, the *Titania*, of Liverpool. She took out of her two men and a lady passenger."

"What for?"

"The two men were my cousin and me, and the lady was Miss Alice Trent. He took us for seamen, and the lady—well, you can guess."

"The scoundrel!" cried Herbert, springing to his feet.

"Has he harmed her?"

"No, sir; not as yet. He wants her to marry him, but she won't consent."

"So the pirate has fallen in love with his captive. Is that it?"

"I don't think so, sir. There's suthin' in it I can't understand. The slaver captain attacked our vessel for the purpose of catching Miss Trent, so he must have known beforehand that she would be on board. He seems to hate rather than love her. It's some old grudge, I reckon. He wanted me to fire on the brig, and had me whipped when I refused. That was why I jumped into the sea, although I knew there wasn't much chance of my being saved by your vessel."

"You are a brave man!" exclaimed Herbert. "Would you like to join my crew?"

"If you are going after the Sea Queen, sir."

"I am, I assure you."

"Then I'm your man. I'd give ten years of my life to get within reach of Carandel!"

"Why?"

"To return the lashes he gave me!" exclaimed Travers, denching his huge fists. "The Spanish rascal! I'll teach him to flog an Englishman!"

"Well," remarked Herbert, smiling, "you may have the opportunity soon. By the way, do you know what place the Sea Queen will be likely to make for?"

"Yes," answered the Jack Tar confidently.

"Where?" asked Herbert eagerly.

"Portobello Bay, sir, at the head of the Majana River, just above the mouth of the Congo. She's bound there to get a cargo of slaves from King Gumbo, up the river."

"Do you think you could guide me there?"

"Certain, sir. I've been aboard the Sea Queen three months, and I've been there twice. The captain has been waiting for Gumbo to get the slaves ready for embarkation, and he's been cruising about while he waited, and plundering all the small craft he fell in with."

"I see. Then to Portobello Bay we'll go."

And through the gathering darkness the Little Wonder sailed onward to the coast on the track of the Sea Queen.

CHAPTER 3.

The Strange Schooner—The Slaver's Captive—Up the River—The Blockhouse.

CAPTAIN CARANDEL was well acquainted with the little stream called the Majana, and he found no difficulty in piloting his vessel up the river when the strange sail hove in sight.

The Spaniard believed that the new-comer was the Little Wonder, for he knew that Herbert Somers would be certain to chase him after his piratical attack upon the brig; but when he climbed to the masthead and viewed the approaching schooner through a telescope, he saw that he was mistaken.

The vessel was like the Little Wonder, but the sharp eyes of the slaver captain easily detected a difference. The cruiser's hull was painted in dark brown with a thin red line above the water-mark, while this vessel was black with a yellow line.

"It isn't the cruiser," he said to Baricas, when he descended to the deck, "but it's her counterpart in everything except paint. I never knew before that there were two vessels in existence that so nearly resembled the Sea Queen."

"I did," answered the Portuguese. "I heard a yarn about these three vessels. They were all built by a shipbuilder in Glasgow, who designed them to serve as tenders to men-of-war. One of them—the Little Wonder—is still doing that; this vessel was sold, and you bought it, you remember, at Sierra Leone; the third one was cut out by some unknown persons in the Bay of Fernando Po, and has never been seen since."

"What was her name?"

"The Black Swan."

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

"I expect this vessel is the Black Swan, then," observed Captain Carandel thoughtfully. "If so, I should think she is more likely to be a friend than a foe."

"Why, she could only have been cut out for an illegal purpose. I suppose she is a slaver."

"Perhaps; or a pirate."

"Yes, or a pirate. In either case she won't harm us."

"Why should she not?"

"We're birds of a feather, you know."

"I reckon that won't make much difference to 'em, cap'n." observed Hardin, the second mate of the Sea Queen. "We oughtn't ter trust 'em too far."

"Just so," coincided Baricas.

"Well," continued the Spanish captain, "we will keep on up the river, and then in all probability we shall not be seen by the men of the Black Swan. We don't want any fighting if we can help it."

"A leetle scrimmage would jest liven us up a bit," suggested the Yankee, who was a confirmed fire-eater.

"No. In a fight there is nothing to be gained but hard knocks," replied the prudent slaver. "Besides, I don't want to risk injuring our passenger."

Saying this, the captain went below, while Hardin winked at Baricas in a decidedly knowing way.

"Is it time yet?" he queried.

"Not yet," replied the Portuguese, grinning like a demon; "we'll let him run on for awhile. Wait till we get up the river, and then our gallant captain will hear something drop."

"How many of the men are for you?"

"Thirty, as yet. Others will follow."

"Good! And King Gumbo?"

"Yes."

"We're all right, then. Remember, the lady is to fall to my share," said the American.

A smile that was indefinable glided over the dark face of Antonio Baricas.

"Of course," he replied.

Evidently there was trouble brewing on board the Sea Queen.

While the two officers were conversing, the captain descended the hatchway, and entered a small cabin. The apartment was luxuriously furnished, and looked more like a lady's boudoir than a cabin in a slave ship. On a soft divan reclined a young lady, whose face, though pale and anxious, was yet of rare loveliness. Her eyes were deep blue, her mouth small, with red lips and pearly little teeth; and a mass of dark brown hair surmounted her shapely little head. Her form was graceful and lithe, her hands small and white; her features were regular and clearly marked.

An expression of suffering was upon her beautiful face; it changed to a look of dislike when the slaver captain entered.

"Well," began the commander, as he seated himself upon a couch, after closing the door, "how do you find yourself to-day, my fair captive?"

Alice Trent made no reply.

"Come," continued Carandel, "don't be contrary, little one! Answer me."

"Why do you persist in annoying me?" the captive exclaimed. "If you will not set me free, you might at least relieve me of your hateful presence!"

"A little spitfire, by Jove!" ejaculated the slaver, smiling in an amusing way. "But, really, *cara mia*, you shouldn't be angry with me. I am your devoted admirer I assure you."

Alice was silent.

"I did you the honour to make you a certain proposal a short time ago," went on the Spaniard; "allow me to renew it now."

"My answer is the same."

"You refuse?"

"I do, most decidedly!"

"You are very foolish, *mi muchacha*. If you marry me you will live a very happy life on board this vessel. You will be queen of the schooner; you shall have slaves to wait on you. All this if you will become Mrs. Captain Carandel."

"I never will!"

"I think I can make you change your mind," the slaver answered.

"I won't, and that settles it!"

"It does not settle it, my dear; not at all. I am not the sort of man to be foiled by a silly girl's whims."

"Why do you persecute me so? I have never injured you in any way."

"Haven't you?"

"No."

"Perhaps you have a bad memory. You do not know me, do you?"

"I do not—other than as Captain Carandel, the slaver," replied the girl.

"You don't recollect meeting me in the past—eh?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, you were very young at the time," the slaver observed, in a reflective sort of way, while a hard, grim look came over his face; "but if your father were here he would know me."

"Who are you?"

"At present I am Captain Carandel."

"Is that your real name?"

"No. Listen to me, Alice Trent. It was your father who made me what I am, and I have sworn to take vengeance upon him. You are in my power, and he will soon be. Then you will find out who Captain Carandel is!"

The girl shuddered as she saw the expression of diabolical ferocity that flashed across the face of the slaver captain as he spoke. He looked like a fiend.

"How has my father injured you?" Alice faltered, terrified by the look on Carandel's face.

"I was an officer in the Spanish Navy before I met Henry Trent. I owe to him my disgrace and dismissal. He caused me to become what I now am—a human wolf. And he shall soon suffer for it!"

"You cannot harm him; he is safe at Fernando Po," replied Alice Trent.

"You are mistaken."

"Oh, no! I was on my way there to join him when I was kidnapped by you."

"Perhaps so. But he was sent by the governor to make a survey of the coast a few miles north of here. I have dispatched a party of my men to meet him there. In twenty-four hours he will be at my fort up the river, and I shall get there about the same time."

"Can this be true?" murmured Alice, in dismay.

"Oh, yes; it's true!" exclaimed the Spaniard. "Through my spy in Fernando Po, I learned that he would be sent, and so I was ready for him. I found out from the same source that he expected his daughter in the *Titania*, from Liverpool, and so lay in wait for the vessel."

"Is my father a prisoner now?" asked the girl, with sinking heart.

"He is, and twenty-four hours hence you shall see him. Alice Trent, when I captured you I intended to kill you before the eyes of your father before I killed him. But now I have altered my mind. You shall marry me instead."

"Never!"

"I'll give you your choice—marriage or death."

"I prefer death a thousand times!" the brave girl cried.

"You have twenty-four hours to consider the matter in," the slaver answered, rising as he spoke.

"My answer then will be the same as now."

"We'll see about that." And then Captain Carandel went out of the little cabin, closing the door behind him with a slam.

Meanwhile, the schooner glided rapidly along between banks covered with verdure. Huge trees reared their branches aloft, mangroves lined the banks, and masses of foliage floated on the bosom of the stream. Here and there a hideous alligator or slimy lizard would be seen wallowing in the thick mud.

At the helm of the Sea Queen stood a tall, swarthy mulatto, named Panajos. He was a native of the country, and a skilled pilot. Avoiding the rocks and reefs of the foul, marshy channel, he steered the schooner in safety for more than four miles. Then the Sea Queen anchored.

At that spot the river widened into a lagoon, and on the north bank stood a strongly-built log-house, surrounded by a wooden palisade. Evidently the hut was intended to serve as a fort in case of emergency, for the windows were provided with thick shutters pierced with loop-holes.

"Fetch the prisoner on deck!" commanded Captain Carandel, when the schooner had come to anchor.

The order was at once obeyed. Alice Trent was conducted to the deck.

"Well, my fair one, you see your future home," remarked the slaver, pointing to the house on the bank.

Alice did not answer, but scanned the faces of the crew, as if appealing for aid. Her heart sank as her gaze turned from one villainous face to the next. Only one seemed to express sympathy, and that was the face of honest Bill Travers, the sailor who had been taken prisoner by Carandel and forced to join his crew. He was the cousin of the Jack Travers who had escaped to the *Little Wonder* a week before.

Alice Trent felt cheered by the sight. Here, at least, was a friend who would aid her if he could.

"Lower a boat!" ordered the slaver captain; and when this

ANSWERS

PLUCK.—No. 587.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

was done he handed the fair prisoner into it, and, when he had seated himself by her side, the two were quickly rowed ashore, and the captain, with affected gallantry, assisted Alice to land.

Five minutes later Alice Trent was securely imprisoned in a small apartment, behind a barred and bolted door.

CHAPTER 4.

The Corsair Captain—The Boy Slave—In the Bay.

AND now let us revisit the vessel whose appearance had caused the slaver captain to beat such a precipitate retreat from the little bay at the mouth of the Majana River. As stated, the new arrival was a schooner of the same size as the Sea Queen. Painted in small white letters on her stern was the name, "Black Swan." Her hull, bulwarks, masts, and blocks were all painted in sombre black, contrasting strangely with the snowy white of her decks and her polished brass capstan, that shone like gold in the rays of the midday sun. The vessel was armed, too, in precisely the same manner as the two already described; in fact, the three schooners were as alike as three peas.

Christo Cardoc, captain of the Black Swan, commanded a crew of sixty or seventy, mostly British and American, with a mixture of negroes and lascars, and a score of Malays.

Quite a young man was Captain Cardoc—not more than thirty—with a swarthy skin that showed his Southern blood. Clad in a gorgeous costume—velvet jacket, trimmed with gold lace, boots of Cordova leather, sash of crimson silk, vest of satin, and hat ornamented with a gold cord—he looked what he was, a pirate chief.

When the look-out aboard the Sea Queen discovered the Black Swan approaching the bay, the corsair was dining in company with his officers. Near Captain Cardoc sat Lucas Dinwiddie, first mate, an American from Virginia; Carolus Bernal, a Swede, the second mate; and Red Garcias, a Spaniard, third mate.

A lad dressed in a fanciful Eastern costume waited at table. The appearance of the boy was so striking that few would have passed him without a second glance. He was about sixteen years of age, tall, well-formed, lithe, yet firm-set; with a handsome face, and long, curly brown hair. His features were of the Anglo-Saxon type, bronzed by continual exposure to a tropical sun; his good looks, however, were marred by a sullen, discontented expression. Whenever he glanced at Captain Cardoc a look of hatred gleamed in his dark eyes. Saxon—for so the pirates called him—was the drudge of the ship.

Dinwiddie, when Saxon had left the cabin, remarked:

"That's a strange boy of yours, captain. Where did you pick him up?"

"At a sale of slaves at Mayomba," replied Cardoc the Corsair, puffing at his cigar.

"Why, the boy is white!"

"So I believe, although the dealer who sold him to me declared that he was a mulatto."

"Well, that's strange, I declare!" said Dinwiddie.

"How could he have got into the slave-dealer's hands?" observed Carolus Bernal.

"Can't say," replied the captain. "All I know is that the dealer sold him to me as a slave. I bought him because I thought he would be handy as a cabin-boy."

"You call him Saxon—is that his name?"

"I don't know his name. I call him Saxon because he has an English look. He's no more a negro than I am."

"That's plain," observed Red Garcias.

"Where are we bound now, captain?" asked Lucas Dinwiddie, changing the subject.

"To Portobello Bay," answered Cardoc.

"Not for slaves?"

"Oh, no! I've done trading in 'black ivory.' We're after something else now."

"Is it a secret, captain?" asked Bernal.

"Not at all. I intend to hunt up the schooner we've heard so much about lately."

"You don't expect to gain much by plundering a slaver, do you, captain?"

"Yes, I do; in more ways than one. Besides, I have a personal reason."

"Oh, I see!"

"An enemy of mine is aboard the Sea Queen," the pirate captain explained. "I intend to capture the Sea Queen to get at him. Then we can sell the vessel in some port, and pick out the best of the slaves to join our crew."

"What is the name of the man you are in search of, captain?" asked Dinwiddie.

"Juan Cavillo, a Spaniard. I saw him at Loango four months ago. I immediately followed him, intending to force

PLUCK.—No. 587.

him into a duel at once and settle the account that had been open so long. But he saw me, and, without waiting to fight, he sprang into a boat and rowed to his vessel, instantly weighed anchor, and stood out to sea. I was baffled for the time. I inquired the name of the schooner I saw him board, and found that it was the Sea Queen. That is why I know that Juan Cavillo is aboard the Sea Queen!"

"Land ho!" called out the man at the wheel at this moment.

"Come, let us go on deck, gentlemen," added Captain Cardoc, rising from his seat.

They ascended the companion.

The thin blue line that marked the coast was plainly visible from the deck.

"Steer for Portobello Bay," ordered Captain Cardoc. And half an hour later the Black Swan passed over the sand-bar and anchored in the spot which only an hour previous had been occupied by the Sea Queen.

CHAPTER 5.

The Polacca—At Close Quarters—Pursuing the Pirates—Saxon.

HERBERT SOMERS did not let the grass grow under his feet. He was an active young officer and eager to distinguish himself and gain promotion by capturing the slaver. After Jack Travers had expressed his confidence in his ability to guide the ship to Portobello Bay, where he expected Captain Carandel would go to get his cargo of "black ivory" on board, the young commander at once repaired thither.

The seaman knew the whereabouts of the bay pretty well, and before the week was out the Little Wonder was in sight of the coast a few miles from the Majana River.

Early on the day when the Black Swan entered Portobello Bay the look-out reported a sail in sight. Herbert made out through his glass that the vessel was a polacca—a small craft common in the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Guinea. The little barque was anchored in a small indentation of the coast, hardly large enough to be called a bay, and its only sail was furled. The British ensign floated lazily in the breeze at the masthead.

"Run in shore," Herbert said to Jack Travers, who was at the wheel. "We'll speak this vessel, and see if she has seen anything of the Sea Queen." The lieutenant had taken a great liking to the sturdy seaman, and had made him a sort of second officer on board the Little Wonder.

"Looks like a polacca, sir."

"Yes. I know a Government officer was going to be sent to this part of the coast to make a survey, as it was reported that there were several dangerous sandbanks hereabouts. Possibly that is the vessel of the survey party."

The Little Wonder skimmed over the water at a good speed, and soon ran into the open bay where lay the polacca. Just then the sound of firearms, rapidly discharged, fell upon their ears.

"Guns!" exclaimed Jack Travers.

"There's fighting going on somewhere!" cried the midshipman, Harry Estcourt.

Now that the Little Wonder was only a mile from the polacca, the seamen saw a boat full of men pull off from the shore and quickly row to the vessel.

Reaching the polacca's side, they rapidly boarded the vessel, and then arose a commotion on the little deck.

"Piracy, by Jupiter!" ejaculated Herbert.

Quickly he ordered his men to prepare for action. The honest tars gladly seized their cutlasses, eager for the fight.

A battle was now being waged on board the polacca. The crew—not more than a dozen men—were manfully resisting the assailants. Swiftly the Little Wonder approached the scene of combat, Herbert eagerly watching the fight. Suddenly the attacking party seemed to perceive the approach of the cruiser, hitherto unnoticed. There was a lull in the battle, and several made a rush for the boat; but Herbert Somers's vessel was now alongside, and the word given to board.

Cutlass in hand, the sturdy seamen swarmed into the polacca. The pirates (if such they were) were surprised at the sudden attack. They numbered about twenty, and were led by a dark-skinned, Italian-looking fellow, who was armed with a long, keen Toledo, with which he slashed about like one possessed. But their ferocity availed but little against the calm courage of the British tars.

Step by step the pirates were driven back. Some threw down their weapons and sprang overboard to swim ashore; others fought on in sullen despair. The polacca's deck was encumbered by corpses, and blood flowed freely. Herbert, a master of fence, disarmed the Italian leader, and bade him surrender.

The pirate drew a pistol and fired at the young commander, but missed. Then, with a bitter imprecation, the Italian turned to fly. Too late. Travers's heavy cutlass descended upon his head, and the sharp blade sank deep into his skull. With a groan the stricken wretch dropped upon the deck. That ended the battle. The surviving pirates—numbering six—threw down their weapons and begged for quarter.

Herbert ordered them to be put in irons and confined in the hold of his vessel.

Of the original crew of the polacca four were still alive. Herbert asked for the captain.

"He's gone ashore," one of the sailors replied.

"Gone ashore! Alone?"

"No, sir; Mr. Trent, the surveyor, was with him."

"Trent!" exclaimed the officer, remembering the name.

"Wasn't that the name of Captain Carandel's prisoner, Jack?"

"Yes, sir."

"What place did Mr. Trent go to?" asked Somers.

"Dunno, sir," answered the sailor who had spoken first.

"He went with Captain Watson on shore, to look round, not thinkin' of danger. Then these pirates came swarming out of the woods and surrounded them."

"Then they are prisoners?" asked Herbert.

"I expect so; unless they're killed. After that the pirates attacked us, and you know the rest," continued the sailor.

"Yes; but why did they attack you? There was nothing to be gained by capturing the polacca, for there are, I should think, no valuables on board, and they would not be likely to make the attack out of pure mischief."

"Jes' so, sir. I can't think why they troubled themselves about us."

"Even the vessel itself wouldn't be of any value to them," remarked Jack Travers; "it wouldn't fetch fifty pounds at a sale, I should think."

"You are right, Jack. But now we must go ashore and look for Captain Watson and the surveyor."

A boat was lowered, and Herbert took his seat in the stern-sheets, while the sailors took their oars. Twenty men accompanied him. In a few minutes the boat grated upon the sandy beach, and the seamen sprang ashore. Several of the pirates were seen running at full speed to the southward along the beach. The bluejackets wanted to pursue them, but Somers

did not think it safe. For all he knew, the woods might be full of pirates, and an ambuscade might be prepared for him. Meanwhile, the sailors spread over the shore to search for the bodies of the two missing men, for Herbert believed they had been killed.

A loud shout soon announced a discovery. Herbert hurried to the spot, and found a dozen seamen collected round a body lying on the sand.

"It's poor Captain Watson!" exclaimed Brown, the sailor from the polacca.

"The skipper of the polacca!" observed Travers.

The man was quite dead. A deep cut across the temple, from which the blood was welling slowly, told how he had died. The sand was trampled and disturbed, showing that the two men had made a stout fight for their lives.

But Trent! Where was he?

"I think I can see how it is," said Jack Travers to the lieutenant, in an undertone. He drew his commander aside, and continued:

"I know Miss Alice Trent was going to the port of Fernando Po to meet her father. I believe this Mr. Trent is the man."

"And so Captain Carandel has kidnapped both father and daughter?"

"That's about the size of it. He has some deep game on hand," the seaman went on. "I am certain he boarded the Titania, my ship, simply to take out Miss Trent. He has attacked the polacca to capture her father, you may depend upon it. I thought from his conduct to the young lady that he had some old grudge agin her or her family. I reckon that is so, and he has captured them to square the account. See?"

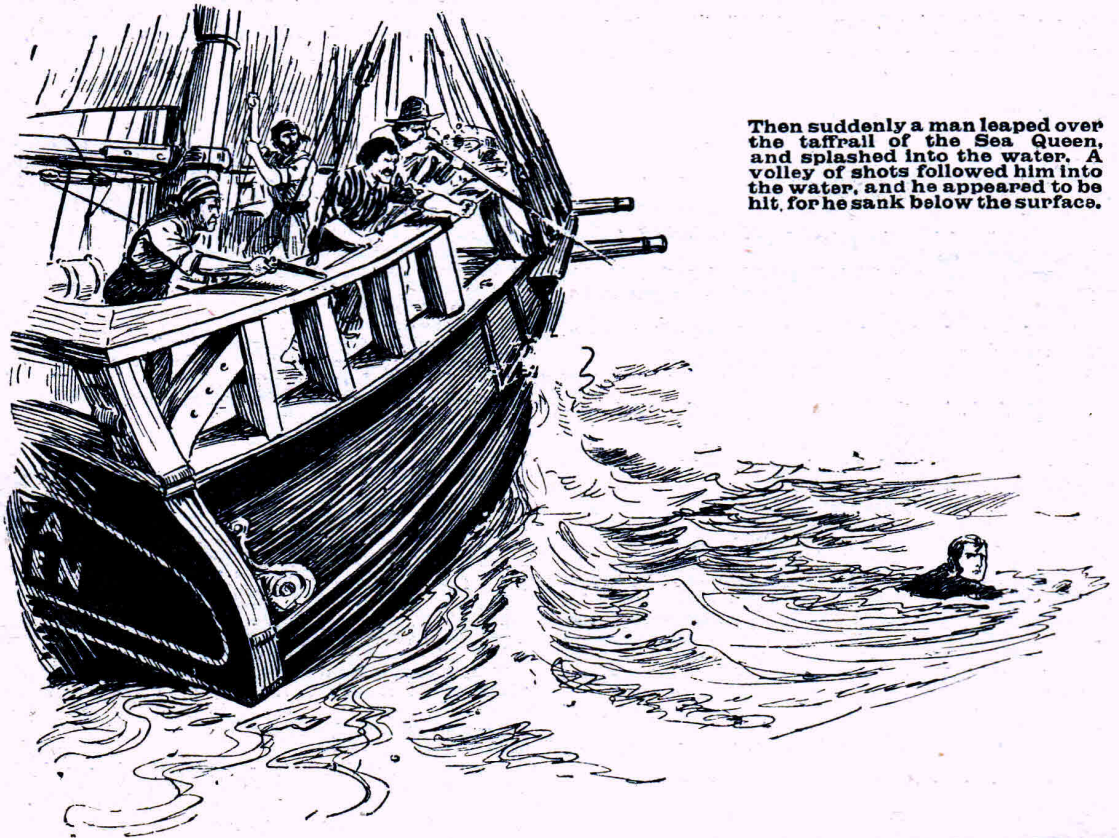
Herbert saw, and said so. "As a naval officer, it is my duty to pursue the pirates and save the prisoners," he remarked.

"So I should think, sir."

"It will be a splendid thing if we capture the Sea Queen," put in Harry Estcourt.

"You are right, my lad."

Shortly afterwards the men were called together, and, when informed of the commander's intention, were in great glee at the prospect of another brush with the slavers. The Little Wonder was to be left in charge of Daly, the old gunner, a seaman who had seen fifty years' service.



Then suddenly a man leaped over the taffrail of the Sea Queen, and splashed into the water. A volley of shots followed him into the water, and he appeared to be hit, for he sank below the surface.

"You will take the vessel into Portobello Bay," Herbert said just before leaving. "If you find the Sea Queen there, you know what to do; if not, anchor there and wait for me."

"Shall I go with you, sir?" asked Travers.

"Certainly! You will be useful, especially as you know Miss Trent."

Thirty men, armed to the teeth and carrying provisions for seven days, landed with Lieutenant Somers, and the expedition started off southward in the track of the slavers.

For several hours Herbert and his men pressed on through the dense West African forest, and then halted in a little glade for dinner and rest.

While the bluejackets were busy with their meal, a human form was stealthily approaching their camp. Gliding unseen through the wooded dells and natural arbours, the new-comer, all unsuspected, reached the edge of the little glade where the party had halted. He looked upon the sturdy seamen, and an exclamation of satisfaction came from his lips.

He stepped boldly forth and advanced towards the British sailors, who sprang up and seized their weapons at this unexpected intrusion.

"Hold!" he cried, lifting his hand. "I am a friend!"

"Who are you?" demanded Herbert.

"My name is Saxon, and I come to give you information concerning the pirate schooner," was the unexpected reply.

CHAPTER 6.

The Portuguese Plot—The Prisoner—An Old Foe.

ANTONIO BARICAS, the Portuguese first mate of the schooner *Sea Queen*, after the vessel was anchored in the lagoon, advised the captain to proceed at once to King Gumbo's town, up the *Majana*, and bring down the convoy of slaves.

"There is no telling how soon the cruiser may be upon us, capitan mio," the wily Portuguese said. "You know that fellow Travers escaped to the *Little Wonder*, and he has been here often enough to know how to guide a vessel here."

"Just so, Baricas," said Captain Carandel; "the sooner we are off the better, for more reasons than one. But we cannot get away yet. The party I sent to catch old Trent has not yet returned, and I must settle accounts with him before I leave here."

"How has he injured you, captain?" the mate asked curiously.

"Never mind that, Baricas!" Carandel replied brusquely; he did not like the prying of the first mate.

The Portuguese scowled, and changed the subject.

"When will you go to King Gumbo's place?"

"To-morrow, I think," was the reply.

Baricas sought out Hardin, the second mate.

"He says he's going to-morrow," he began.

"The blow can be struck then," observed the American. "Gumbo will act straight by us, if the inducement is sufficient."

"I have offered him the price of two cargoes of slaves," said the Portuguese.

"Humph! Don't you think it possible that the old skin may make a bargain with the skipper when he gets to the village?"

"I think not. Anyhow, I'll see that the men that accompany Carandel are those who are not in the secret. While he is absent I and my party can seize the schooner and weigh anchor."

"Good! And when the *Sea Queen* is yours I am to have a thousand doubloons from the strong-box. That was the agreement, wasn't it?"

"Yes. And don't fear but I'll keep faith with you as long as you do with me."

And then the wily plotters separated, evidently well satisfied with the progress of their scheme.

Antonio Baricas had won nearly half the crew from their allegiance to the slaver captain, and, backed by them, he intended to seize the vessel during the absence of her legitimate commander. He was glad of Hardin's help, but as to his reward, the wily Portuguese had his ideas about that, too. "Honour among thieves!" is an old saying, but not always a true one.

Just an hour before sunset a man came on board to report that the party had returned, with Mr. Trent a prisoner. A glint of triumph and anticipated revenge shone from the black eyes of the slaver captain.

"At last!" he muttered. "Where is he?" he asked the man.

"We've put him inter the room next to the lady," replied the man, who was one of those who had participated in the attack on the *polacca*, the failure of which he proceeded to relate to Captain Carandel.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

"Confound the luck!" said the captain. "So it was the *Little Wonder* that attacked you?"

The slaver captain was thoughtful for a few minutes. Then he called Baricas, and re-told Williams' story. "You see," he concluded, "the sooner we get away from this neighbourhood the better. I will go to Gumbo's first thing in the morning. We must get the slaves on board, and clear out as quick as we know how."

"How many men will you take?"

"Thirty. I half suspect that the old black rascal means to play us false, for I don't like the tone of his letter, so let the men be all well armed."

"I'll see to it, captain."

Baricas went off in high glee, and Captain Carandel went ashore to the house wherein his prisoners were confined. Entering, he went up a ladder to the second floor, for stairs there were none. He unlocked and unbarred a door, and strode into a small, cell-like apartment, where a man lay on the floor bound hand and foot. The rays of the setting sun streamed in through a small window and lighted the little room.

"Who comes?" said the prisoner.

"I do, Henry Trent," replied the slaver. "Maybe you'll recognise me," he added, bending down and bringing his face close to that of Trent.

A sudden startled exclamation broke from the bound man. "Ruez Carmen!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, Ruez Carmen!" answered the slaver captain, in a tone of ferocity. "You remember me, do you not?"

"Yes, villain, I do!" cried Trent. "Where is my boy that you kidnapped?"

"I'll tell you," answered the Spaniard. "Listen, Henry Trent! It was you who caused my dismissal from the Spanish Navy."

"It was not! You brought it upon yourself by your rascality!" interrupted Trent.

"I swore to take vengeance upon you for my disgrace," went on the slaver. "I vowed to wreck your life as you had wrecked mine. You had two children—a girl and a boy. The boy I stole from your home—"

"What have you done with him?"

"I'll tell you soon. I took him ten years ago and carried him aboard my schooner. I took him with me to Loango, and left him there."

"Left him there? Marooned him on the coast, you mean?"

"Oh, no! Worse than that. I sold him as a slave."

"Sold my son as a slave!" the prostrate man gasped.

"That was the first blow," continued the slaver captain, glaring at his victim, his eyes inflamed with hatred and malicious triumph. "Then I left you in peace until now. Of course, you heard that the *Titania* had been robbed of its fair passenger by Captain Carandel?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am Captain Carandel, the slaver."

"You? You are Ruez Carmen!"

"Yes, that was my name in the old time; but on engaging in the slave trade I changed it to Carandel. Do you see, mi amigo?"

"Then my daughter is in your power?" faltered the unfortunate captive.

"Yes; and I am going to marry her."

"She will never consent."

"Oh, I think I can persuade her to do so!" replied Carandel with a horrible grin. "You don't know how persuasive I can be at times."

"Wretch! If you harm a single hair of her head, I will—"

"Don't threaten, Senior Trent," interjected the Spaniard. "You are quite powerless in this matter, and you know it."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the prisoner.

"Kill you!" was the ferocious rejoinder.

"When, and how?"

"Not yet. You shall see the priest unite your daughter and myself in wedlock. You shall rue the day you provoked the enmity of Ruez Carmen!"

Saying which the Spaniard left the room, carefully closing the door after him and bolting it.

He left Henry Trent a prey to despair. The unfortunate victim of the slaver's revenge lay upon the floor in silent misery.

Darkness descended, and enveloped sea and land in a sable mantle.

Then Trent heard a footstep outside the door. The bolts were silently withdrawn, and the door slowly opened.

"Hist!" came a deep whisper. "Silence! I am a friend."

Then a dark figure strode into the room, and the door was closed again.

CHAPTER 7.

Saxon Escapes from the Corsair Schooner—The Black Swan Goes Up the Majana—The Arrival of the Little Wonder.

CAPTAIN CARDOC, the commander of the corsair schooner Black Swan, after anchoring in the little bay vacated by the Sea Queen, did not remain idle. He had taken a great deal of trouble to find out as much as possible of the movements of the schooner of Captain Carandel.

The corsair had formerly been a slaver, and had had dealings with most of the negro chiefs from the Congo to the Gaboon. Indeed, it was King Gumbo himself that gave him information of the Sea Queen's intended visit to the River Majana. The pirate now resolved to anchor in Portobello Bay, and send his boats up the river to find out if the slaver was there.

Saxon tried hard to obtain permission to go with the boats. "Oh, no, my lad!" answered the corsair chief, when the boy slave made the request. "You cost me too much money to lose, you know. You intend to cut and run, if you get a chance."

"I am not your property!" growled the boy, in an angry tone.

"Oh, yes you are, boy!" the pirate replied. "I bought you and paid for you, and if that doesn't make you my property I'm much mistaken."

"You had no right to buy me. I am not a negro, and, if I was, you have no authority over me. Slavery is illegal, and I am as free as you are."

"Don't be saucy, my boy, if you value a whole skin!" cautioned the corsair.

"I ask for my freedom! When I am free I can work, and earn money to pay back to you whatever you gave for me."

"I tell you I won't let you go!" Cardoc said angrily. "And now go away and don't annoy me any more, or I'll have you flogged!"

"You won't give me my liberty?"

"I won't, confound you!"

"You won't let me go with the boats?"

"No."

"Then there is only one thing for me to do," continued the young slave.

"Well?"

"And I'll do it."

Wrought up to a pitch of desperation, the lad snatched the long dagger from the pirate's belt and struck a furious blow at Cardoc's breast. This movement took the pirate captain by surprise; he was not prepared for such an act on the part of his victim. The captain was cruel by nature, and it delighted him to taunt the high-spirited lad. He had gone too far at last.

Had not Lucas Dinwiddie, the first mate of the Black Swan, struck aside the dagger ere the boy's arm descended, the corsair captain would have gone to his last account. Before the lad could strike again, Carolus Bernal seized him from behind and pinioned his arms.

"You young rascal!" shouted Captain Cardoc, mad with rage, as he drew a pistol from his belt and cocked it.

"Are you going to kill him, captain?"

"Yes!"

"Fire!" exclaimed Saxon defiantly. "Death is better than slavery."

"Blow out the young cub's brains!" said Carolus Bernal. "Got any prayers to say?" he asked.

Saxon looked round as if seeking an avenue of escape. Bernal had released him, and stepped back to get out of the line of fire. The boy suddenly rushed to the side and sprang into the water. He was a good swimmer. Down he went into the depths, and swam under water as long as he could towards the shore. Only a hundred yards separated the schooner and the land. Saxon had covered a third of the distance, when he rose to the surface to breathe.

"Lower a boat!" yelled Cardoc, in a rage.

"Fire after him!" said Dinwiddie.

The corsair took aim at the swimmer and fired. The ball splashed into the water a few feet from the boy, who continued his strenuous efforts to reach the shore. By the time the boat was lowered Saxon had scrambled up on the rocks. Without stopping to look back, he bounded away and disappeared into the woods.

"Confound the boy!" exclaimed Cardoc. "It's no use pursuing him. We could never catch him in the forest."

"He's worse off there than here," observed Dinwiddie.

"He can't live long in the woods."

"No," said Red Garcias; "the lions or the snakes will soon make an end of him."

"I hope so!" the captain exclaimed vindictively. "The young rascal! To attempt my life!"

The corsair captain then gave orders to prepare for the expedition up the river. Two boats, under the charge of Dinwiddie and Bernal, pulled up the river with muffled oars, and just before sunset reached the entrance of the lagoon where the Sea Queen rode at anchor.

"There she is!" exclaimed Dinwiddie, pointing to the slaver.

"They're too strong for us to tackle now," the American remarked. "We had better return and report to the skipper, I reckon."

Accordingly the party returned. When they were once more on board the schooner, the captain was informed of what they had seen.

"If that vessel is there the river must be navigable for our ship also," Captain Cardoc observed thoughtfully.

"Yes, captain, that is so."

"Then in the morning we will go up the river," said the pirate captain.

And at the first streak of dawn the Black Swan was in motion. A fair breeze blew from the sea, and the schooner's passage up the Majana was easy if not rapid.

Portobello Bay was left vacant by the departure of the Black Swan, but not for long.

Daly, who had the command of the Little Wonder, had some difficulty in discovering Portobello Bay, and it was not until after nightfall that he approached it.

He decided not to take the risk of running in after dark, so he stood off and on at the entrance until morning was well advanced. The high rocks at the mouth of the bay concealed the Black Swan from the eyes of those on board the Little Wonder.

Half an hour after Captain Cardoc's schooner had sailed up the Majana stream the Little Wonder glided into the bay and anchored there.

It was not long before the roar of cannon awoke the echoes of the woods. Startled by the sound, the cruiser's crew knew not what to make of it. Daly decided to run his vessel up the river to the scene of combat.

And so it happened that the Little Wonder followed in the wake of the outlaw schooners.

CHAPTER 8.

The Young White Slave—Despatching a Messenger—Deep in the Forest—The Fort—in the Hands of the Enemy.

LIEUTENANT SOMERS, the young commander of the Little Wonder, and his followers heard the words of the lad Saxon in astonishment.

"What do you know about the pirate vessel?" Herbert asked, looking curiously at the boy.

"A great deal," was the prompt reply. "I've been on board her for years."

"You are British, if I mistake not?"

"Yes, sir, I believe I am. I heard the captain say he thought so, too, the other day."

Saxon related the story of his life and the incidents of his escape to the officer. The sailors listened, and many were their expressions of anger at the conduct of the corsair captain.

"You are British seamen," said the boy, when he had concluded his story. "Are you after the pirates?"

"Yes."

"I can lead you to the Black Swan, if you like!" exclaimed the boy, his eyes flashing with pleasure at the prospect of giving up Captain Cardoc and his crew into the hands of the cruiser's men.

"The Black Swan!" ejaculated Herbert.

"Yes, sir; the vessel I came from."

"I thought you came from the Sea Queen."

"No, sir; I belonged to Captain Cardoc, the corsair," replied the boy.

"Where is the Black Swan now?" asked Somers.

"At anchor in Portobello Bay."

"Do you know aught of the Sea Queen?"

"Yes, a little. She is a slaver, and Captain Cardoc intends to attack her. He thinks she is somewhere up the Majana, and he is now sending his boats up the river to find out."

"All this confirms your idea," Herbert said aside to Jack Travers. "If the Sea Queen is hidden somewhere up the Majana, it would be easy for her men to be the parties concerned in the attack on the polacca."

"Yes, sir. I know Captain Carandel has a stronghold on the bank of the Majana," Jack Travers replied. "And then the young man says the corsair captain is goin' ter go for the slaver captain. If we let them hammer at each other till one's settled, then we can step in and collar both."

"That's a good idea, Travers," declared the young officer.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

"We'll do that, I think. But we'll go on and scout round the slaver's stronghold a bit first. When we strike, we must make a clean sweep."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Will you come with us, my boy?" Herbert asked, addressing Saxon.

"Certainly, sir; I'll be glad to!"

"Very well. Now, Jack," resumed Herbert Somers, "I think I'll send a man to wait near the mouth of the Majana for the Little Wonder, and warn Daly when he comes not to attack the pirate, but to merely guard the mouth of the river so that she cannot escape."

"But if the pirate sees her he'll take the alarm," said Jack.

"She won't get there before dark, and the gunner has too much sense to attempt to enter the bay after nightfall. He won't go in till dawn to-morrow, and by that time I suppose the Black Swan will be miles up the river, engaged in attacking the Sea Queen."

"That seems to be about right, sir," assented the clear-headed sailor. "Who will you send?"

"Walter Robinson, I think. He's a good man, and a sharp one. Call him, will you?"

Robinson was called. He was a big, brawny sailor, with an honest, intelligent face and muscular limbs.

"Robinson," said Herbert, "I have picked you out to do a dangerous service because I know you to be a brave man."

The honest tar touched his hat and blushed at the compliment.

"I allers try to do my duty, sir," he replied.

"I know that, or I should not have selected you for this. Now," continued Herbert, "I want you to go to Portobello Bay from here, and wait on the shore until the Little Wonder comes into the bay. Then you are to go on board and deliver a note, which I will give you, to Mr. Daly, who is in charge of the schooner."

And Herbert hastily scribbled a few lines on a leaf of paper he tore from his notebook, folded it, and handed it to the sailor, who, again touching his hat, departed.

"Now!" said Herbert briskly, "we must be moving."

The day was now nearly over. The sailors resumed the order of march, and the thirty-two men trudged on through the darkening forest.

As night deepened, thunderous roars, that told of the presence of the king of beasts, resounded through the recesses of the forest. The hoarse cry of the chimpanzee mingled discordantly with the shrill screech of the tiger-cat, the snarl of jackals sounded dismally, and the hiss of startled serpents was often heard. Fireflies flashed and glittered amongst the thick leaves of the baobab and the light, feathery frondage of the palms.

Awed by the solitude and grandeur of the magnificent, untrodden forest, the seamen kept silence. Not a word was heard as the stalwart bluejackets traversed the wood.

Herbert Somers was at the head of the line, and Jack Travers next.

Half a mile after mile was so covered. At nine o'clock, Jack made a signal to the men to stop. He raised his arm and pointed forward. They had reached a spot where trees were fewer, and the sound of dull splashing told of the proximity of the river.

"What is it, Jack?" asked Herbert, as he glanced in the direction indicated by the seaman's outstretched finger.

"See that big palm?" asked Travers. "I know it well. It ain't a hundred yards from the house of Captain Carandel—his fort as he calls it."

"Then we are almost upon them!" exclaimed Herbert excitedly. "How many entrances are there to the house?"

"Two—back and front. But the place is surrounded by a strong palisade about ten feet high."

"Listen, my men," said Herbert, addressing the sailors, who all crowded close to listen to his words. "In that den of iniquity yonder are two prisoners at the mercy of that villain, Captain Carandel, the Spanish slaver and pirate. It is our duty as British seamen to effect their rescue. We may have to contend with odds of two to one, but that will not daunt British hearts. I feel convinced that you are all ready to do your duty, even if death stands in the way. Is it not so?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came in a deep whisper from the assembled tars. A cheer trembled upon their lips, and only the knowledge that the least noise would alarm the pirates stopped its utterance.

"Now, I am going to have a look around before we make an attack on the slaver's den," continued the youthful commander. "You come with me, Jack. I'll leave you, Marvell, in charge of the party. Keep here in this spot, and don't make any noise that will attract attention."

"Shall I stop here, sir?" asked the lad Saxon.

"Yes, my boy," answered Herbert.

"Come, Jack," he added. And then the two men rapidly strode away through the gloom and disappeared from sight.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

Left alone, the sailors sat down on rocks and fallen trunks of trees to await the return of their leader.

An hour glided past, but still the young commander remained absent; another followed, and yet another. The sailors in vain listened for returning footsteps. Midnight came and passed, but still no sign of Herbert or Jack.

At last old Mark Marvell gave vent to his apprehensions in words.

"What kin have become of the cap'n?" he said uneasily. "He said he'd be back in an hour or two, and he's bin gone four now."

"Mebbe the slavers have got him," suggested a seaman named Andrew Benson.

"I hope not," growled Marvell. "If so, we orter try ter save him; but he gave orders for us not to move from here."

"Let's wait till daylight, and if he's not here by then we'll search for him," one of the sailors remarked.

"I s'pose that's what we had better do," answered Mark Marvell. "We can't do nothin' afore daylight!"

If old Mark had counted his men at that moment he would have found one missing. Saxon, suspecting that Herbert and his companion had fallen into the hands of the slavers, had followed in their track to ascertain the truth.

Let us now follow the fortunes of the two bold men who had thus ventured into the lions' den.

Leaving their companions, Herbert and Jack Travers went swiftly on until the forest was passed. They then found themselves in a little clearing just at the back of the block house. A few yards to the right the waters of the Majana glistened as they murmured and tumbled among the tall bushes and mangrove bushes. There was no moon, and the gloom was intense. The house loomed up before them like a huge shadow, dimly outlined against the dark background of the sky. It was closed and silent, and showed no sign of being inhabited.

"Looks as if it is deserted," Herbert remarked, as they came to a halt.

"Not it," replied Jack; "the slavers are there right enough. Look!" And Jack pointed to where the Sea Queen rode at anchor in the lagoon. The schooner was just visible in the gloom.

"Hallo!" whispered Jack; "there's somethin' up!"

A sudden commotion was visible in the house; lights gleamed in the windows, and voices were heard. Noiselessly creeping round to the front, the two watchers tried to learn the cause of the disturbance. The front gate of the palisade stood wide open, and a crowd of men were collected near it. Several torches lighted up the scene.

Two men stood in the midst of the clamorous crew, whose villainous faces and numerous weapons showed them to be sailors belonging to the slave ship. The slavers were making excited gestures, and seemed to be menacing the two men.

"By Jupiter!" ejaculated Jack Travers, as he and his companion came in sight of the animated group. "There's my Cousin Bill. And I'll bet that other chap is Mr. Trent."

"An attempted escape, I suppose," remarked Herbert, looking with interest at the scene. "It looks as if the slavers intended to kill them. Jack, you had better hasten back to where we left the men, and fetch them up. The prisoners there must be saved at all hazards."

"I'll be off like a rocket, sir."

"Will you?" said a mocking voice beside them. They turned in amazement and alarm, and beheld the dark, saturnine face of Antonio Baricas, the first mate of the Sea Queen.

"Oh, no, you won't!" continued the Portuguese, with a malevolent grin. "I happened to run across you as I came from the ship," he explained, "and I decided to take you in and introduce you to our captain."

"I'll never surrender!" grated Jack.

"Never!" echoed Lieutenant Somers.

The Portuguese laughed jeeringly.

"Mira!" (behold) cried he; and a dozen men stepped from the thicket, with muskets levelled at the two brave Britishers. "Surrender, or die!" cried the Portuguese.

Resistance was hopeless. A single volley would settle the question if the two men showed fight.

"We give in!" snapped Herbert, throwing down his cutlass angrily.

"Shows your good sense!" grinned Baricas.

Four of the ruffianly slavers grasped the arms of the two prisoners, and, surrounded by the wild, lawless crew, they were hurried on to the fort.

But the swarthy scoundrel Baricas had no suspicion that the capture had been seen by anyone not of the slaver crew. Nevertheless, the slave lad, Saxon, from the branches of a widespread banyan, had witnessed the whole transaction.

CHAPTER 9.

The Escape and the Recapture—In Durance Vile—Saxon's Plan.

HENRY TRENT, bound and helpless on the floor of his cell, watched his mysterious visitor with eager eyes. Had the slaver captain returned to kill him at once? He knew that Captain Carandel only spared him for the present in order to inflict further tortures upon him.

Closing the door, the intruder turned on the light of a bullseye lantern.

"You are Mr. Trent?"

"I am," answered the prisoner, wondering what his visitor wanted. At the first glance he saw that the new-comer was not Captain Carandel. He beheld instead a brawny, sturdy seaman, with a bearded, bronzed face.

"Father of Miss Alice Trent?" added the man.

"Yes."

"I am Bill Travers. I am a British sailor taken prisoner

"My child!" exclaimed Mr. Trent, rushing into the room. The next moment the girl was clasped in the arms of her parent.

"There's no time to lose," said Bill. "At any moment we are liable to be discovered by those scoundrels downstairs. Follow me!"

He led the way out of the room to a window which overlooked the enclosure at the back of the house.

"Ten feet below this window there is a shed," he whispered. "Once we reach that we can easily get to the ground."

"But how are we to reach it?"

Travers indicated a rope which hung out of the window, secured to a stout beam within. The cord was thick and strong, capable of supporting a dozen men.

"Slide down?" asked Henry Trent.

"Yes."

"But Alice—"

"I will assist the lady," interrupted the seaman; and he swung himself out of the window. "Give her out to me,"



Wrought up to a pitch of desperation the lad snatched the long dagger from the pirate's belt, and struck a furious blow at Cardoc's breast.

by the pirates," the man went on. "I have come to help you to escape."

"Thanks, friend! And my daughter?"

"And Miss Alice as well, of course."

Without further parley, the sailor severed the prisoner's bonds with his sharp clasp-knife. In a few minutes Henry Trent rose to his feet, a free man.

"Have you weapons?" he then asked.

"Here, take this!" And Bill thrust a long cutlass into his hand. "Don't hesitate to use it if necessary. Miss Alice is in the next room."

"Let us go to her, I pray!" exclaimed Trent hastily.

"Right you are!" And Bill put out the lantern, so that its light should not betray them to the pirates. The two then crept towards the cell in which the fair prisoner was kept. In a minute the door was open.

"Hush!" said Bill, warningly, fearful lest the startled girl might cry out, and thus alarm the ruffians below.

"Who comes?" came a tremulous voice from the darkness within.

he continued, holding to the rope with his legs and right hand, and keeping the left arm free to support Alice in the descent.

The young lady hesitated a moment, and then slid out of the window, clutching the rope with both her little hands, while the strong arm of the sailor was passed around her slender waist. Down they went, slowly at first, then more rapidly. Travers had taken the precaution to knot the rope in many places, so that the descent, although he was so encumbered, was not very difficult. Once safe upon terra firma, Bill said:

"Wait a minute here, while I go up and help your dad."

Alice assented, and the big sailor climbed up the rope again as nimbly as a monkey. Trent was waiting anxiously at the window.

"Is my daughter safe?" he asked, as the seaman reached the window again.

"Safe and sound, Mr. Trent," replied the bluejacket, as he clambered in. "Now, you next. Grip the rope tightly, and I'll help you out!"

Trent was not a particularly active man, but the knowledge that his life depended upon his exertions caused him to make an effort, and so he performed the descent in safety. Bill was about to follow, when he heard a creaking on the ladder that formed the stairway.

He listened intently, and ground his teeth with fury as he realised that someone was ascending to the second story.

"Hang it!" he muttered, under his breath. "To be baulked now, just at the moment of success! By Jupiter! I won't be taken again!"

He crept towards the ladder, reaching it just as a burly, half-drunken Basque sailor came up. Crouching in the darkness, the Englishman remained unseen by the slaver, until it was too late. The Basque had just caught sight of the dark figure, and was about to open his mouth to utter a yell, when the huge fist of the British sailor struck him between the eyes.

The blow was delivered with all the force of the sturdy seaman's brawny arm, and the unlucky ruffian staggered back stunned. He would have fallen had not Bill caught him in his arms. Gently and noiselessly the sailor lowered the insensible Basque to the floor. The man lay as still as a log of wood.

Bill knew that the slavers below would soon discover the absence of their comrade, so he made haste to get out of the window and join his friends outside. They had been anxiously awaiting his appearance, alarmed by the delay.

"Anything happened?" asked Mr. Trent.

"Yes," answered Bill shortly. "Come on!"

Quickly they passed round the house, keeping close in the shadow of the circle of palisades until they reached the gate in the front.

This Bill proceeded to unfasten. Barely had he done so than an uproar in the house told them that the escape had been discovered by the slaver crew. One of the men, going upstairs to find out what had become of the Basque, found him lying insensible on the floor. The open window and the rope showed the means used to leave the house by the fugitives.

"Out—out! Search for them!" yelled the slaver captain.

And as the crew rushed out of the house like a pack of wolves, he slid down the rope and reached the ground. The noise of the opening gate showed the direction taken by the escaped prisoners. The slaver captain dashed across the yard, and reached the gate just as his followers came up. Bill had succeeded in opening the heavy gate, but before the three runaways could pass out they were surrounded by the howling crew.

"Checkmate!" cried Captain Carandel, as he seized the arm of Alice.

The poor girl uttered a scream of terror, and, overcome by the bitter disappointment, fainted dead away.

The men laid hold of Bill Travers and Henry Trent, who did not attempt to resist. The odds were too overwhelming for that. And a few minutes later Antonio Baricas and the Yankee, Hardin, coming ashore from the schooner with a dozen others to learn the cause of the disturbance, captured Herbert Somers and Jack Travers in the manner described in a previous chapter. The Portuguese brought in his prisoners in triumph. Captain Carandel's eyes sparkled as he saw them.

"Ah, so you are here again, Travers!" he cried. "And who is this other, Baricas?"

"Don't know, captain. Found them together over yonder, and brought 'em in!"

"He's the skipper of the Little Wonder, sir," said one of the slavers who had fought against Herbert on the deck of the polacca.

"Is that so?" demanded Captain Carandel, turning to the young officer.

"It is," answered Herbert calmly.

"You came here to attack my schooner—eh? You have companions near at hand?"

"Perhaps."

"Is it so? Answer me, sir!"

But Herbert was silent. The Spaniard scowled darkly. He did not like the bold words and independent bearing of the man who was completely at his mercy. He grasped the hilt of his cutlass threateningly.

"Will you tell me if you have any friends near at hand? You had better do so."

"I'll tell you nothing," answered Herbert.

"Take them into the house!" cried the slaver. And the two men were dragged away along with Bill and Mr. Trent. Alice was removed to her cell. In their hurry the ruffians locked all the men in one room. Then they returned to the captain.

"Search the woods!" ordered Captain Carandel. "I don't believe that that infernal British officer came here with only

Pluck.—No. 587.

one companion. Most likely there is a strong force stationed near at hand. Be careful; keep your eyes open, and if you see anything suspicious return at once and report to me."

The slaver crew began to search for the men whose presence they suspected. It was now past midnight, and the night was intensely dark. Captain Carandel sent a man on board the Sea Queen to tell the twenty men left in charge of her to be on the watch for an attack. He left twenty well-armed men in charge of the little fort, and with the rest began to hunt for Herbert's party.

But the slaver captain did not intend to brave the dangers of the forest at midnight. He knew that the thickets abounded with poisonous serpents and ferocious animals, and so he contented himself with standing under a tree, where a fire had been ignited to light up the surrounding jungle.

"We must find out whether there is any danger of an attack to-night," the slaver captain remarked to Antonio Baricas, who stood by his side. "If there is, of course I shall not be able to go up to King Gumbo's village to-morrow."

"I don't think there's anybody near," the Portuguese replied.

As the reader knows, the intended mutineer was anxious that the slaver captain should go to the village of the sable monarch.

"Those two fellows," he continued, referring to Herbert and Jack, "evidently followed up the party that attacked the polacca."

"Evidently," replied Carandel. "And don't you think it unlikely that only those two would come?"

"Not at all," replied Baricas; and here he spoke out what he really thought. "In my opinion they merely came to scout round, and spy on our position before leading a party to attack us. I think that young Somers would not leave less than half his crew on board the Little Wonder, and in that case he could not have more than twenty or thirty to follow him ashore. With such a puny force he would be a fool to risk an attack before finding out the force of his opponents. So he came on, with that man Travers as a guide, to get a look at our defences, intending to return and bring on his men afterwards. How does that strike you?"

"Well, that seems about correct," Carandel admitted. "If so, we have nothing to fear from Somers' men. Still, I'll let the men look round a bit. There's nothing like being sure."

"And if they find nobody you'll go to Gumbo's place to-morrow?"

"Yes. This locality is too dangerous to stay in longer than can be helped."

Little did the two scoundrels dream that a spy was listening to every word they uttered.

Saxon, the boy slave, was in the branches of the banyan-tree under which they stood.

He heard the plans of Captain Carandel, and, without waiting to hear more, he slid down the trunk of the tree and darted away, unnoticed in the deep gloom. He ran swiftly, and in ten minutes reached the place where he had left his friends.

"Hallo, my lad!" exclaimed old Mark Marvell, as he appeared. "Where have you been?"

The boy quickly explained. Marvell listened in astonishment.

"What will you do?" asked Andrew Benson.

"Go and rescue the captain, of course."

"Don't go to-night, sir," interposed Saxon. "I heard the slaver captain say that he would be going to King Gumbo's village to-morrow. The slaver's force is treble yours; but if he takes a large force with him to-morrow the odds will be less."

"True, youngster," assented the grizzled old seaman. "But in the meantime they may kill our captain, you see."

"They won't," replied the lad; "they have locked him up in a room in their house. They won't dare to kill a Government officer. If you attack them now, your defeat is certain. I counted more than eighty men, and they are all on the alert now."

Marvell looked grave at this information. He was a brave man, but he did not care to risk an attack upon such overwhelming odds. Such a proceeding could only end in defeat, which would leave matters worse than ever.

"Are you sure that the slaver skipper is going away to-morrow, my lad?" he asked dubiously.

"Quite," replied Saxon. And then he related how he had heard Captain Carandel and the Portuguese discussing their plans while he was concealed in the branches of the banyan.

"Besides, to-morrow Captain Cardoc, the corsair, will be here, and if you attack then you'll take them between two fires."

"But if, as you say, the slavers are searching the woods for us, they're bound to find us here."

"Not if you all climb up trees."

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

This suggestion was acted upon, and the thirty seamen concealed themselves in the wide-spreading boughs overhead. The slavers in their search once passed the place where they were hidden, but nothing was noticed in the darkness. It was not until the light of dawn once more appeared in the sky that the sailors descended from their uncomfortable perches.

CHAPTER 10.

The Mutiny—Arrival of the Black Swan—A Battle Royal—The Corsair's Victory.

THE projects of Antonio Baricas seemed about to prove successful. The slaver captain, as his men had found no traces of the enemy, came to the conclusion that Herbert and Jack were indeed alone. Under these circumstances, Carandel had no hesitation in going to the village of the Royal slave-dealer.

Ordering two boats to be lowered and manned, intending to proceed to the negro town by water, he took his place in one of them just as the sun rose, and the men pulled up the river.

Once the boats were lost to view among the mangroves, Antonio Baricas breathed more freely. He felt that everything was working out just as he desired. He sought out Hardin, and the two mutineers quietly went to work. Nearly fifty men had been left behind. Of these, twenty were in the house and thirty on the schooner. All but five of the latter were the confederates of the two mates. Baricas bade his adherents arm themselves, and then called the men all on deck and made a speech, setting forth that he had decided that it would benefit the whole ship's company if Carandel were replaced by a new captain, that dealing in slaves was precarious work, and was growing more risky every day.

If the crew would stand by him, he would assume the command of the Sea Queen, hoist the black flag, and fill their pockets with gold.

"Who's for me, lads?" he concluded.

His confederates gave a cheer, and those who were not in the plot, finding themselves in the minority, joined in to ensure their own safety. And so Antonio Baricas was unanimously elected captain of the Sea Queen, vice Captain Carandel, deposed.

This done, the new commander and his followers landed and proceeded into the house. There a similar scene occurred. The men who were faithful to the captain did not care to risk their lives in a contest with the larger force of mutineers, so every man sided with the usurper.

Hardin then claimed his reward. But the treacherous Portuguese had not the slightest intention of keeping his word with his former confederate. He refused to comply with Hardin's demands, and the Yankee, in a boiling rage, struck him in the face.

That was just what Baricas wanted. As he was now firmly established as the captain of the Sea Queen, Hardin's conduct was rank mutiny, and punishable with death. He did not give the unfortunate man time to prepare. As the Yankee struck him Baricas drew a dagger, and plunged it to the hilt in the breast of his ally.

Hardin uttered one yell, and fell a corpse at the feet of his ruthless murderer. This dreadful deed avenged the unruly crew, and showed them that the new captain meant to use his authority to the full.

By this time the Black Swan, which started up the river at daybreak, had reached the lagoon where the slave schooner rode at anchor.

"The Black Swan, by thunder!" cried Baricas, in dismay, as the corsair schooner glided into the lagoon with the emblem of rapine flying at her peak.

But, whatever his faults, the Portuguese was no coward, and he prepared to face the danger with a bold front. He acted with quick decision when the pirate schooner was first sighted. He bade his men prepare to fight for their lives, feeling certain that the Black Swan meant to attack him, for already he could descry signs of warlike preparations on board the pirate vessel.

He placed ten well-armed men in the log fort on shore, and then, with the rest of the men, numbering about forty, got the Sea Queen into fighting trim.

"Sea Queen, ahoy!" rang out the voice of the corsair captain, when only half a mile of muddy water separated the two vessels.

"Ahoy, the Black Swan!" shouted back the Portuguese. "Have you a man aboard your vessel named Juan Cavillo?" sang out Captain Cardoc.

"No!"

"You lie, confound you! If you give up Juan Cavillo into my hands I'll not attack you!"

"I tell you there's nobody of that name aboard this vessel," declared Baricas, who knew that none of the men of the Sea Queen bore that appellation.

"Very well, I'll come and look myself."

"Try it, and you'll meet with a warm reception!" the Portuguese cried grimly.

No more words were wasted, but both parties prepared for war. The decks of the Black Swan absolutely swarmed with men. Antonio Baricas ground his teeth with rage when he saw that the pirates mustered nearly twice the number of his own crew.

The battle was opened by the Black Swan. A ball from her long thirty-pounder went between the masts of the Sea Queen, cutting away a spar and killing two men.

Then the Sea Queen, guided by the skilful hand of the mulatto pilot, Panajos, glided across the bows of the Black Swan, and a broadside was discharged just at the right moment, raking her fore and aft. Terrible was the havoc aboard the corsair schooner. Fifteen men were killed or disabled, the spars and rigging were badly torn, and Lucas Dinwiddie, the first mate, had his left arm carried off by a cannon-ball.

A fierce oath burst from the lips of the corsair captain, as he surveyed the scene of ruin and devastation around him.

Then the Long Tom, the thirty-pounder of the Sea Queen, came into play. The first ball pierced the mainmast of the corsair and made a hole through it. The pirate was armed with a long gun similar to that on board the Sea Queen. Captain Cardoc sighted it with his own hand, and sent a ball skipping over the water towards the slaver. A howl of dismay went up from the throats of the slaver at the result; for the cannon-ball had stuck the Long Tom and tumbled it over.

Quick to improve the occasion, the corsair sent shot after shot into the Sea Queen. Baricas replied as well as he could with his small guns, but such puny weapons were no match for the terrible cannon on board the Black Swan.

One of the well-aimed balls struck the slaver's foremast close to the deck, and with a terrific crash it went by the board, causing the Sea Queen to heel over to starboard until her yards touched the surface of the water.

"Cut away the wreck!" yelled Baricas, in a paroxysm of rage, realising that the fate of the Sea Queen was sealed.

The slaver crew attempted to obey; but, before the broken mast could be cut free, the mainmast, weakened by the strain, fell as another ball ploughed through the wood.

This disaster completely disabled the Sea Queen, and left her at the mercy of her antagonist. A broadside from the pirate crashed through her hull, and she lay almost on her beam-ends. Then the Black Swan ranged up alongside the doomed schooner, and the despairing ruffians heard the voice of the corsair captain calling for boarders.

"Men," shouted Baricas, in a voice that rang like a clarion across the lagoon, "we are all doomed! No quarter will be shown. As we must die, let us die sword in hand!"

A frenzied yell answered this speech, and the ruffians rushed like tigers to repel the attack. One last broadside the Sea Queen fired as the Black Swan came alongside, and the leaden balls went through and through the hull of the corsair, laying low a quarter of her crew. Then a horde of armed men, headed by Captain Cardoc, Carolus Bernal, and Red Garcia, came pouring upon the decks of the luckless slaver.

"Forward, my men!" roared the corsair captain. And he rushed headlong into the thick of the fray, brandishing his cutlass and dealing death on every side.

"Fight to the last!" yelled Baricas, as he crossed swords with Carolus Bernal.

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"No quarter!" retorted the pirates, pressing forward upon the men of the Sea Queen.

Pirates and slavers were mingled in a fearful conflict. Amongst the scattered spars and the wreck of the broken masts, over the bodies of the dead and dying, on decks slippery with blood, the battle raged. The slavers, though terribly outnumbered, fought like tigers, and for ten minutes the fight went on with unabated fury. Every man knew that quarter would not be given, and none felt inclined to show mercy. Cutlasses were dyed crimson, pistols were emptied, and the number of the combatants grew fewer, as one by one they fell to the deck, dead or wounded.

But it was inevitable that the superior force would win. Every slaver was attacked by two pirates, and, of course, the unequal conflict could only end one way. A bullet from Cardoc's pistol disabled the sword-arm of the Portuguese captain, and then Red Garcias struck him over the shoulder with his cutlass. Baricas, knowing that everything was lost, made a bold dash for life and liberty. He suddenly rushed to the side, and, wounded as he was, sprang into the water. Striking out sturdily, he made for the shore, and then his men, demoralised by the desertion of their leader followed his example. Twenty or thirty men leaped into the lagoon and swam towards the shore, which they were destined never to reach.

"Fire after them! Give them a volley!" the corsair captain shouted.

Every one of the pirates who possessed a firearm discharged it at the fugitives, and a perfect storm of pistol-shots and musket-balls swept the surface of the lagoon. When the smoke had cleared away not a single swimmer was to be seen.

"They're ended," said the pitiless pirate chief. "Now, search the vessel, and see if anyone is concealed. I'll give a hundred doubloons to the man who finds Juan Cavillo!"

The ruffians spread over the vessel, eager to earn the reward.

"May he not be among those who are drowned, captain?" said Red Garcias.

"No," replied the corsair, "for if he had been on deck I should have recognised him. If he is not below, then he is not on board this vessel."

"Perhaps he is in that log-hut on the shore," suggested Garcias.

"That is what I think. If I can't find him in this ship I shall immediately attack that building," answered the corsair captain.

The pirates ransacked the Sea Queen from stem to stern, appropriating whatever they took a fancy to, and slaying all the skulkers they found below decks. But no Juan Cavillo was to be found.

"Am I never to find him?" muttered the corsair captain fiercely.

"Maybe this Cavillo sails under another name, captain?" suggested Red Garcias.

"Ah, that's not unlikely!"

"Boats coming down the river!" sang out one of the pirate crew at that moment.

"It must be the slavers returning!" exclaimed the corsair captain excitedly. "Yes, yes," he continued, in a tone of exultation; "I can see Juan Cavillo among them!"

"Then you've got him at last!" remarked Garcias.

"At last—yes, at last! Men, load the gun, and aim at the leading boat!"

A surprise awaited the returning slavers.

CHAPTER 11.

The Ambush—A Precipitate Retreat—The Little Wonder Anchors in the Majana.

WHEN Captain Carandel rowed away from the Sea Queen at dawn that morning he little anticipated the tragic scene that would be enacted before his return.

The village of the native potentate was nearly twenty miles from the lagoon where lay the Sea Queen. Before he accomplished a third of the distance, Captain Carandel fell into a cunningly-prepared ambush.

Though he had suspected King Gumbo of treacherous designs, he believed that he had nothing to fear until he reached the village of the sable monarch. He was mistaken. The wily king had placed five hundred men on each bank of the Majana, about five miles from the anchorage of the Sea Queen, and, as the two boats came fairly abreast the negroes' position, the two bands discharged volleys of arrows at the unlucky slavers. A bitter imprecation burst from the captain as he found his forebodings realised.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

The slavers, having no protection against the arrows of the blacks, suffered great loss as the well-directed shafts poured into the boats. At the first discharge, fifteen men were killed and several more wounded.

"Back!" shouted Captain Carandel.

The sailors, seeing that their lives depended upon swift action, quickly turned round the boats, and got out their oars. Aided by the current, they rapidly beat a retreat.

But the black warriors were not inclined to let them off so easily. They ran along the banks, yelling and shooting. Two or three men let go their oars and fell back, and when at last the boats outdistanced the negroes, more than half the party had gone to their long account. The corpses were thrown into the river without ceremony, and the boats, thus lightened, made rapid headway. The men rowed with all their strength, for they were anxious to get beyond reach of the ferocious savages.

At last the lagoon was gained, and then their startled eyes fell upon the disabled Sea Queen, and the Black Swan lying alongside her.

"Diavolo! What has happened?" the slaver captain cried.

Barely had the words left his lips when the roar of a cannon smote on their ears, and a ball came across the intervening space, and plunged into the water a few yards from the boats.

"It is the Black Swan!" muttered Carandel.

"The pirate!" cried one of the men.

"We are doomed!" howled the slavers, in despair.

Then came another cannon-ball, striking the leading boat amidships, and cutting it in two.

"Quick, my lads! shouted Captain Carandel, to his companions in the second boat. "To the shore—to the shore!"

"We are doomed!" cried the terrified ruffians.

"Fools! Row to the shore, and we may yet be saved! You forget the fort!"

Thus urged, the slavers bent to their oars, and in two minutes the boat grated on the beach. As the men leaped ashore another ball from the pirate struck the boat, and smashed in one side.

"To the fort!" cried Captain Carandel.

At the top of their speed, the ten men from the second boat, with two who had swum ashore from the first, darted towards the house.

Had they arrived an hour earlier a volley would have greeted them; but, since the end of Baricas and the capture of the Sea Queen by the corsairs, the mutineers in the fort were glad to have their captain back again. So the gate was opened, and the fugitives rushed in.

The captain at once asked to be enlightened as to what had taken place during his absence.

Panajos, who had escaped meeting the fate of his comrades on board the Sea Queen by swimming ashore, told Carandel the story of his first mate's treachery.

"The scoundrel! Where is he?"

"In the lagoon. He was killed by the pirates on board the Sea Queen."

The slaver captain knew that Panajos was a thorough-paced liar, and he had some shrewd suspicions that the men before him were not so innocent as they pretended to be; but, as he was in need of the services of all, he appeared to be satisfied, reserving his vengeance for some future day.

"Now, my men," said he briskly, "the pirates will attack us soon, and we must be ready for them. They will show no mercy, so we must defend ourselves to the last gasp. Get your guns, and go to your posts!"

The men obeyed. Only sixteen of the slaver band were now left, but that number was sufficient to defend the little fort.

From the roof of the house, Captain Carandel saw two boats lowered by the corsairs and filled with men. With Cardoc in command of one and Red Garcias of the other, they approached the shore.

The face of the slaver became deadly pale as he caught sight of the swarthy face of Christo Cardoc.

"Diavolo! He of all others!" he almost groaned, gazing at the corsair captain with eyes full of fear and dismay.

"I am doomed beyond hope, with that demon amongst my foes. But I'll die game! Like the cornered wolf, I'll turn and fight, and die rending my enemies!"

The pirates landed out of range of the fort, and took up their position under the shelter of some huge trees a hundred yards from the fort. The band numbered forty, all well armed.

Then the long gun of the Black Swan opened fire upon the

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

wooden palisades that encircled the little fort. A furious oath came from the Spaniard.

"We can't stand that!" muttered the wretched man, in despair. "But I'll have my revenge before I die!" he added, with a sudden ferocity.

He descended from the roof to the ground. "Fetch out all the prisoners!" he ordered.

Herbert Somers and his companions had all spent the night in the little cell, and, when the cannonade awoke them in the morning, they began to hope that the Little Wonder had arrived and attacked the slavers.

Herbert climbed on Jack Travers' shoulders, and looked out of the window, which commanded a view of the lagoon. He saw the engagement between the Black Swan and the Sea Queen, and witnessed the defeat of the latter. He remembered what the boy Saxon had told him of the intention of the corsair captain to attack the slave-traders.

"The pirate vessel has arrived," he told his companions. "The rogues are falling out, and perhaps we may get a chance to escape in the confusion. The slavers have got the worst of it!"

Shortly after that the door was unlocked, and the five prisoners taken out into the courtyard.

Meanwhile, with guns double-shotted and every man at his post, the Little Wonder awaited in the bay the approach of the slavers or pirates, determined to dispute their passage, even if they came in company.

CHAPTER 12.

Cardoc's Story—Ruez Carmen's Revenge—The Pirates' Victory—Last of the Slavers.

THE men who landed from the Black Swan collected just out of range of the blockhouse.

"When the walls are beaten down you mean to make an assault, captain?" asked Red Garcias.

"Yes, mi amigo. I would wait to starve them out, but that might take months to do. There can't be very many of them left, and our attack will be certain to carry their position."

"So I think, mi amo. Are you sure that your man is in yonder house?" the lieutenant asked.

"Quite. I saw him in the returning boat, and he was one of those who reached the house in safety."

"I s'pose he's done you some serious injury, captain?" remarked Red Garcias curiously.

"He has," answered Cardoc moodily.

All this time the long gun aboard the Black Swan had kept up a continuous cannonade. Both the gate and the palisades now showed signs of weakening. Meanwhile Captain Carandel was not idle. He knew that the fort must soon fall into the hands of the pirates, and so he resolved to take immediate revenge on his old foe Henry Trent.

The cause of his hatred of the Englishman may be briefly told.

Many years before Henry Trent had met Ruez Carmen—for that was Captain Carandel's real name—at a ball in Madrid. Carmen was then an officer in the Spanish Navy. A quarrel had arisen between them, caused by the fickleness of a certain signorita, and the Spaniard challenged the Englishman to fight a duel. The challenge was accepted, but the Spaniard bribed Trent's second to omit the bullet when he loaded the pistol. The consequence was that Trent was wounded, while the officer remained uninjured. But the treacherous second confessed afterwards what he had done, and Ruez Carmen was arrested, disgraced, and dismissed from the service. Smarting under this treatment, he resolved to take vengeance on the Englishman. He first stole the son of Mr. Trent, then aged six years, and sold him as a slave to a native chief of Loango, one Modoca. Afterwards he kidnapped Alice Trent and her father, intending to force the girl into a marriage with himself, and then slay her parent with his own hand.

But while the attention of all the slavers was directed to the prisoners, the pirates, headed by Captain Cardoc and Red Garcias, were swiftly approaching the stronghold.

Captain Carandel realised that he was alone with his five prisoners. For a moment he was dismayed. Then he slung his shoulders with philosophic indifference.

"At least you shall not escape me!" he cried; and he drew his sword and rushed upon Trent. But as he did so Captain Cardoc and his men came swarming over the broken palisades.

A long pistol gleamed in the hand of the corsair captain, and as he sprang inside he took aim at Captain Carandel and fired.

The slaver's sword dropped from his nerveless grasp. He halted, and staggered back a few paces, vainly clutching at the air in the effort to retain his balance. Then a hoarse, choking yell of bitter agony burst from his throat, and he reeled and fell to the ground, where he lay still.

"That's the end of Juan Cavillo!" quoth Christo Cardoc triumphantly.

"Ha!" he added, as he caught sight of the bound prisoners. "Whom have we here?"

Herbert explained the matter to him.

"Well, we'll finish Carandel's work for him," said the brutal ruffian. "Here, men, load your guns, and give these fellows a volley! Kill all except the girl."

The pirates prepared to obey this inhuman order, and the prisoners had given themselves up for lost, when suddenly a sound broke on the air which struck dismay to the hearts of the corsairs, and caused Herbert to utter a shout of joy.

It was a sound which can never be mistaken—a hearty cheer from the throats of British sailors.

CHAPTER 13.

Rescue—A Startling Recognition—The Conclusion.

AS the Englishmen charged in at one side of the building the dismayed pirates surged out at the other. Captain Cardoc tried in vain to rally his men. The victory was rapid and complete. Quickly the prisoners were freed from their bonds.

Saxon had been one of the foremost in the attack, and when the pirates retreated he was the one to untie the bonds of Mr. Trent. The prisoner, seeing the face of the boy, started violently.

"Who are you?" he cried agitatedly.

"I am called Saxon," replied the boy, in surprise at the strange emotion of the other.

"But your real name—what is it?"

"I don't know."

"Is it possible that this is he?" murmured Henry Trent, with deep emotion. "Alice"—turning to his daughter—"does not this young man's face seem familiar to you?"

"Yes," replied Alice, after looking at Saxon.

"Who does he resemble?"

"Yourself," was the reply.

"I am right," said Mr. Trent. "Boy, where did you come from?"

"Captain Cardoc bought me as a slave from a native chief, named Modoca," replied Saxon, trembling with a strange emotion.

"I thought so!" cried Trent, his face illumined with joy. "It is Henry, my lost son!"

A groan from Captain Carandel interrupted him. The slaver captain was still alive.

Trent knelt beside Ruez Carmen, and the eyes of the slaver slowly opened as he returned to consciousness.

"Ruez Carmen," said Trent earnestly, drawing the lad close to the slaver, so that the glazing eyes of the dying man were fixed upon him, "do you recognise this boy?"

"It is Henry Trent, the son of my foe," murmured the slaver, speaking to himself. "My plot of vengeance has miscarried."

There could be no further doubt. Mr. Trent had at last regained his long-lost son, the little Henry who had been stolen and sold into bondage by the slaver captain.

Captain Carandel was buried by the side of his ancient enemy Christo Cardoc, the corsair captain.

The English sailors, with Mr. Trent and his son and daughter, made a voyage down the Majama River, in one of the pirate's boats. As Herbert Somers expected, they found that the Black Swan had been captured by the Little Wonder.

Herbert once more had the pleasure of pacing the deck of his own vessel. He had another pleasure, too—the great pleasure of welcoming aboard his craft the lovely girl whom he had rescued from a living death, and who was destined, before the Little Wonder regained old England's shores, to become the wife of Lieutenant Herbert Somers. And in their great happiness these two forgot the perils through which they had passed and the dangers which had threatened them.

THE END.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

THE GREAT PANJAMDRUM!

By REGINALD WRAY.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUTTON MITCHELL.



A Side-Splitting School Story, introducing
JOLLY DICK JOLLY.

CHAPTER 1.
The Raid on Dormitory D.

IT was night. A full moon shed its silvery refulgence through the windows of Dormitory D, singling out, with beams almost as bright as those of day, every sleeping form lying, in a double row, on either side of the long room. All save one were wrapped in more or less—probably less—innocent slumber.

The solitary exception was Dick Jolly, the schoolboy ventriloquist. Though the hour was midnight, sleep had not as yet set its seal on his eyelids.

It was not an uneasy conscience which kept him awake, but real, downright, unadulterated misery.

He had now been at the school a week, but he had been unable to secure the goodwill of his comrades.

It is true he had made two friends—Harry Western, who had been drawn to him by his discovery of his ventriloquial powers, and round-faced, good-humoured Jerry Summers, to whom he had confided the secret of his wondrous gift of throwing his voice where he listed.

But the former, being a Fifth-Former, was far too important an individual to be seen much in the company of a mere tadpole, as all new boys at Shoreham College were called, whilst Jerry Summers, having only just emerged from the tadpole stage himself, had not sufficient influence with the other boys to affect Dick's position one way or the other.

But even misery will not keep a healthy boy awake all night, and he was in the act of dropping off when he was aroused by the rattle of the door-handle of Dormitory D.

The next moment he had sprang to a sitting position, and was gazing, tongue-tied—whilst streams of icy-cold water seemed to be trickling up and down his back—at a strange, weird, headless figure, clad from top to toe in white, which entered through the slowly-opening door.

Another and another followed, until a dozen white figures were pacing with solemn steps down the dormitory.

A cry of terror rose to Dick's lips, but he checked it ere it could find utterance when he saw one of the "ghosts" trip over its flowing draperies and sprawl on the floor, whilst an anything but sepulchral voice whispered:

"Peter Pips, you asinine ass, you'd bungle a funeral!"

"That's right, blame me!" growled the fallen "ghost."

"The beastly sheet slipped. Ow! Ouch!"

PLUCK.—No. 587.

The exclamation of pain was drawn from the speaker's lips by the application of toes more solid than any self-respecting ghost would own to his ribs.

His superstitious fears gone, Dick Jolly clasped his hands round his knees and watched the procession approach, an appreciative grin on his lips.

A boy in the adjoining bed, awakened by the noise of Peter Pips' chastisement, sprang up in bed; then, seeing the ghostly forms so close at hand, uttered a frenzied yell and dived beneath the bedclothes.

The following morning the young hero declared "he knew what the white figures were, and was only kidding"; but if so, his acting was peculiarly good, and suggested the stage as his ultimate career.

The grin, which had changed into an amused laugh, vanished entirely from Dick Jolly's face as the leader of the weird procession came to a halt at the foot of his bed, and, pointing a long, not over-clearly but accusing finger at him, said, in melodramatic tones:

"Come! The Great Panjamdrum awaits thee!"

"Then the Great Jampanceonundrum will have to wait!" laughed Dick defiantly.

"Aren't you afraid?" demanded the spokesman of the headless ones.

"What! Of a pack of kids in nightshirts?" cried Dick contemptuously.

"Lord Low Forgetter, remember the culprit's words," said the leader, turning to a figure immediately behind him.

"They are recorded, O Turnip Head," returned the one addressed.

"Good, O Parsnip Pate!" replied the leader. Then, turning to Dick, he demanded:

"Are you downhearted?"

"No!" thundered Dick, in as loud a voice as fear lest he should arouse the monitors in the cubicle at the end of the room would allow.

"Then wait until you appear before the Great Pan, etc., and you jolly soon will be," was the ominous reply. "Seize the miscreant, and bind him with bonds of triple brass, or if the B. T. B. is not forthcoming, with towels."

Dick Jolly sought to spring out of bed, but four white-shirted ones were upon him, and, despite his struggles, he arms tied behind him.

He was then hauled roughly to his feet and led from the room, leaving his awakened room-mates to discuss whether

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

they should avenge the insult to their dormitory or let things slide.

Opinions were at first about evenly divided, for the temptation to join in the lark was well-nigh irresistible. Had the prisoner ravished from their midst been anyone else but Dick Jolly, every boy present would have voted unanimously for war; but, alas, so great was the prejudice against the unfortunate acrobat millionaire that the "peace-at-any-price" party prevailed, despite all that Jerry Summers and some half-dozen other boys, who were beginning to realise that despite his wealth Dick was not really a bad sort, could do to prevent them.

CHAPTER 2.
Before the Great Panjamdrum.

IN the meantime Dick Jolly had found himself being hustled down a long corridor which ran along the front of the house, then through a small door, into a room in which were only some half-dozen beds.

At least, Dick supposed there were only half a dozen, though he could not exactly say, for they were piled on the top of each other at one end of the room, to form a throne for a strange, weird, grotesque figure, perched somewhat uncertainly upon a chair covered with what looked like, and most certainly was, a gaudy travelling-rug.

The strange being boasted an enormous head of a peculiarly ferocious and awe-inspiring character, the effect of which was somewhat marred by empty holes where its eyes should have been, whilst a pair of gleaming and very human orbs appeared between its jagged and animal-like teeth. His body was as large as pillows could make it, and his lower extremities were hidden by a loosely-draped blanket.

Although not quite easy in his mind as to what all these preparations portended, Dick Jolly was more excited than frightened, and was, moreover, determined that, whatever took place, the laugh should not be entirely on the side of his captors. To this end he kept his eyes and wit alike in full working order.

At present he was bound and gagged; but when, in obedience to the hollow-toned order: "Unbind the captive, caiff!" from the enthroned one, the towels which both gagged and bound him—were unloosed, he lost no time in getting to work.

The Great Panjamdrum—for such Dick doubted not the big-headed one was—raised a hand which looked ludicrously small attached to so large a body, as he ordered:

"Let the bugler bugle, but lightly withal, lest the powers that be, and didn't oughter be, should be aroused."

Immediately a boy standing on the lower tier of beds raised a long cube of foolscap to his lips.

"Taranta-ra! Taranta-taran-tara!" came in strident tones that echoed through the room from the paper trumpet.

It was followed by a shrill yell of terror, as the bugler, dropping his foolscap trumpet, jumped back as though it had stung him, and after almost falling from the bed but retaining his balance almost by a miracle, stood gazing at it in speechless amazement.

"You giddy ass! Do you want to rouse the whole house?" remonstrated the Panjamdrum.

Some half-dozen headless apparitions, who answered the summons with a haste which somewhat marred the dignity of the proceedings, said the same, only more so.

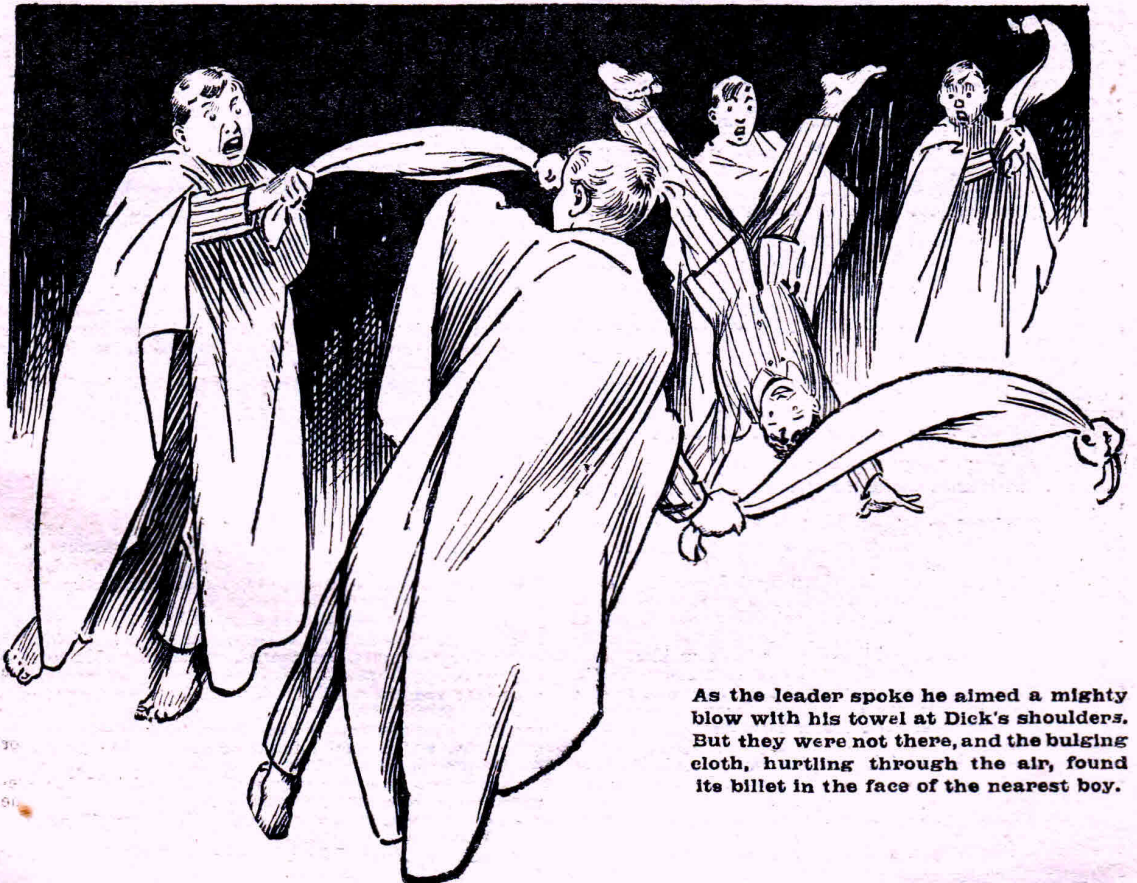
"But I only whispered into the beastly thing," explained the unfortunate bugler, picking up the paper trumpet and examining it carefully.

First he looked down the big end, then tried the small, and, seeing nothing, placed it once more to his lips.

Louder, clearer, more resonant than ever, a stirring call, composed of parts of the "Alert," the "Stable Call," and "Come to the Cookhouse Door, Boys!" issued from the trumpet.

"It's alive! The beastly thing is haunted!" yelled the alarmed boy, as, hurling the paper cone from him, he sprang to the floor, and, beside himself with terror, jumped under the beds, shaking the Great Panjamdrum's throne to its very foundations.

But even there the mysterious sounds followed, though so low as to be inaudible to all except the victim, who,



As the leader spoke he aimed a mighty blow with his towel at Dick's shoulders. But they were not there, and the bulging cloth, hurtling through the air, found its billet in the face of the nearest boy.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

thoroughly unnerved, wriggled from his place of concealment and darted from the room.

Dick Jolly smiled, well pleased. He had scored first trick in the game, at any rate.

"Recorder, log Smithson Senior for trial to-morrow night. We verily believe the precocious infant sought to pull our august leg," ordered the Great Panjamdrum.

Then he fixed his eyeless sockets on Dick Jolly.

"Prisoner at the bar," he continued, in the hollow tones to which we have been referred, "after the long and patient hearing which would probably have been given to your case had we, in our wisdom, thought it necessary, I, as the one and only Great Panjamdrum, have found you guilty on the following counts:

"Item: That on a certain date, unknown to this honourable court, you did dare to be born.

"Item: That having been born you did dare most obstinately to continue to live.

"Item: That persisting to live—a most heinous offence, and one in itself worthy of severe punishment—you did venture to enter, your paternal and maternal relatives aiding and abetting you, the sacred precincts of Shorebay, to the great disgust of the three hundred odd boys who grace that famed seat of learning with their presence.

"Item: That you are a cad, a sneak, a beast, a bounder, a common or garden acrobat; and, as such, quite unfit to mix with gentlemen."

"Finished?" asked Dick coolly as the other paused for breath.

"Not with you, sweet youth. When I have you will know it. I— For goodness' sake, one of you chaps massacre that cat!" he added, as a most appalling catawauling arose from just outside the door.

Crying that the cat would wake the masters, and perhaps bring the monitors into the room, two or three of the Panjamdrum's attendants flung open the door, only to find that no cat was there.

"As I was saying, or rather was about to say, when—" "Micou-ow—micou!"

As the shrill sounds rang out through the night the Great Panjamdrum uttered an ejaculation of annoyance, whilst his more or less faithful followers hastened once more to the door.

In vain. No cat was there, yet when they closed the portal the fearful mewling was resumed.

The headless ones looked at each other from beneath the yokes of their nightshirts, and, though unwillingly, the bravest amongst them advanced into the landing, and looked up and down it.

No feline serenader of the night was there, but they scurried back, for a handle rattled; and barely half a second after they had regained their dormitory a door was thrown angrily open, and the voice of Mr. Puntole was heard declaiming:

"Shoo, cat! Get away you beast!"

For some minutes Dick's captors stood about the room, scarce daring to breathe, the more nervous trembling in their slippers, for if curiosity drew the master into their room they might find it difficult to invent a plausible excuse for the state of the furniture.

But no heavy footstep was heard approaching, no harsh voice demanded "what they meant by it," or threatened condign punishment in the morning; so, though with less energy than before, they prepared to resume the rag.

Dick Jolly had won another trick, but had still a card or two to play.

"Prisoner at the bar!" began the Great Panjamdrum.

"Bah!" Dick made one of the attendants on the great one say.

The G.P. glared angrily at the delinquent, who thrust his head through his shirt collar and looked around him in dismay; then continued:

"As I was saying when that sheep bleated, you have been found guilty on every count, and, though we are inclined to deal mercifully with you, as you have, undoubtedly, a bee in your bonnet, the sentence of the court is—"

But "bee in your bonnet" had given Dick an idea.

The next moment the Great Panjamdrum ceased his oration, and began wagging his huge head from side to side in a most uncouth way, for from within the mask now came an angry buzzing which could only emanate from an irate bee or wasp.

It never entered the mighty Panjamdrum's head that bees and wasps are cosily tucked up in their little beds during the cold weather, but, expecting every moment to feel the sting of the angry insect, he clutched wildly at his mask, and, grasping it on either side, drew it off with such frantic violence that he scraped a slice off one side of his somewhat prominent nose.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

But even this sacrifice availed him nothing.

"Ou—Ah—Help! The beastly thing has gone down my neck!" he yelled, springing up and clutching wildly at his throat.

Alas, the action was as ill-advised as it was rash. The bedstead dais which sustained the throne was not built for rough usage, and collapsed, sending the mighty Panjamdrum literally rolling at Dick's feet, and bringing that unworthy potentate's supporters in a confused mass of waving arms and legs on the top of him.

Now was Dick Jolly's chance, for he could easily have made good his escape, when by a nimble spring he had escaped being rolled over by the pillow-encased boy; but, alas, the temptation was more than he could resist, so, instead of making for the door and seeking safety in flight, he sprang on to the prostrate, pillow-enswathed boy and danced a Highland fling on his unnaturally distended form, crowing with triumph as he did so.

But his triumph was shortlived.

Furious at the indignity to which he was subjected, the fallen potentate seized Dick by the ankle, and that all-too-daring youngster fell prostrate on the floor with a force which for a moment knocked all the breath out of his body.

And now the Great Panjamdrum—known as Jason Smith in private life—turned the tables, and himself, on poor Dick, rolling over him from head to foot, and then from foot to head, and repeating the process until the daring Boy Ventriquist felt as though he was being operated upon by a peculiarly soft yet heavy mangle.

That was bad enough in all conscience, but when, with subdued shouts of joy, the other boys took a hand in the game and, laying sacrilegious hands on the G.P. himself, continued the rolling process, Dick thought it high time to put an end to the game. This he did by wriggling on to his face; then rising suddenly he arched his back with a force which sent the unfortunate Jason Smith careering through space, until he was brought up with a shock, which drew a disgusted "Ouch!" from his lips, on to his dishonoured throne.

CHAPTER 3.

A New Way to Run the Gauntlet.

CONTENT that the thought that he had so far come off with flying colours, Dick Jolly's modesty urged him to withdraw from the scene of his exploits.

Probably his would-be tormentors would have been glad to get rid of one who had proved himself so doughty a foe, but for the fact that they would be the laughing stock of the whole school when Dick told his tale the following day. Consequently the boys nearest the door threw themselves upon him as, dodging from side to side, he made a dart for the window.

In vain he sought to avoid their outstretched hands; the room was too small, his foes too many, and after a few minutes' desperate struggling he found himself a prisoner once more.

But if the Great Panjamdrum had lost his head, his decapitated court had found theirs, for above the hitherto headless shoulders appeared flushed and laughing faces, in whose merry eyes Dick fancied he detected more friendliness than he had ever seen there before.

The fact of it was the court of the Great Panjamdrum was a regular institution, which had been held by the boys of the Fourth Form ever since Shorebay College had been founded, for the good of the souls of tadpoles and others who broke the school's code of honour or made themselves objectionable in any other way; and Dick Jolly was the first boy who had ever succeeded in breaking up the court, and bringing ridicule upon it's mighty head.

Whilst two of the boys mounted guard over the prisoner in one corner, the others held a whispered consultation in another. Presently a stout, thick-set lad, who had been chosen leader vice Jason Smith, kicked out, beckoned the guard to approach with their prisoner.

"In the name of the Fourth Form, I have to offer you our most abject apologies, Dick Jolly," he began. "Owing to circumstances beyond our control, we are not able to carry out our full programme. This is the more to be regretted as, after long and anxious thought, we had prepared some quite new and original tortures for your special benefit, in which the gentle punishments of the modern Chinese—i.e., faying alive, etc., and the mild forms of the old-time Inquisition—were judiciously blended."

"I'll have a bob each way on Judicially Blended!" murmured a lad of sporting proclivities.

"You'll have a thick ear if you don't shut up!" promised the spokesman.

"Unfortunately, as I have before remarked," he continued, "we find ourselves unable to complete the intended pro-

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

gramme; but, realising that you would have just cause of complaint if he had, in the words of the poet,

'Brought you from your nice warm cot
To give you something nice and hot,
Then done you out of all the lot,
You bounder,'

we have determined to allow you the inestimable privilege of running the gauntlet."

Subdued cheering.

Dick Jolly made a gesture of dissent.

"Please don't trouble on my account. I have had a most enjoyable visit," he replied gratefully. "But the best of friends must part, so—"

He left the sentence uncompleted, and, dodging under his guards' arms, darted towards the door.

But the door was closed, and, ere he could open it, he was seized and brought back.

"So glad you have changed your mind and come back!" said the leader, in honeyed tones. "Now, men of the Fourth, to towels!"

"Open the door! Now, Jolly, when I give the word, bolt down the line, and may your heels save your back."

A collision was inevitable, so, alighting on his feet, Dick clasped the new-comer in a tight embrace, and, burying his face in the other's shoulder, in the wild hope that he might not be recognised, waltzed him gracefully down the corridor.

But the dance, like all good things in this world, did not last long.

Exactly opposite his bed-room door the master's feet glided from beneath him, and he seated himself, with a disconcerting jar, on the floor, whilst Dick involuntarily followed suit.

**CHAPTER 4.
Dick Plays the Game.**

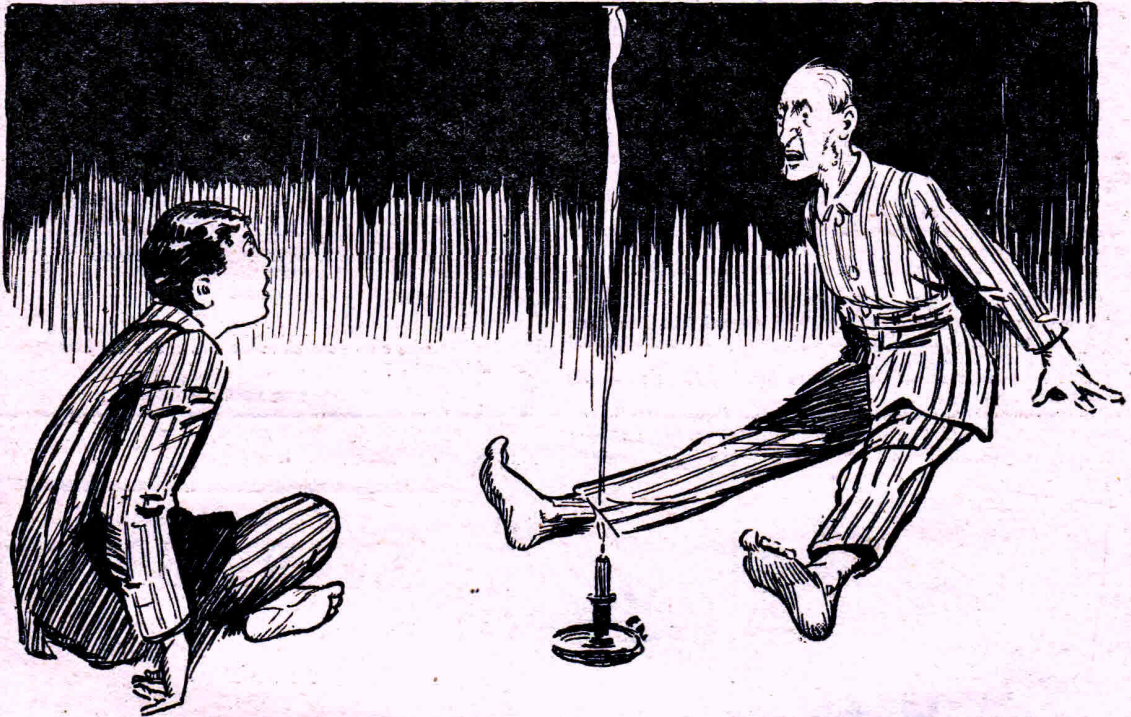
FOR several seconds the two remained gazing at each other. Dick, with consternation depicted on his speaking countenance; Mr. Puntole, for it was he, with a face so full of amazement that it had no room for any other expression.

"Dear me!" gasped Mr. Puntole at last.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir—" began Dick.

"Richard Jolly!" ejaculated the master.

"Yes, sir; I—" again began Dick, but he was as ruthlessly interrupted as before by Mr. Puntole saying:



For several seconds the two remained gazing at each other; Dick with consternation depicted on his speaking countenance, and Mr. Puntole with a face so full of amazement that it had no room for any other expression.

"Stand aside and give me a chance for a spurt, then," requested Dick.

"The request is reasonable, and is granted," agreed the leader, adding, by way of precaution: "But mind, if you move before I give the word, you'll be brought back."

Dick nodded, and the other, after casting a swift glance along the line to assure himself that every boy was in his place with a nicely-knotted towel in his hand, cried:

"Go!"

As he spoke, he aimed a mighty blow with his towel at Dick's shoulders.

But they were not there, and the bulging cloth, hurtling through the air, found its billet in the face of the nearest boy.

Dick had pledged his word not to move until the word was given, and kept it; but when he did move it was in so unexpected a fashion that not a knotted towel reached him.

Even as the word "Go!" left the starter's lips, he had thrown himself forward on to his hands, and covered the distance between the beds and the door in a series of catharine-wheels, which so astonished the would-be strikers that some of them did not even attempt a blow until he was past.

But even as Dick reached the door, a tall, lank form barred his path.

"Richard Jolly! A tadpo—I mean, a new boy—dares to spin me, Archibald Puntole, round as if I were a teetotum!"²

"I did not know it was you, sir; indeed I—"

It was a brave attempt, but the master would not let him complete a sentence. Indeed, it is doubtful if he heard him, so astounded was he.

"Help me up!" he ordered.

Willingly Dick complied.

"Come in here!" commanded the master, leading the way into his room. "I sat down much quicker than I generally do, and the floor was very hard," he murmured, as he lowered himself cautiously into a chair.

Then he adjusted his spectacles, which had slipped to the end of his nose, and looked blankly at the boy.

"You are in Dormitory D, Jolly?" he said at last.

"No, sir; I'm here, sir—that is to say, sir, I belong to Dormitory D, if that is what you mean, sir," stammered Dick, confused by the master's close scrutiny.

"You prevaricate, sir!" thundered Mr. Puntole, who was rapidly regaining his self-control, and losing his temper. "Now tell me what you were doing in Dormitory G? Were you carried there?"

Dick hesitated.

Bounder though the boys called him, he was no sneak.
PLUCK.—No. 587.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

"No, sir; I walked," he declared at last.

"Of your own free will?"

Again Dick hesitated; then remembering that, though a prisoner, he had looked upon the whole proceedings as a lark and had gone willingly, he replied:

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

This was something in the nature of a poser, but Dick stuck to his guns.

"I showed the boys of Dormitory G some tricks, sir," he replied, truthfully enough.

"So, to show the boys some of your mountebank tricks, you get up in the middle of the night, do you?" cried Mr. Puntole wrathfully. "Go back to your room, sir! I will report you to the Head in the morning!"

"Beg pardon, sir!"

Both Mr. Puntole and Dick looked to the door from whence the apology, which had so startled them, had come, and were astonished to see Jason Smith, minus the great Panjamdrum's pillows, and clad only in pyjamas, being thrust slowly but irresistibly over the threshold by a crowd of white but determined-faced boys.

"Good gracious! Has the whole school gone mad?" demanded the astounded master. "What do you want here?"

"It isn't fair, sir!" stammered Smith, prompted by stage-whispers from every one of the crowd.

"What isn't fair?" queried Mr. Puntole.

"It was a rag, sir," explained Jason Smith.

"Oh! The Panjamdrum, I suppose?" ejaculated the master, seeing daylight.

"Yes, sir," admitted Smith, holding down his head to hide the rising grin which hovered on his lips rather than through shame.

"And Richard Jolly was the victim? May I be allowed to ask how he had offended the might and dignity of the Fourth Form?" demanded Mr. Puntole, with a gentle sarcasm which caused the listening boys to flush angrily.

Jason Smith looked at his companions and hesitated, then blurted out:

"His father's a millionaire, sir."

"Good gracious, how shocking!" interposed Mr. Puntole, with pretended horror. "But the poor boy can't help how rich his father is. Anything else?"

"He's been an acrobat," continued Smith, red as a boiled lobster this time.

Mr. Puntole raised his hands in horror.

"This is awful! But let us hope he has seen the error of his way. Next, please!" he cried.

"We thought him a bouncer and a cad; but when we found he wasn't going to split, we——" explained Smith eagerly, when the master interrupted him, saying:

"You made the startling discovery that even a millionaire has feelings, whilst even an acrobat can be a gentleman?"

"Yes, sir; I suppose that was it," confessed the boy, adding eagerly: "So you see, sir, it wasn't Jolly's fault, for we carried him off from Dormitory D."

Mr. Puntole nodded.

"That is about how I figured it out, and I am glad you have had the decency to come forward and confess. I suppose I must send Richard Jolly back to bed and report Dormitory G instead," he remarked.

"We hope you won't, sir. It was only a rag, and no one was hurt!" exclaimed several boys simultaneously.

"Oh, wasn't there!" muttered the master, instinctively reaching towards the injured part of his anatomy.

The action reminded him of something else.

"Oh, well, I suppose I must overlook it this time, but don't let it occur again," he said, adding, as the boys began to thank him: "That will do. Run off to bed. And—er—boys! We will forget what has happened to-night, especially the last part—eh?"

"Mum's the word, sir. Good-night, sir, and thank you!" cried the boys, as, delighted with the turn events had taken, they trooped out of the room.

Jason Smith thrust his arm through that of Dick Jolly, saying:

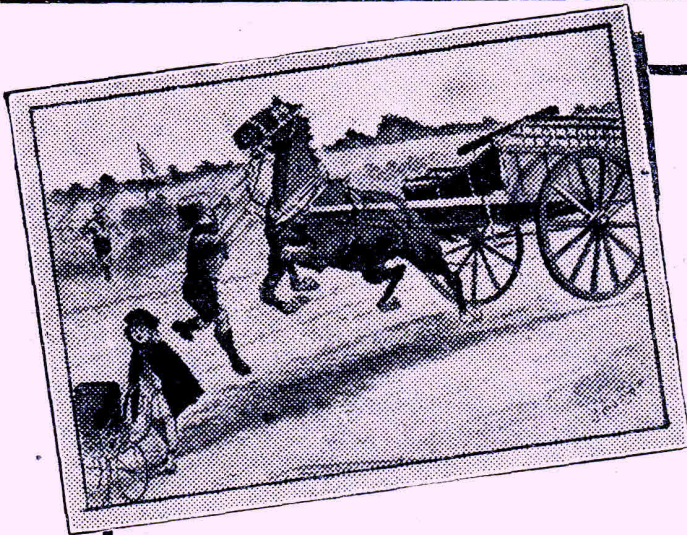
"Come on, old chap! I'll see you back to your dormitory. Steady on, you fellows! This tadpole is a brick! Three cheers for Jolly Dick Jolly!"

Pausing before the door of Dormitory G, the boys waved their hands frantically above their heads, and opened their mouths, though no sounds came from them in the noiseless cheer the Shorebayians ever used when shouts might be followed by unpleasant consequences.

Again and again the pantomime was repeated, until at last Dick and Smith disappeared in the direction of Dormitory D.

Half an hour later Dick Jolly tumbled off to sleep, happier than he had been since he had made his first appearance at Shorebay College.

THE END.



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RATTLING INSTALMENT OF OUR FINE DETECTIVE SERIAL.

THE GREAT CHEQUE FRAUD



NOTE.

This Fine Serial has been taken from the Great Davidson Film of the same name, produced by Chas. Raymond, who also produced "The Mystery of the Diamond Belt," etc., etc. Write and ask your film manager to book this great photo-play.

INTRODUCTION.

GEORGE MARSDEN PLUMMER, the notorious criminal, reads of a big financial deal to take place between MR. JOHN MORGAN and another gentleman, the amount involved being £10,000. This Plummer resolves to obtain, his accomplices being FLASH KATE and JACK DENNIS.

GEORGE MORGAN, John Morgan's son, wishes to marry MABEL DENNIS, Jack's sister and his father's secretary, but John Morgan will not hear of this and disowns his son. Meanwhile Plummer obtains the £10,000.

Sexton Blake is called in to investigate. He finds a clue, and Plummer is tracked to a house by Tinker, who is captured and taken away to a disused factory by the river. Blake follows and endeavours to rescue Tinker, but Plummer sets the building on fire. The two escape, however, by jumping into the river.

In the meantime, George Morgan has obtained a berth with a friend of his father's.

Inspector Martin of Scotland Yard receives a message from Jack Dennis, revealing Plummer's new hiding-place, and after sending for Blake and Tinker, raids the house. Plummer and his accomplices escape in the former's motor-car, but are followed by Blake. Blake loses control of his motor-cycle, and to avoid a dangerous bend in the road decides to charge the fence by the roadside. On the other side of this fence is a field and then the river. As he approaches the bend, another car comes round and narrowly misses him.

The Odds Against Sexton Blake

"STEADY, lass—steady!"

Blake kept the mare well in hand. She was fresher than he thought, and betrayed a disposition to take the next hedge at a gallop. He was bent on making the most of his lead, and espied an open gate some fifty yards to the right. A rapid calculation assured him that by skirting the next field and breaking away towards the distant spinney he would have a good half mile in hand.

The mare answered promptly to his hand. She was making splendid headway, and Blake chuckled softly to himself.

"If Plummer supposes he's rid of me, he's made the mistake of his life. It's Kate I fear. She may tumble to the possibility of being followed. Most likely she'll try to get him to stop to make sure. Heaven help him if I get level! I'll have him, if I break the mare's heart to get him!"

His keen eyes ranged over the bare countryside—grazing lands, with here and there a patch in cultivation, the spinney ahead, and beyond to the right a patch of heath. The quick motion of the animal warmed his chilled frame, and the hope that he might yet be able to intercept the fugitives acted like a tonic.

The odds were all against him, but Sexton Blake was by nature an optimist. He had taken bigger chances than the present, and come out top.

"Well done, old girl!"

The exclamation was well merited, for the mare, gathering her strength for the leap, had cleared the low, straggling hedge and a broad, water-logged ditch beyond. Another animal would have floundered hopelessly on the boggy banks; but her forefeet alighted to a nicety on the wavy grass, and with an easy spring she was on terra firma again.

Blake stroked her arched neck and eased off the bit. She was going against the wind, and might need some nursing, for the heath threatened obstacles which he had not anticipated.

A clump of furze barred his progress. Some hawthorns and a tangle of brambles spread away to the left. There was

not much choice. It was either right or left, with a chance that he might meet a break in the furze and so push along diagonally if he chose the right-hand course.

"Keep it up, old girl—keep it up, and win through!" he muttered.

The mare whinnied and struggled on, finding a narrow track which twisted through furze and bracken, and finally brought her upon a wide spread of pasture.

Far ahead Blake espied a twisting road. Again he urged his mount to her utmost effort. In fancy he heard the hum of Plummer's car; in fancy he saw the master-rogue forging ahead of him.

Then suddenly in one wild moment fancy became fact. The mare was flying down a gentle incline, making towards a four-foot hedge which bordered the road, and in a flash Blake espied his enemy.

Plummer was a good mile behind, and Blake's heart leapt in exultation. The chances were all in his favour. He urged the mare on, conscious as he did so that the master-criminal had espied him and was putting on every ounce of power.

The big car came sweeping up the road at an amazing speed.

Would the mare clear the hedge in time?

Blake urged her still faster.

She answered pluckily, but it was plain that she had reached her limit. She floundered once as she approached the hedge. Quick as thought her rider brought her up.

The hum of the car grew louder and more insistent.

A mocking laugh seemed to reach Blake as he approached the hedge. He saw the car drawing near; he made out the straining figures of Plummer and his three companions.

Then for a brief and nerve-racking moment they were hidden as the mare gathered herself for the final leap. He could feel her muscles strain and bunch to the effort.

For one moment the hedge loomed blankly ahead, shutting out all sight of the trailing road. Then, with a grim, set face, Sexton Blake soared above, and came down not a dozen yards ahead of the thundering car.

PLUCK.—No. 587.

ALSO DR. HUXTON RYMER!

A gasp of horror broke from Kate, and Dennis half leapt to his feet.

They saw the mare swerve, frightened by the rush and noise of the leaping car. They saw her rider make a swift and desperate effort to retain his seat and bring the startled animal round. For an instant his fate trembled in the balance. Then, with a low, wailing gasp, Kate screened her eyes.

The mare had stumbled, and Sexton Blake lay stunned and helpless across the road.

Plummer smiled. The luck was with him, and he could afford to give a point. He reached over and tapped Gustav's shoulder.

"Ease her down and steer clear!" he said.

"You don't mean to leave him there?" expostulated Kate. "No time for sentiment. He means mischief," Plummer snapped. "If he's down and out, it's not our fault. His."

The car described an ugly curve to avoid the prone detective. The grind of the wheels alarmed Dennis.

"That fool will pitch us into the bank! We're not out of the wood yet," he growled.

"Pretty near it. He won't stir in a hurry," Plummer remarked, with a cruel laugh.

But not for the first time Plummer was mistaken. The big car had scarcely sped from view when Sexton Blake struggled, in a maze, to his feet. He had been badly stunned, but no bones were broken. The mare, foam-flecked and shivering with fright, had strayed across the road. He staggered after her, resolved gamely to resume the chase, albeit there seemed small odds in his favour.

"There's just a chance the motor's overheated and the car will break down this side of Hockley," he muttered. "I may catch him yet. It's worth the struggle."

He coaxed the mare to hand, and climbed painfully into the saddle. She was almost as game as her rider, and seemed to understand what was required of her.

Across the road Plummer's car had come to a stand.

The master-criminal himself had alighted to assist Gustav and Dennis, who were desperately striving to get the engine into motion.

With a snarl of rage, Plummer drew his automatic and fired at Blake.

The detective slithered from his horse's back and dropped neatly into the tonneau, just as the engine started.

The men had whipped back to their places, and Plummer, with a snarl and an oath, sprang at his daring pursuer.

"Too late—too late, Blake! You've taken the odd chance, and lost!" he snapped.

Blake wasted no time in recrimination; and herein he was wise, for his assailant, being comparatively fresh, was able quickly to break through his guard. It was evidently Plummer's object to reach for his throat.

He snapped out a few brief orders to his companions, who, slower than himself, had as yet made no attempt to dislodge their insistent pursuer.

Sexton Blake fought tooth and nail to retain his place in the car. If only he could hold at bay the desperate criminal, assistance might be had of some passer-by. They could not be far from Hockley now—under a mile, he judged. A circumstance all in his favour—a circumstance, moreover, which appealed with ugly force to his adroit foe.

The sudden curious glint of green in Plummer's eyes warned Sexton Blake that his enemy had sighted a coupe.

Nerving himself for a last desperate effort, he flung his whole weight upon the master-criminal.

Plummer had not expected this. With a snarl of fury he recoiled, tripped, and would have been over the edge of the car but for Kate's swift intervention.

Then in a twinkling the advantage which Blake had secured was cruelly snatched away. One false step brought him to his knees. In a moment Dennis' arms curled about him.

Plummer grinned and nodded.

He reached down, and Blake knew that the game was out of his own keeping. He struggled, but all in vain. His foes held him in an iron grasp.

The car swung on, humming merrily towards the outskirts of Hockley. A dazed yokel and a child saw two men hurl a third from the body of a swiftly-speeding motor.

They caught a glimpse of a woman fair to look on crouching in terror behind the men. Then their interest shifted to the lifeless semblance of a man lying by the roadside.

"He be a dead 'un! If he ain't, he ought to be!" ventured the fellow. But the child, quicker to grasp the sense of tragedy, timidly approached.

"Come here, Jarge!" he cried. "T' man ain't dead. He's on a heap of muck, and he says he's Sexton Blake, and you've got to stop that car."

(To be continued.)

PLUCK.—No. 587.

BILLY MERSON

THE DOUBLE DIAMOND.

(Continued from page 5.)

by the action of the sea, for a diamond is like that before it is cut.

Plummer raised the stone towards his sparkling eyes, his breath coming quickly from between his lips; then suddenly a low, savage curse broke from him. There were many things that the master-criminal had studied, among them being precious stones, both in their rough and in their cut state, and in a moment he knew that it was no marvellous diamond that he held in his hand. It might have deceived some people, but Plummer was not of their number.

The master-criminal reeled back against the table, his face drawn and haggard, dazed by the shock that he had sustained. In a dim kind of way he knew that the whole affair of the giant diamond was a fake, and that he, the greatest criminal the world had known for years, had been made a fool through it.

Mechanically Plummer made a move to drop the ball of glass into his pocket; then, with an oath, he thrust it back into the leather bag, and moved towards the safe.

Once more Plummer, disguised as Pat Leary, was in the cellar that lay beneath the main dining-room of the famous New York restaurant. Two empty spirit bottles lay on the floor close to him, and a third that he had opened was in his hand, as he bent his ear to the receiver of the telephone that he had rigged up, so that he could listen to any conversations that took place at the table specially reserved for Captain Peter Teller.

Why he had come back to impersonate Pat Leary once more he could not have said, save that some impulse had brought him to the place, and his heart was filled with black hatred as the voice of the detective came to him over the wire.

"I guess we worked it neatly, Veldman," he heard Captain Peter Teller say. "I've got the papers at work right away on the stunt, and to-morrow there'll be columns of stuff about how I was fooled by Nicol Penrane because he owed me a grudge. The whole of America will believe that it was nothing but a poor fake of a diamond that I took from Penrane, and if you've done your part, that'll be the last that we shall hear of the real diamond!"

Plummer drew his breath in with a hiss as the last words reached him, and he was shaking with rage from head to foot as the words that followed reached him.

"It was cute," Louis Veldman said, with an oily chuckle. "Who but you would have thought of hiding the real diamond in a fake? There will be another big diamond in Russia in a few days' time, but only the Grand Duke—and he has already sailed with it—will ever know the truth!"

The receiver of the telephone dropped from Plummer's limp hand, and as he straightened his back, even his disguise could not prevent him from looking like an old man. He had had his hand on a fortune, and thrust it away from him. He had sweated in the dusty cellar, only to be made a fool of at the finish, and up above two men were chuckling at the success of their scheme, without knowing of the strange manner in which the master-criminal had come into it.

With shaking fingers Plummer raised the bottle of spirits to his lips, and drank heavily; then his back straightened, and there was murder in the green of his eyes as he looked up at the cobweb-hung ceiling above him.

"You shall pay for it, Captain Peter Teller," he snarled—"pay for it, if I have to starve in the Bowery for ten years to do it!"

Then, with savage fingers, the master-criminal tore off his disguise and went out into the street, leaving the patrons of the famous restaurant to ring in vain for their favourite wines, and already his brain was forming a plan that should enable him to be avenged upon Captain Peter Teller and Mr. Louis Veldman.

THE END

Don't Forget that

DR. HUXTON RYMER

APPEARS NEXT WEEK!

BILLY MERSON NEXT WEEK!

GREAT POPULAR TRIUMPH OF "HAIR-DRILL."

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You can always obtain further supplies of "Harlene" from your Chemist at 1s., 2s. 6d., or 4s. 6d. per bottle; "Uzon" Brilliantine—1s., 2s. 6d.; "Cremex" at 1s. per box of seven shampoos (single packets 2d. each).

If ordered direct from Edwards' Harlene Co., any article will be sent post free on remittance. Carriage extra on foreign orders.

SPECIAL NOTICE.—An innovation that will be much appreciated by travellers, and incidentally soldiers and sailors at home and abroad, is announced by Mr. Edwards' introduction of "Solidified Harlene." For a long time, in response to many requests, Mr. Edwards has been experimenting in this direction, and has at last produced Edwards' "Harlene" in solid form, so that it can more conveniently be carried in one's portmanteau or equipment than when in liquid form in a bottle.

In addition to the popular Liquid "Edwards' Harlene," Solidified "Harlene," is now on sale at all chemists in tins at 2s. 9d., or supplies may be obtained post free on remittance direct from Edwards' Harlene Co., 20-26, Lamb's Conduit St., London, W.C.

A REMARKABLE HAIR BEAUTY OFFER.

So that readers of this paper may at once commence to test for themselves the wonderful improvement "Harlene Hair-Drill" makes in the hair, Mr. Edwards has decided to give everyone an opportunity of following Miss Terriss's example by sending 1,000,000 of his Four-Fold "Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfits absolutely Gratis.

We give Miss Ellaline Terriss's letter, knowing it will be read with the greatest interest by those who desire to cultivate a beautiful appearance.

Coliseum, London, W.C.,
October 27, 1915.

To Messrs. Edwards' Harlene Co.,
Lamb's Conduit Street, W.C.

Dear Sirs,—Thank you very much for sending the "Harlene" so promptly. As you know, I always like to keep a good supply with me.

I always apply "Harlene" night and morning. It is a delightful exercise I am careful not to forget, and on my dressing-table at the theatre, as at home, "Harlene" is a constant companion. I always tell my friends of "Harlene," and I think I have made many converts to this natural method of growing hair and keeping the hair healthy. I feel inclined to add that every Britisher should use "Harlene," for we all want to keep young nowadays, both men and women.

Yours faithfully,
(Signed) ELLALINE TERRISS.



Millions of people have taken delight in the charm of Miss Ellaline Terriss and her fascinating art. To-day this world-famous actress gives advice which will enable everyone to double their attractiveness and charm. The secret is "Harlene Hair-Drill," in connection with which a Four-fold Gift awaits your acceptance. Fill in and post form given here.

WHAT DO YOU ANSWER TO THESE QUESTIONS ?

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1. Do you notice any powdery dust when brushing ?
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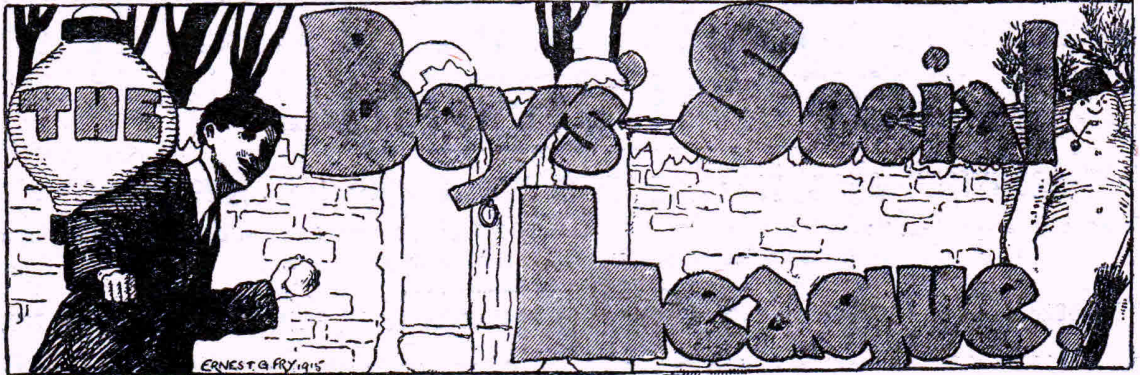
Fill in and post to
EDWARDS' HARLENE Co.,
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Dear Sirs,—Please send me your free "Harlene" Fourfold Hair-Growing Outfit. I enclose 4d. stamps for postage to any part of the world. (Foreign stamps accepted.)

Name

Address

PLUCK, January 25th, 1916.



A WORD ABOUT NEXT WEEK'S NUMBER.

I feel sure that general satisfaction will prevail among my chums at the announcement of Billy Merson's appearance in PLUCK again next week.

The first story, which, you will recall, was entitled "The Man in Possession," was very successful. I had quite a good number of letters concerning it, and asking that Mr. Merson should become a permanent feature.

It is, however, impossible to arrange for this great comedian to appear every week, but certainly I think we may look for a story every three weeks or so.

Next week's story will be entitled:

"THE ONLY MAN!"

and it is written from the Merson film of the same title. The illustrations will be executed by Philip Swinnerton, who has already firmly established himself with Pluckites.

By the way, I have had many inquiries from readers as to what they can do to ensure a Merson film appearing at their local halls.

Of course, the Homeland Productions Syndicate, Ltd., are responsible for the films, but I believe the Globe Film Co., Gerrard Street, London, W.C., are the renters. Therefore, ask your picture-palace manager to write direct to the latter firm for particulars.

A MATTER OF POLITENESS.

Among my list of queries is one from "A Bradford Reader," who wishes me to settle a little point upon which he is in doubt.

It seems that our friend is in the habit of seeing home a girl friend of the family, and that to do so necessitates a short ride on a tram.

Now, "A Bradford Reader" is not quite certain whether, when the end of the journey is reached, he should descend from the car first, or allow the young lady to.

Naturally, our chum should descend first, as it is his place to assist his girl friend from the car, which he would be unable to do were he to let her alight first.

And while it occurs to me, let me assure all my readers that "A Bradford Reader" is under military age; so please do not think that he is asking a frivolous question about a girl when he ought to be in khaki.

APPEALS FROM THE TRENCHES.

BOXING-GLOVES.

"PRIVATE E. BATES, No. 4244,

"Clipstone Camp.

"Dear Editor,—Just a line or two, on behalf of my comrades, to ask you or any of your readers if they have a set of boxing-gloves they could oblige us with, as there are no amusements here, and time hangs heavy. As we are only one small section of machine-gunners, we have not the privileges afforded to regiments, so if any good old reader could oblige, I am sure they would be appreciated.

"Wishing you and the paper every success, I beg to remain, yours sincerely,

PRIVATE E. BATES."

FOOTBALL WANTED.

"R. WILKEY, No. 771,

"B.E.F.

"Dear Editor,—I hope you will excuse me taking the liberty of writing to you, but would you be kind enough to

All the Addresses of the above soldiers are in my possession, and can be obtained by writing to me for them.—The Editor

try and send us a football, to pass the weary hours when we are out of the trenches? I am an old reader of your splendid paper, and it is always eagerly snapped up when I have finished with it. I think the tales are fine, and your Christmas Number was voted a great success by all my comrades.

"Well, sir, I will close now, wishing your paper every success.—I, for all the boys, remain, yours sincerely,

"R. WILKEY."

BOOKS.

"PRIVATE W. LYALL, No. 650,

"B.E.F.

"Dear Editor,—Being a reader of the old paper for many years, and, therefore, an old friend of yours, I venture to ask you if you could manage to find some kind reader who could send me out some old 'Boys' Friend' Threepenny Libraries, to help to shove by the long nights. We are settling down to our second winter here now, and, knowing from experience what the long nights are, I would be very much obliged to you.

"With the best of luck to the paper, from

"A GORDON HIGHLANDER."

LUMINOUS WRIST WATCH.

"CORPORAL J. E. GREENWOOD,

"B.E.F.

"Dear Editor,—I take the liberty of writing you these few lines, being a constant reader of your paper, especially during my time in civilian life. I do not get the same opportunity out here of reading your paper, much as I would like to; but when opportunity offers, I can assure you, it is the first thought in my mind.

"Would some kind reader or friend send out a luminous wristlet watch, as they are most valuable these dark nights, on guard? We cannot get one out here for love or money.

"All success for the coming year to you and the paper, and thanking you in anticipation.—I am, your constant reader,

"JOHN E. GREENWOOD."

BILLY MERSON
appears again in
"PLUCK"
NEXT WEEK!

2.



1. British Super-Dreadnought lifted high and dry in floating-dock for cleaning and repairs. 2. British-built floating-dock for South American port in tow of Dutch ocean-going tugs. 3. British pre-Dreadnought Battleship in graving-dock at naval port. 4. Battleship entering floating-dock submerged for her reception. 5. Ocean tramp undergoing repair in floating-dock.

PLUCK—Every Friday, 1d.


DON'T DELAY ANY LONGER! POST THESE TWO FORMS TO-DAY.

THE BOYS' SOCIAL LEAGUE.
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I, the undersigned, wish to become a Member of the above League, and I promise to carry out its aims and objects to the best of my ability.

Name.....
Address.....
Age and Occupation.....

BADGE COUPON.



Two of these coupons and a sixpenny postal order must be sent by every applicant for a Boys' Social League Badge.

PLUCK. No. 587. Week ending Jan. 29th, 1916.

Do not forget to enclose 1d. stamp for return postage on certificate when applying for membership.

It is to YOUR Benefit to Join THE League!

FOLD THE BOOK OVER AT DOTTED—

To.....
(Or, if missing, Company Commander)

Company.....

Regiment.....

British Expeditionary Force.

WITH BEST WISHES
FROM.....

1d.
STAMP.

LINES AND FILL IN THE ADDRESS.

N.B.—IF ADDRESSEE CANNOT BE FOUND, will the Company Commander kindly see that this book is **NOT** returned to sender, but handed to the addressee's companions to read? Editor, PLUCK.

Being a member of The Boys' Social League, I wish to have the following advertisement inserted under the section:

SALE—EXCHANGE—WANTED.

(Cross out the two words which do not apply.)

Among the Advertisements for.....

Name.....
(Only initials of Christian names.)

League Number

Address.....

Advertisements without this number will be destroyed.

Be careful not to use more than twelve words here. Do not mix Sale, Exchange, and Wanted together; they must be kept distinct.

Remember, too, that advertisements reading like trade ones, are likely to be ignored. Cut out this form for future use if you have no advertisement now. It may not appear every week. No. 587