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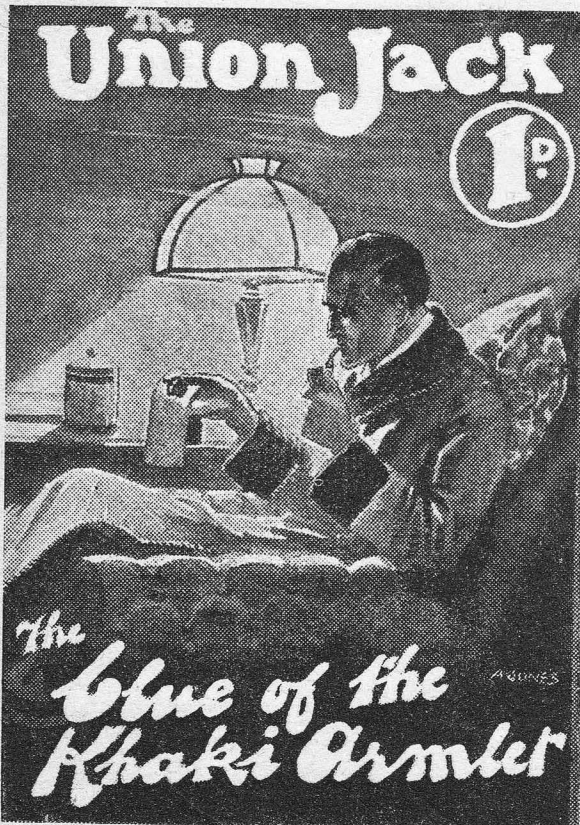
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OUT TO-DAY!

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The Secret Lagoon

By PHILIP McLEOD.

Author of "The Boys of Briery" and other popular tales.

A ripping, short, complete story, showing how two plucky, shipwrecked Britons come on a strange discovery, and by great ingenuity and resource defeated the wily Huns and captured a German submarine.

WHEN the s.s. Mowgli struck on the outer reef and foundered, Alan Macdonald, the engineer, and Jack Fastnett, the ship's boy, were flung into the boiling welter of waters which battered the outer coral ring surrounding the tiny island. They were hurled remorselessly on the coral, and then lifted by a smooth volume of resistless sea over the reef, buffeted and deafened, and found themselves, spent and bruised, swimming mechanically in the calm lagoon, towards the silhouetted palms.

Exhausted, they flung themselves on the shining beach, and huddled together in their soddened clothes, with the boom of the sullen breakers for a lullaby. They slept through the night till the sudden dawn.

Shivering a little, the boy looked up at the morning sun, and glanced round at the coconut-fringed beach, the thick tropical jungle behind, and a seemingly natural little path that led up the cliffs to the very summit of the atoll.

He rolled over and began to stretch.

"I'm hungry!" said Jack Fastnett.

The engineer, on whose determined, dour face the sun began to play, merely grunted.

"Mac," cried the lad, as he gave the Scot a hearty dig in the ribs, "I'm hungry!"

The engineer slowly turned over.

"Then there's not much wrong wi' you, me lad," he murmured, gaping, as he shook his bruised body.

They both attempted to rise; then laughed. Their strained, cramped limbs gave way under them, and they collapsed, groaning with pain, on the soft, yielding sand.

Soon after, though, with chafing, they managed to totter to their feet, and scrambled along the shore.

"Coconuts!" cried Jack. "And not on sticks! All milky! I guess we'll have some of them, Mac."

"Me, too," murmured the engineer. "I'm thinkin' it's no' so good as a bowl of porridge, but a man must tak' just ay what he finds forbye."

They breakfasted gloriously, munching heartily, and drinking the coconut milk.

"I'm thinkin'," said the engineer, as he drained his last drop, "we'll just tak' a good look round, wee Jack."

They took a little natural path that led to the summit. It led, winding, through a wealth of tropical vegetation, and the climb made them breathless.

On the top they paused in sheer delight at the wondrous scene.

The limitless Pacific stretched away till the sky, surely the bluest of all blue skies, merged into one exquisite tone on the horizon. They stood drinking it in silently. Then:

"You'll be missing your haggis, Mac?" joked the boy.

They looked round the big island and the vast expanse of sea. There seemed little chance of leaving the place for some time.

"Dinna speak disrespectfully of the greatest dish of the greatest people in the wor-ruld!" cried the engineer, as he made a dive for Jack with a pretended threatening gesture.

The lad backed hurriedly, laughing, and holding his hands out to protect himself from the onslaught.

Then a startling thing happened.

Jack Fastnett disappeared!

Vanished, through a tangle of tropical foliage, as though he had been spirited away.

A slipping, sliding sound, a crash, and a shout of surprise and pain.

"Where are ye, boy? Are ye hurt?" shouted the engineer in alarm.

"Oh!" came a groan from somewhere that Mac couldn't locate. "I've fallen!"

"Of course you have, you bletherer! But where?"

"Into a hut—through the roof!"

Mac started in amaze. A hut in that tiny place was the last thing he expected to find.

"Mac, it's all right!" And then eagerly: "I say! What on earth— My goodness!"

"Speak up, laddie!"

"Just wait a tick, old Mac, and I'll show you something that will make your eyes drop out with surprise!"

Mac knelt, peering into the blackness, until in a flash it was light as day, and his eyes began to take in the astounding sight.

He was looking from above through a hole made by Jack's body through the roof of a shack, built evidently with a view to concealment.

There was nothing so very remarkable in that, but the furnishings and articles that met the engineer's astonished gaze were certainly the last that the honest Scot ever expected to see.

In his excitement, he nearly followed Jack's example by tumbling in through the same aperture, but he pulled himself back in time, and ran hot-foot down the little hill, to meet Jack's puzzled face peering through a screen of vegetation.

"Here, quick!" cried the youngster, parting the palms which cunningly concealed the entrance. "My giddy aunt, but we've tumbled on 'some' find! Just come into the parlour, and gaze with all your giddy optics, me lad!"

Mac did.

The interior of the mysterious hut amply repaid inspection. It was packed. Packed with every conceivable article, utensil, device, and appliance required on a submarine.

There were spare parts, munitions, foods, rifles, and petrol. Petrol! Gallons and gallons—enough to make a veritable river of petrol!

And the carefully-lettered label on every article was in German!

"Huns!" said Jack, in a whisper, as, round-eyed, he looked at the open-mouthed engineer. "Huns!" he repeated softly. "What on earth does it all mean, Mac?"

Mac was already sniffing round like a pointer, fingering the various engineering parts, and reading slowly, but with full comprehension, a document which he had picked up.

"And that's that," he remarked, with aggravating calmness, as he folded the paper and placed it in his coat.

"What's what, you gink?"

"Laddie," replied the engineer, "this island is nothing more nor less than a German submarine base! From what I can read in the various papers here, I can see that some big U-boat is in the habit of calling in for supplies. By the dates in a kind of diary affair here, it may not be very long before the boat comes again."

"Here?"

"Yes, boy; and we must prepare a little welcome for them."

Together they sweated and toiled, moving rifles and other firearms out into a cache in the jungle. They armed themselves, of course; and Mac rigged up a kind of booby-trap arrangement in which a huge tree-trunk they chopped down played a star part.

Knocking off at last, they made a raid on the tinned provisions, of which there was a fine store. The day had passed quickly.

Mac put on a pipe, and they clambered up once more to the top of the little atoll.

"Mac," cried Jack suddenly, "we are rabbits. Do you know, we've not closed that beautiful hole I made in the top of the hut when I fell through into the Hunneries!"

"You're right, boy! Fancy us forgetting that little

emergency exit. Back to work, lad. We must finish that before night."

It was a tough job, but eventually they made the hut quite as tight a cage as could be desired.

Clambering up the hillside once more, they gazed over the wide expanse of the Pacific.

The lagoon was still as a mill-pond, when suddenly Jack noticed a peculiar troubling of the water near the break in the reef.

"Mac," he breathed, "I believe they've come!"

In a moment they took cover, and watched breathlessly.

"You're right again," muttered the engineer, as he strained his eyes, following the direction of the curious ripple.

Then the waters parted, an unmistakable periscope appeared, followed by—wonder of wonders!—the very latest type of undersea boat!

They watched tiny figures appear running on the deck, one in a uniform with braid directing the other ant-like creatures. They could hear the unmistakable harsh, guttural of the Fatherland as the commands rang out.

On the eve of their plan the two castaways' hearts trembled. Could they bring off that terrific coup, or would they be helpless in the hands of the Huns?

In the bright sunlight their plot seemed so feasible, so simple, that failure seemed impossible; but now, with the tropic night imminent, facing that mysterious craft with her numerous crew, they felt that success was beyond their grasp.

They crept still farther into the undergrowth. Peering from their shelter, they watched a tiny boat put off from the submarine. The sailors pulled quickly towards the white beach, while in the stern sat the officer whose commands they had heard.

As the boat grated into the soft shingle, the crew sprang out and made for the natural path that led towards the summit of the island, led by a figure Mac took to be a boat-swain or petty officer.

The commander, however, did not follow his crew, but remained on the shining beach, smoking a cigarette and stretching his legs. He was accompanied by a small dog who obviously enjoyed a spell of freedom from the cramped quarters of the boat.

Jack and the engineer had, with as little noise as possible, cautiously crept back towards the shack where their trap was laid.

Mac had made a cunning contraption of stout rope and beams, the whole affair being crowned with the tree-trunk, which was so arranged as to fall and effectively block the entrance to the shack when Mac released a counterweight.

They could hear stumbling figures coming through the undergrowth, and exclamations in strong German when a Hunnish foot was caught in a trail of creeper.

Safely ensconced in the branches of a tree, Jack watched the first of the little procession appear, unmask the entrance, and enter the shack.

One by one, they disappeared within, until, trembling, Jack gave the signal.

Crash!

As Mac released the counterweight, the great trunk fell as true as the heart of an engineer could desire. The noise of the falling tree mingled with the cries of the astonished and dismayed Germans, who, unarmed and robbed of all weapons of offence, beat in vain against the strong door.

However, the hut was so carefully made, in order to keep all wet from penetrating, that the only sound which came through the stout walls was a confused murmur, which was cloaked by the dense jungle.

The Huns were trapped!

Mac and Jack Fastnett gaped at each other in glee, but this was only the first part of the programme.

There remained the officer commanding and the rest of the crew to account for.

They stole down towards the beach.

The German officer was still strolling and smoking.

"There's that wretched dog!" muttered Mac. "We'll never get him without a fuss."

But after all it was the dog that helped them, for it dashed after a gaily-painted butterfly which fluttered into the jungle.

The Herr Lieutenant called harshly for it to come back.

Jack and Macdonald watched, crouching and breathless, as the U boat commander angrily threw away his cigarette and started after the dog, which, running after the fluttering insect, was rapidly leading the sailor towards their hiding-place.

Barking loudly, the animal dashed right into the brake where Jack and his chum were waiting, and as the commander came plunging in after his pet, Mac's lean arms shot out and caught him round the neck in a loving embrace.

Jack caught the dog and tied him quickly to a branch.

Never in his whole life was that German so surprised. Mac's sinewy hand had clutched his throat, and, speechless PLUCK.—No. 595.

as he was, Jack pushed a bunch of grass between his teeth, gagging him effectually.

He struggled fiercely, while Jack with a line was trying to bind his arms.

The three struggling figures were mixed up hopelessly, and as the German exerted all his strength they came crashing down in a heap, the lieutenant, who was underneath, striking his bullet head against a projecting tree-trunk.

As Jack and the engineer pulled themselves apart and stood panting, looking down at their foe, they saw that he was senseless.

As Mac turned him over the fallen man groaned.

"He's had some knock," muttered the engineer. "His blessed arm's broken!"

There was no time to be lost in trussing up the senseless captain. Jack and his chum stole down in the darkness, which had now enveloped the island. There was a light burning on the U boat, doubtless to guide the Germans back to their ship.

They reached the shore. Thus far everything had gone so unexpectedly well that neither, although excited and in the highest spirits, could help feeling that there must be a finish to their luck.

Yap, yap, yap!

"There's that wretched dog!" And Jack clutched the engineer, with a gasp.

The sound could be heard on the U boat, and surely would awaken some suspicion. But no!

All was quiet, save for a subdued harmony which floated across the mysterious lagoon, bathed in the quiet of the tropical night. The young moon shone directly on the rocking U boat, making the scene seem more unreal than before.

The chorus stopped.

Then Mac, who had been cudgelling his brains for an idea, drew Jack gently into the shelter of the trees again.

"Back to the lieutenant!" he whispered. "I must get his clothes."

"Why? What can you do with them?" Jack returned.

"Wait," said Mac, "and help."

The German lieutenant lay where he had been flung—still unconscious, and breathing stertorously.

Together they stripped him, and Mac arrayed himself in all the gorgeously of the handsome uniform.

"Gott strafe England!" he whispered hoarsely to the astonished Jack, who jumped at Mac's really quite convincing accent.

They went back to the shore, where the small boat was grounded. Then, leaping in, and bringing the captain's dog, they, or rather Jack, pulled, while Mac lay back in imitation of the haughty captain.

The dog started barking, and as they reached the side of the boat a figure appeared, called into being by a guttural hail from the Scot.

The figure saluted as his supposed captain clambered on board.

His cry of astonishment was nipped in the bud as the "crew" caught him a hefty one on the side of the head with a dripping oar.

His body slid quietly into the lagoon, a momentary phosphorescent gleam showing where it had fallen like a plummet.

The lieutenant's dog trotted along the deck.

At that moment the three remaining members of the crew put their heads above the companion-way.

"Now for it!" cried Mac. And they jumped.

To the Huns it seemed as though some monsters had descended from the sky, as, flattened, bruised, and battered, thoroughly cowed by the revolvers held by the two chums, they stared, blinking at their captors.

"Truss the beauties up!" commanded Mac, his Scottish brogue much in evidence; and one of the bewildered sailors started.

"You are one Scotchman!" he gasped. "One Fifer!"

"Ay," grunted Mac, grimly amused, "a Fife man. But what's that to you, you dirty German?"

"I am one Hungarian—a pressed man! I hate these Germans!" cried the man indignantly. "And I have been in Glasgow, and learnt the engineering in the yards ere."

Mac looked at him searchingly.

It would be a great help to have a friend on board; for a plan was beginning to shape itself in the canny Scot's brain.

He was convinced that the man spoke the truth, for once he had been on a tramp run by an Austrian firm where the officers were divided into two camps, and the hatred that sullenly brooded under smiling faces amazed him.

If this Hungarian could put him up to one or two wrinkles—for, expert as he was, Mac did not want to overrule his cunning in dealing with the latest product of the Kiel building yards—he would be a very useful ally.

But Mac was too cautious to trust the seemingly honest sailor all at once.

(Continued on page 24.)



Charlie at the Show

A genuinely funny account of Charlie Chaplin's latest comical adventures, told with irresistible humour by Jack Lewis, and sketched by Phil Swinnerton. The whole being a record of the fine Essanay Film

CHAPTER I, Kindred Spirits.

THOSE favoured folk who have studied the wonderful science of geography, can take any ordinary atlas of the world, given away by extraordinary tea-merchants, and point straight away to the charming little Welsh town of Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh.

But for the benefit of those who have used their atlas as an outer covering for brandy-balls, or, maybe, as a flypaper, it would perhaps be as well to explain that the aforementioned charming Welsh town of Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh is about forty-five calendar miles (avoidupois) from the equally charming city of Rhmws-y-nghpw.

I think that has made it pretty clear.

Now to get on with the story.

In the main street of Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh, there is one of those old-time, goodly hostels which dispense ginger-beer, hot raspberry, clove, peppermint, or pineapple, as well as the cup which cheers, and, alas! inebriates.

This hostel is known locally as the Frog—though, to give it its full title, it rejoices in the name of the Frog and Flannel—and in its cheery interior there were scenes of afternoon revelry.

For a stranger had come into the town, a stranger who was more passing strange than most strangers usually are.

Little wonder really that the good people who had been born, bred and buttered in Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh looked askance at him.

Was that, they wondered, the very latest fashion in bowlers? Were those trousers the last word in fashion from Bond Street, W.?

And that moustache—what about it? Certainly it looked like a portion of a brokendown flue-brush. But then, who was to say flue-brushes weren't the "go"—that is to say, the absolute "went"?

Yes, the goodly people assembled in the goodly bar-parlour of the goodly Frog and Flannel were favourably impressed by the owner of that bowler. They felt kindly disposed towards the proprietor of those trousers.

They liked him. He was a sport!

Who but a sport would wear three dents in the crown of his bowler, patch his trousers with sandpaper—to assist in the lighting of matches—and suspend those same trousers precariously with the sort of string braces one uses to tie up peascoks?

Also, he was a sport in his demeanour. His whole bearing reflected it.

Had he not swung in at the swing-doors so genially that they swung back before he got in? And, when he picked himself up off the pavement, he had not fumed and raged and stamped and swore. He did not kick the salmon-tin he had sat down on, angrily; he did not spurn it from him furiously.

He merely looked at it more in sorrow than in anger, smiled, raised his hat, and told it not to "mensch."

Then he entered the dispensary with more caution, and placed his suit-case carefully in a corner by a "Guess-your-weight" machine.

The inmates gazed in astonishment at the suit-case, but they didn't say anything. They didn't like to.

And so they waited until the stranger opened the conversation. They watched him in silence as he took off his bowler, took a portion of cigarette out of it, and a match.

Then he struck the match on his trousers, lighted the cigarette, put his bowler on again, and looked round on the company.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen!" he said, with a smile. "Very windy night!"

"Very windy, whatever!" agreed the landlord.

"Extremely!" said the stranger. "I never knew the breeze to be so windy before. It is apt to blow one about as if one was a fagpaper. Yes, for all the world as if one was a fagpaper!"

"Looks as if it's blown your portmanter about a bit, old crow," said a gentleman in the corner.

The stranger glanced at his patchwork suit-case, and then glanced at the man in the corner.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I prefer not to be called a crow, thank you. I object to crows."

The man leaned back, and, opening his mouth so wide as to pretty well obscure the rest of his face, he laughed like a mirthful hippopotamus.

"Ho, ho!" he chortled "Don't like crows, don't you? I shouldn't think they liked you—not in them trousers and that 'at!"

The visitor to Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh bridled rather. He froze into dignity. A slighting remark had been passed about his bowler and his trousers, and his pride was touched.

For some moments he sat still, saying nothing. Then he made a strange remark.

"Do you ever get any Zeppelins down here?" he asked.

"I hafn't seen none whatever," said the landlord.

"I see. You don't suffer with air-raids?"

"Not as I've noticed particler!"

"H'm!" said the proprietor of the bowler. "That's rather a pity. I was going to tell our friend in the corner not to put his nose out of the window. Beacons like that are apt to get bombs dropped on 'em!"

With these scathing remarks the stranger got up and moved to the bar with the quiet grace of a young land-crab. He took off his bowler, and tapped with it upon the counter. Then he turned and surveyed the company benevolently.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "name your drinks. At my expense name your fancies!"

A hum ran through the gathering, and the generous individual with the flue-brush moustache, smiled.

"Perhaps it would be as well for me to introduce myself," he said. "Surname, Chaplin—christened Charlie—after a certain gentleman by name of Peace. I haven't got my birth certificate, but I've got the 'Police Gazette' in my port-manteau, if anybody doubts my affy-daffy. Sounds Welsh, that, doesn't it? But pardon the joke. Don't mensch!"

As it happened, nobody menshed, or seemed desirous of menshing, and so Charlie—for, indeed, it was none but he—tapped again on the counter with the brim of his bowler.

"Come, gentlemen," he repeated. "Kindly designate your fluid. In other words: What do you want me to pay for?"

The invitation stirred the red-nosed party in the corner from a spell of brooding upon the subject of Zeppelins, bombs, and lighting regulations. He wiped his moustache quickly with his sleeve.

"Mine's a brandy-and-soda," he said. "That's my drink, you bet!"

"I don't bet," said Charlie coldly. "I never gamble on any account. You'd better have a hot raspberry!"

It was an innocent remark, but, strange to say, it stirred the ire of the gentleman in the corner.

"Look 'ere!" he said. "I suppose you wouldn't care for me to bash your 'ead in?"

Charlie started.

"Certainly not!" he said. "The idea! Certainly not! Not in this bowler!"

"Very well, then," said the man. "Then don't let's have so much about raspberries, d'ye hear?"

"Yes, thanks," replied Charlie, shifting back a bit as the man shifted forward. "I hear quite well, thank you! Don't mensch! But you are a rather peculiar man!"

"I dessay I am," said the irate one. "What about it?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Charlie, standing on one balancer and swinging his cane. "Nothing at all, I assure you. But I was about to remark that I have never found a more rare and refreshing fruit than—"

He paused suddenly, as the man with the high complexion seized up a pewter pot.

"Say it!" he cried. "Go on, say it, and 'ave your 'ead bashed in! Rare and refreshing what—eh? Rare and refreshing what?"

"Marrows," said Charlie quickly. "I'm passionately fond of them. Sit me down beside a marrow, and I'm as happy as a nigger with a melon. But what will you take, Mr.—er—"

"Swiller, my name is," said the gentleman, rather mollified. "Jerry Swiller, only son of Edward and Elizabeth, late of this parish. And I don't mind telling you that Jerry is a

good 'un. He might not have a collar on, and he might not have brushed the brickdust off his coat and 'at—"

"Don't mensh!" said Charlie, smiling and patting his shoulder. "Brickdust is only skin deep, as the proverb says. Don't you trouble to wash because I'm here."

"I'm not going to," said Jerry promptly. "And don't you trouble to wash while I'm here. You may have peccoliar ideas about trousis, and portmanters—but don't you be afraid to talk to me. I'm not a proud sort!"

Charlie stiffened rather at the remark. He looked down at his trousers and boots; he glanced in a mirror, and shifted his tie round from the back of his neck. Then he said coldly:

"What fluid do you take, Mr. Swiller?"

On his own confession, Mr. Swiller was not a proud sort. He named his drink nearly as quickly as Charlie refused to buy it.

"Come, come, Mr. Swiller!" said Charlie. "Have something about twopence!"

There was nothing else for it, and Mr. Swiller assented with a rather bad grace. But things ran smoothly after that, and when half an hour had passed Charlie and Jerry were quite remarkably good friends.

Never before had Charlie met such a charming, good-natured old sport as Jerry. Never before had Jerry met such a charming, intelligent, good-natured old sport as Charlie.

That's what Jerry and Charlie kept telling one another, at any rate.

And even after that the friendship ripened. Confidences of the closest kind were freely exchanged.

Jerry had told Charlie how much he paid for his bowler at the local rag-shop. Charlie had opened his portmanteau and shown Jerry the photograph of the girl who had pinched his heart—sweet Sheila Shavings, the little, sweet-faced labeller in the jam factory, the idol of his heart, the very apple of his bowler.

And then, when Charlie had kissed the photograph, given it to Jerry to kiss as well, and handed it round the bar for everyone to do the same, he stood up and surveyed the scene like a pantomime Napoleon.

"Jerry, old friend," he said, holding up his mug—"Jerry, my old-established pal, my fellow-winkle on the barrow of life, have you ever studied the—er—hic—the—er—poetsh?"

"I 'ave," said Jerry.

"What—hic—what have you studied?" asked Charlie.

"I learned 'Little Tim' once when I was a boy," said Jerry.

Charlie smiled.

"Ah, then," he said, "you must know the words of the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam?"

"Oh, Ma K—what?" asked Jerry.

"Omar Khayyam," said Charlie dramatically. "Don't you know those immortal lines:

"Take thou the cup in hand,
And waive the rest?"

"Yes," said Jerry, "I 'eard of 'em, I believe. But put my ginger-beer down! If you want to wave any, you spill your own!"

Charlie smiled, and, with a murmured apology, drank Jerry's beer. Then he pulled himself together, pulled up his trousers, adjusted his bowler, and slapped Jerry so hard on the shoulder that he nearly fell under the counter.

"Jerry," he said, "you're a good sort!"

"I dessay," said Jerry. "But I ain't a punchball. Not so much of it!"

"Certainly, Jerry!" said Charlie, raising his hat politely. "If you say, 'Not so much of it,' then, in regard for you, I will decrease the amount. But look here! Would you care to accompany me to the opera to-night?"

"Do you mean the music—all?" said Jerry.

"That's it," said Charlie.

"I don't care for music—alls, not much," said Jerry.

"That's quite all right. I'll pay," said Charlie.

Jerry brightened.

"I don't mind 'em sometimes," he said.

"Then you'll come, old comrade?" said Charlie, tripping over his own feet and sitting down on the weighing-machine in a way which made the indicator fly round like a stop-clock.

"I'll come," said Jerry.

Charlie nodded and smiled. He took out his watch, breathed on the face, shook it, and wiped it with his bowler. After he had given it a further polish on his trousers he looked up.

"The time now," he said slowly—"the correct Greenwich stinky is twelve minutes past five. Now, five minutes ago it would have been seven minutes past, wouldn't it?"

"It would," said Jerry.

"Good!" said Charlie. "Then meet me then!"

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And with those words he got up, took his portmanteau and cane, and passed out into the gathering murk, leaving Jerry to scratch his head and work it out—with the assistance of the weighing-machine.

CHAPTER 2.

Two at the Show.

HAD the proprietor of a certain bowler wended his way straight home after leaving the goodly comfort of the Frog and Flannel, he might have been a little less hazy about his appointment with his new-found friend, Jerry Swiller.

But owing to some inconsiderate people having left banana-skins lying about outside the doors of kindred dispensaries, Charles of the bushy moustache must needs slip up and fall inside.

Thus we find that on route for his apartments he fell into the error of imbibing several more raspberry hot drinks, two peppermints, and one clove—which is enough to undermine anybody's communications and make them unsteady on their trench mortars.

One thing, however, he was quite clear about, and that was that he had made arrangements to attend the second performance of the variety opera to be given that night at the big hall in Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh.

In view of this he unpacked his suit-case and took out a ball of string, a broken telescope, a pad which he used for putting a gloss on his bowler, and, lastly, a suit of dress-clothes which he had used at big dinners at the Astor Hotel.

It was a lovely suit. The people of American Society had often paused in the palm court to gaze at it. All the other waiters were madly jealous of it. And this was the suit which he donned in readiness for the opera.

Charlie was not a vain man—not in the least. But there was some excuse for the way he swayed and curveted in front of the glass. It wasn't a handsome glass. It was one of those variety which bear an advertisement for shaving-powder, and someone had scratched off half the mercury from the back. Consequently there is little wonder that Charlie, in a frantic endeavour to catch a complete view of his bobtails, turned round so many times that he got giddy and sat in the washstand.

He got to his feet, with his bobtails dripping with the water he had just washed in.

"H'm!" he muttered. "Mosh 'noying! Bobtails all damp. Spoil 'pearance alt'gether. Ah, well, worst troubles at sea than wet bobtails—mush worst!"

With this philosophical remark he bent down to do up his boots. But in bending down he failed to judge the distance correctly, and he fell forward with his head under the bed.

This situation was rather awkward. It wanted thinking out.

Every time Charlie tried to come back he banged his head on a loose bed-iron.

"Confoun' it!" he muttered. "Thish won't do. Mushn't knock landlady's bed about. It'sh not a case of 'get out and get under.' It'sh a case of get under and geddout."

Having come to this conclusion, Charlie proceeded to crawl under the bed and out the other side. When he had done this he noticed that his fancy waistcoat was coated with fluff and feathers. But even this did not perturb him. Like the resourceful man he was, he brushed himself down with the shaving-brush and wiped off the lather with the towel.

Then, having readjusted his hair with the tooth-brush, he sat down on the bed.

"Now," he said, taking up his opera-hat and gazing at it with a frown, "where was it I promised to meet that pershon Jerry Swiller? Where wash it now?"

He scratched his head to assist recollection, got up, sat down again, and blew into one of his gloves.

But for the life of him he could not recollect where and at what time the tryst was to be.

At last he got on to his pins again and gave it up for a bad job.

"Oughter remember," he muttered. "I remember looking at my watch. I was mosh 'xplishit—most 'xplishit 'bout the time. Anyhow," he added, "I don't care if I don't meet him. I didnt like the way he looked at my trousers and my bowler. Said he didn't mind being seen speaking to me. Washn't a proud sort. Very insultin', that wash."

With these words Charlie took up his cane and his coat, put on his opera-hat, and moved out of his bed-room.

Being a naturally impatient man, he did not trouble to descend the stairs one by one. Taking advantage of a piece of orange-peel on the top stair, he came down without touching the others.

The only disadvantage of the descent was that it made his opera-hat look like the sort of accordion one picks up cheap in a jumble sale.

But everything has its drawbacks, and, with this borne

comfortingly in mind, Charlie kept on wending his way towards the music-hall.

When he was half there a small boy darted past him in an orange-box, and Charlie stopped and gazed after him.

Gradually a wave of indignation came over his moustache. It bristled.

"The idea!" he said, holding a lamp-post tightly in case the wind might blow it over. "There's that fellow riding, and I've got to walk!"

He looked round him, and heard the bang and rattle of a steam traction engine churning along the road, drawing behind it a train of heavily-laden brewers' waggons.

Charlie stepped out from the kerb and waved his arms frantically—so frantically, indeed, that he nearly knocked his hat under the engine.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Hi, there—stho!"

The driver of the engine pulled up with a frightful rattle and snorting, and the drays behind jammed one after the other, jangling a multitude of bottles.

"What's up?" he demanded, looking down at Charlie and wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. "What's wrong, guv'nor?"

"Are you a taxshi?" asked Charlie, waving his cane and leaning easily against the mudguard.

"Taxi!" exclaimed the man. "Taxi! Me? I mean—this 'ere! You're barmy, guv'nor!"

"I don't want any 'mpertinensh!" said Charlie coldly. "If you're a taxshi, drive me to the op'rer!"

He pulled out his watch, glanced at it, and then turned sharply to the lamp-post.

"Watshon?" he said, tapping the lamp-post with the brim of his hat, "we have sheven minutes to catch the midnight express to Mexhico. If our friend will drive fast enough we can do it with ten minutes to spare!"

"Guv'nor," said the driver of the traction engine, with a rather absurd smile, "hop off!"

Charlie waved his watch.

"Driver," he said, "whip up the horse and drive me to King's Cross. Do it in ten seconds and you get ninepence extra!"

"You'd better pick your 'at up before I start up, else you'll get it run over!"

Charlie picked his hat up and gazed at it sadly. Then he looked up reprovingly at the driver of the engine.

Charlie drew himself up so straight that he nearly went over backwards and sat down in the path.

"Are you the driver of thish engine?" Charlie demanded.

"No," said the man. "The company pays me to stand up 'ere and watch the wheels go round!"

"Don't be abshurd!" said Charlie. "I shay, are you the driver of thish engine?"

"I am," said the man.

"I frgive you," said Charlie. "You're good chap. You're indishpensh'ble to the communit'y. I hope you never get called up under the group system. I shay, I hope you—hic!—I hope you never do! Shake han'sh!"

The driver put down a grimy hand, and Charlie shook it solemnly. Then, after kissing the engine, he raised his hat to the vans, and began once more to wend his way towards the music-hall.

In good time he arrived there, and tacked his way into the vestibule. It was rather an imposing vestibule for Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh, and Charlie was impressed. In order to regain his self-possession he struck a match on one of the marble pillars, lighted a cigarette, and threw the match into a palm-tree.

Then, glancing round, he observed a tall figure in resplendent uniform, with numerous medals upon his manly breast.

Major-General FitzJohn FitzGeorge, of Taffy Turrets, was home on leave, and, to while away his stay in his native village, he was taking Mrs. FitzJohn FitzGeorge to the music-hall.

But how was Charlie to know this? I say, how could anyone expect him to know? Majors-general shouldn't dress like commissionaires.

He strolled up, and with a sharp air he threw his coat over the general's shoulder, and forced his hat into his hand.

"Take those'sh to the cloak-room, my man," he said—"sharp! And I want a packet of Players'h, and a—"

He didn't get any farther in the list of his requirements. He suddenly received a nasty push in the face, so violent that he skated back, tripped up over one of his own feet, and sat on a baby asleep in a bassinette.

This was all very uncalled for, and Charlie was a little perturbed. He picked himself up, apologised to the baby, and rescued his hat from the middle of one of the evergreens. Then he turned round.

"Some of these commish'naires are a bit too uppish!" he muttered. "Think no end of themselves just because they've been through the Crimea and had their whiskers froze

at—at Waterloo, or whatever the great battle was'h! But where'sh that man Shwiller—I shay, where is'h he?"

He turned round several times looking for Jerry, but there was no sign of his bosom pal in the vestibule. So at last, growing indignant, he tacked up to the box-office and peered through the wire netting.

"R'turn to Sheppard'sh Bush!" he said. "An' a ticket for—I shay, a ticket for an extra bowler!"

A red face peered through the pigeon-hole.

"Now," said a harsh voice, "what do you want—hay?"

"Nothing particular, Rufus!" said Charlie, pushing his hat—or trying to—through the window. "How mush—I shay, how mush will you advansh me on that?"

"Take it away, and don't waste my time!" said the clerk of the box-office. "Go on—hop it!"

"If you're full up with nice hats," said Charlie, "there's a very nice globe of goldfish I've got at home—"

"Look here!" said the theatre man. "If you don't hop it—"

"My man," said Charlie, with sudden coldness, "be careful how you speak to me! And oblige me also by tucking your nose back into the office. A strong light makes my

CHARLIE
POLITELY
PUSHED
THE LADY
INTO
THE
FOUNTAIN



eyes ache. I want one seat in the very front row of the stalls—nexht to the or-chestra!"

The man grunted, turned a handle, and a little sphere of metal like a laundry label jumped out in front of Charlie. Charlie started, picked it up, and put down fivepence with a bang.

"Here!" said the box-office man. "What's this?"

"Fivepence!" said Charlie promptly.

"Not so much of it!" said the man. "You want a front-row stall, don't you?"

"Pre-cisely!" said Charlie.

"Well, then," said the person in the box, "I want another four-and-sevenpence!"

"What!" exclaimed Charlie, making such a swift calculation that his hat throbbled. "Do you mean to shay—I shay, do you mean to tell me you want five shillings for this?"

He held up the metal slab.

"Yes," said the man, "I do—quick!"

Charlie was going to pause for further argument, but he perceived a motion inside the office which indicated that the man was coming outside. So very quickly he slapped down the extra four-and-sevenpence and made his way through into the theatre.

Meanwhile, things had been happening outside which Charlie had not dreamed of.

Jerry Swiller, with a little more brickdust on his bowler than usual, and a trifle more whitewash on his coat, was pacing up and down past the theatre like an old Polar bear.

Every now and again he paused, and appeared to raise a telescope to his face as if he was looking for Charlie. But, in reality, he was quenching his thirst from a bottle of best stone ginger which he had brought with him.

At first, as he paced up and down, Jerry's face was the picture of contentment and expectation. But gradually, as the time went on, and his new-found friend of the imitable bowler did not turn up to pay for his seat in the theatre, Jerry's face began to take on an expression of decided annoyance. Once he strode up past the theatre to one of these popular open-air restaurants where you can purchase various kinds of shellfish and eat them out of a small saucer a la carte and al fresco.

"Give us a penn'orth of whelks!" said Jerry to the proprietor. "Ow are they—fresh?"

"Bootiful!" said the fish merchant. "Lovely!"

Jerry, being a trustful man, took his word for it, and absorbed the whelks quickly.

"Got any winkles?" he asked when he had done so.

"Yes!" said the man. "Beauties!"

"Right!" said Jerry. "Give us a penn'orth—in this pocket. Must 'ave something to eat in the thay-ater."

"Yes," agreed the vendor; "nothing like winkles when you're feeling peckish."

Jerry agreed, held out the pocket for the winkles, and returned to his beat outside the theatre.

But the hour came along for the performance to commence, and there was still no sign of Charlie. So at last Jerry, muttering nasty things to his collar-stud, entered the Pwllgwl-ap-Girgh music-hall, procured a seat in the most elevated portion of the house, and, making his way up the stairs, took his perch in the front with a birdseye view of the stage.

CHAPTER 3.

Dealing with Sundry Mishaps to Charlie.

"For a-hunting we will go,

A-hunting we will go,

Tally-ho! tally-ho! tally-ho!"

THE clarion notes, clear as a foghorn on a misty day, resounded through the theatre as Charlie, his bowler and coat and stick clasped tightly, made his way down the centre aisle of the hall.

In spite of the fact that Jerry Swiller had not turned up, he was quite happy, and when he was happy he always sang the same song.

Not that he had ever been hunting. The nearest thing to it he had ever experienced was when he fell off the bed and sat on the clothes-horse one morning when hunting for his stud.

But that didn't matter. You don't have to be a hunter to sing a hunting-song. So Charlie let the lusty notes ring out as he made his way down towards the front row of the stalls.

It happened, however, that the orchestra were playing the overture, and so everybody turned to Charlie and shouted, "Sh!"

Charlie stopped, and looked round the auditorium.

"I refuse to shoosh!" he said. "I sha'n't shoosh! If you want anyone to shoosh, shoosh the orchestra! I shay, shoosh the orchestra!"

With this Charlie flourished his bowler so defiantly that he dropped his stick. He picked it up, and dropped his coat. Tucking the stick under his arm he grabbed the coat up quickly, and his hat fell off. It was most annoying.

But at last he managed to recover the lot, and made his way along a row of people to the seat which had been reserved for him, in the front row of the stalls. In doing so he trod on so many toes that it was like walking over a cornfield.

"Hi, there! Mind where you're coming to!" That was the greeting he got from nearly everyone.

And he replied to it by raising his bowler, smiling, saying, "Don't mensh!" and putting his foot down on the next person's toe.

At last, however, he reached his seat, and sat himself down with a long-drawn sigh. He put his arm up, and leaned back in the manner of a man who settles down to enjoy himself.

But he hadn't been there a minute when he felt something dig him sharply in the back of the neck. He looked round, to encounter the indignant gaze of a fiery-faced old general—the one, as a matter of fact, whom he had mistaken for a commissioner.

"Poltroon!" hissed the general. "Poltroon! Take your elbow out of my wife's ear, before I smash you with my cane!"

Charlie bridled.
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"Very well, sergeant," he said—"very well. But tell your wife to keep her ear over her own side. But there—"
He raised his hat and smiled at the frigid glance of Mrs. FitzJohn. "Xcushe me, madam! There are ears'h and ears'h! Your misfortune, ma'am!"

"What do you mean, fellow?" demanded the general's wife.
"I mean that I've sheen—I shay, I've sheen rhubarb-leaves, ma'am, which might have been—I shay, they might have been pansy-blossoms compared with—hie!—I shay, compared with some sorts of ears'h that grow on different people!"

Mrs. FitzJohn FitzGeorge put up her nose and turned her head away. The general, red with rage, leaned over farther.

"Poltroon!" he hissed. "Poltroon! After the performance—I say, after the performance—I will smash you!"

Charlie raised his hat and smiled.
"Thanks!" he said. "Don't mensh! Don't think of menshing! I am at your disposal! Hallo! What's thish? What's thish?"

He glanced up as a figure popped up from the orchestra and took a stand upon the conductor's chair.

There was really some excuse for Charlie's surprise. The musical genius in charge of the band was a thing of beauty, and a joy for ever. His face was not unlike a Bank-Holiday coccanut with a superabundance of fibre. His hair was not unlike a workhouse door-mat, while his whiskers looked like the inside of a horschair couch that had been left outdoors on a wet night.

Charlie was a stranger to Pwllgwl-ap-Whayyoumaycall, so he was not aware that the conductor of the band was a shining light in the musical profession. He had not heard of Gustave Gaboo, the famous lightning conductor.

So Charlie forgot all about the general and his lady, and turned his attention to Gustave Gaboo, as he took up his perch, outspread his arms, and held his baton high.

The next moment the music began—a sweet little sonata—which sounded like a dead march played in ragtime, and Charlie, who had a real soul for song, began to shrug his shoulders rhythmically and throw his arms about.

But once again he received a nasty jolt in the neck, and once again General FitzJohn leaned over.

"Poltroon!" he hissed. "If you don't want me to smash you now, keep your elbows down!"

"Certainly!" said Charlie. "Don't mensh, Charlie, my lad! You must be more careful! Keep your elbows'h out of the—hie!—out of the rhubarb! But talking about fruit—le's have a banana!"

He leaned forward, and, groping about in the tails of his coat, he presently extracted a couple of lovely, overripe specimens of Canary fruit, and ate them with enjoyment.

But the skins were still in his hand, and he eyed them doubtfully.

"Where shall I put 'em?" he mused. "Can't eat 'em very well; and if I throw 'em away they'll be bound—I shay, they'll be bound to hit someone! Sh'pose I'd better—"

He paused, with his eyes fixed upon the broad mouthpiece of the trombone, which was projecting over the rail of the orchestra.

"Hallo!" he said to himself, sitting up straight and looking hard. "Didn't know they had them here! Looks'h like a shoot for wastepaper, orange-peel, and fag-ends. Fanshy having one of them here! Mosh thoughtful!"

He took out his cigarette and tossed it lightly down the trombone, following it up with the banana-peel.

Immediately there issued from the orchestra a nasty, discordant noise which made Gustave Gaboo, the conductor, fairly leap with rage. He rapped on the rail with his baton, and made the band start again.

And when they started there issued once again that weird and wonderful wail from the trombone.

Passing his hands wildly through his hair, Gustave glared nastily down at the trombone performer.

"Bah!" he shouted. "Why you make that 'orrible noisa, Meester Evans? Bah! You breaka my 'eart! Vy don't you go away and learna to play? Bah!"

The trombonist blushed to the very tip of his bald head, and blew into his trombone so hard that he nearly burst. He sprang up.

"What you mean?" he cried angrily. "What you mean? I haf got to learn to play whatefer— Bah yourself, you Italian grinder of organs! Who was it fell off the top, eh? Who was it?"

He turned up his trombone as he spoke, and immediately to his anger and consternation there fell out the outer covering of the two bananas and a half-smoked cigarette.

Now, Mr. Evans was a quick-tempered man. He took up the skins, and, looking over his trombone, he hurled them with all his might full into Charlie's face. For a moment Charlie sat still. Then, unhooking one of the skins from his ear, he got to his feet.

"I say," he said sharply—"I say! What do you mean by that? Did you throw that fruit at me?"

"Yess, I did!" spluttered the Welshman. "You keep your rubbish out of my trombone, whateffer! I will haf you turned out of the theatre!"

With these words he resumed his seat, and picked up his instrument. But Charlie was not going to let matters end there. He had been publicly insulted, and his honour was going to be publicly satisfied.

So taking a wax vesta out of his pocket, and putting a cigar between his lips, he leaned over and struck the match on Mr. Evans' bald head.

This was the signal for a general misunderstanding. The player of the trombone was not the sort of person to lend out his tuppenny as a piece of tinder. Besides, if he allowed every Tom, Dick, and Harry to strike matches on his cerebrum, all the shine would be off it in a week. It would look like a piece of emery-paper.

So dropping his trombone, he jumped up, and turning, gave Charlie a really nasty push in the face.

For some moments Charlie disappeared. But in good time he emerged from somewhere under the general, levered himself up, and stepped forward to demand an explanation.

"I say," he said, in a freezing way to the trombonist, "did you hit me then? I shay, did you hit me then?"

THEY
SANG
OH! HOW THEY
SANG



Mr. Evans did not pause to confirm it. He struck out at Charlie again.

But this time Charlie hopped to one side, and, jumping in, he swung a terrible upper-cut to the bald head.

It was a carefully thought-out blow, the sort of upper-cut which can only be learned and mastered by one who had been in the past the famous pugilist called Filleted Freddie.

It found its mark, that upper-cut; though it wasn't precisely the mark it was meant to find.

Missing the trombonist by certainly not more than a foot, it handed hard and true on Gustave Gaboo, burying itself, as it were, in a wealth of whisker.

But, as we have said before, the blow was certainly not the sort to stop at whiskers. It would have churned its way through a plantation of furze.

Thus it came to pass that the well-known lightning conductor, Gustave Gaboo, shot off his perch like an uprooted raspberry-cane, sat on the flautist with such violence that he nearly swallowed the flute, rolled off on to the triangle, cannoned past the 'cello, and finally came to earth with his head through the kettle-drum.

Gustave Gaboo's descent from the conductor's chair to the orchestra-pit was what might have been called a chapter of

accidents. But there was really no need for him to become so angry as he did.

He sprang up, and began to dance about like a dolly on an organ, waving his hands and tearing his whiskers in a most absurd and abandoned manner.

Charlie, leaning over the rail of the orchestra, looked down upon him in lofty contempt.

"All right!" he said. "Keep your fibre on, Gustave! Accidents will happen in the besh regulated families! It's no good you sthanding there like that, carrying on like a seidlitz-powder! Pull yourself together! Take your whiskers' h out of the kettle-drum!"

But Charlie, unfortunately, was not permitted to stand there and give Gustave Gaboo any more advice.

He suddenly felt himself seized by the scruff of the neck and the end of his bobtails. Then he was hoisted up and carried along the row.

"Come on!" said the gruff voice of the commissioner. "Out of it! We've 'ad enough of your little 'alf-larks! Out you go!"

"Put me down!" cried Charlie, kicking. "I shay, put me down! You're too violent!"

"We're going to be a bit more violent in 'alf a minute!" said the liveried one comfortingly.

And he was as good as his word.

When he reached the end of the theatre he suddenly hoisted Charlie up, and Charlie felt himself being hurled through space—or, rather, through the sort of space one usually finds in a theatre vestibule.

But once again Charlie's good fortune came to his assistance. Had he collided with one of the marble pillars he might have hurt himself. At any rate, it is quite possible he would have done his hat a large portion of no good.

It is quite possible, too, that he might have taken a running dive into the lovely fountain which played about in the middle of the palm-court.

But as Charlie flew over the ground, as it were, he espied beside the fountain the charming lady. True, she must have weighed about forty-eight stone in the shade, and she was the sort of person who is bigger round than Hyde Park, but upon her face there was a look of loneliness.

In the swift glance Charlie caught of her as he approached, it flashed in upon his mind that she was alone and unprotected. She wanted cheerful company to gladden her heavy heart.

"Sybil," he cried quickly, "I am coming! Don't you see me coming?"

Fortunately for Charlie, she didn't have time to see him. Before she had time to think, he had carried out his promise, and come to her.

But it was the commissioner's fault that Charlie came a bit too suddenly. He was a little over-anxious about it.

He came at her with the gentle gracefulness of a Spanish bull at a toreador, and the next moment she had been knocked back, and fell into the fountain like an animated bundle of washing.

"Oh!" she screamed. "I'm murdered! I'm— Oh, go-go-gog-bbspgh— Help!"

Now, Charlie's was always a lightning-like brain. He had that wonderful presence of mind which means so much in an emergency. Quick as a thought he realised the danger of the situation, he perceived that beauty was in distress.

Light as a grasshopper he sprang on to the edge of the fountain, and he stood there poised like Professor Porpoise, the wooden-legged natation expert, who dives off the end of Winkle Bay Pier three times a day excepting Sundays.

"Help! I'm drowning!" The pitiful cry from the lady in the fountain resounded through the palm-court. "Help! Gogogog-bbbb-spg—"

A light of resolution sprang into Charlie's moustache. His bobtails bristled with a grim purposefulness.

"Madame," he said, "tread water for a few minutes. I am coming."

"I c-can't!" screamed the fat lady. "Save me, Claude!"

That settled it. She had called him Claude. None but a craven could stand and see a woman drowned when she had entreated him pitifully, and called him Claude.

"Madame," cried Charlie, "do not fear! Do not be apprehensive. Whilst I am here your windpipe shall not be choked; your lungs, my dear madame, shall not be water-logged. Certainly not—even if I get wet myself, I will save you!"

"Hurry up, then!" cried the stout party, floundering about like a whale. "Hurry up! I am sinking!"

Charlie nodded, and assumed a dramatic pose, inspired by the sylph-like marble person in the centre of the fountain.

"You say you are sinking, ma'am," he said, throwing out his arm in the manner of a tragedian. "So are the sands of time—the sands of time are sinking, and—"

"Pull me out, you fool—pull me out!" cried the lady, forgetting herself.

"All right, ma'am," said Charle coldly. "But shift a bit, and give me room to dive in. And close your mouth a bit, too, ma'am, else there won't be any water left for me to dive into!"

The stout lady floundered over, and the next moment Charlie threw himself in heroically, cutting the water with the silent grace of a hippopotamus.

"Lie still, ma'am," he gasped. "Lie still, and I will swim to you! I can see the lights of Dover in the distance!"

He struck out towards beauty in distress, but he hadn't done more than half a stroke when he felt something hook him by the trousers, and the next moment he was jerked bodily out of the water, swung round, and dropped once again on terra-firma.

It took him some time to get the hook disentangled from his trousers. When at last he succeeded, and had drawn himself up with becoming dignity, he saw that the stout lady had been fished out, and was being revived in a corner, while the big commissioner was standing grinning with a long pole and a hook on the end.

That, then, thought Charlie, was the way he had been lifted out of his difficulty. And the thought annoyed him.

After thoroughly squeezing the water out of his bobtails and emptying his opera-hat on one of the palms, he squared his shoulders, strode up to the commissioner, and, raising his hand, tapped him upon the watch-chain.

"Look here, my man," he said sharply—"I shay, look here! Do you take me for a—I shay do you take me for a—hic—for a confounded fish?"

For a reply the big commissioner bent down and took a handful of Charlie's coat-collar, shaking him slightly.

"No," he said, "I don't. But I tell you what I did take you for."

"Whash 'at?" asked Charlie.

"A kangaroo," said the commissioner.

"A kangaroo?" said Charlie.

"Yes," said the man in livery. "Now hop off!"

For a moment Charlie paused, thinking.

Then he raised his hat politely, and smiled.

"Certainly," he said. "Don't mensh—only too pleased!"

And, with these gentlemanly words, he put on his hat, turned up his coat-collar to keep the water from running down his neck, and turned back into the theatre.

CHAPTER 4. More Mishaps.

AMONG all the gamut of cross-talk comedians and mutual songsters it would have been hard to have found a more popular pair than Noggett and Nuggett, otherwise known as the "Long and the Short Of It!"

The proprietors of the Pwllgwll-ap-thingumybob Musical Hall had procured their appearance at a simply ruinous figure. It was rumoured in the town that they were not receiving less than ninepence a night and perks.

It had been said in the announcement of their coming that they possessed between them the finest aviary in the world. No private persons in the two hemispheres had collected such a wonderful variety of feathered creatures, though this was really to be expected, for wherever they performed the public always made a point of giving them a bird at each performance.

To night they were rendering their famous song:

"Meet me to-night in the raspberry-canes,
In the shade of the goosberry-tree,"

the haunting melody of which had haunted thousands of sensitive people.

And it haunted Charlie as he sat in the box nearest the stage. The song haunted him so much that he tried to stuff his bobtails in his ears to prevent him hearing it. But he was far too much of a gentleman to signify his disapproval in the popular manner. He just lay back, and, lighting a fine old Havana cigar, which he had purchased for tuppence three weeks before, he puffed the smoke out towards the stage in a playful attempt to "gas" Mr. Noggett and asphyxiate his pal.

But there was another person in the house who was not disposed to take things so quietly. Oh, no! Jerry Swiller, in the gallery, was not favourably impressed with the "Long and Short Of It," and, being a person of impulse, he didn't care to disguise his feelings.

So he got to his feet, and began to wave about his bottle of stone ginger.

"Get off!" he shouted encouragingly to the comedians.

"Go on! Get off! You're rotten!"

"Sh! Ordah! Ordah!" shouted someone from the dress-circle.

"All right!" shouted Jerry, stepping forward and peering down over the rail. "Order up! Order up, if you're going to! I'll have the same again!"

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"Sh! 'Sh!" came the correcting words from the circle again; and Jerry got angry.

"I shan't shoosh," he shouted—"not till you two get off! If I say they're no class, they ain't—so now! Go on, you two—'op it!"

It was at this moment that Charlie, in the box, began to realise that something was afoot. Getting up, he leaned over the rail of the box, and peered upwards just at the moment when Jerry looked down.

And their eyes met.

"Hallo, old pal!" shouted Jerry. "Hallo, old chum! Fancy meetin' you 'ere!"

"Sh! Ordah!" shouted the voice again.

But Jerry took no notice. He was staring down at Charlie. "Where did you get to?" he shouted. "And wot yer doing, swanking it down in the box? Come up here, and have one with your old chum!"

"I'm afraid I can't!" shouted Charlie. "I've left my beastly wings at home. You come down here!"

Jerry nodded, and put one leg over the rail, with the sort of vague idea of stepping down into the pit. He was prevented from doing so by one of the attendants, who caught hold of him, and dragged him back.

This annoyed Jerry. If he wanted to go down to his pal in the box he was going down, and he didn't want to be deterred by people like that.

He turned round, and flourished his bottle wildly.

"Here, you with the marmalade uniform," he said; "you let me alone, else I'll pitch you down into the band!"

The attendant didn't like the look of Jerry's bottle, so he decided that discretion was the better part of valour.

"Come, come, old sport!" he said. "Pull yourself together!"

"I'm together already!" said Jerry with dignity. "I don't want any pulling. If I want to step down and see a pal of mine in the box I am a-going to—"

"But if you step over that rail you'll hurt yourself," the attendant pointed out.

Now, Jerry was not an unreasonable man. He ceased to wave the bottle about, and, turning round, peered once again over the rail down the dizzy altitude to the pit.

He turned round.

"It is rather a long way," he said. "Thanks'h for the tip, old spohrt. You're a good sort. Shake hansh!"

The attendant put down his trayful of pastries and confectionery in order to comply, and Jerry pump-handled his fin solemnly. Then he peered down into the tray.

"What yer got there?" he asked.

"Swiss-roll, cheese-cakes, raspberry-buns, and mer-in-gues," said the attendant.

Jerry nodded and groped in his pocket. Then, laying down a silver coin, he took the value in cakes, and put them in a little heap beside him.

"Hallo!" he said to himself, when the attendant had gone. "Hallo! Them two still on?"

He peered down, very annoyed, at the stage, where Noggett and Nuggett were still inviting someone to meet them in the raspberry-canes beneath the gooseberry-tree.

He jumped up and leaned over the rail.

"Get off!" he shouted. "Both of you! Slope!"

The "Long and the Short Of It" didn't take any notice, and Jerry picked up a cream bun and hurled it with all his force.

It was a splendid shot. It hit Noggett full in the face, and broke like a piece of shrapnel. The next one—a doughnut, which had been baked several weeks—caught Nuggett in the ear, and made him stagger.

Meanwhile, Charlie had been watching eagerly. As the doughnut rebounded off the "Short Of It's" ear and rolled down into the orchestra, he jumped up, and pulled hard at the bell in the box. An attendant came racing in.

"What's up, sir? What's up?" he gasped.

Charlie was lolling back in his chair, with his eyes turned up and his mouth open.

"My heart," he half whispered—"my heart! Ice-cream—quick! It is the only thing which will revive me. Bring me plenty of ice-cream."

With a scared look the attendant darted off, and came back with as many plates of ice-cream as he could carry.

"Here you are, sir," he said. "Here it is. Where will you take it?"

"Mind your own business!" said Charlie. "I'll take it where I like! If my heart's bad, that's nothing to do with 'ou!"

"Is it better now, sir?" asked the man, not without alarm.

Charlie lolled back, gasped, and half closed his eyes.

"No," he said; "it isn't. It will be when you've taken your face out of the box. Geddout!"

The man "goddout," and then Charlie began to recover in a remarkable way. He stood up, and took a plate of ice-

cream off the table, raising his hand, and holding it far back over his shoulder.

The next moment he threw it, and Signor Noggett's whiskers suddenly looked as if their proprietor had taken a running dive into a basin of custard.

One after the other the plates of ice-cream flew out of the box, and each time they found their mark there came a wild scream of joy from the gallery, and Jerry Swiller, mad with enthusiasm, tried to scramble over the rail.

For some minutes this went on, but still Noggett and Nuggett refused to be abashed.

But at last, when a portion of the ice-cream and one of the dough-nuts had rolled down over the first violin in the orchestra-pit, the management intervened, and the curtain came down so suddenly that it knocked Nuggett over the footlights like a ninepin, and the last the audience saw of the turn was that gallant gentleman wiping his face on some of the band parts.

When the curtain was raised again, the manager of the music-hall was standing in the centre of the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "Messrs. Noggett and Nuggett wish to thank you for your very kind appreciation, and to announce that they won't appear again this evening. The next turn will be the most wonderful ever put before you. Professor Salamanca Suchano, the famous fire-eater and red-hot-poker-negotiator, will give an exhibition of his wonderful art."

A roar of applause went up from the audience. Charlie rang for some more ice-cream. Jerry Swiller, in the gallery, jumped up, tripped over, sat on a lady with a baby, asked her where she was coming to, put one leg over the rail, and waved his hand till the curtain rose once more on Professor Suchano, the man with the asbestos interior.

CHAPTER 5. Fire!

AS we have said before, the proprietor of the music-hall at Pwllgwll-ap-Grpgh was an enterprising person. He did not believe in serving up to his audience any sort of show.

Only the best and the latest were good enough for him.

And really, Professor Salamanca Suchano was a splendid turn. He swallowed fire much more easily than Noggett and Nuggett had imbibed ice-cream, and you don't meet every day a man who can chew up red-hot cinders as if they had been tiger-nuts.

Before he began his performance, he came to the footlights and addressed the audience.

"Ladies and shentlemens," he said—"Beefore I begin to commence I must speak ze short vords to you all. In ze first spot, I am born in ze putiful Italian seety of Sapolio, where I leeve vith my stepfathers over ze feesh-and-potater bazaar. Ven I was only three months of age I swallow ze first red-hot ceender, and eet vos not burn—only make me feel insides ze leetle bit 'ot. In this way I find out that my stomachs vos not ze same as ze ordinary, common or keetchen-garden stomachs vich you was meet in ze ordin'ry trots of life.

"Vell, ladies and shentlemens, in Ectaly I goe on ze stage and make ze big 'it, and I keep on 'itting for years and years, until ze managements of ze—vos you call thees theatre?—writes me and says, 'Come over here, signor. Come to my theatre, and swallow ze fires in front of my audience. Chew ze red-hot poker for me, and I pay you 'undreds of pouns!"

"So," went on Signor Salamanca Suchano, "I am here to-night to give ze axhibition, and—"

"Get on with it then, and don't talk so much!" shouted Jerry from the gallery, waving his bottle at the performer. "You've chewed the rag long enough. Now 'ave a go at the cinders!"

Professor Suchano blushed, and peered up at the gallery.

"Vot ees eet my friends remarks?" he asked.

"Get on with it," shouted Jerry, "before I throw this bottle at you!"

The professor passed a hand over his brow, and looked a little bewildered.

"Ees it that my friend vant me to swallow ees nose?" he said. "No; I am afraid yes. Eet ees too 'ot."

Jerry made a dive for the rail, and was nearly across when someone grabbed him and pulled him back. But he struggled manfully.

"Lemme get down at 'im!" he cried. "Lemme get down, that's all. I'll teach him to say my nose is 'ot! I'll teach 'im!"

There was a bit of a hubbub throughout the theatre, and presently Charlie, in the box below, growing impatient, stood up and leaned out over the stage.

"Excuse me, professor," he said. "Don't take any

notish of our friend up there. In other words, old sphort, don't waste time. Times' h money, and money's h the root of all evil. Take the root by the forelock, old feller. Strike while the iron's h 'ot. Thash is to to shay, eat your poker while it's h warm."

With this gracious invitation he sank down into the box, and, turning, saw that during the conversation someone else had entered it and taken a seat. The sight startled Charlie rather, for the new-comer was by no means an ordinary individual. He was about as big round as the dome of St. Paul's, his face looked like a bladder of best lard, and his whole appearance, as he sat in the chair, was very much like a first-prize blancmange at a milk-pudding show.

Not that the individual could help being fat. Charlie didn't blame him for that. But the disconcerting thing about him was that all the time he sat there his ears were linked in a perpetual smile. His face was, as it were, bisected with mirth.

For the moment Charlie forgot all about the fire-eating professor. He stood upon his pins, and, steadying himself, took a complete and comprehensive survey of the stranger. Then he raised his hat.

"Good-evening!" he said.

The fat one did not reply. He just smiled like the proverbial cat from Cheshire.

"Good-evening, Jelly!" said Charlie again. "How is it you come to be out of your mould?"

This seemed to amuse the fat one, who was only a youth. He leaned back, and, opening his mouth wide, laughed hilariously.

Charlie stepped back in alarm.

"Hold on," he said—"hold on! If you open your face any wider the top of your head will fall off! Are you the fat person from Peckham?"

The fat one shook his head and laughed again. Then from his trousers pocket he took out a big piece of newspaper, and, unwrapping it, disclosed a collection of brandyballs and jububes.

He offered the bag to Charlie, and Charlie took one, with a smile. Then, after dusting it with his handkerchief, he put it in his mouth, smiled at the fat boy, and turned his attention once again to the show.

All the rest of the audience were turning their attention to it too, for the professor's feats with a red-hot poker were most compelling.

Even Jerry Swiller was held enthralled. With wide-open eyes he gazed at the performance.

There was no doubt that Professor Salamanca Suchano was hot stuff—very hot!

When he had bit a piece off the poker and dined sumptuously off a few lighted candles, he advanced once more towards the audience.

"Now, ladies and shentlemens," he said, "I weel proceed to perform my last and most wonderful tricks. From the centre of the stage there vill come a great spurt of flame, vich will make you all hop vith ze alarms. Eet vill be my pizness to put out zat flames. How shall I do it?"

"No idea," said Charlie, looking over his box. "Not the slightest, professor."

"Vell," went on the Italian, "I vill poot it out, but not vith the pourings of water over it. I tell you, ladies and shentlemens, that I vill not outpoot it vith sands, or any such things. The vay I ex-extinvisn it vill be this: I shall eat it. All the flame that come ups I vill svaller, and it vill deesappear."

This was rather a remarkable thing to promise, but evidently Signor Suchano meant to do it. To a man with an inside like his, a dish of curry-powder and peppercorns must have been like so much ice-cream.

Charlie and the fat boy watched him intently. So did all the people in the stalls, the fauteuils, and the circle. So did Jerry Swiller in the gallery.

As a matter of fact, there was no figure in the gods more intent and quiet than was Jerry's for those few tense minutes.

But when, suddenly, there spurted from the stage a huge tongue of flame, Jerry lost his nerve. He sprang up, waving his bottle in his excitement, and, as he saw the professor step into the flame, he leaned right out over the rail.

"Fire! Fire!" he shouted. "Put him out! He's alright!"

"Don't be silly, there! Sit down!" shouted the manager, who had his eye upon Jerry.

"If I come down there," shouted Jerry, half scrambling over the rail, "I'll teach you to tell me to sit down! I'll make you sit up! Are you going to stand there and see a bloke burnt up like a bundle of faggots? Fire! Fire!"

He swung round quickly, and then suddenly he threw his bottle at the nearest bald head, and darted up the steps, for at the top he espied the very thing required to save the very tragic situation.

Hanging on the wall there was a fire-hydrant and a length of hose, and in a moment Jerry, being a man of action, had grabbed it.

(Concluded on page 23.)



Mystery Island

By **HAMILTON TEED.**

On Mystery Island Rymer and Ah Foo, together with the Kanaka crew of the Octopus, find an old galleon imbedded in the rock. A mad Spaniard appears, and Rymer fights a duel with him, and is afterwards attacked by black bushmen in the madman's service.

CHAPTER 5.

Another Surprise—The Log of the Santa Rosa—The Treasure.

RYMER dropped his rapier and jerked out his automatic.

"Into cover, plenty quick!" he cried to his party. And Ah Foo, reading his master's meaning, forced the blacks into the bush on the right.

"The time for this stage business is gone by!" muttered Rymer, as he dashed after them. "A little cold lead will do that bunch of assassins some good, I reckon!"

Parting the branches, he leveled his automatic, and as a fresh rain of spears began he opened fire. Ah Foo took up his place beside his master, and began to shoot also.

They kept up a perfect bombardment of the part of the bush from which the spears were coming. Several cries told them that some of the bullets had found a billet, and then, as the flying spears grew fewer, Rymer paused and turned round to the blacks who crouched behind him.

"You make plenty big fella jump!" he ordered. "You makum big fella knife longa fall bushman. You make run, run—you fight plenty much. My word! You no go longa me, me makum finish longa you plenty quick. You savee me?"

To do the blacks justice, they did not need much encouragement to charge. The bushmen are the age-old enemies of the water-men, and Rymer's crew was of the water-tribes.

In the bush were their enemies, the bushmen. Leading them was the big white man whom they knew to be a great fighter. They trusted him more than they feared the unknown ahead of them.

So with Ah Foo urging them up, they drew their knives and prepared to follow Rymer.

Rymer waited until he had slipped a fresh clip of cartridges into his automatic, then he parted the bushes and gave a yell. Leading his men, he charged the bush across from him, and a great crashing of branches told how thick were the numbers of the enemy.

But Rymer's automatic had inspired the bushmen with a holy fear of the white man. A few spears came at them as they rushed forward, but they suddenly stopped, and even as Rymer broke cover he knew that he had the enemy on the run.

He kept on nevertheless, until the crashing of branches died away in the distance, and then he pulled up.

Now he found himself in a small, open bit of jungle, and as he turned to muster his men he caught a glimpse of sunlight on water. It was off to the left, and he could just catch a glimpse of it through the trees.

"You come longa me, Ah Foo," he said curtly. "You black fella stay longa this place."

He and Ah Foo, holding their weapons ready for instant use, crept along between the trees until they had reached the cover of a small clump of young paw-paw trees close to the water which Rymer had seen.

Slowly and cautiously Rymer pushed the branches aside and looked out. Then he started back, for before him was a sight that held him spellbound with the sheer wonder of it all.

He appeared to be looking upon a small lake which was fringed with the dense green of the jungle. On that there was nothing wonderful. It was not at all marvellous that there should be a small lake in the uplands of the island.

But it was what he saw floating on that lake that held him spellbound with astonishment, for if he could believe his eyes, then he was gazing upon nothing more or less than a great Spanish galleon of the Middle Ages—a huge, high-pooped ship, which rode at anchor high up above the sea, just as she might have ridden at anchor four hundred years before.

It had been a considerable shock to Rymer when he had discovered the old galleon caught in the cliff of dead coral. But that had not been hard to comprehend when one took into consideration the volcanic formation of the island.

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Stranger things than that are happening every day. Nature conceals, and then reveals, on every hand.

But to come upon this lake high up on the very apex of the mountain some five hundred feet above the sea—to see, floating upon its placid surface, a great Spanish galleon of old, was a thing that would not yield so easily to the explanation which had sufficed for the other ship.

Curiously Rymer studied the formation of the lake, and the more he examined it the more certain did he become in his own mind that he was looking upon nothing but what had once been the coral lagoon of the atoll.

The whole coral formation had been lifted high above the sea by the upheaval in the deeps, and the lagoon had been lifted with it.

Was it possible that the galleon which he saw had been anchored in the lagoon those many hundreds of years ago when that upheaval had taken place? Was it possible that the upheaval had been gradual enough to lift lagoon and ship without wrecking the vessel?

Instead of a sudden shooting up of the island, had it been a slow rising?

Rymer's thought went back to the galleon which had been caught in the dead coral cliff. While the grip of the coral was terrific, yet had the island been subjected to a sudden splitting asunder, then it stood to reason that the wrecked galleon would have been driven clear of its resting-place and sent hurtling back into the sea.

But that had not happened. It still rested in the grip of the coral just as it had been driven there by some hurricane of long ago. That in itself was proof enough that the upheaval had not been of a very radical nature.

But was it possible that it had been gentle enough to lift this great galleon even as she rode at anchor? Was she and the wrecked galleon in the cliff part of an old Spanish convoy which had been beating across from Chili towards the Cape of Good Hope perhaps when Drake and his men were harrying the other side of the continent?

Had they run for the island—or what was then a coral atoll—for refuge, and had one of them been wrecked while trying to make the lagoon? Had the other reached safety, and while she lay at anchor in the shelter of the lagoon, had the upheaval come, and had she been caught?

It certainly seemed the only explanation, and in that explanation, too, there was some light on the strange creature whom Rymer had met back in the bush—the stranger who masqueraded in the doublet and hose of the Middle Ages, and who fought with a fine Toledo blade of old Spain.

What did it mean?

Rymer saw that by skirting the beach of the lake he could come close upon the galleon. Already there was a wide bridge of trees connecting the shore and the galleon, and he was determined to go aboard her.

What had become of the mad stranger he did not know. He could see no signs of anyone about the lake or the galleon. Yet he doubted not that once he broke cover he would be watched by dozens of unseen eyes.

He turned to Ah Foo, and whispered:

"You go longa fool black fella, Ah Foo! Bring longa me plenty quick! I makum go aboard big fella ship!"

Ah Foo hesitated for a single instant. It was plain that he did not like this new decision of his master's, but he said nothing, and, stealing back through the trees, mastered the blacks. He drove them along to where Rymer was crouching, then, as they approached, Rymer rose.

"You see big fella ship," he said. "You makum plenty big run longa shore. You go now. My word, you no run plenty quick, I plenty cross longa you!"

The blacks stared with wide eyes at the galleon, but their fear of Rymer kept them from turning tail, and as his voice cracked out like a whip they broke cover.

To Rymer's surprise, not a single spear was thrown at them as they raced round the beach towards the rough logs which had been laid from the shore to the galleon. Across these he forced his men, and went last himself.

Arriving on the deck, he saw that the oak was perfectly

preserved, and there was every sign that each detail of the galleon had been under the care of human beings.

Leaving the blacks in the waist of the galleon, he made his way aft to the high poop. Up the ladder he went until he came to an open companion-way. He hesitated at the top of this for a little, then, with his automatic held ready for any ambush, he descended the steps.

As he proceeded he realised that he was in no modern replica of a Spanish galleon. It was the real thing, and as he entered the main saloon of the ship he saw that it was hung with faded old silken hangings.

Running almost the full length of the cabin was a huge black oaken table, screwed down to the deck. About it were great oaken chairs, and standing on the threshold Rymer saw at one end of the table a leather-bound volume.

He walked towards it, moving warily as he went, but he reached the end of the table without being challenged or attacked, and, opening the volume, he saw with a start of surprise that it was a ship's log.

And the first entry in the log was dated May 15th, 1569! Slowly Rymer made out the old Spanish characters. It had begun in Barcelona, in Spain, nearly three hundred and fifty years before.

Scarcely believing the evidence of his eyes, he turned over page after page, reading of the fitting out of the galleon, Santa Rosa, in Barcelona, and of the departure of the galleon with men and stores for the New World.

Day by day Rymer followed the course of that old ship as she sailed across the Atlantic to the Spanish Main. Then he read of her stopping at Santa Marta, and unloading, and then there came six weeks of perfunctory entries, during which time she lay at anchor in the roadstead before Santa Marta.

Then the entries suddenly grew longer. He read of great preparations made to receive treasure. He read of orders to proceed down the Atlantic coast of South America and to round Cape Horn, to proceed up the western coast of Peru, there to take on many chests of gold bullion and silver ingots.

He read of "the depredations of the buccaneer Drake," and of the decision of the governor of Santa Marta to send the galleon home by way of the Magellan Straits instead of across the Atlantic.

So Rymer's surmise had not been far wrong after all. He remembered that Drake had passed through Magellan Straits, and had made England by the Pacific route, as early as 1578, and he knew that it was quite within the bounds of possibility that the Spaniards and Portuguese had used the route several years before that.

At any rate, here was written proof that the galleon Santa Rosa had set out on that journey as early as 1571—seven years before Drake started.

With an ever-growing interest Rymer read of the journey round the Horn and up the west coast to Peru. He read with feverish haste the record of the twenty chests of gold and the hundred chests of silver ingots which had been taken on at Peru.

Then he read of the voyage across the Pacific, until he came to an entry which spoke of the coming of a great hurricane. Then followed the tale of the great storm which he had imagined. He could in fancy see, as he read, the galleon running for shelter.

Then he read for the first time of another galleon which was travelling in company with her. He read of the wreck of the galleon Philippe II. He read further, and then he came upon the full explanation of the mystery.

"We lay at anchor in the small lagoon," he translated slowly. "The great hurricane had passed, but the sea still raged mightily. The Santa Rosa was to leave the island the following day, but late in the afternoon of November 3rd the sky suddenly became black.

"The sun was blotted out, and we feared that another great storm was about to break over us. For an hour it was impossible to see any distance. Then there was a great disturbance in the lagoon, and a series of loud reports were heard on the island. The galleon heeled over, and we feared that she would capsize. She righted herself most nobly, and then we felt a great rocking and plunging of the ship.

"All that night the disturbance kept up, and in the morning we dropped to the deck and prayed aloud to the Virgin, for a terrible thing had happened.

"During the night the whole island had been lifted up by some great force. The lagoon in which we had laid at anchor was now high above the sea. Yet the water remained in it, and the galleon floated safely. The sea was far below us. It was a magical change, and must have been the work of some malignant giants who lived under the sea."

Then three days passed without any entry. On the fourth day Rymer read:

"We have held a meeting of the whole ship's company, and have prayed to the Virgin. The sea is still far beneath. We

shall wait here until the island sinks back again, then we shall sail back again to Spain."

There the entries in the book ended, but as he sat in that dusty, oaken saloon of the old galleon, his head resting on one hand, Rymer could visualise the course of the last three hundred and fifty years.

He could see the little colony of men and women erecting huts on the beach. He could see the passage of the years, and the ship's company growing old, while the children grew up. Then generation would follow generation.

Probably there had been much savage fighting with the bushmen, which had sadly depleted the strength of the little marooned company. But from generation to generation, while the great outside world went on and grew in knowledge, this little colony would live as life had been known in the Middle Ages.

Their history would stop with the doings of the great Drake. They would know nothing of what had happened in the world since.

And now had he gazed upon, had he fought with, the sole descendant of those marooned Spaniards?

Somehow Rymer knew that he had. He knew, too, that the man was half insane. Owing to his insanity the savage bushmen would leave him unharmed, and, judging from their attitude, he had tamed them to his will.

It was a marvellous chapter from ancient history, and somehow, as Rymer rose to go back to the deck, he moved softly, as though reluctant to disturb the dust of those many years. Yet once he felt the solid deck beneath his feet and drew in the soft air above his thoughts returned to that tally of the twenty chests of gold and the hundred chests of silver ingots.

Was it possible that any of the treasure still remained on the galleon?

CHAPTER 6.

The Treasure—The Warning—'Twi'x Greed and Humanity—The Earthquake—The Last of the Island.

AN hour later, in the forward hold of the galleon, Huxton Rymer sat dumb with amazement at the profusion of wealth upon which he gazed.

A careful search had revealed the fact that the treasure spoken of in the ship's log was still in the galleon. A hundred and twenty chests of treasure-trove. He knew they were all there, for hadn't he counted them twice?

The chests of gold were smaller than the silver chests, but as he tore up the lid of one of them and gazed at the heaped-up yellow ingots which had lain undisturbed for three hundred and fifty years, all the greed in the man's nature rose up, and sent his senses reeling with the magnitude of it all.

In those chests there was enough gold and silver to make of him a Cæsar. He would be one of the mighty of the earth. He could buy all that spelled luxury to him; and Rymer's tastes were prodigal.

A hundred and twenty chests of treasure-trove! It was like a mad dream; it was like the splendid visions of the opium fiend.

A hundred and twenty chests of treasure-trove! His head swam with the effort to compute its value. He staggered to his feet and climbed the ladder to the deck.

Ah Foo squatted by the bulwarks smoking a yellow cigarette and guarding the Kanakas who crouched in the waist.

Gazing over the side, Rymer could still see no signs of the crazed Spaniard or the bushmen. He was calculating how he could get that treasure down the cliff and aboard the yacht. A block and tackle arranged at the top of the cliff; the Kanakas to carry it to the edge and lower it down; then to transport it to the schooner.

It would not be difficult, providing he were left undisturbed by the blacks. He decided quickly. He would make his way back to the scashore at once and start to work. That very afternoon the gold at least would be transferred, and on the morrow the silver.

He summoned Ah Foo, and gave his orders for the return. The Kanakas jumped up at once when they knew they were to return, and, passing over the logs to the shore, they set off in Indian file for the edge of the cliff.

Strangely enough, they were not attacked on the way. They reached the bottom of the gradual slope of the dead coral, where the wrecked galleon lay, and there began the more dangerous descent of the cliff.

An hour later they were back under the coconut-palms, where the plague-stricken blacks lay.

To do him justice, Rymer visited his sick before making any arrangements for the transport of the gold. He found that two more had died, but there seemed a distinct improvement in the other cases.

As he emerged from the improvised shack where the sufferers had been laid, Rymer saw that Ah Foo had prepared a meal of sorts for the blacks, and a very decent little spread

for his master. He remembered then for the first time that no food had passed his lips since breakfast.

He wolfed the food hungrily, scarcely noting what he ate, so preoccupied was he in his thoughts of the great treasure which lay in the hold of the galleon.

By nightfall he would be a wealthy man, and by the next night he would be a Cræsus. It was a very pleasant thought to toy with.

When he finished the food, he rose to give the order for a return to the schooner, and was just about to open his lips, when suddenly he paused and gazed away to the west. A strange change had taken place in the sky.

All the morning it had been a deep azure, but now a yellow haze had spread up from the west, even to the sun itself. There was something in that still, yellow haze that boded no good, and Rymer knew it.

Did it portend a hurricane? He had seen the sky like that before, and he knew that some upheaval of Nature was bound to follow.

Then he remembered the landslide of the previous night. Was the yellow haze but another sign of some impending change which was about to take place?

He frowned impatiently, and stared up over the dead coral cliff which gleamed yellowish under the haze. He recalled the words of the entry in the log of the old Spanish galleon.

Three hundred and fifty years before, when the island had been lifted from the sea, the upheaval had been heralded by a thick, yellow haze. So much the log had said.

That the haze had an immediate relation to the island he felt certain, for there was the landslide of the previous night.

Rymer grew more and more uneasy as he surveyed the signs about him. Then Ah Foo's voice broke on his ears.

"Claptain, him plenty big fella tubble come longa plenty quick. My word, plenty big fella wave come longa schooner. Him fella schooner no stay longa shore."

Rymer nodded.

"I believe you are right, Ah Foo," he replied absently. "We shall have to up anchor and get away; but before we go we will have time to get down some of the treasure. I can't go without that. We will get all hands to work, and get the gold down first."

He swung round sharply to call out to the Kanakas, then all at once his gaze fell on the shack where the plague-stricken blacks lay.

"What good would it do?" he muttered, as the thought came to him that they were helpless against an upheaval of

Nature. "They are a lot of diseased dogs. They are better dead. What difference does it make, anyway? And I must have that gold."

But somehow he could not give the order he had intended giving. He stood irresolute, battling with himself.

He was an adventurer pure and simple. He was a man without principles, as the world regards principles. He would snatch where he could. He would take part in any shady deal that offered a profit, and now there was a vast fortune in treasure-trove within his grasp.

Perhaps, after all, there was only a hurricane coming, and then the blacks would be comparatively safe. He could leave food and medicine for them. He was not their keeper. Why should he risk losing that fortune in gold to take care of a lot of plague-ridden savages who wouldn't appreciate it?

Yet, even as he argued with himself, Rymer knew that there was a great chance of more than a hurricane coming. That landslide the previous night indicated some submarine force at work in the deeps.

It was quite within the bounds of reason that the island should drop back into the ocean. And then the gold would be beyond his reach for ever. He could not let it go.

He opened his lips again to give the order, when just then a great carrion bird wheeled overhead. Once more his eyes took in the shack, and then, with a deep curse, he swung towards Ah Foo.

"Ah Foo," he called, "you makum plenty quick go longa schooner. You makum big fella black come longa shore. You makum put sick fella black on schooner. You savee?"

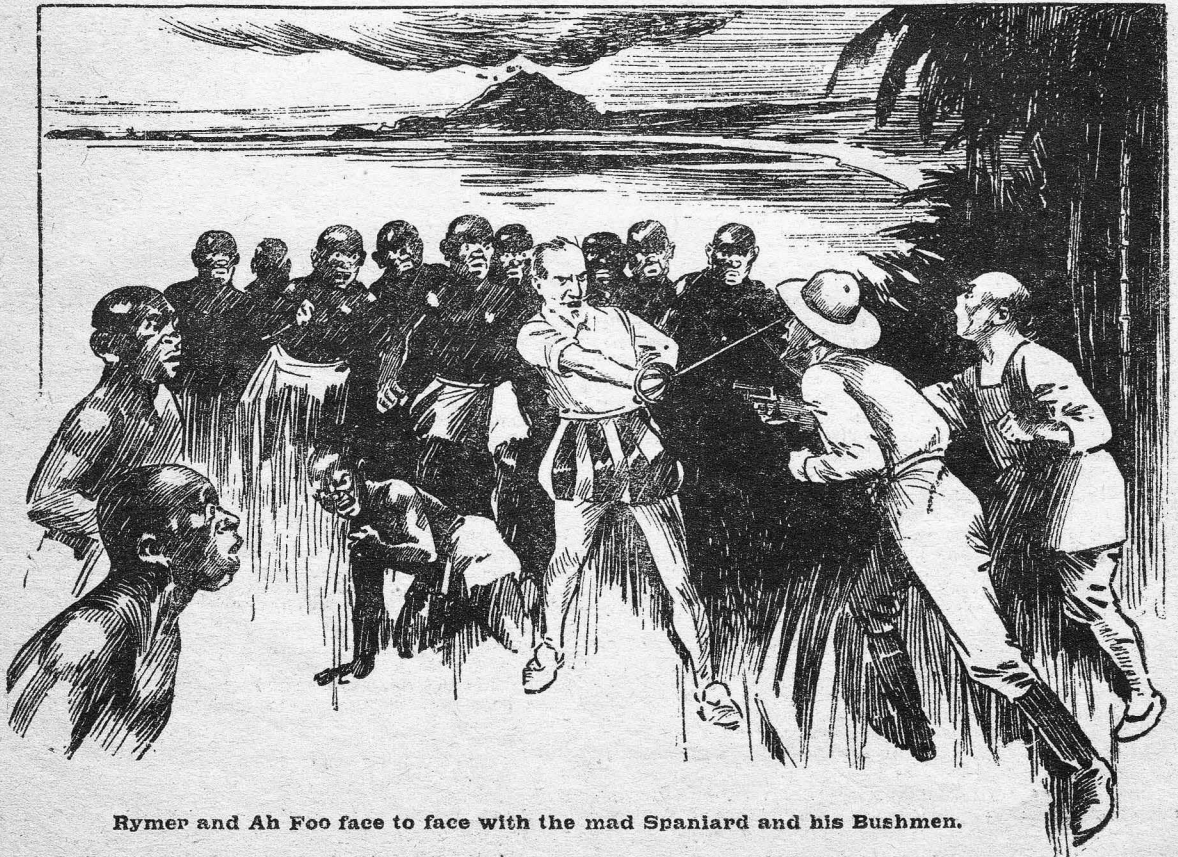
"Me savee, claptain," replied Ah Foo slowly. "You leavum big fella longa ship, claptain?" he asked naively. "You wantum gold you make plenty quick run. My word, big fella tubble him come plenty quick!"

"Big fella gold stay longa schooner!" replied Rymer grimly. "You makum quick run get sick fella black longa schooner!"

Ah Foo turned and drove the blacks into action. Deeper and deeper grew the haze in the west, and Rymer could feel a something sinister in the still air which told him trouble was coming, and coming quickly.

He paced up and down impatiently, the while Ah Foo manned the boat and sent it dancing away across the water to the schooner. He saw another boat leave the schooner's side, then he waited until the crews of the two boats had landed.

(Continued on page iv of cover.)



Rymer and Ah Foo face to face with the mad Spaniard and his Bushmen.



The Bradport Bank Robbery

A fine, thrilling yarn of Will Spearing, of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. Showing how this popular detective investigated the mystery of a Zeppelin Raid, with surprising results, and un-
 ————— masked a smug scoundrel. —————

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

JOHN FORDHAM, Chairman Board of Directors, Provincial Banks, Limited.

LILLA, his daughter, engaged to

HARVEY CROSSLAND, manager Bradport Branch.

MARTIN HAWKE, a financier, rival and enemy of Crossland.

WILLIAM SPEARING, of the C.I.D.

CHAPTER 1. £200,000 in Gold.

WITHIN the imposing committee-room of the London offices of the Provincial Banks, Limited, there was a council of three.

Sir Gustavus Fane, of the Bank of England, and Martin Hawke, financier, were closeted with old John Fordham, president of the Provincial Banks, Limited, and all its ramifications.

"He ought to be here by now, whoever he is," said Sir Gustavus, fussily consulting his gun-metal watch.

To have a gun-metal watch at the end of a gold chain was just like Sir Gustavus—an example of effect with economy which went far to show how he had risen in the world.

Martin Hawke, who embraced that nobleman in the wide contempt with which he viewed the remainder of mankind, openly sneered at such evidence of meanness.

"Your seventeen-and-sixpenny is wrong, Sir Gustavus," he growled. "Nine o'clock was the man's time, not five minutes before nine!"

Profoundly astonished as usual at the financier's rudeness, Sir Gustavus affixed a pince-nez to the bridge of his nose, and examined him with some care, as though expecting to find outward indications of a deranged intellect.

John Fordham, distressed as much by the fussiness of Sir Gustavus as he was by the coarse humour of Martin Hawke, positively sighed with relief when the commissionaire handed him the expected visiting-card.

"Here he is," he said. "I think, gentlemen, that this will be the expert promised us by the Chief Commissioner of Police."

"What name?"

"Um! Let me see. Detective William Spearing, C.I.D., New Scotland Yard."

"Punctual, anyway," growled Hawke. "Have him in!"

The first strokes of nine had just begun to boom from a City clock.

"I think that is the best thing," said John Fordham, turning to the other of his colleagues. "We are agreed that secrecy is impossible."

"Certainly—certainly! The police must be called in. I quite agree."

"Very well. Tell Detective Spearing to step this way."

Detective Spearing, with his keen, clever face and powerful frame, made a good impression on the three men.

"I am glad you are taking up the case," said polite John Fordham. "I have heard of your exploits."

Having introduced Spearing to his colleagues, he lost no time in getting to work.

"When I tell you," he said, "that our national honour is concerned, you will understand the necessity for deep secrecy."

"This is how the case stands. A loan of ten millions of pounds has just been made to Serbia, and one million of that was found by the Provincial Banks, Limited, which we represent."

"The sum was prepared for shipment in boxes of a thousand sovereigns each, and, in accordance with our practice, split into comparatively small amounts for deposit in the strong-rooms of different branch banks."

"The company always avoids putting too many eggs into one basket, Mr. Spearing."

"Well, the amount which concerns us at present is one of

two hundred thousand pounds, deposited with the Bradport branch.

"As you probably know, Bradport is near Southampton, and it promised to be convenient for shipment. Not only that, but our manager in that place—Mr. Harvey Crossland—is a man of proved judgment and probity."

"To all appearances," put in Martin Hawke.

"Undoubtedly!" snapped Sir Gustavus.

He could not distinctly remember hearing the name of Harvey Crossland before that day, but if Hawke opposed him, that was a good enough warrant to the friendship of Sir Gustavus.

"The gold was only deposited there for one night," continued John Fordham, "but in that one night the damage was done."

He leaned forward.

"I don't know whether you have or have not heard of a Zeppelin raid which occurred at Bradport a week ago today?"

"I have not."

"Ah, the news was naturally suppressed, but there is no doubt that a raid did occur!"

"To be brief, it happened that a bomb was dropped in front of the bank, and some expert thief or thieves took advantage of the shattered front to make an entry. By some unexplained means they got away with every penny of the two hundred thousand pounds."

"What we want of you, Detective Spearing, is not the detection of the criminal, or any other thing, but the money. To make up the national loan we must have that two hundred thousand in gold within three days. We rely on you. It has been promised to Serbia, and it happens that even the Bank of England cannot conveniently find it a second time."

"Will do my best, sir."

"We can ask no more."

"If I may question, where was this huge sum placed for safety?"

"It was deposited in the strong vault of the bank."

"How was that opened?"

"It appears to have been blown open. But you shall see for yourself."

"Anyone on premises during night?"

"A watchman."

"Reliable?"

"Yes, certainly, most reliable—an Army veteran."

"Um! What number of bombs dropped?"

"Three in all, I fancy."

"All near bank?"

"Yes, all near bank." John Fordham couldn't help smiling at the detective's queer, jerky sentences. At the same time, he noted how forceful they were. "All near bank," he repeated—"two in front, one at rear."

"Doesn't it strike you as singular," asked Spearing, "three bombs dropped one spot? Airships travel straight line, bombs drop straight line, not small circle."

"Yes, come to think of it, it does."

"I was just about to make the same remark," asserted Hawke.

"Dear me, dear me, yes!" pronounced Sir Gustavus.

"What do you mean to imply, then? That there was no raid?"

"Was airship seen?"

"I—I fancy it was. Several persons heard it. Sims, the watchman, heard it distinctly."

"If airship seen, impossible dispute raid; if not, inclined dispute it."

"But, my dear man," burst in Hawke, "the thing was at least heard by a dozen different people!"

"Might be wrong—a theory, not a conclusion."

Spearing didn't like the ready familiarity of the financier.

"All in the air, that's what I complain about," said Hawke, with unconscious humour and equally unconscious bad manners. "You detective chaps can't do much but bluff, with all your trained faculties. Now, look at me! Here I

am before your eyes, a man with a past, and, I hope, a future. Let us see your goods. Trot out some of your remarkable deductions on my account."

The detective frowned.

"Come, come, Mr. Hawke, this is not quite fair!" expostulated John Fordham.

"Why not?" said Hawke. "If I engaged a clerk, I should want to see what he could do; and if I engage a detective, I have the same desire."

"Very well." It was Spearing speaking. "Will tell you what can be learnt elementary deduction from your person; but warn you—may appear offensive."

The financier chuckled.

"I like that," he said. "Go ahead!"

Spearing fixed his shrewd grey eyes on the financier, and looked him over with a rapid glance which missed nothing.

Shaves with a safety-razor—took dose powerful drug last afternoon—has been in Argentine—goes in great personal danger—

At this point the financier seized him by the shoulder.

"Who on earth are you?" he shouted. "Look here, I'll wager a thousand pounds down that you knew some of that before you saw me in this room!"

"You would lose!" smiled the detective.

John Fordham, although both concerned and amused, was anxious to get on with the business of the day.

With a warm handshake and some compliments he dismissed the detective, while he and Sir Gustavus went off to a committee meeting elsewhere.

"May I ask where you are bound for now?"

Martin Hawke caught the detective up before he had left the building.

"Bradport."

Spearing didn't see any reason for making a secret of it. "Would you care to travel down in my car? I am off to Southampton now myself, and should be glad of your company. Easily drop you at Bradport."

"Many thanks, but—"

"Come, come detective; don't be annoyed at my exuberance. Time is precious, and I can get you to the bank under three hours with ease. Now, what do you say?"

"On second thoughts, I accept."

"That's good; it is really. Here's the car. Isn't she a beauty?"

All the way to Spearing's rooms, and half-way to Bradport, he talked without cessation. He seemed somewhat nervous of the detective.

Spearing was wondering what the reason was, when the financier supplied the explanation himself.

"I say," he asked, "you remember my challenging you to exhibit your power of deduction just now?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've been worrying some about that. How on earth did you do it? Mind you, I don't say you were right, but it's mighty interesting. Can you do any more tricks like that?"

"Prefer not."

"Well now, I'm a business man, detective. Tell me how you deduced those four facts that you trotted out this morning and I'll give you a hundred pounds."

Spearing didn't want the hundred pounds, but he felt that the financier deserved a little lesson.

"Done!" he said. "Get out your fountain-pen and cheque-book, and write me cheque payable Widows' and Orphans' Fund."

"How do you know that I have fountain-pen and cheque-book?"

"When you mentioned hundred pounds—instinctively touched—breast pocket—faint outline."

"Oh, I see; that's quite simple, but what about the pen?"

"Quite simple also—small stain—fountain-pen ink—second finger—right hand."

"Why fountain-pen ink?"

"Transparent—yes, as you are about to say, the pen not fountain-pen, but stylo. Know that by position of stain; stylos are held more vertical."

"Um! Well, I must admit you're right."

"But why don't you bank with Provincial Banks, Limited?"

"Mind your own—How did you know where I banked?"

"Didn't. Yours is ordinary cheque-book. Provincial Bank's cheque-book special shape."

"So it is; so it is! Fancy my not noticing that! Now, what about those other things?"

"Being hard-headed business man, you will no doubt write cheque first."

Martin Hawke grinned. It was so seldom that he met a man decisively his equal that he began to enjoy himself immensely.

Without a word he handed the cheque to Spearing, and awaited an account of those rapidly-made deductions of the morning which had aroused not only his curiosity, but also the weaker emotion of fear.

CHAPTER 2.

SOME DEDUCTIONS—A CROSS-EXAMINATION.

Spearing pocketed the cheque with a smile.

"Afraid disappointment," he said, "quite elementary. I deducted safety-razor from safety-razor cut on chin; they do cut at times. Easy cut to recognise.

That you had taken drug from puncture on arm. It was rather low, and only just under cuff at moment. That it was a powerful drug, because you had cut yourself in shaving—evidently an unusual thing for you—and also because you had not completely thrown off lethargy."

"By Jove, I follow you now! But what about the other two theories—that I had been in the Argentine, and was in personal danger?"

"Men who live in Argentine and fear personal violence take precaution, as a rule, of carrying revolver where most easily seized—in loop of braces. I believe you are carrying a revolver there at this moment?"

"As a matter of fact, I am. How did you see it?"

"Didn't. Had to guess. Small protuberance under waistcoat, left side, and instinctive habit of putting something heavy into place with movement of arm and shoulder."

"Well, detective, you understand your trade all right, I admit it. I don't grudge that hundred. I have bought some useful knowledge," he added, half to himself.

The financier was evidently impressed, but still inclined to patronise. He had to receive a rude shock before quite refraining from that. And it just happened that the said rude shock was on the way.

The car was going at a good thirty-five miles per hour when Spearing noticed a policeman rise out of the hedge behind them, and wave his handkerchief in a peculiar manner.

They were in a police trap.

Two minutes after Spearing's companion was explaining to a smart young constable that he was Martin Hawke—Martin Hawke, the financier; Martin Hawke, of the Stock Exchange; Martin Hawke, of the Royal Yacht Squadron—in short, the Martin Hawke.

"Sorry, sir; you were going at over thirty miles an hour!"

The constable was respectful, but quite unabashed.

"Oh, you be—Look here, officer, here's half-a-sovereign for you!"

"I am sorry that I cannot accept it. Please give me your address."

With some amusement Spearing changed his position so that the constable could see his face.

The man looked at him keenly, flushed, and came to the salute.

"I am sorry, sir!" he said. "I had no idea you were in the car."

"We have met before, I think?"

"Yes, on the Lauderdale case."

"Pleased with you that occasion. More pleased now. What's your name?"

"Clifford."

"Inspector to recommend for promotion.' Put in notebook. Good-day, Clifford!"

"Good-day, sir, and thank you!"

As they resumed their swift course toward Bradport, leaving a happy man behind them, the financier's idea of their relative importance underwent some little modification.

He had begun to realise that there were people in this dark world, many people, who had never heard of the great Martin Hawke. He even guessed that the name of William Spearing might not be entirely eclipsed by the fame of his own.

"Thick as thieves, you police chaps," he grumbled. "But handy people to travel with, I must say!"

For the remainder of the journey he dropped his patronising tone.

The Bradport branch of the Provincial Banks, Limited, occupied an imposing position on the main road. It was a new, three-story building, the upper floors being let for residential purposes.

Harvey Crossland, the manager, hastened to place himself and his staff at Spearing's disposal. He was evidently pleased to see the detective, and anxious to do something towards the recovery of the stolen gold.

ANSWERS

Of Martin Hawke, however, his reception was cold in the extreme. The distrust which the financier appeared to feel for the young manager was apparently returned with interest.

Spearing lost no time in getting to work.

"Should like to see strong-room," he said, as soon as introductions were over.

"Here it is!"

Harvey Crossland opened one of the mahogany doors leading from his own office, and disclosed a further door of steel, which had been torn as though it were paper.

Spearing examined this broken rampart for some time in silence, then pushed it open and entered the safe.

As he obviously wished to be alone, the manager quietly withdrew, but Hawke had no such scruples.

He appeared to have taken a fancy to the detective's fascinating business, and prowled about scrutinising everything in an aimless, fussy way quite out of keeping with his usual behaviour.

"Found anything?" he asked, after five minutes.

"Yes."

"You have, eh? And what is it?"

"Found out where thieves entered strong-room."

"Where was that?"

"At door."

He sat down in the spotless kitchen, and the commissioner seeing that his visitor was not giving himself airs, managed to feel quite at his ease.

"Perhaps, sir, I had better tell you everything just as it happened," he said.

"Do!" said Spearing, who never wasted words.

"Let me see, now," began the man; "to-day's Thursday. Well, it was to-day week, at eleven-fifteen of the evening. I was down here having my bit of grub, same as I am now, when I caught the beat of something for all the world like an aeroplane, only louder and slower-like.

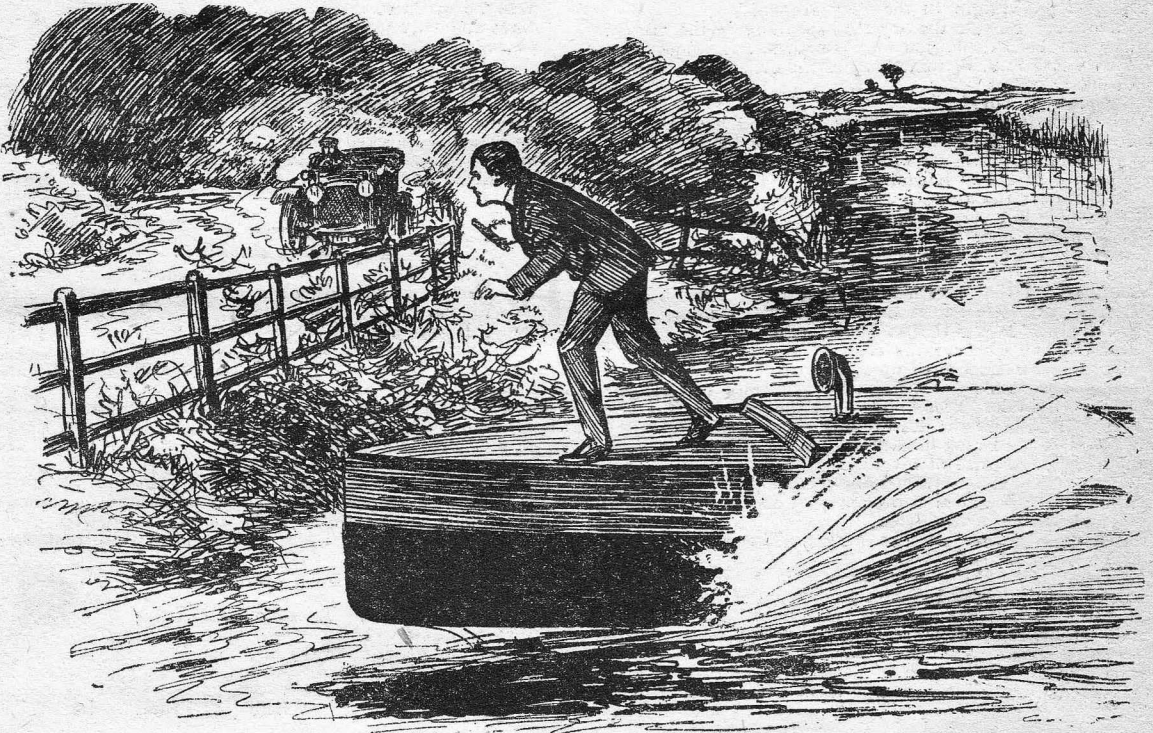
"I'm telling you this, because the Zeppelin raid seemed to be part of the burglary—if you know what I mean."

Spearing nodded.

"Well, I was just getting up to see what it was all about, when down came the first bomb.

"I have been under fire, sir, went right through the South African campaign, but I never heard an explosion before as took the very thoughts out of my head.

"That did. I was standing there mazed, wondering in a sleepy way what was going to happen next, when in comes one of these specials, cap, arm-badge, and all, a stranger, but large as life.



As the heaving, flying boat neared the bank Spearing shut off the engine, and stood upright like a circus rider, upon the bonnet.

Spearing had begun to dislike the financier himself. He would certainly not have told him anything that was of any use.

But Martin Hawke preferred not to see the rebuff.

"Just thought I'd ask," he said carelessly, "because, if you haven't made any discovery, I have."

"And what?"

"A finger-print."

He pointed triumphantly to the blackened edges of the torn steel.

An inner surface had retained the perfect impression of a well-formed thumb.

Spearing did not trouble to state that he had not only noticed the presence of this clue, but had gleaned several additional facts from its existence.

"Don't touch!" was all he said, as he went out of the manager's office.

Turning, he descended to the basement.

Sims, the watchman, a grizzled and stalwart commissioner, was having his midday meal.

He would have left it instantly to attend to the gentleman from London, but Spearing would not allow anything of the sort.

"Please go on," he said kindly. "We can talk just as well while you're eating—perhaps better."

"Down with your light!" he shouted. "Down with your light at once! They'll get the bank!"

"Well, sir, I was a bit jumpy just then, but I did the right thing for a moment.

"Look here," I says, catching hold of his collar, 'what are you doing on the bank's premises?"

"You idiot!" he shouted. "Out with the light! The front of the bank's blown in! I am a special constable!"

"At that, like a fool, I let him go.

"The first thing he did was to jump upon this table and put out the gas. The street window up there is very small, and, when the light went out, you could cut the darkness with a blunt knife.

"I started to move towards the door, and found my visitor was doing the same.

"Just as we collided in the dark, the second bomb came down.

"Great Scott, the special was frightened!"

"He clung to me and shivered like an aspen, and his teeth chattered so that I could hardly hear myself speak."

"How long elapsed between the falling of the first and second bombs?" interrupted Spearing.

"Not so long as you'd think from all that happened. I should say between twenty and thirty seconds."

"And between the second and third?"

"Five seconds at most. That is, if there was a third," added the commissaire.

"Do you doubt it?"

"Yes, I do. If you ask me, one of those explosions was the blowing-in of the strong-room door."

"Inclined to think you right. Go on with story."

"I'd got to where the second and third explosions occurred, hadn't I? You should have heard that special after the third crash came to our ears. If ever a man was cold-footed, he was. At least, I thought so then."

"Do what I might, I couldn't shake him off."

"What with the dark and the dust and the shouting outside, and the clasp of this special chap, I got blazing mad. Just when I had made up my mind to let him have it from the shoulder, someone blew a police-whistle upstairs."

"On this the special gave me a hard push and started off up the passage as fast as he could go."

"A crook—eh?"

"Yes, sir; must have been. Of course, when I came to look at the strong-room, the gold was gone. They had lifted every farthing of it!"

"They?"

"One man couldn't have done it; two hundred heavy boxes take a bit of moving, and I'll swear they didn't have more than five minutes to do it in!"

"Did you go straight to the strong-room?"

"Not direct; I never dreamt that anything in the way of burglary had been done, you understand, sir. I knew there had been a Zep raid, or something of the sort, and I wanted to find out all about it."

"So you went out?"

"Only to the front of the building. I didn't have to open the door, because there wasn't any. It was blown to bits. Even the folding iron gate which goes in front of it was no better than a packet of hairpins."

"Did you hear the aircraft when you got to the door?"

"Yes, I did; but very faint and far away it was then."

"Other people hear it?"

"Oh, yes! I may say everybody did!"

"And how many saw it?"

"Can't say. I didn't. Come to think of it, I don't know anyone who did. Must have been too high. A whole lot of people heard it. It was there right enough."

"How did you discover the crime?"

"Why, when I had rigged up some sort of a barrier in the front, I just went along to the manager's office to reset the watchman's tell-tale. You know what they are, sir? Those little clocks that wake the dead if they're not ticked off every hour. Well, when I took hold of the handle of the manager's door I had the surprise of my life."

"Before I so much as turned the handle, the door opened and there was such a mess of broken glass as you never saw."

"Where did that come from?"

"From the window at the back. The second bomb dropped right outside."

Spearing was silent for some moments.

Then he made a characteristic summing up of the evidence.

"Bombs dropped front and back; man in uniform of special constable holds up watchman while accomplices get away with gold. Difficulty number one. How gold removed. May be assumed not enough of them to carry two hundred boxes. Therefore vehicle used. What was street like in front?"

"Crowded, sir; everybody in Bradport was there."

"Police?"

"Yes, sir, half a dozen."

"And then it is a good step from the manager's office to the street to carry two hundred boxes in five minutes. We will dismiss that theory for the moment. Obviously no communication with buildings on each side. Now, what about back?"

"Impossible. At the back you get a small yard with a high wall and a door that is always padlocked."

"Padlock all right?"

"Yes, quite. I looked at that."

"What beyond wall?"

"A decent-sized field, and then the canal."

"Suppose the door opened by some means, could gold have been transported to barge or the like?"

"Couldn't be done, sir. Further that way than to the street; besides, the canal path is always well patrolled."

"Nevertheless, there are possibilities. Patrol are not infallible. Suppose the thieves had had a small handcart under the back window, loaded that and then run it down to the canal?"

"Well, well, I never thought of that."

"We will inspect that field in a moment. There remains one direction unconsidered in which the missing gold might have gone."

"And which is that, sir?"

"Upwards."

"Do you mean the maisonette above the bank?"

"Yes."

"No good, sir. The tenant of those rooms is Mr. Julius Barkum, an architect. Been there for years. Nice quiet gentleman, very well known in Bradport."

"Was he at home during the raid?"

"Yes; and very upset he was. Almost in tears."

Spearing frowned. Everything seemed to lead up a blind alley.

"Assuming," he muttered to himself, "that specie left bank, it went up to the maisonette or out to the canal. If the former, we shall find it. If the latter—"

The detective checked himself. There must be no thought of failure. That £200,000 had been promised to Serbia, and Serbia should have it.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Julius Barkum.

FOLLOWED by Sims, the watchman, who seemed likely to be a useful assistant, Spearing ascended to the yard.

It was a small concreted space overlooked by the back windows of the bank, and divided from the towpath by a high brick wall. Supposing the gold boxes to have been handed out between the guard bars of the ground-floor windows, those who received them would leave no traces there. Moreover, once the gates were opened, the way to the canal was clear and unfrequented—a stretch of greensward without so much as a ditch dividing it.

Sims had opened the gate, and the detective perceived these facts at a glance. But instead of gaining confidence that his guess had been correct, he began to doubt it.

"Won't do," he jerked out, in his queer, crisp manner—"won't do! Something wrong!"

"I don't see it, sir," Sims ventured to interrupt.

"When last rain?"

"Why, sir, the night before the raid."

"Why meadow wet?"

"Bless you, sir, it's always like that."

Spearing shook his head. It was a blank page where he had expected to find a history.

"Where footmarks? Where cart-ruts?" he asked despondently.

It was in fact a disappointment. One man could not have crossed to the canal without leaving indelible tracks, let alone men who came and went with heavy burdens.

With the long, swift strides of a man in perfect condition, he explored the towpath some way on either side, but without detecting any trace of the gold thieves.

"All same," he remarked, as he rejoined the watchman, "much dust under window—dust mud once."

"Hallo, what's this?"

Bending down, the detective lifted a small paper ring which his keen eyes had perceived among the dust in the angle of the building.

It had once encircled an expensive Havana—a Henry Clay.

He turned it over thoughtfully.

"H'm!" he grunted. "Torn off cigar—not pulled over! Smoker was nervous—very nervous."

Placing the gilded trifle in his pocket-book, he went down upon his hands and knees in the yard and turned the dust over with the blade of his knife.

"Thought as much."

He rose with a small brown object transfixed upon the point. It was the end of the cigar which had borne the paper ring, bitten off and cast away by the smoker.

"Owner man of wealth; cultured taste; nervous disposition; excellent set of teeth—"

Spearing ticked off his information in his lucid, methodical way.

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"Perhaps," he admitted, "visit to yard not so unprofitable as first thought.

"Now let us see Mr. Barkum."

Mr. Julius Barkum, A.R.I.B.A., inhabited a maisonette above the bank, and what architectural work he did was done there. Judging, however, by popular report, his professional practice was very little, and the man himself either a miser or uncomfortably poor.

Spearing ascended from the only entrance, a private one beside the doors of the bank, and was received by the architect in person.

He had already decided that the gold could not have found its way up to Mr. Barkum; but at the same time he had suspicions that the old gentleman was in some way implicated in the robbery.

If such were the case, however, Mr. Barkum would have made an excellent actor, for he seemed delighted to make the acquaintance of the famous Detective Spearing, and said so more than once. It was only when the detective suggested having a look round that his hospitality wavered.

"Oh, well," he said, "just as you like, of course; only—I shouldn't go into the front rooms."

Spearing's business was obviously too important for him to consider persons, however genial and complimentary, and he made a thorough inspection of the maisonette.

Strangely enough, there was a remarkable contrast between the front rooms indicated by Mr. Barkum and the rest of his residence. While, taken as a whole, it was mean, shabby, and poverty-stricken, the two front rooms were furnished with elegance, and fitted with devices dear to a comfort-loving man.

Then why should it be just those rooms that he did not wish to be seen?

Spearing sensed a mystery.

"Do you use all of this place yourself?" he asked.

"All of it? Of course I do!" snapped Mr. Barkum.

Spearing said nothing, but he disbelieved the statement. The architect had but one fire going, and that was in the kitchen; his armchair and slippers were by the kitchen fire; it was very clear that he felt out of place in the two well-furnished rooms.

"I think you've seen the lot now," the old man hinted.

"I don't."

"What do you mean, detective?"

"I haven't been on the roof."

"How did you know it was possible to go on the roof? The trapdoor is invisible."

"Small heap loam and silver sand in scullery—someone engaged repotting—no plants in house—no garden below—therefore on roof!"

Mr. Barkum opened his mouth to make a remark, then thought better of it, and led the way in silence to the big cupboard where the ladder and trapdoor were concealed.

The roof turned out to be a small lead flat, with slated slopes on either side, one falling to the street and the other to the yard. Beyond admiring Mr. Barkum's evergreens, which flourished beneath a big disused storage tank, and wondering what the Provincial Banks, Limited, would think of such a damp-producing existence as a roof-garden on their bank, the detective found only one thing to interest him.

"Keep cats?" he asked.

"Most certainly not!" replied the roof-gardener indignantly.

"Then how account for scratches on slates?"

Each slope was scored by white scratches which went from slate to slate down as far as the eaves.

"Can't say, I'm sure. Did you notice my aspidistra?"

And Mr. Barkum passed on to affairs more congenial.

When the two men reached the entrance-hall, and were in the act of parting, Spearing suddenly clapped his hand to his pocket with a gesture of annoyance.

"Nothing!" he said. "Was going to have cigarette, that's all. Left case behind!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Barkum. "Wish I had a cigarette to offer you, but I'm a non-smoker."

Spearing looked at him keenly.

"I believe you're telling me the truth," he said.

"Most certainly! What else do you suppose?"

"Then you really do not possess any cigarettes?"

"No."

"Nor cigars?"

"Of course not."

Spearing took several rapid strides into the front sitting-room, and picked up what appeared to be a book, but was really a trick cigarette-box.

He pressed a spring, and the cover flew up, revealing a store of excellent cigarettes.

"Whose, then, are these?"

He turned to the bookshelves and pulled out half a dozen volumes, exposing a full cigar-box.

"And those? In short," he went on, "since you do not

know the contents of these rooms, I infer that they are not your rooms. Whose are they?"

Mr. Julius Barkum tried to bluster, but he tried it on the wrong man; he tried half a dozen plausible stories, but each one was so readily disproved by the stern detective that he was at length reduced to telling the truth.

Accepting a tenancy from the bank as a professional man, he had sub-let for what he could get, and was in reality no more than a caretaker for one Matthew Harper, who occupied his best rooms.

By this time Spearing had dismissed the possibility of Mr. Barkum being an accomplice in the crime. The man evidently had neither the nerve nor the brains. But this Matthew Harper was a different proposition altogether.

The old man, cross-examined, admitted that Harper had been in on the evening of the raid, although he had disappeared soon after the falling of the bombs, also that Harper was a man of apparent wealth and leisure who had dispensed with references by the usual method of paying rent in advance. He described his tenant as a big, square-cut man with masterful ways, and a habit of heavy drinking.

Altogether it seemed that Matthew Harper would be worth attention.

"Now, Mr. Barkum," said Spearing, as he left the maisonette, "I'll be frank. You've failed in obligations to Provincial Banks, Limited—liable notice of ejection; but after bigger game than you, and if I have free hand with rooms, and you keep quiet, think can promise no further action. Is it a bargain?"

It was, Mr. Barkum's relief at being able to continue his miserly practices robbed him of what little composure he had possessed; and when last Spearing saw him he was executing a step-dance upon the landing outside his door.

As the detective descended the stairs he drew a small brown object from his vest-pocket and looked at it speculatively.

It was a sample of the cigars which Matthew Harper kept for his own use, and the label showed it to be a Henry Clay.

CHAPTER 4. The Thumb-print Clue.

SPEARING'S visit to Julius Barkum had not cleared up the mystery to any great extent it is true, but it had brought to light an individual who, but for the detective's keen powers of observation, might for ever have remained unknown—the man called Matthew Harper.

Further, if circumstantial evidence is worth anything, Matthew Harper had smoked a cigar beneath the back windows of the bank on or about the night of the raid, so that he became a figure of some importance.

True, it appeared improbable that the gold had been carried out to the canal, the only way in which such a heavy booty could be removed from the bank; but it was still more improbable—if not impossible—that the road had been used; and the only remaining theory, that the specie remained concealed on or around the bank premises, could be dismissed as incredible.

In his long experience as a crime agent, Detective Spearing had learnt never to ignore a logical conclusion because facts appeared against it. Therefore he set it down as a working theory that the gold had been removed by means of the canal, and put aside the means of that extraordinary feat for investigation.

For the present he possessed another clue which his sixth sense—the detective instinct—had passed over as unimportant, although a less sagacious man would possibly have made much of it—the finger-print upon the blackened edges of the safe.

He had found time to instruct the police photographer, and, on the morning after his visit to Julius Barkum, he found an enlarged photograph of that instructive imprint upon the hotel breakfast-table.

He studied it for some time while getting his after-breakfast pipe under way, and then, deciding upon a course of action, set out for the bank.

Arriving there, he sent for Sims, the watchman, and despatched him for a bottle of whisky and a siphon of soda. "Birthday!" he snapped by way of explanation.

When Sims returned with the bottles, he found the detective installed in the downstairs kitchen, performing a peculiar ceremony with a number of tumblers.

He was rubbing a duster alternately upon a tallow-candle and upon the outside of the glasses.

"Faint suspicion grease," he ejaculated. "Quite invisible, but sufficient receive thumb-print."

He gripped one as though to drink from it, and held the result up to the light.

"All ready now. Put on tray and take round. Senior men first. Very careful not disarrange glasses, so that can pick out each man's glass afterwards."

Sims, who was by no means a fool, began to understand Pluck.—No. 595.

what was required of him. Placing bottles and glasses upon a large tray, he followed the detective upstairs.

They proceeded to the private room of the manager, Harvey Crossland, and Spearing respectfully asked him to drink a health.

"Matter of fact, birthday."

Spearing smiled in his bland, good-natured style, and the manager could not refuse.

"Many happy returns!" he toasted.

As soon as the door had closed behind them, Spearing took the used tumbler and placed it on one side.

"Fortunately," he said to himself, "impossible make thumb-print on safe with left hand, so need record only right thumbs. Who next?"

And they passed on until the whole staff had drunk from the prepared tumblers, and, unknown to themselves, recorded the conformation of their right thumbs for future use.

Until a case was nearing solution, Spearing permitted himself a universal suspicion; but always, if possible, he chose a pleasant method of setting his doubts at rest.

Not even Sims escaped.

When the round of the staff was completed, one tumbler remained unused, and, with sly pleasure at discovering a mistake of the great detective, he pointed out that there was one glass too many.

"Yours," muttered Spearing.

Sims grinned, and decided that the gentleman from London was one too many for him.

"Good luck, sir!" he said, filling himself a generous portion.

This method of detecting crime had good points after all. Sims was willing to be suspected every day, if the doubts were to be disposed of in the same agreeable manner.

An hour later Spearing sat before a row of empty tumblers. Very much to his surprise, one of them bore a duplicate of the photograph that he held in his hand.

He had been sitting for some minutes, lost in thought, when a heavy voice came to his ears.

"Down here, do you say? What is he doing down here?"

It was Martin Hawke.

"Hallo!" he said. "What's the game? Musical glasses?"

Disregarding the detective's gesture of annoyance, he bent down and narrowly inspected one of the tumblers.

"Ah," he said, "not so flip-pant after all, I see! You've been after thumb-prints, or I'm a Dutchman!"

Spearing made two mental notes. First, that the financier was somewhat too well aware of the methods used in crime detection; second, that he avoided picking the tumbler up.

"Well, what's the result? Who's the guilty man?"

"Can't say."

"Have you found the thumb that fits that print upon the safe?"

"Yes."

"And whose is it?"

"Prefer not state."

Martin Hawke instantly became aggressive.

"Look here, detective, I am one of the directors of this bank, and I have a right to know. Whose is it?"

Spearing saw that he would be compelled to make the admission.

"Mr. Harvey Crossland's," he said.

"Ah!"

Somehow, Martin Hawke did not appear sufficiently surprised.

"And what steps do you propose to take?" he went on.

"None at present."

Hawke grunted his displeasure.

"I warn you, Mister Detective," he exploded, "that you are not to play with the law!"

PLUCK.—No. 595.

He was a very big man, with a square jaw, and most people were somewhat afraid of him.

Spearing, as it happened, was a very difficult man to frighten.

"No need to shout," he murmured. "Hear you quite plainly."

"You can—ch?"

"Yes; quite plainly."

Spearing was absolutely unruffled.

"Question is," he went on, "do you most want man, or gold?"

"The gold, of course! But——"

"Then let man go for time being."

"Um! You know your own business best, no doubt."

"Precisely."

"But we shall see if you are to play fast and loose like this!"

The financier flung out of the room and began to ascend the stairs.

"We shall see!" he shouted as a parting threat.

"We shall!" muttered Spearing, and he bent a shrewd glance after the retreating figure.

Without the least idea why, he sensed something wrong about Martin Hawke.

Carefully setting aside Harvey Crossland's tumbler, he followed the financier up the stairs, and was just in time to see him start his big and powerful car.

Himself, he turned into the manager's room, and gravely asked for a few minutes' conversation.

There was already a warm feeling of friendship between the young banker and the detective, and the latter found his present task extremely distasteful.

However, it had to be done.

"Now, Mr. Crossland," began Spearing, as soon as he was seated, and had, at the manager's invitation, lighted a cigarette, "I understand that, upon discovering crime, your first act was to close outer door of strong-room, and send for police."

"That is so."

"Are you certain that you did not touch the safe door?"

"Absolutely."

"Are you certain that you did not for a moment lay your hand or fingers upon the place where the safe has been blown open?"

"Yes, quite certain."

The young man was evidently much puzzled at the seemingly unimportant questions.

"Kindly step over here."

Spearing walked over to the broken steel door, and pointed to the thumb-print upon its blackened surface.

"Have you seen that before?"

"Yes, your photographer called my attention to its existence."

"Do you know whose it is?"

"No. If we knew that we might put our hands on the thief."

"It's yours."

Spearing turned and looked Harvey Crossland in the eyes, a sudden glance, keen as a knife-thrust, and he felt certain of the young man's innocence.

"Mine!"

It was impossible that such amazement could be acting. Spearing was convinced that he was cross-examining an innocent man.

But, however unpleasant, the job had to be carried through. "Just one more question," Spearing went on. "Where were you at the time of the raid?"

"Good heavens! Is it coincidence or something more? I was away from home, out at Chyvern, two miles away. I have been trying to sell a motor-bike, and had a wire from there inviting me to bring it to a certain address for inspection."



Detective Spearing, struck upon the chest, was swept off his footing on to the steep and slated roof.

"Possibly, then, someone at Chyvern can provide you with an alibi?"

"That's just it. I believe not. The address given me was an empty house. I thought it was a silly practical joke at the time."

"No," said Spearing thoughtfully; "I don't think it was a joke, but rather grim earnest."

"This makes the case black against me, I am afraid."

"Yes."

"Well, for Heaven's sake, man, tell me what you are going to do—arrest me?"

"Not at present."

"What then?"

"Continue search for thief."

Without another word the detective walked out into the street.

It was the kind of case which every clue makes deeper and darker, and every guess drives further from the truth.

CHAPTER 5.

Lilla Fordham—The Mystery of the Canal.

THREE days after his entering the case, and two days before the date upon which the gold was due for delivery at Southampton, Detective Spearing received a visit from a lady.

He found her standing before the fireplace in the coffee-room of his hotel, and he saw at a glance that she was young and nice-looking.

"My name is Lilla Fordham," she explained, "and my father is the chairman of the Provincial Banks, Limited."

Spearing bowed.

"And what may I do for you?"

"I am engaged to Mr. Crossland. You can help me to prove his innocence."

"Not aware that it is in question."

"Not aware?"

A look of incredulity appeared in her pleasant brown eyes. "Surely you know that he has been arrested?"

It was Spearing's turn to be surprised. He knew nothing of this.

"By whom?" he asked calmly.

"How can I tell? The police, I suppose."

"Who instructed police? I did not."

He spoke half to himself, but the agitated girl took him up swiftly.

"Ah," she cried, "then you may depend upon it, Martin Hawke is at the bottom of this! I suspected as much."

There was cold scorn and anger in every word.

"I believe you are right, but"—the detective turned his piercing grey eyes upon her face—"why did you suspect as much?"

"Because—well, because he has always hated Mr. Crossland."

"Yes; noticed that. Why is it?"

The girl flushed.

"I— Martin Hawke wanted to marry me, and I refused him. That is the reason."

"Um! Determined man, Martin Hawke!"

"Determined!"

The girl almost laughed.

"Mr. Spearing, that man would stop at nothing. I don't suppose Mr. Crossland told you, but I will. He was more than suspected, in some quarters, M.P. and Justice of the Peace as he is, of being in financial difficulties—criminal difficulties."

"But keeps eleventh commandment?"

"The eleventh commandment?"

"Thou shalt not be found out!"

"Does he? I wonder."

Spearing looked at her strangely.

"My dear young lady," he said, "you have come to me for help, but it is you who are helping me."

"I?"

"Yes; you are prompting my imagination."

Spearing began to pace the big room across and across.

The girl could see that he had almost forgotten her presence.

Presently he jerked out an unexpected question.

"Ever heard of Matthew Harper?" he said.

"No, never."

"Ever seen his initial on—say, a cigarette-case?"

"M. H.? No, can't say that I—"
She checked herself. "Wait a minute, though—"

"Ah, I perceive that you have!"

Spearing suffered one of his rare fits of loquacity.

"It is easier to change names than initials. Initials are everywhere—on linen, on brushes, and the like, on travelling-bags. It is difficult and dangerous to change initials. Therefore, the prudent rogue changes names, but not initials. Do you follow me?"

"You suggest some connection between this Matthew Harper and Martin Hawke?"

"Suggest nothing. Merely certain possibility."

The detective resumed his pacing of the floor.

After some little time Lilla Fordham ventured to recall the object of her visit.

"And Mr. Crossland?" she asked, with a catch in her voice.

Spearing turned at once.

"Sorry," he said. "Police have evidence against Mr. Crossland—strong evidence. Can do nothing."

"But you don't believe in his guilt? Say that you don't believe it!"

"Miss Fordham—"

Spearing struggled against his own natural reserve.

"I think, hope, believe can prove innocence with two days. Good-bye!"

"Thanks very, very much! You have made me happier. Good-bye, Detective Spearing!"

They shook hands, and Spearing escorted her to the entrance.

Instead, however, of returning to the coffee-room, where his breakfast was to be served, the detective put on a heavy overcoat, cap, and driving-gauntlets, crammed a handful of biscuits and some bars of chocolate into his pockets, and descended to the edge of the canal.

A few moments later its muddy waters were divided by perhaps the most beautiful craft that had ever traversed them.

It was Spearing's motor-boat *Circe*, almost as famous as himself.

Leaving the black wall of the bank premises on the right hand, he entered upon a straight and unfrequented run of some eight miles to Kettleborough, pushing the clutch over until the bows were wet to the gunwale.

It was his intention to seek the spot at which the gold had been removed from the canal.

How it had got there was another question, and a perplexing one.

Between the rear of the bank premises and the canal was a widespread stretch of marshy ground, and it was quite impossible that two hundred heavy boxes could by any means have been carried across that space without leaving ineffaceable tracks.

Yet it was clear enough that the gold had been removed.

"This way or none," muttered Spearing, as he tuned up the throbbing engine. "Road was closed; awkward questions and trouble galore awaited thieves in front. Clearly, therefore, the spoil was removed by means of this waterway. It could not have gone towards Bradport, because there canal becomes un navigable river. It must have followed the road that I am following now."

Nevertheless, as Spearing plainly saw, that conclusion only removed the problem a step further on; for if it was necessary to get the gold to the canal, it was equally necessary to get it away again, and for the most part the waterway ran through marshy fields and fenland.

The *Circe* had run a full five miles without passing any place that looked suitable for a landing when it was brought to a sudden stop by one of the tollgates which are there still in use.

"First toll I've took this morning," announced the gate-man, as he opened the passage for Spearing.

"Always here?" asked the detective in his short way.

"Ay, always here—night and day."

"Were you here on the night of the raid?"

"Ay."

"Hear any bombs?"

"Hear 'em? Should say I did hear 'em!"

"Hear the engines?"

"What engines?"

"Why, the engines of the *Zeppelin*."

"Nay, I never heard them."

"Ah!"

Spearing had asked that question a good many times, and always with the same result; no one had heard the aircraft but those who lived at or near the bank. It was a curious fact.

"Another question," he said. "On the night of the raid, do you remember a rather heavy boat passing your gate?"

"No, I don't, gov'nor, because there worn't none. Not once did I open my gate all that night through."

"Perhaps you left it for a few moments some time?"

"What, with bombs about? Me leave the waterside? Not likely!"

Spearing, inactive in his boat, was suffering one of his bitterest disappointments. His last theory seemed to be disproved. If the gold had not passed where every process of logic he could apply had assured him that it must have passed, he felt himself to be a beaten man.

He had now forty-eight hours in which to find the gold. It would not suffice for a reconstruction of the case.

"Not much!" the old gatekeeper rambled on, absorbed in

his own soliloquy. "Fire and water be mortal enemies, and I keeps by water all time."

Here he referred to a bottle, which possibly contained something partaking of the nature of both.

"Your friends, sir, likely they'd be in a boat about the size of yours?" he queried conversationally.

"Quite likely."

Spearing was lost in a brown study. Failure—even failure to save Crossland—stared him in the face.

"Waal, I expect as your friends was frightened by bombs. They lay to over yonder for an hour or more, and then went away again."

"What? What? What's that?"

The detective had sprung to his feet, with blazing eyes.

"They lay to over yonder by the road."

"By the road? Where do you mean?"

"Ah, you can't see it from the water, guv'nor. But road makes sudden twist, and canal makes sudden twist, 'til they comes near as kissin'."

"They do, do they? I see now. Where that long, tarred fence runs between."

Two minutes later the old gatekeeper was looking with incredulous eyes at a yellow coin with which he had been presented, and Spearing was gently sliding upwards a loose board in the fence between the canal and the road.

All his lassitude and depression had disappeared. He was again the invincible and tireless crime-agent who had conquered the secrets of a hundred crimes.

Outside the fence, by the edge of the road, there was the spoor of three men and a car. For some time, on hands and knees, the expert tracker was busy noting these messages of boot and tyre; then he returned to the Circe, and proceeded back towards the boat-quay at Bradport, where the canal ends.

In his mind's eye he could see the whole thing—the carrying of the boxes from boat to car, the furious speed of the thieves' departure. Also, as if he had seen it sink, he knew that the thieves' boat lay scuttled at the bottom of the canal, to be raised and re-used, or allowed to rot unseen beneath the dark water.

CHAPTER 6.

Matthew Harper—The Zepplin Myth—Boat versus Car.

SPEARING handed Sims the plan of the bank which he had been studying, and made his way out to the yard, where his first investigation had taken place.

"Now," he said, "if the plan is right, there ought to be a manhole-cover just here. There is! Just help me for a moment."

Bending down, the two men lifted the cover and exposed a boxlike cavity, through which passed a large drain.

Spearing entered this, and threw his glance along the outlet end of the drain.

As he expected, daylight showed at the far end.

"Thought as much!" he jerked. "Saw end of drain from boat."

"It discharges into the canal, then?"

"Yes. But on Wednesday night it discharged into something else."

"And what was that?"

"A boat!" Spearing chuckled.

"Moreover," he continued, "it discharged, not roof-water, but gold—boxes of gold."

"Great heavens!"

"Yes. Clever scheme. Simply handed out boxes, and placed them in drain. Fall of drain did the rest—little grease perhaps, to keep them moving."

Leaving the admiring Sims, he passed through the bank and ascended to the maisonette.

Mr. Barkum was just leaving, portmanteau in hand.

"Ah, detective!" he boomed. "Sorry can't stay; got to go to funeral—uncle—rich. Make yourself at home, and close the door when you leave. Good-bye!"

"Good-day!"

Spearing entered the hall and proceeded without hesitation direct to the roof.

There was another minor point which he found it necessary to clear up.

Although there was a general belief that a raid of hostile aircraft had been responsible for the damage at the bank, and even military measures had been taken in that belief, Spearing could not subscribe to the theory.

That such a carefully-planned robbery should, by the merest chance, coincide with an air raid which did the necessary service to the thieves and no more, was little short of unthinkable.

The detective was working on the basis that the bombs had been dropped from above by the men who subsequently held up the caretaker and robbed the strong-room.

The one flaw in his theory was that the sound of engines

had undoubtedly been heard; and it was that flaw which he was now endeavouring to remove.

Passing out to the narrow flat, he cast a searching glance all round, seeking he knew not what; only something, anything, which his detective instinct would fix upon as suspicious.

He noted again, with satisfaction, the scratches upon the slated slopes. If his theory of bombs carefully aimed from a safe place above were correct, it might well be that the bombs had been allowed to slide down those slates to the eaves, and then let go on their work of destruction by, say, the cutting of a cord.

Presently he found himself looking at that big, disused tank beneath which the greater treasures of the miser's roof-garden were sheltered.

With a strong, muscular effort he drew himself over the edge and dropped down within.

At one side, and fixed against the tank, was what he had hoped to find.

It was a simplified version of the noise-machine which is supplied to cinemas.

He turned the handle, and a perfect representation of distant air-motors rewarded him.

The sound was muffled and intensified to an astonishing degree by the empty tank, and it was easy to understand how the illusion of a raid had been created.

All was going well. With some forty hours yet left out of his five days' grace, he had fully solved the means of the crime, and, in addition, had rather more than a suspicion as to the name of the arch-thief. He foresaw a rapid and successful finish to the case.

His pleased reflections continued while he descended to the base of the tank, but at that spot these received a rude and sudden check.

Something struck the side of his head with a blinding impact, and he staggered to the utmost edge of the narrow flat.

He knew, even while he fought for his balance upon that perilous verge, that murder had been attempted. A sandbag leaves no wound, and, for the rest, he had wandered to the roof of the bank and ventured too near the tragic slopes. That would be the story.

Spearing, however, was a difficult man to kill. He recovered his balance, and hurled himself forward into the arms of his assailant, whom he guessed to be Matthew Harper.

"Curse you!" gasped the latter, as Spearing's powerful arms closed round him. "You shall die now, if I die with you!"

Spearing wasted no words. He simply held on, trying to regain the strength and senses which that sudden blow had half driven out of his body.

His enemy knew this as well as he did, and lost no time in getting to work.

With a sudden twist he tried for the cross-buttock, only to receive a back-heel which sent him on to the leads.

Spearing was a fighter born; a fighter who, when his senses were failing, would fight by instinct.

But, dazed as he was, he could by no means retain the advantage in position which he had secured. The two men, equally lithe and powerful, both heavy-weights, rolled over and over, biting, wrestling, watching for a chance to kick.

No laws are observed when life is at stake.

Spearing, with his calm and calculating nature, found himself opposed to one who "saw red," but yet took no chances.

In his weakened state the detective could only bend before the tempest and fury of the other's attack.

Fencing and covering up, he was driven twenty times to the verge of that eight-foot ring, to traverse which was almost certain death. A dozen times, locked together, the two reeling figures balanced upon the very edge; and a dozen times, by some mutual fear, they thrust themselves away.

In the end Spearing knew that he must win; there were no rounds, and his condition was bound to tell. But before the blind fury of the stranger had spent itself, one, two, perhaps three or more, minutes of peril would have to be lived.

No doubt Spearing's assailant understood this, for he suddenly adopted new and successful tactics.

Putting all his remaining strength into one whirlwind of blows, he drove the detective to the verge of the flat, then, darting back, he sent a flower-pot whirling into the air.

It was a chance shot, but it succeeded.

Detective Spearing, struck upon the chest, was swept off his footing on to the steep and slated roof.

Clutching desperately at every possible finger-hold, he slid down, down—until his body had disappeared from view, and only his fingers remained in sight, clutching the iron gutter at the eaves.

Presently those, too, disappeared, and the assassin gave a sigh of relief, or, perhaps, remorse; it is hard to say which.

But as he leaned against the tank, panting, white, and

shaken, with blood welling out of a cut under his eye, a sudden doubt electrified him once more into action.

True, he was invisible from the street; if he had slain the detective he was fairly safe. But had he? Or had the detective retained enough life to denounce his murderer?

He rushed down to Barkum's first-floor windows, and was just in time to see Spearing complete the descent of a rain-water down-pipe and arrive safely on the footpath before the bank.

At this sight the triumph of the would-be murderer evaporated. He had suddenly become a hunted man—a beaten man who thinks of naught but flight.

If he could only get to his car—

He took the stairs at a headlong rush, and Spearing, still dazed and shaken, was just conscious that his assailant sprang into a large car some doors down the road, and vanished at a great speed.

With a supreme effort he threw off his own lethargy to follow, and then saw that it was no use,

But there was another way.

Rushing upstairs, in response to a violent ringing of his bell, Sims was almost knocked over by the detective, who ran straight through the bank, and out to the back where the motor-boat was moored.

"Phone Kettleborough police to stop red car, number K one double three double O. Mention my name."

"Right, sir!" gasped Sims. But Spearing was already out of earshot.

Bending over the wheel, he let out the full power of the magnificent boat to reach that bend in the road ahead of the fugitive car.

Spray arose on either side like wings, and a glint of sunshine created a rainbow in each.

But Spearing had no eyes for beauty. It was speed, speed, speed that he was after.

He had good reason to believe that the fate of England's Serbian gold was bound up with the fate of that car, and he desired above all things to successfully hold it up.

But in this he seemed doomed to disappointment, for as he emerged upon the meadows he could see the distant car following at a furious speed the windings of the invisible road.

As his path and that of the car converged he saw that he had a slight advantage; but not enough.

It might enable him to reach the bend a couple of seconds before the car; but it would not enable him to take any useful action.

However, like his unknown assailant in the approaching car, he bent to it with all his nerve, coaxing the engine to do its utmost.

He soon gave up hope of intercepting the criminal, and began to beg of the fates a hundred yards—just a hundred yards—in hand at the bend of the road.

Even that seemed a doubtful proposition. His lead was little, if any, greater than that distance; and in order to land he must slow down.

As the heaving, flying boat neared the bank, Spearing shut off the engine, and stood upright like a circus rider upon the bonnet.

The Circe struck with a heavy shock, and ran well up the path; but her skipper leaped an instant before, and sprang to the tarred fence just as the car came upon him.

Bang, bang bang!

Spearing got in just three shots from his automatic, that familiar weapon, which he had not had a chance to draw in the fight upon the roof, and those three shots did all he had seen fit to hope for.

He refloated the Circe, and returned to Bradport at a good speed.

There he set the wires humming with the number and description of the wanted car.

"Punctured, near side rear tyre, and marked bullet-hole in tonneau," the description finished.

CHAPTER 7.

The Japanese Mirror—Spearing Outwitted—Ten Hours to Go.

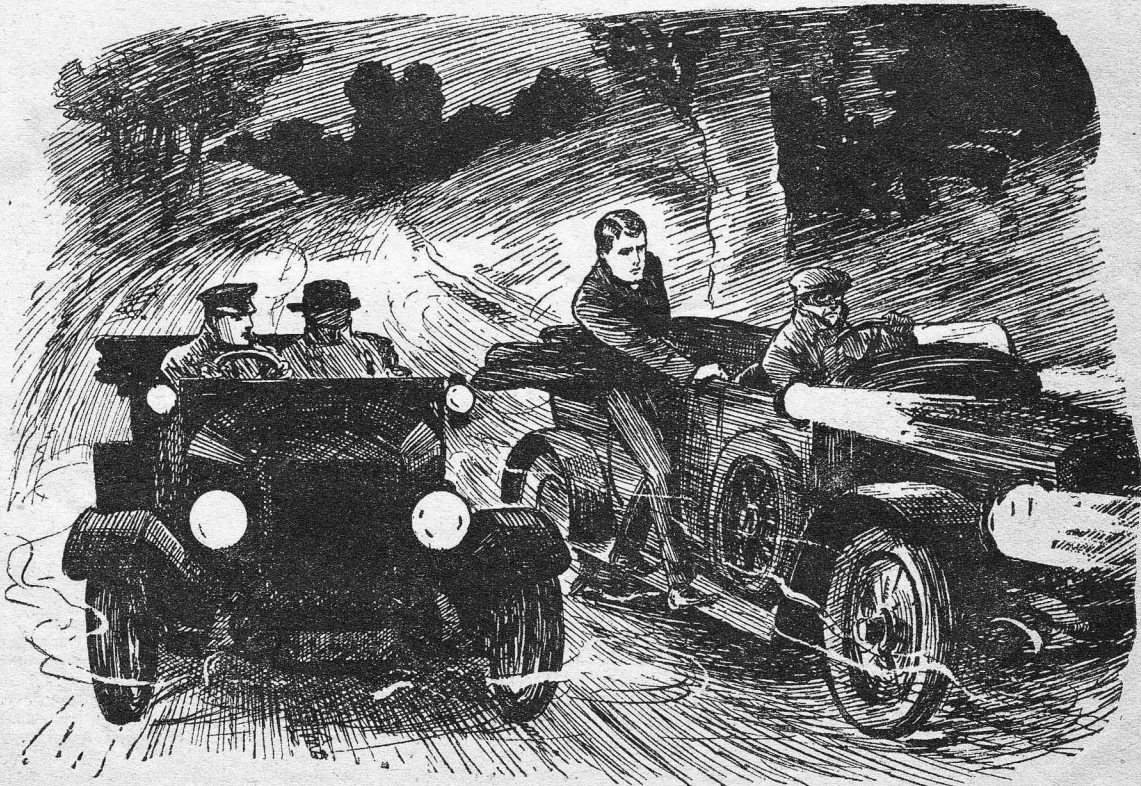
LATE on the evening of his fight with Harper, Spearing approached Mr. Barkum's maisonette, and deftly opened the door by means of a picklock.

He felt no compunction about entering thus, for he was playing for so big a stake that, apart from Barkum being a fit subject for suspicion, rights of individuals simply did not exist.

"Why did Harper return?" he muttered for the hundredth time. "It was dangerous—very—yet he returned. Did he accomplish his mission? Believe not. What was his mission? We shall see."

Cogitating thus, he proceeded to make a thorough search of the two rooms occupied by the man who called himself Harper.

The daylight began to fail, but still he worked on. And yet, scrutinising everything, he displaced nothing. It was a triumph of the searcher's curious art.



Spearing had previously taken his place upon the footboard of his own car, and in the moment that the two cars ran neck and neck, he leaped from one to the other.

At length, with a grunt of satisfaction, he brought to light a small deal box in which was a strange variety of articles—a white kid glove, right hand; a bottle of strong nitrous acid; a polished Japanese mirror of beaten copper; and lastly, a small piece of beeswax.

Spearing contemplated these ill-assorted objects for some time in silence; then, turning over the mirror, he beheld the burnt-in impression of a man's thumb.

He searched no further. Beyond a shadow of doubt, he had found what Harper had risked his liberty in order to destroy, and, also, beyond a shadow of doubt, what Harper would consider worth another visit.

Spearing replaced the box, switched out the light, and sat down in the growing darkness.

If, as he surmised, Harper knew of Barkum's intended absence, the crook would return soon, most likely that night, to finish the job which his doubtless unpremeditated assault of the morning had caused to miscarry.

Hour after hour he sat waiting in the spectral darkness. He dared not light a fire. Worse still, he dared not smoke.

Sleep he could do without.

With closed eyes he reclined in the big armchair of the man for whom he lay in wait; his revolver was ready upon his knees, and he allowed himself to review the complex facts of the case, following one after another of the unravelled threads of incident which seemed all to lead one way.

So the night passed. Dawn and full morning came; and Spearing, disappointed, rose to take his leave.

Just, however, as he rose shivering from the chair, a sharp rat-tat came upon the door of the room in which he stood.

Spearing's face grew grim, and he carefully cocked the automatic.

Then the door opened, and a motherly old charwoman shuffled in.

"Oh, beg pardon, sir, I'm sure!" she croaked. "Mr. Barkum's usually abed this time o' day."

"I only want to do the floor," she added.

"Certainly—certainly!" jerked Spearing, with some haste. And the old woman began to hurl tea-leaves about preparatory to raising a glory of dust.

Amused and annoyed, the detective turned to the door. Then a doubt struck him.

"How did you get in, my good woman?"

"Oh, sir, Mr. Barkum gives me a key, 'e do."

Smiling at the old creature's naive pride, Spearing withdrew out of her devastating track until she should have finished.

As soon as her work was over, he re-entered and made straight for the wooden box.

It still stood, only half hidden, just where he had left it; but he knew instinctively that something was wrong.

He sprang back into the hall just as the front door banged.

On the floor lay the hair, boots, dress, apron, and utensils of the old charwoman, and a rag upon which grease-paint was obvious.

"Martin Hawke!" he groaned.

He tugged at the door, but it had been prepared with wedges for that event. By the time he had it opened all hope of pursuit was vain.

The detective did not know whether admiration or anger was uppermost in him.

He turned back to the sitting-room with a rueful smile.

A cloud of fumes still streamed upwards from the box, but the important evidence it contained was now of little use. The "charwoman" had been at once prudent and thorough. Under cover of a dust cloud "she" had merely inverted the bottle of acid, and left one clue to destroy the rest.

The victim of as fine a piece of character-acting as was ever played, Spearing took the morning express to London, and made an early call upon Sir John Fordham.

The narrative which he jerked out in disconnected phrases was of such importance that, before he had finished, both Lilla Fordham and the Chief Commissioner of Police had been summoned to attend.

"You ask for a warrant to arrest Mr. Martin Hawke," said the Chief Commissioner, "but I cannot see my way to issue such a warrant against one in Mr. Hawke's important public position without a strong case has been established against him."

"I admit that, with the help of Sir John Fordham, you have proved that Mr. Hawke had the motive of financial necessity, and, further, you have certainly caused me to suspect the purity of Mr. Hawke's motives in securing the arrest of Harvey Crossland."

"You have no doubt created a damning case against this Matthew Harper, whoever he is; and you have demonstrated that he smokes the same cigars, has the same initials, and takes the same size boot as Mr. Hawke."

"That is not good enough. Far from it. If your man could have followed the punctured car, or traced its number, which does not appear to be on any list, we might proceed."

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"But, as it is——"

The Chief Commissioner rose and shook hands with Sir John.

"As it is, we must say good-bye to the gold. The case is not proven!"

Detective Spearing was a man of very few words. He had never been known to interrupt in his life. Even now his voice was placid and small.

"For want of what?" he asked.

"For want," said the Chief Commissioner, "of connecting link between Martin Hawke and Matthew Harper."

"Think—here!"

He undid a small parcel, and produced the copper mirror which he had found in Barkum's maisonette.

"Miss Fordham is prepared to take oath that Hawke showed it to Mr. Crossland in her presence. It is badly damaged by acid, but still recognisable."

"That alters the aspect of things entirely," admitted the Chief Commissioner; "and, if Miss Fordham will give us that assurance, the warrant will be issued."

"Allow me to congratulate you, detective."

Spearing looked uncomfortable, as usual, at the compliment he had received.

"Too soon yet," he grunted.

"And now," went on the Chief, "tell us exactly what made you pick on that particular object as a possible clue."

"It has a history. Mr. Martin Hawke used this mirror in the hope of securing both a scapegoat and a wife. He treated the highly-polished back with a film of paraffin-wax, and caused Mr. Crossland to handle it. He then burnt in the thumb-print with strong acid, and pressed upon it a kid glove soaked in beeswax. Result, an exact duplicate of Mr. Crossland's right thumb, which he imprinted upon the safe door when the robbery was over."

"Well, well!"

Both men applauded Spearing's skilful reasoning.

"You shall have that warrant," declared the Chief. "But, remember, we want the gold more than the man."

"Think secure both."

"Then there is still hope. We give you a free hand."

The Chief Commissioner took out his watch.

"It is now ten in the morning," he said. "The gold falls to be delivered at eight to-night. You have ten hours in which to find it. I wish you the best of good fortune."

"And I!" echoed Sir John.

"And I!" echoed Lilla impulsively.

With these good wishes ringing in his ears Spearing left the house.

CHAPTER 8.

The Message—Pursuit—At Bay.

ON the afternoon preceding the evening when the Serbian gold was due for shipment, there was an important division at the House of Commons.

The party whips had been busy, and every seat was full.

A pleasant and simple-looking person in the Strangers' Gallery was conversing with a rough-looking lad, who might have been, but was not, his son.

"Frightened man——" the parson was saying. "Makes for object most valued, especially if that object hard cash."

"He looks calm enough."

"He is calm—at present."

Both the parson and his friend looked down at Martin Hawke, the most immaculate and self-possessed member of the whole Commons.

"And how are you going to start him off, guv'nor?"

"Nothing easier."

The parson drew an envelope from his pocket and addressed it.

"Urgent! To Mr. Martin Hawke, M.P., House of Commons."

Then he took a plain card, inscribed it with a crude but unmistakable representation of the broad arrow, and placed it inside.

"Give this to an usher!" he ordered. "Then go down and tune up your motor-bike. His car is outside. But he may not use it; beware of that. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

The lad turned away, and the parson resumed his scrutiny of Mr. Martin Hawke.

Two minutes passed, and then an official of the House passed round behind that gentleman and handed him the envelope.

Martin Hawke was very interested in a speech just then, and tore the envelope open without looking at it, withdrawing the card, and holding it in his hand until an opportunity should offer for its perusal.

Presently he looked down.

There, in full view of some hundreds of persons, he was displaying the accusing mark of the broad arrow.

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

CHARLIE AT THE SHOW!

(Continued from page 9.)

"Ere," he said to a man at the top, "you turn the water on while I run down with it!"

The man nodded, and did his part. So did Jerry. He dashed down the steps, caught his foot in the hose, and, tripping over, he fell with his head in a perambulator. But, kissing the baby, he got up quickly, swung round, tripped up again, and sat down again.

All these hindrances were annoying—very annoying. But Jerry would not be deterred. Not him! He scrambled up again like a young kangaroo, and, darting successfully down to the end of the aisle, he directed the nozzle of the hose down towards the stage.

He waited some moments, but no water came.

"That's funny!" he said to himself. "Nozzle must be stuffed up! Let's have a look!"

He had a look, but he didn't look long. He discovered suddenly that the nozzle wasn't stuffed up in the slightest, for a stream of water shot out and knocked his bowler off as if it had been the lid of a saucepan.

Standing like a London fireman with the hose in his hand, he played the water down on to the stage and caught Signor Salamanca Suchano just as he was chewing up the last remaining portion of flame.

No one in his sane mind could ever have doubted that Jerry Swiller's intentions were of the very best. But, doubtless, because the fire-eating Italian person was a stranger and didn't know the language, he quite misunderstood those intentions.

He didn't even stand still and consent to being put out.

He just gasped, flung his arms about, and raced round the stage like one of those dogs who has had a tin can attached to his tail.

"Ow!" he shouted. "Stoppit! Oki pokio perugia! Carambo and diabolio! I am becin' drown! Eet es ze great flood vonce again! Ze dams 'ave broke!"

"Now then," shouted Jerry, "not so much swearing! Stand still!"

He got the water on Suchano once again, and was giving him the most complete wash he'd ever had in his life; and the signor had fallen flat on the floor, and was doing the trudgeon-stroke towards the orchestra-pit, when one of the theatre attendants dashed towards Jerry.

It was at this precise moment, too, that Charlie had stood up in the box, and, leaning over, was waving his hat hilariously.

"Splendid!" he was shouting. "Exshellent! Never sheen a water effect like it before—never! Look at it, Fatty, my lad! Obsherve the water, Jelly, old blancmange! Niag'ra Falls! Niag—I shay Niag— Here, wash doing up there? Can't you keep the beastly waterfallsh on the shage?"

It was quite a reasonable sort of request for a gentleman in the best box to make. But somehow or other Jerry, who was in charge of the water effects, couldn't see his way to comply with it.

He couldn't see his way to do anything, really, for somebody else's hat had been smashed down over his eyes, and a nasty upper-cut to the ear had caused him to swing round.

And when he swung round the hose took it in its head to swing round too.

So did the water! It swung round into the box where Charlie was, and in about one minute Jerry's friend—his best

friend—the bosom pal he had made that evening in the Frog and Flannel—was as soured as a herring.

Slowly but surely he felt his senses drifting from him. All his past lives came up before his eyes and went down again. There was a singing in his ears—a low, dull hum, like a cricket coughing.

By a great effort he managed to turn and look at his fat friend upon the floor.

"Blancmange, old sphort," he said, in a voice hardly above a whisper—"Jelly, old pal, if you should shurvive thish, tell the rate-collector that my last thoughts were of him. Tell him that I mentioned his name in my lasht breath! Good-bye, old Custard! Thish is a far, far better thing that I am going to do than I shall ever done before! Good-bye! I am going under the billowsh! Farewell! Au revoy!"

And then, as Fatty struggled to his feet, slipped up, and sat on Charlie's face, a great darkness came upon him.

EPILOGUE.

THE performances at the Theatre Royal and Regal Music Hall at Pwllgwall-ap-Grpgh were always good. They were so good that the people who went to see them were always sorry when the band played the National Anthem. They wended their various ways out of the theatre slowly and reluctantly.

But on a certain dark night there were two members of the audience who must have been the exceptions which proved the rule. They came out quickly.

No one had ever come out of the building quicker than they did. In so great a hurry were they that, doubtless persuaded by two of the attendants, they did not pause to come down the stairs in the approved way. They shot down without touching the steps, like two bags of washing, forged their way through the swing-doors, fled over the pavement, cannoned in a beautiful losing hazard off a lamppost, and lay quietly in the gutter.

For a long time they lay there. The mud was soft enough. What occasion had they to move?

But at last, very slowly this time, they picked themselves up. One of them was wearing an evening-dress which looked as if it had been through the washing-machine. The other was wearing a ragtime suit and a bowler sprinkled with a thick layer of brickdust.

Very slowly they brushed one another down, eyeing each other with an infinite sadness of expression.

Presently, without speaking a word, they linked arms, and made their way slowly through the town.

At a certain corner they paused.

"Jerry, old chum," said the one with the dress-suit and the drenched bottails, "it'sh closed now, isn't it?"

The other nodded disconsolately.

"And will it be very long before it'sh morning, Jerry?" the first one asked.

"No," said Jerry, "not long, Charlie, old feller."

"Come on, then!" said Charlie.

Again they linked arms and moved towards a doorstep opposite. Arrived there, they sat down, making themselves comfortable.

"Good-night, Jerry, old sphort!" said Charlie sleepily.

"Goo'-night, Charlie, old son!" said Jerry drowsily.

A moment later and there was silence. Not a sound disturbed the quietude, only the faint creaking of a board above them as it swayed gently in the night wind.

The moon came slowly from behind a cloud, and its rays fell for a short moment upon the board. Five golden words sprang for a short moment into view. They were:

"Ye Olde Frog and Flannel."



THE SECRET LAGOON.

Continued from Page 2.

He ushered the two other men into the forepart of the huge U boat. They obeyed willingly enough in face of his ugly-looking revolver. Here was a cabin with a stout door, which the engineer securely fastened before returning to the main cabin, where he had left Jack and the Hungarian staring at each other, Jack with his weapon pointed grimly at the prisoner, and his mouth dry with excitement.

"Now," said Mac briskly, "I'm inclined to believe you, but I'm not going to take any risks. Now, I've looked at your blessed commander's diary, which he very kindly left in the shack on the island."

"What, you found the shack, with petrol? Oh, la, la, la! But how?"

"That's my business," said Mac cheerfully.

"Or, rather, mine!" cried Jack, who was longing to take a share in the powwow.

"Well, anyhow," Mac went on, "we've found it. I suppose you're well out of petrol, or you wouldn't be calling here. Is that so?"

"Yes," assented the prisoner. "We were running very short, and we've got a long journey this time. At least—"

"Well?"

"If the Herr Lieutenant comes back."

"He won't."

"Oh!"

"No!"

"Oh, then, who will meet the Heidelberg?"

"What is the Heidelberg?"

"The raider who escaped in disguise, and has flouted your British patrols in the shape of a peaceful merchantman."

"We are to work together. We have received a wireless message to pick her up. She will act as a decoy for us. She waits for us here."

The Hungarian pointed to a spot on the chart.

"There!" he said. "She waits for us there, in one small three days. Who—who will meet her?"

"We will!" snapped Macdonald.

"Hurry!" cried Jack.

"But the petrol?" gasped Matisz, for that was the prisoner's name.

"We'll load it, with the aid of our musical friends inside."

By this time the two imprisoned sailors were kicking up a fine shindy, kicking on the cabin door and strafing in loud and angry tones.

They soon stopped that, however, and they became very meek.

Driving them ashore, with the Hungarian as a sort of foreman, but closely watched by Jack, the pressed crew gathered and loaded the petrol and stores required for the voyage.

Mac collected the lieutenant, who was not a bit grateful, and when the gag was removed from his mouth called Mac a "porridge dog," much to Jack's glee.

"He's an ill-mannered brute," observed the engineer; "but he may be useful."

The lieutenant complained bitterly about his broken arm, and kicked his little dog when it danced round him in an ecstasy of welcome.

Jack, whose boyish blood boiled with fury at the cruelty, made a threatening gesture with his fist, but restrained himself; while the German muttered about the pain in his arm.

"Now, Matisz," cried Mac, when all was ship-shape, "out she goes!"

She glided, her deck all awash, out of the peaceful lagoon, and, sinking a little, sped swiftly away, eating up the knots in spanking fashion.

"Oh, these engineers!" grinned Mac, with delight, as he watched the smooth running. "I congratulate you, Herr Lieutenant!"

Herr Lieutenant only grunted.

"Vere you take her?" he demanded.

"To that little spot marked on that chart there," said Mac quietly.

The lieutenant cried with spluttering rage, and flew at the engineer.

For a brief moment they wrestled; then a howl of pain from the German, as he clapped his hand to his broken arm.

"My arm! My arm!" he cried, as he fell back in his chair, sweating with pain and anger.

But Mac heeded him not.

Jack was ever at the periscope, scanning the surface of the waters, until, on the third day out, he cried in excitement:

"Mac! Mac! Come, look at this! I believe we've found the Heidelberg!"

It was true!

Of two apparently peaceful merchantmen travelling on the waters, one had suddenly flung a shot across the bows of a passenger steamer flying the Union Jack.

As the shot was fired the German flag was run up, and her hidden guns unmasked in an ugly roar.

Hopelessly taken in by the peaceful appearance of the pirates, the British passenger vessel was apparently at the Germans' mercy; but Matisz had not been idle. He had swiftly run to the station from which the torpedo was fired.

Mac, excitedly watching the German, directed the aim.

Unseen, the terrible missile left the tube, quickly rippling towards the doomed pirate.

Too late her captain saw the deadly wake, and in an instant the torpedo had crashed into the very inwards of the enemy craft. A terrific explosion followed, and in a few moments the Heidelberg was sinking rapidly.

What cheers and laughter, mingled with tears, greeted the gallant Mac and the equally popular Jack Fastnett as they appeared leading the German U boat commander up the gangway of the saved liner!

"Be careful, porridge dog!" grunted that pleasant gentleman, as he stepped gingerly up the ladder. "My arm! My arm is broken!"

"I'm sorry," said Mac quietly. Then he added: "I was just thinking what a peety it wasn't yer neck!"

THE END.

IMPORTANT NOTICE ! ! !

The Editor regrets that, owing to the Government restrictions on the import of paper, "PLUCK" will be discontinued for the present as a separate publication, and will be amalgamated with the popular journal,

"THE BOYS' REALM."

Our splendid South Sea Island series, dealing with Doctor Huxton Rymer, will be continued in "THE BOYS' REALM." This week's issue contains a stirring, long, complete story of Doctor Huxton Rymer and Ah Foo, entitled "THE WHITE MAN'S VENGEANCE."

The Editor is sure that all the present readers of "PLUCK" will be delighted with the combined issue of "THE BOYS' REALM AND PLUCK," and to make sure of getting a copy they should place an order with the Newsagent at once.

Ask for "THE BOYS' REALM."

THE BRADPORT BANK ROBBERY.

(Continued from page 22.)

With a swift, guilty movement he crushed it into his pocket, and reeled out of the chamber like a man suddenly seized with illness.

Part at least of the plan had proved a success. The fox was started; it remained to run him to earth.

Ten minutes later a police telegram was handed to the old parson, who was, of course, none other than William Spearing. "Hawke on car, Portsmouth Road. Following."

"Good!" snapped the detective.

He made a sign to the chauffeur of a rakish, open car which stood near, and within a few seconds he also was taking part in that most exciting and dangerous sport—man-hunting.

Just before Hindhead, and on the rim of the Devil's Punch Bowl, they found the motor-cyclist who had sent the wire.

Spearing leaped out and shook the half-insensible man.

"Well?" he shouted.

This was no time for sentiment.

"Got too close," murmured the cyclist. "Hawke waited and backed into me."

"Get on with it!" said Spearing to his chauffeur. "Straight ahead, and top speed!"

He tossed a flask to his injured assistant as the car gathered way.

"Careless—poor chap!" he muttered.

He was using one of the new Becker steam-cars, and "top-speed" meant seventy miles per hour.

Nevertheless, what with interruptions and necessary moderation of their breath-taking speed, it was nearly twenty-five minutes before Spearing was able to make out the features of Martin Hawke in one who turned from his own furious driving to see what it was that threatened to pass him.

Secure in his clerical disguise he gave the word to go by, and his car continued to overhaul the other with considerable ease.

"Wait!" he shouted, as a thought struck him. "When you reach other car, hold abreast for a minute, and then go on. I'm going to board him."

He took a travelling-rug, and buttoned his clerical coat around it; then he tied his handkerchief where the face should be, and placed his soft felt hat upon the end.

It was a poor dummy; but, if Hawke only glanced round, or only saw it in passing, he would believe the parson to be still in the car.

The peril of disclosure was not of great duration, for Spearing's car was the faster, and some to spare.

For an instant they hung level, then the steam-car drew away at a furious speed.

Spearing had previously taken his place upon the footboard outside the door of his own car, and, in the moment that the two cars ran neck and neck, he leaped from one to the other, crouching behind Hawke's spare tyre undetected.

As it happened, he had acted none too early, for Hawke was no sooner rid of the presence of the steam-car than he turned off the main road and began to make over towards Southampton.

A village constable tried to stop their furious course, but Hawke merely ignored him. Fortunately for himself, the man did not get in the way.

Another, little knowing what he did, tried to point out to Hawke that he had a passenger, but fortunately the crook, ignored him also.

Spearing did not, however; and, seeing that such an event was bound to recur, he took the extreme risk of climbing into the chassis and sitting on the floor behind the man he was pursuing.

He had been awake all night, and the movement of the car was very soothing.

"Must not sleep—must not sleep!" he told himself time after time, until that, too, became a lullaby.

He was awakened from a deep slumber by a slowing down of the intensely rapid rhythm of the engine. The car was entering the drive to some large country house.

Muttering a prayer of thanksgiving for his escape from sleep, and another for luck in what he must now attempt.

Spearing climbed on to the folded hood at the back, and jumped for the tangled branches which seemed to be flying backwards overhead.

He arrived with a hideous crash, but the engine was minus its silencer, and Hawke evidently did not hear.

The detective dropped openly into the road, too much hurt to heed the risk, and walked into a thicket for concealment while he saw to his injuries.

An hour later a muddy figure, with one arm in an improvised sling, entered the local station, and demanded a hundred men.

The station inspector-in-charge laughed incredulously.

"Detective Spearing!" explained the injured man. "Warrant arrest Martin Hawke in pocket! Martin Hawke at Greatorex House! Must have hundred men! Soldiers, specials—any sort of honest men!"

"Want 'em now! Jump to it!" he added.

Then he fainted away.

Lights gleamed and voices echoed everywhere in the great house. It was a moment of triumph for Detective Spearing, for down below two hundred boxes of specie were being loaded into a motor-lorry for Southampton, while at least three long "wanted" men were awaiting a strong escort of police.

But the triumph was incomplete. Martin Hawke, the arch-crook, was nowhere to be found.

For the third time the detective questioned the cordon of constabulary and soldiers which was drawn around the whole of the grounds.

"No, sir; no one has passed us," they reiterated.

"Something wrong!" jerked the detective. "He was here when we arrived; his cigar is still smouldering upon his table. Yet he is not in the house, and you say he has not passed."

With the same question often repeated, he made his way around the whole circle. It was no use. Everywhere the reply was the same. But when, for the third time, he questioned the men at the gate he began to understand.

"No," they answered; "nobody has been passed here—except yourself."

"Except myself?"

"Yes; you came out in your car and said you were going for further assistance. That's why we were so surprised to see you again already."

"You're mistaken. My car is standing before the house at this moment."

He hurried back along the drive.

"Have you got them, sir?" asked one of the men there.

"Got whom?" he snapped.

"The extra help that you went for."

Spearing frowned. He looked for his car, and found that it was no longer where he had left it.

"Um!" he said. "Did you see me come out?"

"Yes."

"What did I look like?"

"As you do now—shirt-sleeves, and arm in a sling, and all the rest of it."

"Um! You'd better set the wires going for a man without a coat!"

"Great Joseph! Do you mean that that was not you?"

"I do mean just that!"

"Then who was it?"

"I believe the cleverest crook in Christendom—Martin Hawke, alias Matthew Harper, alias Heaven knows what!"

"And we've let him go!"

The officer groaned.

"Cheer up!" grinned Spearing. "This time we've got the gold! Next time we'll get the man!"

THE END.

Get this week's

BOYS' REALM

(With which PLUCK
is now incorporated)

HUXTON RYMER
and A H FOO

appear in it.

PRICE - - ONE PENNY.

MYSTERY ISLAND!

(Continued from page 12.)

He personally superintended the transporting of the plague-stricken blacks to the schooner, and not until the last had gone did he himself go.

It was getting darker and darker now, and the west had the appearance of a thick pea-soup fog. Yet it was not fog, and Rymer knew it.

Overhead the sun was no longer visible. In the east the sky was black as night.

Never had Rymer seen a more sinister-looking sky than that. He flung out a signal of danger from the halyards of the schooner as he went on board, in the hopes that the crazed Spaniard might be lured down to the shore.

Now that he had definitely sacrificed his intentions regarding the treasure, and had sold his greed for the glow of a decent action, he was determined to do all he could.

He kept the schooner close in shore for two long hours, during which the sky grew blacker and blacker; then, and only when he dared risk it no longer, he started the twin petrol auxiliary engines, and headed her for the open sea.

Nor was he a moment too soon. They were less than half a mile off shore when there was a series of terrific reports behind them.

Turning, and gazing back over the yellow face of the sea, Rymer gasped as he saw the whole face of the white coral cliff split asunder.

It gaped in a great, wide, black opening, then it closed suddenly. A torrent of water poured down over it in a gushing cataract, and he knew that Nature had at last emptied the lake.

High on the crest of the water, sweeping high above the jungle trees, there suddenly appeared the gaunt shape of the old galleon. She rode high on the very edge of the terrible

cataract for a single moment, then she dipped, and crashed down four hundred feet to the beach below.

At the same moment there came a deep rumble, and the whole island shot downwards into the deeps.

The next instant a great tidal wave swept towards them, and in a terrific abyss of blackness, Rymer clung to the tiller, while the schooner swept on in the teeth of a terrific hurricane.

A week later the schooner Octopus, very much battered, but still riding the waves, made the island of San Cristoval, in the Solomons.

From her were landed nineteen convalescent blacks who had been taken off an island in the Bismarcks.

By the trading schooner for Port Moresby, which left the day after the arrival of the Octopus, there also went a letter to England, addressed to James Cartwright, of Devon. It was signed merely by initials, and contained all the papers of Ralph Cartwright, who had died of plague.

Enclosed, too, strangely enough, there was an order on a Brisbane bank for two thousand pounds, presumably the savings of the said Ralph Cartwright.

From some of the private papers Huxton Rymer had discovered that James Cartwright was struggling along on a farm in Devon, and an unposted letter of Ralph Cartwright's spoke of sending two thousand pounds as soon as he could save it.

And, strangely enough, as he lounged on the deck of the Octopus, thinking of the fortune in gold and silver which had gone to the bottom of the Pacific, Huxton Rymer felt no regret.

It had been a hard fight 'twixt greed and humanity, and, to his eternal credit, humanity won. It had been twenty lives against a fortune. It had been a grinding struggle for his adventurous soul.

But humanity had won, and if he had lost the gold he had gained a strange, warm glow which filled his soul with peace.

(You will want to read another story of Huxton Rymer and Ah-Foo. Buy this week's B YS' REALM. There is a fine one entitled, "THE WHITE MAN'S VENGEANCE.")

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