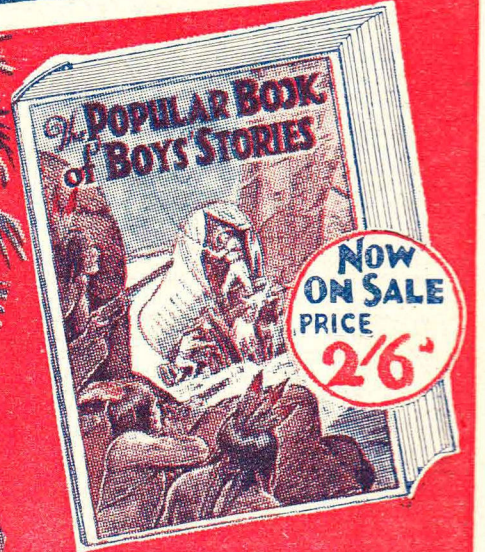
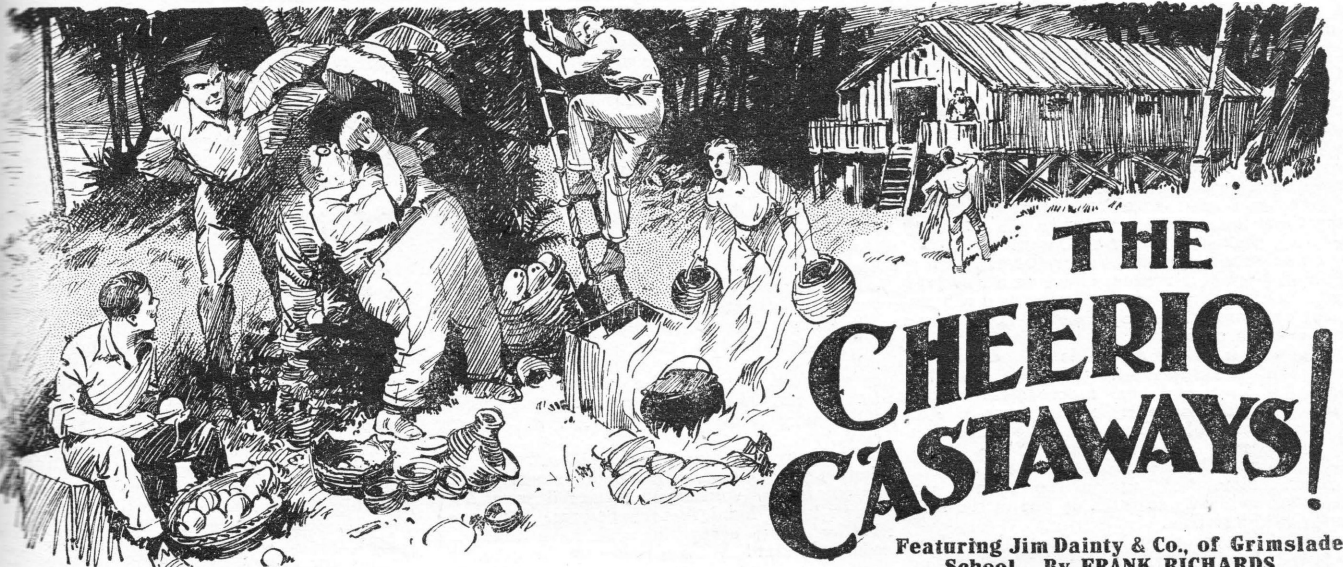


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# The RANGER<sup>2</sup>







# THE CHEERIO CASTAWAYS!

Featuring Jim Dainty & Co., of Grimslade School. By FRANK RICHARDS.

### The Cornered Castaways!



ANOTHER bullet whizzed up over the dashing spray of the waterfall, splattered on the high, rocky wall of the ravine, and dropped into the stream above the fall. The report of the rifle followed, thundering back in a thousand echoes from the woods of Castaway

Island with startling clearness. Fritz Splitz, the fat German junior of Grimslade School, gave a squeal of terror, and the other fellows chuckled. Through the long, hot hours of the tropical day the rifle had rang at intervals, sending lead whizzing up into the ravine that split the hillside. And every time a bullet splattered, there was a squeal from Fatty Fritz.

For the first time since the Grimsladers, wrecked on their holiday cruise, had been cast away on that unknown island in West Indian seas, Fatty Fritz had not gone to sleep in the heat of the day. The crack of the rifle kept him wide awake.

It was hot in the ravine, the sun streaming down from a cloudless sky. But Jim Dainty & Co. were not worrying about that. They had held their own, so far, against the enemies who had landed on Castaway Island, and they were full of confidence. Only on the clear-cut face of Dr. Samuel Sparshott, headmaster of Grimslade, was there a shadow of grim thought. Standing at the mouth of the cavern on the rocky shelf beside the rippling stream, Sammy Sparshott looked up the steep, winding ravine towards the higher slopes of the hill. From below the enemy could not come—the waterfall and the rocks hurled from above had driven them back.

But it was in Sammy's mind that Captain Luz and his black crew might find their way over the wooded, rugged slopes of the great hill and descend the ravine from above. In which case the position of the Grimsladers was hopeless. And he suspected that the sniping from below the waterfall was designed to draw the attention of the castaways from an attack from another direction.

Dr. Sparshott stepped into the cave-mouth at last, leaving the juniors on the watch. The cavern was narrow at the opening, hardly three or four feet wide, but it widened farther on. Its depth could not be calculated. It seemed to extend deep into the solid hill, lost in blackness.

Squatted on the rugged floor, leaning against the rock, was Ezra Sarson, the desperate rascal who had scuttled the Spindrift. Bound hand and foot, the ruffian was a prisoner in the hands of the Grimsladers. He scowled blackly at the tall, athletic young man who was headmaster of Grimslade in far-off England, little as he looked like a school-

master now. Sammy stood looking down on him thoughtfully.

"I guess you ain't going to let me starve, dog-gone you!" muttered Ezra. "Rations are short," said Dr. Sparshott. "Most of our stores have been taken by the rascals who landed from the schooner in the bay. I have six schoolboys in my charge, and I have to think of them first. There is nothing for you, my man."

Ezra Sarson wriggled in his bonds. "But I shall not let you starve," went on Dr. Sparshott. "Neither can I knock you on the head, as you deserve. The alternative is to set you free."

The 'Frisco ruffian's sunken eyes glittered. The bitter hatred in his look showed what use he was likely to make of his freedom.

"You are aware," said Sammy, "that a schooner has put in at this island, and that her captain and crew have treated us as enemies. From talk I have heard among them it seems that you, Sarson, are an old acquaintance of the leader, Captain Luz, a half-white man from, I think, Martinique."

SOMEWHERE ON CASTAWAY ISLAND LIES BURIED A FABULOUS TREASURE, AND JIM DAINTY & CO. FIND THE FIRST CLUE TO IT—A GRISLY SKELETON!

"I guess he's an old shipmate!" said Ezra. "We was in the rum-running together once."

"Yes, he looks like a rum-runner," agreed Sammy. "But it seems that he has visited this lonely island in the hope of unearthing a treasure here. Probably you have heard of Christophe, who was king of Hayti a hundred years ago, and whose fabulous treasures have never been found. Captain Luz fancies that that treasure, or part of it, was hidden on this lonely island by a man whom he calls the Black Marquis, at the order of King Christophe."

"I reckon it's like enough, too," Ezra muttered. "Everybody in the West Indies knows that the gol-darned nigger, Christophe, was always afraid that the French would take Hayti back from him. He sent a million pounds to London to keep it safe from the French. He had ten times as much, I reckon, though where he hid it no man knows. Here, as like as not. It's no secret that the Black Marquis sailed from Hayti with a ship stacked with gold." The scuttler's eyes were gleaming with greed. "By hokey! If Cap'n Luz has a clue to where the Marquis of Marmalade landed that cargo—"

"Who?" ejaculated Sammy.

"That was his title in Hayti—the Black Marquis," grinned Ezra. "The Marquis of Marmalade. They got dog-goned queer titles in that black island, I'll tell a man! I guess I've heard of a Duke of Lemonade there, when I was at Port-au-Prince. Yep!"

Dr. Sparshott grinned. But his face became serious again at once.

"Well, whether the Marquis of Marmalade landed treasure on this island or not, does not concern me," he said. "I have no desire to touch it. Finding us here, Captain Luz believed that we were rival treasure-seekers, and that is why he is seeking our lives. As he turns out to be a friend of yours, you can go to him in safety—"

"You bet!" "You, at least, know perfectly well that we are here because we were shipwrecked," said Dr. Sparshott. "You can tell him that we know nothing of King Christophe's treasure, and want to know nothing. All we want is to be left alone, and Captain Luz can search for his treasure as long as he likes without interference from me. You will tell him so."

"I guess I'll tell him if you let me loose," said Ezra.

Dr. Sparshott stooped over the ruffian and released him from his bonds. Sarson rose and stretched his cramped limbs. Taking him by the arm, Dr. Sparshott led him from the cave on to the narrow, rocky bank of the stream. Fritz Splitz jumped up and backed away in a great hurry at the sight of Ezra Sarson a free man. The other juniors stared at him curiously.

"Letting him go, sir?" asked Jim Dainty.

"We have no food for him, and he can tell those scoundrels yonder the truth about our presence on this island," said Sammy Sparshott briefly. "You had better go up the ravine, Sarson. Probably you will meet your friends in that direction."

"I guess it's easier going down to the beach," growled Sarson.

"No doubt; but there is a sniper down below who may take you for one of us."

"I reckon I'll chance it," sneered the ruffian. Sammy shrugged his shoulders.

Sarson tramped along the rocky ledge towards the waterfall. It was the last fall of the tumbling mountain stream, and a plunge down the falling water was a short cut to the beach of Castaway Island.

"My giddy goloshes!" murmured Ginger Rawlinson. "He's asking for it."

Sarson reached the end of the rocky shelf over the cascade. He stared over into the lower stream.

Crack! The rifle below rang sharply. The ruffian sprang back with a yell as the hat spun on his head, struck by a bullet from the sniper below. A thin stream of red ran down his coppery cheek, where the bullet had grazed. Ezra clapped his hand to the cut with a roar of rage. He came tramping back up the ravine.

"Try the other way—what?" smiled Dr. Sparshott.

With only a savage scowl for reply, Ezra tramped on up the steep ravine. At a little distance above the cave he had to step into the water, which filled the ravine above from side to side. He tramped and splashed his way upward through shallow water. He reached a turn of the ravine, which, in another moment would have hidden him from sight. There he turned round and glared back at the Grimsladers before the cave. His brawny fist was shaken savagely at the group.

"You wait a piece!" he roared. "I'm going to find friends, I reckon, and I won't be long in comin' back for you! I guess you can say your prayers, Sam Sparshott. You won't see another sunset!"

"That is the gratitude I expected," remarked Dr. Sparshott. "But we could not take his life; and one more rascal among so many will make little difference. And Captain Luz will at least learn the truth from him, and may leave us in peace."

"Look out!" yelled Dick Dawson.

The ruffian, high up in the ravine, was stooping, evidently to catch up one of the loose rocks in the stream.

"Ach! Tat peast and a prute vill preak us te head!" yelled Fritz Splitz. And the fat German darted into the shelter of the cave.

Jim Dainty's eyes gleamed. He grabbed up a jagged lump of rock, and took aim. Ezra groped in the running water, found at last what he sought, and rose with a heavy stone in his hand. As he rose, Jim Dainty pitched his rock, as surely and unerringly as he had ever bowled a cricket ball on Little Side at Grimslade.

Crash! The missile landed on the ruffian's chest, even as his arm rose to throw, and he pitched over backwards into the stream.

"Well bowled," grinned Sammy Sparshott. With a wild splashing and spluttering, Ezra Sarson scrambled out of the water, and disappeared beyond the winding curve of the ravine. "Heaving rocks" was a game that two could play at; and the ruffian was anxious to get out of range. He disappeared from sight, a whizzing rock from Ginger Rawlinson crashing just behind him as he vanished.

### The Skeleton in the Cave!

"MEIN gootness! I vas hungry!"  
 "Shut up, you Boche bloater!"  
 "Peastly prute!" moaned Fritz Splitz, "I vas so hungry as neffer vas before! I tink tat I die!"  
 "The sooner the quicker!" said Streaky Bacon, heartlessly.

"I wish tat I vas pack in Chermany."  
 "Same here!" said Sandy Bean. "Germany's more than welcome to you! Now shut up."  
 "Peast and a prute! I tink—"

Dr. Sparshott glanced round.  
 "Is that Splitz grousing?" he asked.  
 "Dainty, I have instructed you to kick Splitz whenever he grouses. Kindly understand that I expect my orders to be obeyed here, just as if we were at Grimslade School."  
 "Sorry, sir—here goes!"

Thud!  
 "Ach! Whoop!" roared Fritz Splitz, as Jim Dainty obeyed his headmaster's instructions. "Mein gootness! Vy for you pang me on mein trousers, peast and prutal pounder! I would peat you till you pellow like a pull, only I vas so veak mit hunger—"

Thud! came Ginger Rawlinson's boot. And the hungry Fritz, yelling, retreated up the cave.

There was no doubt that Fritz was hungry. He was always hungry, even when there was plenty of provender. Now there was far from plenty.

The other fellows were hungry, too. But there was little use in grousing: besides, Grimslade never groused!

The hut on the beach, built with so much labour by the Grimslade castaways, was in the hands of the schooner's crew. Most of the stores in it had been captured. Sammy Sparshott had succeeded in getting away with one rucksack crammed with provisions. But that was all—and there were seven mouths to feed.

The juniors had been able to gather bunches of bananas and eatable plants, and a few

coconuts, to eke out the supplies. Sammy had placed the party on the strictest rations. When the present supply was exhausted, there was no guessing where the next was to come from.

Now that they knew that their headmaster looked for an attack from the upper end of the ravine, the juniors watched in that direction rather anxiously. More than an hour had elapsed since Ezra Sarson had gone, and there was no sign of the enemy yet. But the attack, if it came, could not be stopped, that was certain, with no weapons but sticks and stones, against a crew of armed ruffians. Jim Dainty and Co. wondered what Sammy was going to do. Somehow, they felt that their headmaster would pull them through.

"Dainty!" barked Sammy suddenly.

"Yes, sir!" Jim ran up.

"Stand here, in the cave—looking up the cave. Now, do you feel a wind?"

"Yes, sir," said Jim, after a moment or two. "It's very faint, but I can feel it. On my face."

"I thought I was not mistaken," said Dr. Sparshott. "This cave has another outlet. The mountain was volcanic in former days, and no doubt has a hundred such fissures. Fill your bottles, cans, everything you have that will contain water! We are going up the cave."

Every possible receptacle of water was filled at the stream. Then the Grimsladers took a last, deep drink of the cool, pure water that rippled by at their feet. Dr. Sparshott lighted the lantern. He cast a long look up the ravine. If the enemy were coming, they had not yet appeared. But in Sammy's mind, at least, there was no doubt that they would come. He signed to the juniors to enter the cave, and followed them.

For a short distance, a twilight reigned in the cavern: beyond that, all was blackness. Sammy flashed the lantern-light on the walls of rough rock—a dark basalt, mingled here and there with iron-hard lava, which proved that in the long-ago the mountain had been the sport of volcanic outbreaks. There was no sign of activity about it now, however: for which Jim Dainty and Co. were duly thankful.

Fritz Splitz blinked back with his saucer-eyes, uneasily, at the narrowing patch of daylight at the cavern-mouth. It narrowed and narrowed, and was lost at last as the adventurers penetrated further into the mountain.

"Ach! Mein gootness, Tainty!" murmured Fritz, holding on to Jim's arm. "Suppose tat tere is anudder eruption while tat ve are here?"

"Shut up, ass!" snapped Jim.

"Suppose we dumble into some pottomless bit?" murmured Fritz. "Suppose te mountain fall in on our heads and grush us as flat as neffer vas! Suppose—Mein gootness! Vat vas tat?"

A deep and hollow roar echoed along the depths of the cavern. The juniors came to an involuntary halt, looking about them with startled eyes.

"It is vun earthquake!" howled Fritz.

"Safe me! Ach! Safe me!"

"Silence!" barked Dr. Sparshott.

The hollow roar came again, awakening a thousand echoes. The juniors, looking at Sammy in the glimmer of the lantern, detected a faint smile on his sun-bronzed face.

"What is it, sir?" asked Jim.

"Merely a shout!" drawled Dr. Sparshott. "Our enemies, as I expected, have descended the ravine and are now at the mouth of the cave. Probably they are disappointed to find us gone."

Again and again came the echoing boom behind the castaways. The enemy were shouting to one another as they searched the cave: or perhaps shouting threats after the fugitives. The hollow cave repeated the noise with an effect of thunder.

The Grimsladers marched on, picking their way over the rough and broken rocks of the cavern floor. Here and there, fissures opened at their feet, and had to be stepped or jumped over. It seemed to them that the air grew fresher as they advanced. But there was no glimmer of daylight. Suddenly Fritz Splitz stumbled, and gave a howl, and the party halted again.

"Ach! I fall mit meinself ofer sometings!" gasped Fritz. "Mein gootness! It is something white tat I see—vat is tat?"

Sammy Sparshott flashed the light at the fat German. Fritz was sprawling over a startling object that lay on the cavern floor. As the light gleamed on it, Fritz gave a yell of terror, and leapt away from a grinning skull. Jim Dainty felt his heart leap.

"A skeleton!" he panted.

"Oh, my giddy goloshes!" murmured Ginger, under his breath. "We're not the first to come this way!"

With pale and startled faces, the schoolboys looked at the grisly object stretched on the cavern floor. It was a complete skeleton, glistening white in the rays of the lantern. Dr. Sparshott's brow was grim. Save for the light from the lantern, all round them was pitchy black: and in that patch of light, the skeleton glistened, and the skull grinned hideously.

"A negro's skull," said Dr. Sparshott, quietly. "The formation places that beyond doubt."

"But who—what—" stammered Jim.

"Ach! Ve vas all tead!" moaned Fritz.

"You need have no fear of a skeleton, Splitz—dead for more than a century, probably," said Dr. Sparshott. "I think, my boys, that this discovery makes it probable that Captain Luz is on the right track, in looking for King Christophe's lost treasure on this lonely island."

"Oh!" gasped Jim. "This poor chap was one of the black men who brought it from Hayti."

"It seems probable!" said Dr. Sparshott. "A man would hardly penetrate so far into this desolate cavern without a reason. And—he perished here!"

"But—why?"

"Perhaps to keep the secret of the treasure! Probably the Black Marquis had his orders to take every care!" said Sammy grimly.

"But—the treasure may be here, then!" exclaimed Sandy Bean, glancing round into the blackness. "My hat! If we could get hold of it—"

"Our present business, Bean, is to see that the treasure-seekers do not get hold of us!" said Dr. Sparshott. "Let us go on."

Smash! A bullet from the darkness behind crashed on the lantern in Dr. Sparshott's hand. The report of the rifle followed, rolling in thundering echoes through the hollows of the mountains. The light was instantly extinguished, and the Grimsladers stood in utter darkness.

### A Fight in the Dark!

DR. SPARSHOTT gritted his teeth. The schoolboys caught their breath and Fritz Splitz gave a startled squeal. Sammy's voice rang sharply.

"Keep together! Do not move! If we separate, all is lost."

"Yes, sir!" breathed Jim.

"You will take hold of my rucksack, Dainty! Each of you take hold of another's belt! Do not let go for one moment! Now, I will call the roll, and each of you will answer in turn."

There was a shuffling sound in the darkness, as the juniors formed in Indian file, Jim taking hold of the headmaster's rucksack, the other fellows holding on, each to the belt of the fellow in front of him.

As calmly as if he were calling the school roll in Big Hall at Grimslade, Dr. Sparshott rapped out the names, and each of the juniors answered in turn "Adsum," as if they had been standing in the old school hall. Voice after voice answered from the dense darkness—five of them, clear and steady, Fritz's in a gurgling wail.

"Keep hold, and follow!" said Sammy Sparshott, and he marched on again, groping along the rugged wall of the cavern for a guide, with one hand, and feeling his way with a stick in the other, wary of pitfalls.

Another shot, and another, rang from the darkness, thundering with echoes. But now that the light was gone, the enemy had no mark, and the lead spattered harmlessly. Looking back, the juniors saw a fluttering, dancing glare of ruddy light far behind. It came from a torch. The enemy had not come provided with lanterns. But the light did not reach anywhere near the fugitives. There was no doubt, however, that the pursuit would



gain ground, as the Grimsladers, groping in blackness, had to feel every step of the way.

Shouting voices woke the echoes, and again and again a random shot rang. Among the voices, as they drew nearer, Dr. Sparshott fancied that he could recognise the deep, savage voice of Ezra Sarson, and the shrill tones of Captain Luz.

Suddenly the torch came to a stand-still, and there was an excited buzz of voices. The pursuit had halted.

"They've stopped!" breathed Dick Dawson. "They have found the skeleton!" said Dr. Sparshott quietly. "It may delay them a few minutes; and every minute is precious. Keep on."

The headmaster of Grimslade tramped on, tapping as he went with the stick. Behind him the juniors marched in silence, only Fritz's gasping heard in the darkness.

For several long minutes, the pursuit remained at a standstill, while the schooner's crew gathered, jabbering with excitement, round the skeleton of the man who had sailed from Hayti long ago with the emissary of King Christophe. But it was resumed, and the torchlight gleamed closer and closer behind the schoolboys.

Dr. Sparshott looked back grimly. "There is only one torch!" he murmured. "Captain Luz did not waste time before following us. Dainty! Take the lead and keep on, keeping in touch with the right-hand wall of the cavern. Do not miss it."

"Yes, sir!" said Jim quietly. He asked no questions; the head of Grimslade was not a man to be questioned. Evidently some desperate scheme was working in Sammy's mind to cover the retreat of the boys in his charge.

With Dainty in the lead, the file groped on. Dr. Sparshott vanished from sound as well as sight. With anxious hearts, but obedient to their headmaster's command, the juniors marched on. When they glanced back, they saw the ruddy light of the torch advancing up the tunnel-like cave, nearer and nearer, but they saw nothing of Dr. Sparshott between them and the light. It seemed as if the headmaster of Grimslade had disappeared into the solid rock.

As a matter of fact, he had! Sammy's athletic figure was packed into a deep cleft in the cavern wall, screening him from the sight of the enemy as they came on. Showing hardly an eyelid round the edge of the rough rock, he watched them coming.

Yap, the brawny mulatto, tramped ahead, holding up the glowing torch. Following him came Captain Luz, in his dingy white drill, and Ezra Sarson, gaunt and haggard and savage, each with a weapon in his hand. Behind were more than a dozen of the black crew of the schooner. Closer and closer they came to the cleft which hid the headmaster of Grimslade, and their voices fell clearly on his ears.

"Shoot at sight," he heard the Frisco ruffian mutter. "I'm telling you, that guy Sparshott is a demon, and if he gets a chance at you with a rock—"

"Morbleu! Do I not know it?" snapped Captain Luz. "Twice already he has defeated me, and he is but a maitre d'ecole—a schoolmaster, pardieu! I begin to believe that he told me the truth—that he came not for the treasure—but morbleu, he knows of it now, and he has seen the squelette—the skeleton that we have seen! He knows too much, mon ami!"

"I'll say that if he lives, you'll never get the treasure lifted off this island!" said Ezra. "Content yourself, mon ami—he will not live long!" said Captain Luz. "We gain on them, and as soon as the light falls on Monsieur Sparshott he is a dead man!"

Sammy Sparshott's jaw set hard. He had hoped that the man from Martinique would leave the castaways in peace when he learned that they were not his rivals for the treasure of King Christophe. Such as it was, that hope was gone now. Sammy Sparshott's grip closed hard on his heavy cudgel. The mulatto carrying the torch, six or seven feet ahead of the whites, was almost abreast of the cleft in the cavern-wall. Dr. Sparshott waited.

The mulatto came on. His burly black figure passed before the eyes of the headmaster of Grimslade. He was looking straight

before him, up the tunnel-like cavern, but with the tail of his eye, as it were, he spotted the crouching figure in the cleft. Even as he spotted it, Dr. Sparshott was upon him. The heavy cudgel crashed on the mulatto's thick skull, stretching him senseless.

The torch went to the floor spluttering, and Sammy Sparshott trampled on it fiercely. There was a yell from Captain Luz and his crew as they realised that one, at least, of the fugitives had stayed to meet the pursuit.

Crack! Crack! rang two revolvers at once, but the lead sang over Sammy Sparshott as he threw himself down, crushing out the last glimmer of the torch with his broad chest. Black darkness engulfed the whole party, darkness so thick that it could almost be felt.

Sammy Sparshott was on his feet in a twinkling. With uplifted cudgel, he rushed at the halted crowd of enraged ruffians. Crash! Crash! Crash! rang the blows of the cudgel, right and left, and fearful yells answered.

Dr. Sparshott heard the panting yell of Sarson as he went over under one of the crashing blows, a shriek from Captain Luz as

*As the light gleamed on the object that lay on the cavern floor, Fritz gave a yell of terror and leapt away. "A skeleton!" panted Jim Dainty.*



he caught another, and fell. The next moment Dr. Sparshott was among the startled negroes, slashing right and left with all his beef in every blow.

Crack! Crack! came from Captain Luz's revolver, as the man from Martinique raised himself on an elbow, and fired recklessly in the darkness. A fearful cry followed the firing; but it did not come from Dr. Sparshott. One of the blacks had gone down under the random bullets.

The flash of the revolver guided Dr. Sparshott. His cudgel struck again, and the captain of the Courlis rolled over with a groan. The negroes were yelling and howling, some of them running, some striking at one another in the dark, in the belief that they were striking at an enemy.

It was a scene of the wildest confusion, dominated by the headmaster of Grimslade, who at least knew that when he landed a blow, he landed it on an enemy. He heard the hoarse voice of Ezra Sarson.

"A light! Dog-gone you, a light! Who's got matches? A light!"

A match scratched and flickered. It went out again, as a crashing blow stretched the man who held it on the cavern floor. But the momentary glimmer brought a shot from Sarson; a hurried shot which, however, went

near enough for Sammy Sparshott to feel the wind of it.

The headmaster of Grimslade groped for the torch, found it, and ran up the cavern.

The hoarse voice of Ezra Sarson shouted again and again for a light. Matches scratched, but Sammy Sparshott was beyond the reach of their glimmer. Ezra Sarson hunted savagely for the torch, to re-light it; but the torch was in Dr. Sparshott's hand as he groped away up the cavern. The ruffian's yell of fury boomed behind him as he went.

The uproar died in the darkness behind Dr. Sparshott. If the enemy were still pursuing, they had to pursue at a snail's pace, by the glimmer of matches. Sammy groped on along the cavern wall, till he heard the sound of footsteps in advance of him, and called.

"Here we are, sir!" called back Jim Dainty. "My giddy goloshes! You've stopped them, sir?" asked Ginger.

"I think so," said Sammy cheerfully. "At all events, they will not gain on us now! March!"

Taking the lead once more, Dr. Sparshott led on. Winding along the rugged wall of the cavern, the Grimsladers penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of the island mountain. There was silence behind them now; it was plain that the pursuit, for the present at least, had ceased. There was a sudden yell from Fritz Splitz.

"Vat is tat? I see sometings—"

"That," said Dr. Sparshott calmly, "is daylight!" Ahead of the Grimsladers was a glimmer in the gloom. "Keep on, my boys, we are close to the outlet now."

"Hurrah!" And the Grimsladers marched cheerily on, the patch of daylight far ahead growing larger and broader, lighter and brighter; till at last the darkness of the cavern was left behind, and they stood once more in tropical sunshine.

*(Fresh thrills and perils await the school-boy castaways. Don't miss reading next week's exciting story, buddies.)*