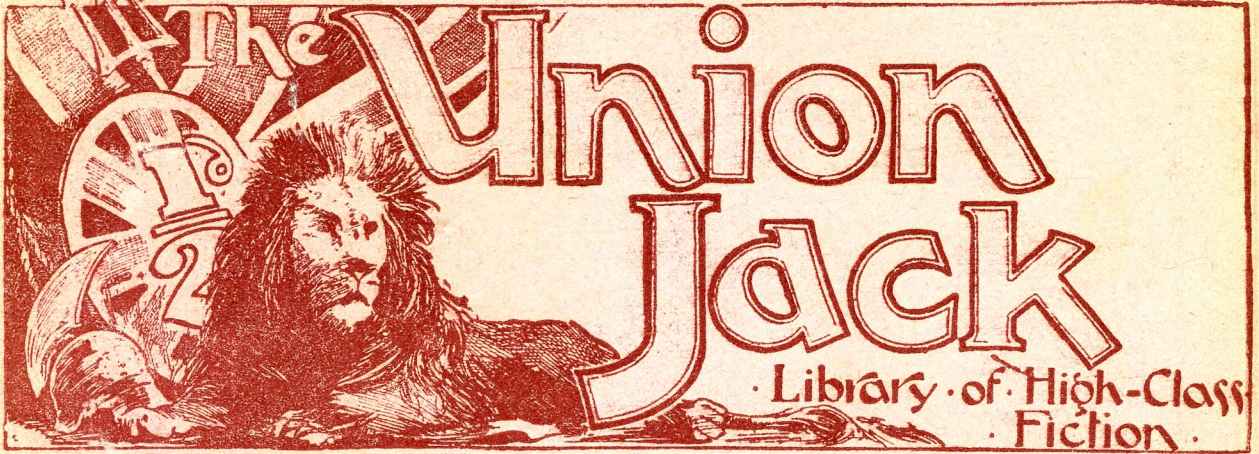


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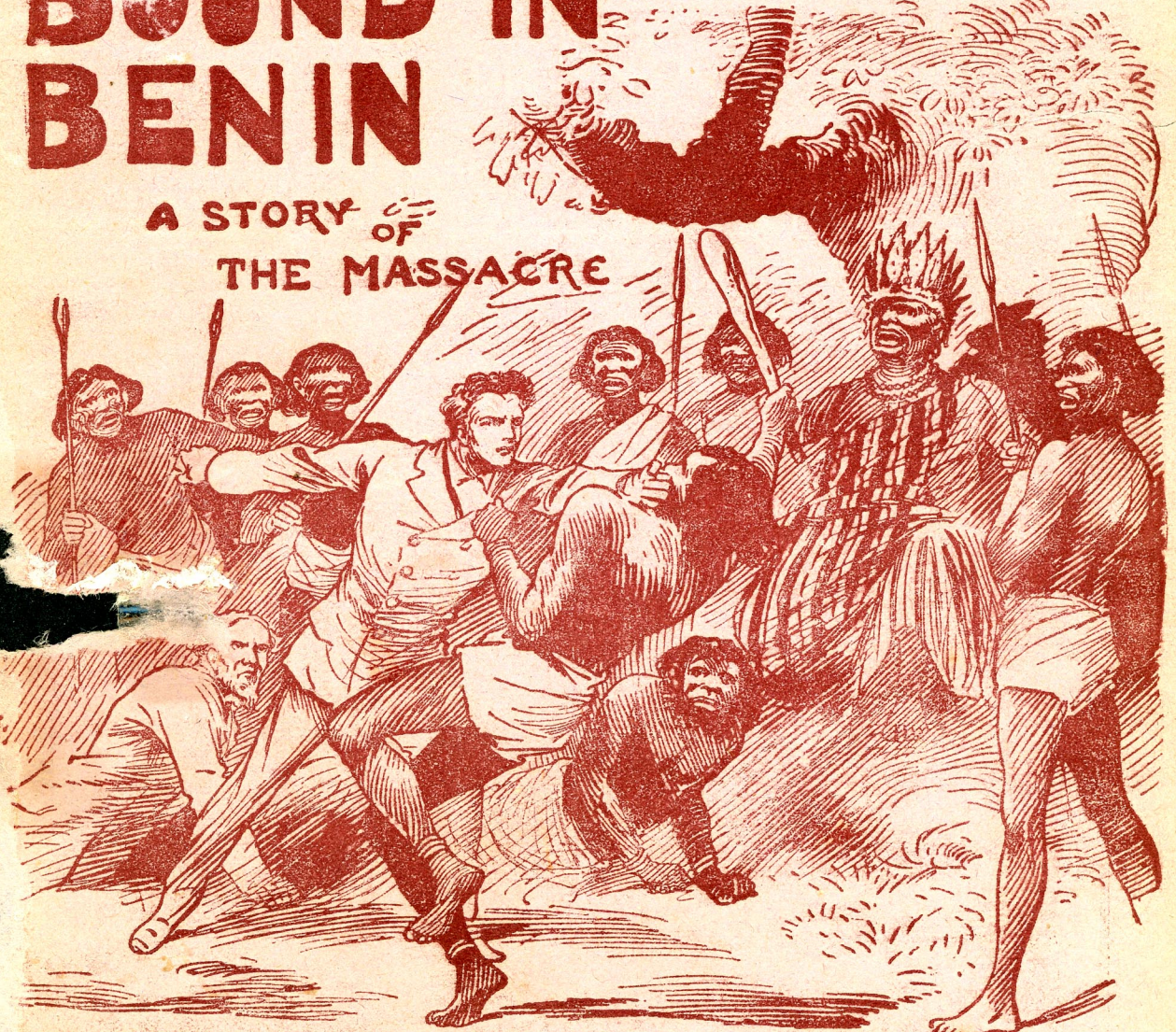


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BOUND IN BENIN

BY LIEUT. A. MANSON.

A STORY OF THE MASSACRE



A true English blow, straight from the shoulder, laid the brutal negro low.

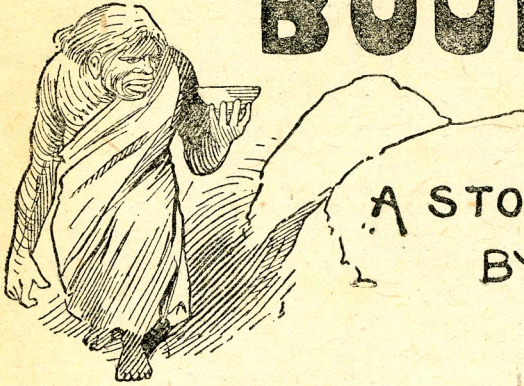
PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

No. 152.



BOUND IN BENIN.

A STORY OF THE MASSACRE
BY LIEUT. A MANSON.



CHAPTER I.

FAREWELL TO HOME—IN THE TROPIC OF CANCER—A PERSISTENT BORE—WHERE ARE WE BOUND FOR?—THE SECRET SIGNALS—A DRUNKEN SKIPPER—OPEN MUTINY.

It was a beautiful evening in the early summer, and the setting sun was darting red beams athwart a lovely valley in the West of England.

On a rocky ledge of an eminence, forming one of a range of hills that bounded the valley on one side, a solitary man was standing looking down with sad eyes on a lonely farmhouse, embosomed among the trees at the foot of the hill.

He was young, and strongly-built, dressed in the style of a well-to-do farmer's son, and he stood with one hand in the pocket of his buckskin breeches, and the other grasping a stout blackthorn, handsomely mounted in silver.

His face was still bare of beard, and the soft felt hat pushed off his brow showed a wide and capacious forehead, that matched well with the set of his wilful-looking mouth.

He had been standing in this pensive attitude for some time,

when appearing to be actuated by a sudden impulse, he raised the hand which held the stick, and, shaking it gently at the lonely farmhouse below, murmured:

"Good-bye, father and mother. Good-bye, George. Good-bye, little Lizzie. You'll none of you see me any more!"

He then turned swiftly, and, with a firm, determined step completed his ascent of the hill.

On reaching the top, he saw in the distance the long, white line of road, winding away for miles, till it was lost in the mystery of the horizon, and far away to the right a confusion of red roofs, and one solitary tower, standing calm and majestic, looking down on the wide stretch of open country.

He descended the hill, and, in the course of an hour's sharp walking, set his feet on the high road, and left the hills behind him.

Exactly four weeks after that an advertisement appeared in all the London papers to the following effect:

"John,—Come back. We have found out our mistake. Come back and forgive us. Your father is very ill.—LIZZIE."

The person to whom this was addressed never saw it, for he was at that time on the wide Atlantic, rapidly approaching the Tropic of Cancer.

He was pacing the deck in a pensive mood, looking at the dancing waves, or watching the flight of a sea-bird from the



The carriers started off at a quick trot, the bodies of their prisoners dangling and swaying from the poles.

neighbouring islands; but there was an expression on his face as if the present scene was veiled to his eyes, and he was recalling the bygone years.

"Enjoying the beauties of the ocean, my friend?" said a slightly nasal voice behind him, and, at the same time, a somewhat rude and heavy hand was laid on his shoulder.

He turned with an expression of annoyance on his face, which was not lost on the intruder, and replied:

"No. I was thinking of something far different."

"Surly cub!" muttered the gentleman, with the nasal voice. "No getting alongside of him. I'll wake him up presently, I doubt. Hallo! There's that son-of-a-gun up to his tricks again!"

As he spoke, a small, thin man, with a deep scar down one side of his face, peeped up the hatchway, and made signs to the man at the wheel, who watched him attentively, and nodded as if in assent.

"There's some eternal villainy brewing. Of that I'm sartin sure. But what it is I can't at present fathom."

These words were not spoken aloud. They were merely thought in the recesses of the gentleman's brain.

"I wish that lad was not so perky. We might together find out something that would be valuable to us. Hallo! there, mister," said he, walking close up to the young man, whose name, as we learned from the advertisement, was John—John Gower. "Can a body have a few minutes' confidential chat with you, without crowding you too much?"

John looked up with the same shade of annoyance in his face as before; but something in the expression of the man's keen, grey eye, caused him to relax, and he replied:

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Thanks," said the man, in so peculiar a tone that John glanced at him suspiciously, and felt inclined to take huff again.

The next words that fell from the stranger's lips made John Gower open his eyes.

"Are you aware where this old tub is going to?"

"Why, to Rio. You knew that before you took your passage in her, surely?" replied John, regarding the man with eyes that seemed to say: "You've been having a glass too much, my good friend."

"She is not going there!"

"Where is she going, then?"

"That I cannot say, though I can make a very good guess."

"You are a strange man."

"You are a stranger man, not to be able to trust the evidence of your senses."

"My senses give me no evidence that the vessel is going anywhere but on her rightful course."

"Have you seen the skipper lately?"

"Not for some little time."

"You will be astonished to learn that he is in his cabin as drunk as a lord, and the ship's course has been altered without his knowledge."

"Why, man, you must be crazy!" said John; but at the same time a vague uneasiness took possession of him, as he looked in the man's earnest face.

"Look! look!" he whispered in John's ear. And he pointed to a curious scene that was taking place a little distance from them.

The same diminutive man, who had given the signal before, was now telegraphing to the man at the wheel, who, with the same rapt attention on his face, was endeavouring to read the signs.

At last, with a nod and a smile of satisfaction, that had a grim significance for the two watchers, the man at the wheel gave the other to understand all was clear, and the latter descended to the regions below.

"What had better be done?" asked John, now convinced there was something going as it ought not to go."

"What say, if we pop down and try and see the skipper?"

"I am ready. Shall we go at once?" "Yes."

They walked across the deck, and descended to the captain's cabin. They were the only passengers, with the exception of the person they had seen signalling to the man at the wheel. The mate was ill—had been taken seriously and mysteriously ill soon after they had entered the Channel, and had been in bed ever since.

They knocked at the door, and a hoarse voice bade them enter.

The room reeked with odours of stale tobacco and of old rum. For some few minutes they could discern nothing clearly; but, as their eyes got used to the murk, they saw the skipper sitting in an armchair at the other end of the table, a pitiable spectacle of helpless intoxication.

A half-emptied glass and a wholly-emptied rum-flask stood on the table near him, and the table was stained and ugly with the spilled liquor.

The drunken skipper took no notice of the entry of the two men. He was too far gone in insensibility.

They tried to rouse him; but he only snorted in an imbecile manner, and they regarded each other in dismay.

The American said in a low tone:

"I fear he is in the hand of an astute villain who keeps him plied with drink."

"Oh, you do—do you?" cried a mocking voice from the door behind them. And, turning, they saw the wizened face of the man they had watched on the deck grinning at them malevolently.

"Perhaps," he said, in the same mocking tone, "you would like to run this vessel yourselves. I have noticed you very busy of late prying into what you have no business with."

"No business, do you say?" demanded Cyrus Fadden, as we may now call the American without further mystery. "No business? When we book our passage for Rio, and find we are being taken to goodness knows where?"

"What authority have you on board this ship?" asked John.

"Authority enough to have you pitched overboard, if you are not civil!" snarled the man, with a sudden change from his crafty manner to a fierce, aggressive ferocity.

"Indeed?" said John.

"Yes, indeed. Get out of this cabin at once! It is a private place, where neither you nor your Yankee friend have any business. Clear out, or I'll have you chucked out!"

John strode forward with some idea of chastising his insolence, when the small man stepped back, uttered a loud cry of rage, and, the door flying open, half a dozen of the crew rushed in, their faces aflame from drink, uttering loud yells.

"Ah! this is a mutiny!" cried Cyrus. "Old man, wake up. They are robbing you of your vessel."

Before he could utter another word, he was felled to the floor, and John, attempting to assist him, found himself involved in the same plight.

One of the armed ruffians had struck him a heavy blow on the temple, from which a thin stream of blood was now flowing, and he lay dazed and wondering on the ground.

Before he could make an effort to rouse himself, he found himself seized by a group of men, and hurried from the cabin.

CHAPTER II.

THE LEADER EXPLAINS HIS PLAN—ADRIFT ON THE OCEAN—CYRUS SHOWS HIS SKILL—FREE ONCE MORE—THE CAPTAIN DISAPPEARS—BORNE ON BY THE CURRENT.

The two men, finding themselves thus violently assaulted, struggled desperately with their assailants; but numbers prevailed, and, with a heavy groan of despair, John fell to the ground.

There was a chorus of mocking laughter, as the victory was thus declared in favour of the mutineers, and the two prisoners were quickly deprived of the power of making any further resistance.

"What is your purpose? What do you mean by such conduct as this?" asked Cyrus.

"What are you going to do with us?" said John.

"Well, we don't want your blood on our hands; we know it's useless to attempt to come to terms with you; so all we can do is to turn you adrift, and give you a chance for your lives. If you lose them it won't be our fault."

"Do you really intend to do what you have said?" asked John, looking at the man with horror, as he stood before him grinning with all his might.

"We do that, my boy, as you will very soon find out. Lift them up, men, and bring them on deck. They won't have another chance of interfering in the management of this vessel."

"Interfering with the management?" said John indignantly.

"You mean, interposing to save the vessel from the hands of a rascal like you?"

"Do I? Well, very likely we mean the same thing. You are talking very big just now. In a short time, maybe, you will not make so open a mouth."

"What do you intend to do with us?"

"Haven't I told you? Why, we're going to put you in a snug little boat—you and your friend, and the drunken skipper—and send you on a cruise round the Gold Coast. We are bound there, too, and we shall load the ship with gold, and you will tear your hair with envy to think you were such fools as to interfere where you had no business."

Then, seeing John was about to retort with one of his hot remarks, the leader of the mutineers went on:

"Bring them up to the deck. No more palaver. We'll settle their business in a brace of shakes."

"Bring them along, men, and fetch up the skipper, too. We'll send them all adrift together."

"Nay, man, you will never be so reckless!" pleaded John Gower, overcome with the horror of the situation.

"Bring them along!" was the only reply. And the crew,

"CALLED TO ARMS," a stirring War Story, in to-morrow's
"PLUCK," id.

grinning with ferocious glee, set about their task with every appearance of supreme enjoyment.

John was the first to be carried to the deck, and there he was thrown down with brutal violence.

In a few minutes Cyrus was brought up also, and, last of all, the skipper, still insensibly drunk.

The boat was quickly got ready, and lowered to the water, and, when this was done, the leader came over to where the prisoners were lying, and, touching them by turns with his foot, said contemptuously:

"Now then, carrion! Come along. Your gig is ready, and you are going for a sail on the sea—the salt, salt sea!"

He looked demoniacal as he uttered these words, and the crew around laughed aloud.

"But, surely," said John, "you will unbind us? You will not turn us adrift in this fashion?"

"Surely," he replied, mimicking John's manner of saying the word—"surely, but we are. It's more merciful, you know. If you had the use of your limbs, you'd be trying to save yourselves, and so prolonging your misery. No, no. We are too humane for that. You go just as you are, and the quicker will be the end of you. That's genuine humanity—isn't it, men?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the fierce response. And the leader winked and chuckled at his villainous crew.

"Age before honour!" cried the mutineer leader, in a mocking voice; "the old gent first."

Immediately there was a rush made upon Cyrus, who was, of course, incapable of defence, and he was lifted and carried to the side of the vessel. Some tackle was fastened to his body, and he was dropped over the side, where a man stood upright in the boat, to receive and unfasten the body.

"Next one!" cried the leader. And John was lifted, and in a few moments thrown down on top of his companion.

The drunken skipper, still insensible, came down last.

Then the man loosened the rope that held the boat to the vessel's side, seized it in his hands, and was hoisted up.

"Good-morning to you!" cried a mocking voice from above. "Good-morning, and good luck!"

In a few minutes the vessel had spread her sails, and was flying over the face of the waters.

Cyrus at once began a persistent course of wriggling and writhing, which lasted for some time, and then, to the astonishment and delight of John, he bent over him with arms free, and with a gleaming knife in his slender right hand.

"They are not quite so clever as they thought themselves. We will not die with our arms fettered, at all events. We will have a struggle for life. Cheer up, lad. While there's life there's hope. There are ships on the ocean, there are islands in the sea, and there are currents which may bear us to the land. What, man, we are not dead yet. Look on the sunny side."

All the time he was speaking, he was busy at John's bonds, and, in a surprisingly short time, had them lying in pieces in the bottom of the boat.

"There, lad. Now you are a free man again. Look up—pluck up spirit, and battle for your life."

John looked at him with surprise, and wondered for a moment or two if this was the same man who had caused him such annoyance on the deck of the vessel but a few short hours before?

So soon as his arms were unbound, he sat up in the boat, and looked around him o'er the wide waste of waters on which they were floating.

"What do you think will become of us?" he asked of his companion presently, as the latter appeared absorbed in deep thought.

"In a few hours—a very few hours, we shall be in sight of land."

"What?" said John incredulously. "In sight of land?"

"Yes. Look, the boat is moving, without any help from us. We are in a gentle current, which I have no doubt will presently increase in force, and drift us at last to land."

As Cyrus predicted, so it came to pass, and towards evening they became aware the boat was moving rapidly in a straight line.

Towards morning they saw there was a gradual change, both in the scene and in the skipper. His eyes stared wildly, and he began to rave.

They watched him closely; but he took no notice of anything they said or did to him.

When the sun had risen high in the heavens, he started to his feet.

They tried to persuade him to lie down, for he was imperilling the safety of the boat; but he appeared endowed with extraordinary strength, and they were obliged to quit their hold on him to avoid being pitched into the sea.

Directly they released him he drew himself up to his full height, and before they could guess his intention, sprang with a wild cry into the waves.

They could render the poor wretch no assistance, for the

boat drifted rapidly on, and they had no means of staying her course.

He came to the surface once with a white, bewildered, terrified face, and then sank for ever.

"It is the best thing that could happen to him," said Cyrus Fadden. "He has escaped much misery."

John Gower answered with a deep sigh.

CHAPTER III.

IN BENIN BIGHT—A CROWD OF BLACKS—THE BLACK CHIEF—WE WILL NOT KNEEL—TIT FOR TAT—AN UNPLEASANT JOURNEY—ARRIVAL AT THE TOWN.

On went the boat. No sign of land was seen all that day, and the night fell at last, and their eyes closed in broken and uneasy slumbers.

When they again awoke, it was with a confused feeling that they were again on board the ship, and surrounded by the angry mutineers.

A few seconds sufficed to dispel the illusion.

They were surrounded, it was true; but by a dreadful-looking mob of ferocious blacks, who were chattering and gesticulating in the most alarming manner.

"Hallo!" said Cyrus, regarding the ugly crew, "we have got into unpleasant company. I trust they are not cannibals, though I fear the taste is somewhat prevalent in these parts."

"Where are we?" asked John, in a tone of wonder and apprehension combined.

"I cannot precisely say. But I have been once before in the Bight of Benin, and if I am not mistaken it is somewhere in that neighbourhood we are at this present moment. This is either an island, or part of the mainland of the Gold Coast, on the west coast of Africa—in fact, of that much I am sure."

"The Gold Coast. That rascal mentioned the place, you remember?"

"I do. And it was to that part of the world they themselves were bound in my opinion."

John was about to make some answer, but before they could say another word, the black mob made a rush on them, and they were dragged unceremoniously out of the boat, and some yards inwards towards a giant tree, whose leaves and branches made a pleasant shade in the fierce sunlight which was now beginning to stream down from the cloudless sky.

Beneath this tree was seated a fierce-looking and immensely corpulent black man, who regarded the prisoners with a ferociously-gleaming eye, as they were dragged and pushed into his presences.

The men who accompanied them went down on their knees, and grovelled before this black fellow, and they made signs to the prisoners to do the same.

"They want us to kneel," said John, looking at his companion.

"So I see," was the quiet rejoinder. "What is your opinion? Had we better do it?"

"Certainly not!" cried John Gower, with a look of scorn in his eye. "Kneel to a black rascal like that? I'd rather be shot at once!"

"Oh, as for that, shooting on the spot is not much in their line. They like something more protracted."

"Do you mean torture?" asked John, blanching a little.

The other nodded his head, and smiled grimly.

"I don't care!" said John. "Let them do as they will, they shall not make me go down on my knees to any black rascal in the world."

"Bravo, lad! My sentiments exactly!"

This little dialogue had taken but a few seconds in delivery; but it was too long for the blacks, whose impatience displayed itself in loud cries.

John had opened his mouth to say something in reply to his comrade, when a fellow who had stolen up behind them with a heavy club dealt him a terrific blow on the back of the head, and he went down like a log of wood. The next instant Cyrus lay beside him from the same cause.

John, though stunned for the instant, was up again in a remarkably short space of time, and, seeing the man with the club standing near him, he launched his left with terrific force straight into the face of the negro, who, with a shrill cry, occupied the spot from which John had just risen, and lay there as if he had been smitten with his own club.

"Well done, lad!" cried Cyrus, who had lifted his head from the ground just in time to see the punishment of the aggressor. "A true British blow, straight from the shoulder. The black fellow seems to have taken it to heart."

There was a sudden and ominous silence of the black mob, as they witnessed this daring deed on the part of one whom they had supposed would be overcome with fear at the mighty presence in which he stood.

Presently the chief spoke. He seemed to give an order, and the next moment a crowd of blacks, armed with spears,

rushed forward and the two prisoners were thrown to the ground in spite of their desperate struggles to throw off the enemy.

They were soon bound securely with withes, in a manner which would have taught the mutineers a wrinkle could they have seen the process.

A few minutes after there came a tremendous yell from the back of the crowd surrounding them, and four men drew near bearing long poles in their hands. Two of these they thrust brutally under the thongs which bound the hands and feet of the two Englishmen, and lifted them by this means from the ground.

The agony was exquisite as they hung with all their weight by their wrists and ankles, and, in a few seconds, the withes that bound them began, as it were, to eat into the flesh, from which the blood soon streamed.

This agony was increased when, at an order from the chief under the tree, the carriers started off at a quick trot, and the bodies of the prisoners dangled and swayed from the poles.

They rested once or twice, for the bearers' sake—not for theirs—on the terrible journey, and towards evening they were startled for an instant out of the consciousness of their sufferings by a deafening din of drums and trumpets which arose in the distance before them.

"We are approaching a town of some sort," said Cyrus hopefully. "Then we shall be released."

John only answered with a groan.

Cyrus was right. On looking around them with pained and swollen eyes, they saw they were entering a long lane of huts, and that crowds of blacks were thronging round to catch a glimpse of the white prisoners.

Presently they were borne in another direction out of the straight line, and were at length thrown down unceremoniously in a dark and ill-smelling hut.

As his bruised limbs touched the ground, John fainted away.

CHAPTER IV.

ALONE IN THE HUT—A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR—A NOVEL EXPERIENCE—A FRIGHTFUL JOURNEY—THE COVERED STREAM—THE HUT.

When John again recovered his consciousness, he found himself in a dismal, ill-smelling place, with a half-open door through which there was a glimpse of sunlight, and of waving branches.

It was some time before he could recall all the incidents that had led up to his present predicament, and then, looking about him, he missed his companion.

"Fadden!" he cried—"Fadden! Where are you?"

There was no answer, and a great terror took possession of his soul. Was it possible that anything had happened to his friend?

He raised himself with difficulty on his elbow, and strove to pierce the gloom of the further corners of the hut. There was neither movement nor sound.

He called aloud once more, and then thought he detected a faint rustling in the further corner, where he could dimly perceive a heap of rushes, or some similar material.

His fixed his eyes on this, and called out again.

There was no answer, but there was a decided movement in the heap.

While he was racking his brain to find out what this might portend, and wondering whether some drunken black, or perhaps some venomous beast, had taken refuge there, he was startled by seeing the mass of material moved aside at the bottom, and a pair of gleaming eyes fixed intently upon him.

"A wild beast," he said to himself. "But of what kind?"

What beast did he know of that had eyes like that?

A still more decisive movement took place, and he saw the head and shoulders of a man protrude from the mass.

The shoulders were those of a man of immense size, and the head and face were also of giant proportions. What was his astonishment, then, when the figure, having entirely withdrawn itself and stood upright, he saw it was the figure of a man scarce four feet high, whose arms, hanging by his side, allowed his fingers to rest on the floor, exactly as in the case of the larger monkeys.

The black, cavernous eyes gazed at him with great intensity; but he saw, to his surprise, they were not fixed on him with a ferocious look, but rather with a mild and gentle expression, which did not tally with the wild and uncouth appearance of the rest of the frightful figure.

"Who are you?" asked John, almost unconsciously; for he had no idea the figure would understand his question.

"Ju-Ju man—Mahlki. Come help white man."

The young Englishman looked at the strange being, and was inclined to think he was the victim of some illusion of the senses.

The voice of his strange visitor was wonderfully deep, and made the air vibrate like the pedal of an organ, or the boom of a big bell.

"Where is my friend? Where is the other white man? Do you know?"

"Ju-Ju man—medicine man—know all things," was the solemn reply.

"Does he, by George!" exclaimed John, beside himself with surprise at the fact of the strangeness of the visitor, and his being able to speak English.

"Can he tell me where my friend is?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?" said John, a prey to the most poignant emotion, caused by the strange solemnity of the dwarf's manner and the sudden disappearance of his comrade.

"He go to King's palace. He there now. He sacrifice to Marimbo, the great King's god."

"What!" cried John, in a voice that quivered with horror.

"When did they take him? Why did they not take me, too?"

"You go to-night."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the excited man, in a burst of hysterical laughter. "Are they going to sacrifice me, too?"

"Yes. All white men come on shore go to be sacrifice to Marimbo."

"Excellent! And what is the precise nature of the ceremony? Do they take long about it?"

"Yes, long, long time."

"Ah, just so! They spin it out a bit. Didn't I understand you to say just now that you had come to help the white man?"

"Yes."

"How do you propose to do it?"

For answer the black drew a gleaming blade from under his dark woollen garment, which entirely concealed his short legs, and advanced on the captive.

For one moment John had the wild hope that the dwarf was intent on slaughtering him, and he welcomed the merciful death that would save him from the lingering tortures he knew by repute.

To his increased astonishment, the black, instead of sticking the knife into the white man's breast, slipped it beneath the withes that bound his ankles, and set his legs free. The next instant he had done the same to his arms.

"Come with me. I put you hide."

"My good friend—for such in intention I see you are—I couldn't move to save my life; my limbs are dead. All the blood has been forced out of the arteries, and the doors closed against any return."

"Your legs, your arms, stiff?" said the dwarf, looking at the captive, and a little puzzled by the speech he had just used.

"Stiff, my good fellow, conveys no idea of the case. They are dead, as far as fitness for active service is concerned."

"Then Mahlki carry white man on his shoulder."

"My excellent Ju-Ju man, you could not do such a thing. I have not been feeding very well of late, but I am too heavy."

With a curious look in his face, the dwarf stepped forward, and before John could guess his intention had put his arms around him and hoisted him to his monstrous shoulder as easily, it seemed, as he would have lifted a cat.

"I carry you little way; then I give you something make walk, run, jump."

He approached the door, when a renewed feeling of distrust coming into John's mind, he said loudly:

"Where are you going to take me?"

"Hush! Not talk, not cough, not sneeze. Marimbo hear. Kill both. Go fast. Not long."

Resigning himself to his fate, in which, in spite of the grimness of his surroundings, John could not help detecting a tiny grain of humour, he allowed the dwarf to carry him from the hut.

The burst of blinding sunshine, as they came out into the open air, destroyed his visual organs for the time, and all was blank.

He was conscious, though, of an awful stillness in the air, and not a sound of bird or beast was to be heard.

"Where are all the people?" he asked in wonder.

"Hush! Not talk. Marimbo hear. Kill both at once."

John could feel a tremor pass through the dwarf's limbs as he spoke, as though he were fully convinced of the presence of some great danger, from which they could be saved only by the greatest precautions.

With rapid strides, despite the by no means insignificant weight he carried across his shoulder, the dwarf proceeded along a narrow lane, bordered on each side by thickly growing shrubs and a kind of latticework.

A few minutes after they had entered a patch of long, thick grass, amid which the dwarf deposited his burden, motioning the white man to follow him on hands and knees through the jungle.

The way was comparatively easy for John, as the wide shoulders of the dwarf cleared his passage for him, and by



He drew himself up to his full height, and, before they could guess his intentions, sprang into the sea.

keeping close to his guide he was enabled to escape much of the inconvenience and worry of the journey.

Some half-hour's progression in this way brought them to a kind of beaten track amid the grass, and the dwarf, rising to his feet, said:

"Now safe. Out Marimbo's land. We find hut; food. Come!"

Scarcely yet able to move his limbs with any degree of speed, John followed the dwarf, and after many devious windings found himself on the banks of a small stream, arched over as far as his eye could reach by a kind of dense, green arcade, through which the rays of the sun could not penetrate.

Into the stream went the dwarf, and the white man followed. The stream was not deep, and the touch of the water on his flesh brought an agreeable sense of relief and growing vigour to John, which was very cheering to his spirits.

Presently the dwarf stopped, and, turning round, said, as he extended his hand to the left:

"Hut there!"

CHAPTER V.

IN MAHLKI'S HUT—JOHN REMEMBERS HIS FRIEND—JU-JU MEDICINE—MAHLKI CONSENTS TO TRY—THE WAY BARRED—MAHLKI DISAPPEARS—THE DEATH STRUGGLE—PRISONER ONCE MORE.

John looked eagerly before him, but failed to see the faintest sign of any such thing as a habitation.

"Where is the hut?" he asked, looking at the dwarf with a questioning glance.

"You see. Come!"

He did see, in a very few moments, for, on reaching a clump of bushes a few yards further from them, the dwarf pulled them aside with his hand, and there, in the midst of a somewhat deep hollow, was a small thatched hut, similar in construction to those he had observed in the town or village to which he had been conveyed with his companion.

The dwarf, after holding the bush for the Englishman to pass, let go of it, and the branches fell back into their places in such a way as to deceive the most suspicious eye.

The dwarf pointed to a heap of leaves in one corner, and bade his companion seat himself, saying:

"Now talk. Much do. Make haste!"

For the first time during the excitement of the journey the thought of his companion came into John's mind, and he was struck with remorse, as it seemed to him that he had done something very like running away and leaving his friend in the lurch.

"I am very much obliged to you for what you have done for me, but my friend and companion—what is to become of him?"

"He die. No save."

"But I must try—I must try! I cannot leave him to perish, after all we have gone through together. Where is he? Tell me where I can find him. I do not wish you to endanger yourself any more than you have done, but I can't leave my friend to perish in that way."

"What you do save him?" asked the dwarf, looking at the other keenly out of his by no means savage-looking eyes.

"Anything. Can you not suggest something? You were able to do something for me, why not for my friend?"

"Too late. He dead. Marimbo have the Englishman for morning sacrifice. No hope for one get into Marimbo's hands."

"Poor fellow!" cried John, in a burst of grief. "But for him I should now be lying at the bottom of the ocean. I must find out what has become of him. Mahlki, I am going back to look for him."

"Wah!" cried Mahlki, in a low tone of great emotion, "that Marimbo call. He want to kill both white men."

"Marimbo or no, I must go—I must go!"

"Wah! Mahlki go with. If white man not die, we get him. I fear he die."

John, in his eagerness, had risen from the heap of leaves on which he had been seated, and the dwarf regarded him with attentive eyes. Then drawing a small phial from his bosom, carefully wrapped up in a mossy covering, he held it up, and said:

"This good. This cure pains in limb; give life to the dead. This Ju-Ju medicine. You take?"

"I'll take anything you give me, for I firmly believe you mean to do well, though you are only a Ju-Ju man."

The dwarf nodded with satisfaction, for though he did not quite understand the application of the last remarks, he saw that the white man was ready to trust him, and that was enough.

He procured a small earthen pannikin full of clear water, dropped a few drops of the liquor from the phial into the pipkin, and presented it to his companion.

The latter took it without hesitation, and drank it off. The result was marvellous. He suddenly felt his blood course warmly through his veins, while a feeling of hope and satisfaction filled his heart, and his doubts and anxieties were all fled.

"That is capital stuff, Mahlki!"

"Yes. That Ju-Ju medicine. Ju-Ju great magic. Strong as Marimbo—stronger!"

"Well, then, Mahlki, let us get off; and if you can use this magic power and get us away from this beastly place, I and my friend, there's nothing we won't do for you."

"You, yes; your friend I fear." And Mahlki shook his head.

"You will try, Mahlki, will you not?"

"Mahlki will try."

"Good! If we succeed, or even if we get away ourselves, you may rely on it I will never forget your kindness."

"You know why Mahlki do this?"

"Indeed I do not. It is puzzling me very much to know."

"Mahlki tell one day, when we get safe away. Now we go back to Marimbo land."

They turned out of the hut, John still in a glow of hope and confidence, the result of the Ju-Ju medicine, and retraced their steps for some distance, till they reached the stream, when, instead of wading through it, as they had done before, Mahlki crossed it, John following in his footsteps, until they arrived on the opposite bank, where, pushing his way through the dense bushes that lined it, he led the Englishman out into a wide and barren plain, on which, far to the left, they could see the hilly ground and the trees which John knew marked the spot whence he had escaped that morning.

The faint noise of drums and the shouts of men came over the plain towards them, and John looked inquiringly at the dwarf.

"What is that noise?" he asked.

"They begin the sacrifice to Marimbo."

"Ah! we shall be too late?"

The dwarf looked at him curiously, and made no reply.

"Hurry—hurry!" cried John.

"Hush! said the dwarf, in a low tone. And he tried to check the advance of his companion.

The latter resisted desperately, thinking the dwarf was repenting of his intention to attempt to rescue the other white man, and pulled himself from the Ju-Ju's grasp.

At that moment a savage howl of anger and surprise filled the air, and a number of men, armed with spears, sprang out of the grass a few yards in front of them.

"Hallo!" murmured John, staggered at the sight. And he looked round to the dwarf for an explanation.

Mahlki had disappeared.

For a moment the white man stood regarding his foes with a proud disdain, but the thought presenting itself to his mind that he was utterly defenceless, and that he had not even a stone to use as a weapon against the enemy, he turned and fled. A savage shout greeted the attempt at escape, and swift as the wind the savages were on their trail."

The influence of the strange medicine given him by the Ju-Ju man was still potent within him, and he felt a vigour in his limbs and a fierce determination in his soul that seemed to increase as the danger neared him.

Swift as he ran, however, the savages were swifter, and slowly but surely they gained on him.

He was in sight of the belt of arched bushes that covered the stream which they had crossed that morning, and was in hopes that he might there baffle the foe, when a sharp, stinging pain smote him in the back, just below the shoulder blade, and he staggered forward a few paces and fell on his face.

Before he could rise the enemy was upon him, and he found himself in the triumphant grasp of a dozen hideous savages. Still his heart did not fail him. With the contempt of the true Briton for all inferior races, he drew himself up, and making a clutch at the savage that was holding him, the two rolled together on the ground.

Their struggles were so desperate that the rest of the band did not care to interfere for a few seconds, for fear of injuring their own man, who was now top, now bottom, in the fierce clutch of his foe.

At last, his struggles growing fainter as the grasp of the muscular white hands tightened on his throat, the rest of the savages rushed forward, and drove their spears into various parts of the white man's body.

This was more than human nature could stand, and John, with a deep groan, turned over and lay still.

They dragged his body away for a few yards, and then returned to look at their dead comrade, who lay on his back with staring eyes and protruding tongue, the effect of the terrible clutch to which he had been subjected.

"Wah!" was the exclamation of the band, as they looked at the work of the enemy. And they glanced at each other and chattered as though they said, "The white man pinches hard."

Then, with a whoop of fury, they seized the body and bore it along to the distant belt of trees marking the high ground of what the Ju-Ju man had called Marimbo's ground.

They had got far away on their road, and were but black specks in the distance, when the Ju-Ju man raised his head from a dense mass of tangled grass in the scene of the struggle, and looked after the party with attentive eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

BACK TO MARIMBO'S LAND—AN AWFUL EXPERIENCE—CYRUS AGAIN—THE CHOICE OF VICTIMS—THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

John's naturally fine constitution and the influence of Mahiki's medicine soon fought against the lethargy produced by the loss of blood, and before they had reached the foot of the rising ground which led to the village his eyes opened, and he looked around him wonderingly.

He found himself, tied hand and foot, much as on the former occasion, carried along in a kind of rude litter, formed by two or three branches stretched across a pair of longer poles, and which was a truly uncomfortable couch.

They were now ascending the hilly land where the village was situated, and John soon recalled some of the more striking features which had impressed him on entering the place for the first time.

Crowds of people soon thronged around them, and accompanied the party to the entrance of the narrow lane through which Mahlki had carried the Englishman.

He was borne back to the same hut from which he had been carried by the dwarf that morning—at least, he supposed it was the same, for there was the identical heap of rushes in the corner from which the dwarf had emerged in such a mysterious manner.

A sudden gleam of hope illumined his mind. The dwarf might again find means to render him help, as well as his companion.

At the thought of his companion a terrible feeling of apprehension seized him. He knew well enough he was in a place where mercy and pity were unknown virtues, and he thought with horror of the possible fate of his unhappy friend.

As these dismal reflections were passing through his mind he heard the tramp of feet approaching the hut, where two or three men, with spears in their hands, had been posted as guards, and saluted the new-comers with a loud yell, whether of defiance or congratulation the prisoner could not tell.

In a very few seconds after the hut was filled with a mob of frantic creatures, who danced around the captive, brandishing their spears and uttering fierce cries that were unmistakably threats.

Suddenly a cry was heard without, the tumult in the hut ceased, and the frenzied crowd shrank back and allowed three men to enter, each of whom had a long cotton garment wrapped about his loins and brought over one shoulder. Their bodies were intensely black, and their looks appalling.

Each one carried in his hand a long gleaming knife, with which he made savage passes at the mob as they walked through, in order to clear the way.

They approached the captive, and, stooping over him, placed a hand under each arm and raised him from the ground.

His feet being tied, he was unable to step out with his conductors, and one of them, stooping, severed the bonds, and, saying something in a fierce tone, hurried the prisoner on.

In front of the hut was an enclosure, the gate of which now stood open, and John saw that it contained several small huts, and at some distance within a much larger hut, behind which appeared to be ranged a number of other huts, one behind the other.

Only a few of the crowd followed them into this enclosure, and they did so in complete silence, leaving the yelling mob on the other side of the gates, which were shut as soon as the party accompanying the prisoner had passed through.

At the doors of several of the huts headless trunks were lying, and in many places on their road through this awful enclosure the party had to step over the remains of mutilated human bodies.

Once or twice John closed his eyes in horror, and thought he should swoon.

As they approached the first large hut two men, dressed much the same as the three who were escorting the prisoner, appeared at the door, and, giving an ear-piercing yell, stood aside to allow the procession to pass in.

An awful silence now seemed to fall on the place which they were passing through, and the blacks themselves looked about them furtively, and seemed oppressed with a fearful awe.

The first hut was a somewhat spacious one, and at the end, before what appeared like a blank wall, they stopped in complete silence for the space of several minutes. Then a deep-toned instrument, like a gong, sounded, and part of the partition of the hut moved away.

Two fierce creatures appeared in the opening, and a parley took place between them and the party with the prisoner, purely a matter of form, and part of some ceremony or etiquette, for in a few moments the partition was thrown open wider, and the party entered.

As the partition closed behind them, John found himself in almost total darkness, and felt more oppressed in spirit than he had felt since the trouble began.

Death and torture, and black darkness seemed around him in all directions.

There was another stoppage, another palaver, and they entered a third hut, where lights were burning, and several creatures lay on the ground bound, and in many cases bleeding from ghastly wounds.

Here John was told to stop, and a particular corner being pointed out to him by one who appeared to have authority over the rest, the dispirited captive lay down amid the misery of the place, which stared at him from all sides.

As he lay thus, he heard his name called softly, and, looking round him in astonishment, he saw a face he knew gazing at him from out of the gloom of the hut.

It was Cyrus.

"Is that you Fadden?"

"Yes, Jack. What is left of me. I am nearly dead of hunger. Have they given you anything to eat?"

"Nothing—now I come to think of it."

Cyrus looked at him for a moment in some astonishment at the nature of the answer, and asked:

"Haven't you suffered from want of food?"

"Not yet. I shall begin presently, I have no doubt."

"They think probably that as they are going to butcher us, it is useless trouble feeding us."

"Very likely. You think they do mean to kill us?"

"Undoubtedly. All you see around you are destined for the same fate. We are all to be sacrificed to the King's head

god. There was a fellow here for a little while who spoke some English—enough to make me understand that much."

"Can't you come over here to this end?" asked Cyrus, in a low voice. "I would come to you, but I cannot move."

"Nor can I. Is there anyone here who understands English, think you?"

"I should think not."

"I have had a strange adventure. When I awoke early this morning, and found you gone, and the room empty, I was confounded."

"I was taken out soon after I had fallen into a deep sleep. I was dragged up, and before I knew what they were going to do with me, was hustled out, and hurried to this place. I thought you were with me, and I scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry that you were not."

John was about to relate the extraordinary circumstances of his escape and recapture, when a tremendous yell from without filled the room, and a sudden glare of torches lighted the scene.

The door at the lower end was thrown open, and a group of men appeared, escorting three individuals dressed in a strange and grotesque fashion, who appeared to be regarded with extraordinary respect.

These three men, making the most uncouth gestures with their hands and eyes and mouths, walked through the rows of prostrate creatures on the ground, who, in their turn, looked at the three with horrible apprehension in their eyes, as they feared doom was come to them.

Three times did the three pass among the victims, apparently unable to make a choice.

Then one of them made a dart, and, clutching an unhappy wretch by the throat, dragged him, speechless with terror, from the ground.

He was seized immediately by some of the assistants with the knives, and hurried from the hut through the door at the other end.

Again the fantastically horrible perambulation was made by these three, and, extending this time a little further than at the first, they came near the corner where John was lying, a prey to the most terrible emotions.

He was almost praying that their next choice might fall on him, in order that he might the more speedily be put out of his lingering misery, when one of the three danced up to him, and, as he passed him, uttered these words:

"Mahli—Ju-Ju man. All right!"

Almost before John had caught the syllables as they fell from the black's lips, the speaker was gone, and presently made a pounce on another wretch, who was dragged out like the first.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE VICTIMS—A FRIEND IN NEED—THE LOOSENING OF THE BONDS—A DART FOR THE LONG GRASS—AWAY TO MAHLKI'S HUT—STRANGE CRIES—THE HIDDEN HOLLOW—A GRUESOME SIGHT.

The noise of the approaching men was again heard, and the door opening, the three blacks, with their attendants, entered the room.

A shudder ran through the whole of the mass of humanity huddled on the floor of the hut, and so sure as any wretch covered beneath the flaming looks of the three, so surely would he be pounced on and dragged from the floor by the infuriated torturers, who seemed to take an infinite delight in exciting the fears of their fellow-creatures.

Three more were taken out at this bout, then another interval occurred, and the silence was unbroken save for the whispers of the two friends, or the restless moanings of the expectant victims on the floor.

Suddenly the door at the end opened once more, this time without noise, and the three men appeared as before, but without their assistants.

They walked rapidly through the room to the door at the other end, which they opened and disappeared, all but one.

This one was the man who had spoken to John a little while before.

He came rapidly back, crossed to the corner where the younger man lay, drew a small, but exceedingly sharp knife from his bosom, and severed the bonds round the white man's arms. Then, dropping the knife at his feet, he whispered the words: "Loose him, and go quick! You see Mahli soon," and scuttled swiftly away after his fellows.

Quick as thought John had the bonds off his ankles, and then, with a half articulate cry of eagerness, ran over to where his friend lay watching with incredulous eyes all that had passed so rapidly.

It took scarcely any time to relieve him from his bonds and lift him to his feet.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Cyrus, looking around him, and seeing the staring eyes of the rest of the prisoners fixed upon them with wonder and entreaty."

"Shall we release these?" asked John, pointing to their fellow captives.

"Release one, and give him the knife to let the rest free. We have no time to lose."

John stooped over the nearest man, who was watching him intently, severed the withes around his arm, thrust the knife into his hand, and, asked by signs, pointing to both the doors, "Which way?"

The man who had seized the knife, and was hacking away at the bonds on his ankles, nodded vigorously at the door by which they had entered. They signed to him to release the others, to which he nodded a cordial assent, and the two companions glided as quickly as they could to the door, and peeped out.

All was dark and silent, as it had been when they came through.

"Come on!" said Cyrus, in an eager whisper. "If caught, we shall be no worse off than if we remain here."

This was incontrovertible, and with a gesture of assent John motioned his companion to proceed.

They passed through the second hut, and through the larger one at the beginning, and, as they neared the door, they saw a sight that made them utter a low cry of surprise and joy.

Just within the threshold lay two long knives, with bone handles, and the blades crossed one upon the other.

Whether these had been placed there designedly for their use, or whether they were placed there with some fetich purpose, they stopped not to think; but, quickly darting on the knives, they seized them in their grasp, and, raising themselves erect with a look of triumph in their eyes, stepped out into the open air.

Not a soul was to be seen, nor a sound heard.

The only tenants of the place were the corpses that lay on either side of the road, or swung from the branches of the trees, whence they appeared to emit dismal moans as they swung to and fro in the light breeze, which ever and anon swept past them.

Our two heroes gained the gate of the enclosure, which swung open to their touch and a few yards away they saw the hut in which they had been confined, and further off, the roofs of other huts, doubtless those which constituted the town through which they passed when they were brought hanging from the poles to their present position.

"This way!" cried John, turning to the left, for he remembered well enough the way he had been borne by the dwarf some hours before.

They passed along the narrow lane down which the dwarf had carried John.

"Is this the way you came this morning?" asked Cyrus, as they entered the long grass without the gate.

"Yes. Now if we can find the track he took, we should get to the stream, and have no difficulty in finding the hut, where, no doubt, we should see Mahli himself."

"Yonder appears something very like a track," said Cyrus, pointing to a trodden-down appearance of the grass a little to their left.

"I shouldn't wonder if that turned out to be the place," said John Gower. And the two, proceeding towards it, threw themselves into the tangle of grass, and began to crawl forward.

In a short time they paused breathless, for the exertion of making their way through the close stems was infinitely more fatiguing, both to John and Cyrus, than it would have been had they had the dwarf's ponderous body to act as a pioneer for them.

At last, worn out with fatigue, they stopped to rest.

The heat was now insufferable, and, having no covering on their heads, they were glad to crouch beneath the stems, and draw them over them to shut out the intense heat.

Here, overcome with fatigue, after a few words of congratulation on the success that had attended their efforts so far, they fell asleep.

They must have slept for some hours or more, when they were awakened by a loud screaming in their immediate neighbourhood, and they started into a sitting posture, hardly able for a few moments to realise their position.

The screams increased in loudness and in number, and they were convinced that some horrible work was going on in their neighbourhood.

Instinctively they clutched their knives, and looked inquiringly at each other.

"I think we ought to go and see what it is," said John. "We need not expose ourselves. But if there is any chance of curbing some diabolical cruelty or setting free some victim, we ought not to lose it."

"Spoken like a true Briton," said Cyrus, with a smile. "British pluck never thinks of consequences; but only of the call for assistance. Go on, friend. I am with you to the last."

They crawled on through the tall grass, the screams increasing in intensity every moment; and now with the screams were interspersed bursts of maniac laughter that froze the blood by its wild ferocity.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DEAD HERO—NO NAME—ATTACKED BY THE FOE—FLIGHT TO THE CAVE—THE REVOLVER TELLS ITS TALE—A WELL-AIMED SPEAR—JOHN CONTINUES THE DEFENCE—ARE THE SPEARS POISONED?—CAPTIVES ONCE MORE.

"He is dead!" murmured John, looking through a kind of mist in his eyes at the handsome form of the young Englishman who lay stark and rigid before them.

There was no doubt of his being an Englishman; his whole appearance and dress announced his nationality.

"He has been dead some hours," assented Cyrus.

"There has been a fight evidently, and he has given a good account of himself."

"Yes. Those three near us have a bullet in their brains."

"Shall we search him? There might be papers on him which would give a clue to his identity, and it might be in our power to inform his friends one day."

Cyrus nodded assent, and they searched the pockets of the dead young hero, who had fallen in the midst of his foes.

There was only a small pocket-book, containing the Queen's Regulations, but with no name in it, a gold watch attached to a guard made of a woman's hair, the revolver in his hand, and the ammunition-belt round his waist.

He appeared quite young, not more than twenty, but there was a determined set about the mouth, and a look in the eyes—not yet faded out—that showed the enemy had had a youth in years but a brave man in courage to deal with.

"We'll take charge of these things," said Cyrus, pointing to the property; "and as for the revolver and ammunition, we may find it of great service."

"True," assented John. "But the next thing to do is to find a place to dispose of the body, to save it from the attack of those hungry brutes."

They looked about them, and espying a hole in the side of the hollow at the end furthest from them, proceeded thither to see

if it were practicable to insert the body.

It appeared feasible, and they returned to the spot where the dead man lay.

Lifting the body gently and reverently, they walked slowly across to the cavity where they intended to conceal it, when, just as they had reached the spot, a loud yell hurtled through the air, and a spear quivered in the side of the hill above the cavity they were reaching.

They looked up in alarm, and saw about a dozen blacks running along the edge of the hollow towards the spot they were standing on.

"Quick!" said Cyrus; "drop the body. We can defend it and ourselves in the cave. Do you go in first; there is room for two, one behind the other."

John hesitated for a moment, and then, seeing the justice of the advice, he sprang into the cavity, just as the blacks came running down the side of the hollow to attack them.

Cyrus, who had taken the precaution to load the revolver in all its chambers as soon as he had come into possession of it, clambered in after his friend, and his body almost filled the opening.

Three of the blacks had reached the bottom, and came on straight for the cave, with spears poised ready for throwing, when crack, crack! went the revolver, and two of the men threw up their arms and rolled over and over on the ground. The third ran back to join the others, who were coming on.

At sight of the two bodies lying on the ground, and of the other bodies in the middle of the hollow, they paused, as if for consultation, offering a splendid target to the marksman in the cave. He, however, prudently reserved his ammunition till actually attacked.

The consultation appeared to be an animated one; and then, with a wild rush, the whole party came on to the cave, in the hope, doubtless, that some of them would land safely, and avenge the rest. They came on with a loud yell, and had almost



He saw it was the figure of a man scarce four feet high, whose arms, hanging by his sides, allowed his fingers to rest upon the floor.

They moved forward once more, and then John, who was first, stopped short, with a sharp though smothered exclamation. He had nearly tumbled head-foremost into a deep hollow, which was concealed from view by the denseness of the herbage.

"Good heavens!" he cried, recoiling from the danger. "What is it?" asked Cyrus, with some apprehension, as he noted the expression on his companion's face.

"Come and see!" He crawled forward to his friend's side, and, pushing aside the herbage, looked upon a gruesome sight.

The screams and cries and mad laughter came from a pack of hideous animals, who were engaged in fighting over the remains of human bodies in the hollow below them.

There were some half-dozen bodies. Five of them were black, but the sixth lay apart, by a low bush, and was dressed in the costume of a white man.

His pith helmet lay beside him, and his white face was upturned to the sky. In his outstretched right hand he clutched a revolver of the latest pattern, and his ammunition-belt was still buckled round his waist.

Three of the hideous brutes had approached the body of this man, and were making snaps at it with their venomous teeth, but were evidently deterred by the look of the eyes, which were still open, and staring fixedly before them.

Soon becoming aware that there was nothing to fear from the dead man, the brutes made a spring on the body.

A loud and formidable yell startled the whole pack at this moment, and the two white men, springing to their feet, waved their arms at the fierce crew below.

With a wild, answering scream of terror, the hungry brutes dispersed on all sides, and rushed to the top of the hollow.

Still shouting, and brandishing their knives, to overawe the animals, John and Cyrus hastily descended the hollow and hastened to the side of the prostrate man.

He was dead; there was no doubt of that.

NEXT WEEK, "THE BODY-GUARD OF

reached the body of the young Englishman, when above their ear-splitting yells rang out the bark of the revolver—one, two, three!—and two more of the enemy fell.

"Hurrah!" cried Cyrus.

But in the very act of speaking there came a cloud of spears, and he fell forward with a cry, his head outside the cave.

There was a yell of triumph from the blacks, and Cyrus said feebly:

"Quick! take the revolver, and defend me and the dead man!"

John stooped over the prostrate body of his friend, and had seized the revolver in his hand, when one of the blacks threw a spear with such dexterous aim that it struck him in the muscle of the arm.

He quickly changed the weapon to the other hand and fired. Whether it was the awkwardness of firing with the left hand, or the shock of the wound he had just received, the bullet went wide of the mark, and the blacks gave a howl of derision.

Thinking, perhaps, that this was the best chance they would ever get, they ran forward once more, and, shortening the spears in their hands, stabbed with them into the cave.

They paid dearly for their temerity, for, steadying himself against the side of the rocky cavity, John collected all his nerve into a focus of desperation, and fired quickly two shots in succession.

Two blacks fell back, one dead and the other desperately wounded; but they were dragged out of the way by those behind them, who crowded up into their place.

John tried to load, but the revolver fell from his hand, and fell with a ringing noise on the floor of the cavity.

Drawing the knife which he had stuck in his belt, he essayed to parry the thrusts of the spears, and for some time succeeded, for the blacks, stabbing into the darkness—themselves stopping the light from the entry—were wild in their aim, and John was able to parry most of their blows.

One of the blacks had clambered up into the opening, and was standing in a stooping posture on the prostrate body of Cyrus, when the latter, making a supreme effort, raised himself a little from the ground, and threw the black forward on his face at the very feet of John.

The latter stooped, and drove his knife into the body of the foe, and at the same time managed to get possession of the revolver at his feet.

The blacks, seeing this, uttered a cry of fear, and dropped down from the entry on to the bottom of the hollow.

This gave John an opportunity of looking at his friend.

"Are you much hurt?" he asked, in a tone of great sympathy.

"No, I think not—only a flesh wound. The danger is, if the spears be poisoned. Then the slightest wound will be fatal."

"Good heavens, let us hope not!" cried John, in a voice of the deepest distress.

"Are you wounded, too?"

"Unfortunately, yes. In the right arm, too. It made me drop the revolver, and nearly settled my hash."

"Look out!" said Cyrus at this moment, in a warning voice.

"Let me load the revolver, if you cannot."

John handed his friend the little arm, and was about to help him to get the ammunition from the belt, when there was a sudden darkening of the cave, a furious cry, and John fell across the body of his friend, pierced through the shoulder by a quivering spear.

Before Cyrus could get into position for using the arm he had just succeeded in loading he was seized violently by the head and shoulders and dragged out of the cave.

Here, while two or three were busy binding him, he saw his comrade's body also dragged cut and flung down by his side.

When he saw the pale and pain-drawn face of the other, he could scarcely restrain a moan, for he made sure that he was dead.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE BLACKS—CYRUS FADDEN MORALISES—A STRANGE CRY—A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR—MAHLKI ONCE MORE—THE POTENT DRUG.

Cyrus was in terrible distress, not only from the pain of his wound, but also from his fear that his friend was dead.

The latter lay almost motionless near the American, but Cyrus was rejoiced to see a faint pulsation near the temple of his comrade, and a slight motion of the lungs, which showed life was not yet extinct.

His further reflections were cut short by a sudden hubbub on the top of the hill, or, rather, the edge of the hollow, to his left hand. He lifted his eyes to the spot, and beheld a dense mob of blacks, with gleaming spears, gazing down on the scene.

There was an answering shout from those below, which showed the new-comers were friends, and a few seconds after the mob streamed down the sides into the bottom of the hollow. They set up a groan of mourning when they beheld the dead of their own nation, but this gave place to a loud yell of mad triumph when they set eyes on the dead body of the Englishman and the two captives.

They rushed up to the latter, and, dancing round them with uplifted spears, made gestures as though they would slay them or the spot.

Cyrus was anticipating this fate to befall him every instant, and was indeed praying that it might take place, and so save him and his dying companion from the horrors to come, when a diversion occurred which attracted the attention of the furious blacks from their captives to the edge of the hollow, where they had themselves just descended.

A loud cry echoed from the top of the hollow—a loud, deep, resonant cry, unlike the voice of a man.

They stood, as it were, spellbound, gazing at the spot in question, when there appeared a figure shadowed against the sky, which filled the breasts of the savages with awe, and gave Cyrus a spasm of wonder and hope.

It was the figure of a dwarf, and Cyrus instantly remembered the adventure of John Gower with Mahlki.

Was it possible this was the same man?

The figure began to descend the side of the hollow with slow but prodigiously long strides, and the blacks, as he drew near



There appeared a figure shadowed against the sky, which filled the breasts of the savages with awe.

bowed their heads, and averted their eyes, as though they feared the new-comer with a great fear.

He spoke no word to any of the blacks; but came straight on to where the prisoners lay bound on the ground.

The dwarf stood for a moment bending over the unconscious man, and then, turning to the blacks who watched him at a little distance, and without bestowing a look on Cyrus, who tried to catch his eye, said something in a wondrously deep and solemn voice.

There was a loud shout of approval, or applause, or both, and then the dwarf, taking a small earthen vessel from his bosom, handed it to one of the savages near him.

The man took the vessel with an air of the most profound and abject awe, and darted away with it like lightning up the side of the hollow.

In a few minutes the black returned, carrying the pipkin in his hand apparently filled with water. On approaching the dwarf, he handed it to him with the same abject reverence as before, and then retired to the ranks of his companions, who were looking on in profound stillness.

Turning round, and bending over the insensible man, the dwarf began a low chanting cry, at the sound of which the blacks in the rear, with one consent, turned their backs on the three, and stood with heads bent down looking in the opposite direction.

Taking from his breast the moss-wrapped phial, which Cyrus recognised from his recollection of John's description of it, the dwarf poured some of it in the cup of water, and held it to the wounded man's lips.

Unconscious, as he was, the dying man took in the water eagerly, and when he had drunk about half the contents, the dwarf, with a rapid turn of the wrist, presented the cup to the lips of the other.

With a murmured blessing, that was almost accompanied by tears, Cyrus sucked in the water, and then, with a heavy sigh of disappointment that there was no more, looked in the dwarf's face.

"That do much good. Must wait. Mahlki can no more do, now. Will do, by and by. You no fear. You go safe. By and by. You go prison now. By and by, come out all right—all right!"

Before Cyrus could ask a question as to the precise significance of all this, the dwarf had turned towards the black mob, and, commencing another chant in a different tone, caused them to turn round once more.

Then they parted into two ranks, and the dwarf passing through them slowly ascended the side of the hill, and disappeared over the top.

Cyrus felt a strange disappointment at seeing the curious being disappear; but in a very few moments he was conscious that the potent drug administered to him was beginning to take marvellous effect.

His spirits suddenly rose, his blood seemed to course more freely through his veins, and the pain of his wounds seemed to have yielded to the influence of some potent anodyne. He looked at his friend, and saw, to his wonder and delight, that the potion was taking effect there also.

The blacks now surrounded him and his companion, and with brutal violence made them rise to their feet.

Finding, however, that all their efforts could not arouse John Gower, they had a hurried consultation, and a few of the blacks were despatched up the sides of the hollow to collect material for forming a litter.

This was soon done, to the great relief of Cyrus, who saw his friend lifted in, while he himself was ordered by significant gestures to walk by the side.

On ascending the hollow, they speedily found themselves in a kind of jungle, through which it was almost impossible to make one's way, and a few of the blacks went before with knives to cut some semblance of a passage through the tangled vegetation.

They rested once or twice, and, as the night came on, fires were lighted, and the blacks lay down to rest.

Cyrus noticed with horror that some of the black fellows were wearing silk handkerchiefs, and gold chains round their heads and necks, and one even carried an English officer's sword-scabard in his hand.

This aroused a sudden misgiving in his mind, that the young fellow they had left behind them in the hollow was only one of their victims, and he considered it mournfully probable that a party had been massacred.

Early in the morning they set out once more, and to the great joy of Cyrus, his friend, in the course of their journey, opened his eyes, and showed symptoms of returning consciousness.

Towards evening a great shouting arose in front of them.

A few minutes after the shouts had been answered by the escort a band of men came rushing out of a belt of trees in front of them, and gave way to every vagary of delight, as they saw the two prisoners, and beheld the spoils of the conquerors.

In the midst of these extravagant expressions of joy they passed through the belt of trees, and came out upon the banks of a river.

On the opposite side were several large thatched huts, surrounded by trees, with wide-spreading limbs, from the branches of one of which three corpses were swinging mournfully to and fro.

Several large canoes were floating on the waters, and at a cry from the party two of these paddled across to take them on board.

In a very short space of time the prisoners were landed on the opposite bank, and were hurried to the hut, in the immediate neighbourhood of the three swinging bodies.

CHAPTER X.

IN PRISON ONCE MORE—THE RAVINGS OF THE SICK MAN—A MASSACRE?—WHAT NOISE IS THAT?—THE ARMED BOATS—A WELCOME APPEARANCE—THE END.

Some men armed with spears lay down across the mat at the entrance of the hut, as a guard, and also to keep out intruders.

For this last, Cyrus felt infinitely obliged to them, for the near presence of any number of the black fellows was offensive in the highest degree.

He lay for awhile listening to the mutterings of his comrade, and then fell asleep.

Towards morning, Cyrus was overjoyed to see his friend sitting up and watching with eyes in which the light of reason had surely been re-illuminated.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Cyrus, unable to repress the exhibition of his joy.

"Have I been ill?"

"Yes, Jack. Very ill, and delirious."

"Where are we? And what has happened since the fight at the cave's mouth? I remember all that."

Cyrus related all that had happened, and fully described the visit of Mahlki once more, and what he had done and promised to do. He went on:

"I fear there has been a massacre of white men in the neighbourhood somewhere, for they are in possession of several articles, which must have belonged to white folks at one time or other."

"But what business would white men have in this part of the country?"

"Well, you know, this place we are in must be somewhere near the Niger Protectorate, and it is just possible that a party of explorers of some kind may have been waylaid and massacred by these inhuman savages."

"I should think that very improbable. but for one fact——"

"You mean the finding of the body of the poor young Englishman in the hollow?"

"I do."

"It is that fact which convinces me there has been something of the sort."

"Hark! listen to that shouting and drumming. What can it be?"

"The arrival of some chief, perhaps."

The men on guard at the door had heard the sound, and had started up, and now peered out in a somewhat anxious manner into the street.

From the open door of the hut, when the men had retired from the precincts, as they very soon did, and in a very hasty manner, the two prisoners could see the river—that is, a small portion of it—and they now saw canoe after canoe glide by filled with naked blacks, armed with spears and clubs.

"There is a shindy of some kind on," said Cyrus.

As he spoke a form darkened the door, and, to their inexpressible joy, they saw the unmistakable form of the dwarf.

"It's Mahlki!" they both cried out together.

He came forward, with a curious expression of triumph in his face, and, pausing for a moment to look towards the door, placed his finger on his lips as a sign of caution.

"Something has happened, has there not, Mahlki?" asked John Gower, as he looked into the Ju-Ju man's troubled face.

"Much happen. Much to happen. Soon."

"Have any white men been killed by your folks, Mahlki?" asked Cyrus Fadden.

"Yes. Bad job—much bad job. They very sorry in little while. They 'traid white man come take away their land, stop their religion. They make great sacrifice; make vows to the great god. Kill all white man, friend or enemy. Ah, fools!"

He stooped as he spoke, and quickly freed the two prisoners, who leaped to their feet, and seized the short knives he placed in their hands. Then, to their astonishment, he leaped aside, and, with a celerity marvellous in so bulky a man, disappeared

at one dive beneath the bundle of dry leaves which had formed the prisoners' bed.

The cause was not long to seek.

The door was darkened again by three forms, who rushed into the hut, keen and glittering knife in hand, intent on the slaughter of the white men.

Coming into the gloom of the hut from the bright sunshine without, they were unable to see clearly what had taken place; but, supposing the prisoners were still bound on the floor, they rushed to the heap of leaves, and began stabbing furiously at it.

Before they could make a second thrust, however, the two men, who had drawn aside to let them pass, sprang upon them with uplifted arms, and slew them where they stood. They slew two, that is to say, for the third, when he saw the foe upon them, uttered a yell of terror, and made for the door.

Too late. One was there to receive him, and the strong arms of Mahlki seized him by the throat, and in a second or two choked the life out of him.

"That bad. Cannot help. They kill, if not we. Now we have some medicine. Make strong, quick—run, jump, fight. All want."

In a few moments he had procured some water from the river near at hand, going and coming with the marvellous celerity he had already shown in his movements, and, pouring out the drug, he presented it to each one in turn.

The two friends took it without hesitation, having perfect confidence now in Mahlki's dispensing abilities; and when this performance had been gone through, he said:

"Now come! Black men run away from sea; we go to sea."

He led the way to the door of the hut, where he paused a moment to see that all was clear, and then, stepping out, signed to the others to follow.

At this moment a low, trembling cry, as of a bird or animal in distress, sounded close to them, and Mahlki, putting his hand on his mouth, relapsed into silence.

For some minutes they sat thus in rigid stillness, and during that time they heard many strange calls and cries in the thick jungle through which they were now passing. Some of them were really the cries of birds and animals, but these Mahlki detected at once. Every now and then, however, would come a call which was answered out of the distance, and Mahlki, leaning forward, would whisper:

"Black man. Spies. All long river banks. We careful go. Come!"

The guide's caution increased with every mile they went. The river now got very wide, and they were evidently nearing the sea.

"We cross. It not deep. It strong. It carry away—not mind. Follow close behind Mahlki. He know the shallow. Other part deep," said Mahlki.

He stepped into the water as he spoke, and they were about to follow, when there was a sudden yell from the bank opposite them, a spear shot out, and struck Mahlki full in the breast. He uttered a loud cry of despair, threw up his arms, and the next moment, having stepped into the deep water, was carried away by the raging torrent out of all human help.

Two days after this, Lieutenant George Gower, in the launch of her Majesty's ship "Pembroke," was sailing in the neighbourhood of Cape Formosa, when the attention of the crew

was attracted by loud yells from the distant shore of the Bight.

As they watched, they saw two figures emerge from the trees, and come down with lightning rapidity to the shore. In a few seconds they were followed by a howling mob of blacks bent on their destruction.

Interested by the fact that the fugitives were evidently Europeans, and in danger of their lives, the lieutenant gave the necessary orders, and prepared to defend the two white men.

The latter, when they caught sight of the vessel, gave a loud shout, and, their enemies being close upon them, leaped into the sea. Both were strong swimmers, and struck out with marvellous energy, and, seconded by the zealous efforts of the crew of the launch, were soon taken on board.

Lieutenant Gower hastened to the spot where the two were reclining on the deck of the vessel. At the sight of one of them he started back as if he had seen a ghost.

Recovering himself, he stretched out his hand, and with a little quaver in his voice, said:

"Jack, old man, how are you?"

The other clasped the proffered hand, and that was all that marked the meeting of these two, under such extraordinary circumstances.

It was not for some time afterwards, when John Gower had told the story of himself and his companion, that Lieutenant Gower asked:

"Then you never saw the advertisement?"

"No. Was there an advertisement?"

"Yes. It was running at the time I left home. There it is." And the young sailor, who was one year younger than John, showed the latter a copy of the advertisement, which we have quoted in the earlier part of the story.

"It was an extraordinary thing!" murmured John, looking in his brother's face.

"It was most extraordinary. Your own conduct was as extraordinary as that of my father. You might have seen that our silence and affected grief, were simulated in order to soothe the poor old man's excited nerves.

"How is it that you are in this quarter of the world, and at this particular spot?" asked John curiously.

"Well, we've been cruising about in search of a vessel called the 'Raleigh,' which has mysteriously disappeared, and is supposed to have been stolen by the crew, and to have been anchored somewhere on this coast."

"The 'Raleigh'?" repeated John. "Why, that is the very vessel that we came out in, my friend and I!"

"Good. Then I shall have all the keener interest in its capture. But there is other news coming down from the interior, which may take up all our time. There has been a frightful massacre of Englishmen, and I expect to receive orders to land a party of bluejackets in a few hours, as soon as we receive orders from home."

"Ah, that reminds me," replied John, and he then related the episode of the young Englishman.

Before the two friends left the "Pembroke," on which they had been received as guests, the orders had come out from England, and when they sailed from Gwato, in the "Sea Lion," a contingent was pouring in, that promised speedy vengeance on the butchers of their fellow-creatures.

That promise has been fulfilled. England has avenged her brethren.

THE END.

ROVING RALPH.

CONCLUSION.

Flint bent over the prostrate form.

"Dead beyond all question," he said. "Well, it is no fault of ours, and perhaps it is better so. It will be no easy task to get this body back to the asylum, but all the same it has to be done."

It was quite late in the afternoon before the tired party reached the asylum, which place they found to be in the hands of the police. Lockey and West already had been taken away in safe custody. There was nothing for it now but to follow to the town and there remain till after the inquest.

The lapse of a week saw most things satisfactorily settled, and all arrangements made for the transfer of our three heroes to London. West and Lockey, on a variety of charges, were committed to take their trial at the next assizes, which, however, were some time off, and therefore Flint and Gregory were in a position to leave for London without any great delay.

A few days later saw the whole party comfortably housed in an hotel. By this time Gregory had quite recovered his usual health and spirits. He and Flint had a long talk over the future of our lads.

"I have seen your other trustee, Ralph," Flint said, "and he regrets now that he had so neglected his duty. There is a certain amount of excuse for him, because he regarded your uncle as an honest man. But in future he has promised me to look closer to your interests."

"I can take care of myself," Ralph replied.

"Especially when you get into mischief," Flint laughed. "But, my boy, you are young yet, and have much to learn. We have arranged for you all to go to school again for the next two years at least. But your new school will not be the same kind as Marners'. You are going to Winchester."

Ralph's eyes sparkled. Then he looked grave.

"I shall be sorry to lose George and Will," he said.

"You are not going to lose them," Flint replied. "Like your own, their future will be assured. Mr. Gregory is a rich man, and he has taken a fancy to your friends; in fact, he has adopted them. So now you are happy."

And here will we leave the gallant lads, whose fortunes we have followed so far to the future. Perhaps some day the reader may meet them again.

THE END.

SEE THE NEXT PAGE FOR OUR NEW SERIAL.

LONDON'S GREATEST MYSTERY. See below.

THE BLACK SEAL

OR THE QUEST OF "ZUB" THE DOG DETECTIVE

BY STANHOPE SPRIGG.

AUTHOR OF "999," "UNDER SUSPICION," "FETTERS OF GUILT."

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR.

There is a general impression abroad that there is something radically wrong with the English detective service. There is. The men employed by the police in this department exist only to prove people guilty of crime, not to show that persons who are suspected of wrong-doing are frequently innocent.

As a consequence, those who are unhappy enough to incur the odium of some murder or theft have no means of proving their guiltlessness unless they consult some private detective, many of whom are blackmailers, or are hopelessly inefficient.

Luckily, a new class of men are taking up the detection of crime in London—young, enthusiastic, courageous, skilful men, who do not hesitate to employ bloodhounds, detective cameras, the "X" rays, and the like.

It is with the adventures of one of these—one Jack Fairfax, who is well known in London and the provinces—and a wonderful bloodhound he has trained, that this story deals. Read it closely, and you will see one of the cruellest mysteries of cruel London laid bare.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

JACK FAIRFAX, a young London detective.
 JESSIE NORRIS, a girl of mystery, rich but inscrutable.
 VIOLA NORRIS, her sister, found dead.
 GENERAL CARDWELL, their guardian.
 LIEUTENANT EDWARD GLYN, his nephew, engaged to Viola.

CAPTAIN MORTIMER, his friend, a West End shark.
 LARRY MAGGS, Jack's office-boy, an imp.
 SUPERINTENDENT FOX } Officers at Scotland Yard.
 SERGEANT WHIPP }
 MARGARET MAGGS, Jessie's nurse.

And "ZUB," THE FAMOUS DOG DETECTIVE.

"Be content to know that you are working for one who rewards you well, who will repay silence with fortune, and success with limitless gold."

CHAPTER I.

"WHISPER THE WORD 'RESCUE.'"

Jack Fairfax sat alone in his offices in the Strand one evening late in March, plunged, for the moment, in profound reflection. No wonder! Just before the time for closing that tiny apartment on the top-floor of an enterprising jeweller's a strange messenger had come to him—a small negro boy, clad in a tight-fitting cloth suit, with glittering steel buttons, the ordinary uniform of a page, and had, without a word of explanation, presented a note to him.

Now Jack, being a young and astute detective, was nothing if not inquisitive, and before he had broken

the heavy black seal on the envelope

he asked the lad what his business was at that unholy hour, and whom he had come from. Then the first part of the mystery stood revealed. The lad shook his head, pointed to his mouth, and, with an indescribable gesture of pathos, indicated his ears.

Thereon, Jack became more persistent still. He repeated his demand, and at last the boy opened his mouth, and revealed the terrible fact that not only was he deaf and dumb, but that quite recently his tongue had been torn out.

Jack, brave as a lion, was startled by this, and shrank back with an exclamation of horror.

An instant later, however, he recovered himself, and, tearing off the cover, began to read the letter, failing for the moment to observe that, directly his gaze was withdrawn, the boy turned round with incredible stealthiness, and slipped out of the room!

Curiously enough, the note itself was as weird and remarkable as the source through which it had come. It was no other than this:

"London, W.

"Dear Mr. Fairfax,—If you can do all that you pretend you can in your advertisements in the London papers, I shall not hesitate to employ you, although I am told that you are only about eighteen years old, and have been in practice in London but a few months. As a rule, I don't believe in private detectives. For the most part, they make use of their business to grossly overcharge the poor wretches that come to them for assistance; but there are instances in which their services are indispensable.

"The forces at Scotland Yard are, as you know well enough, only available to prove suspects guilty, not to show that the wrongfully accused are innocent—and hence one like myself is sometimes bound to look for assistance outside the ranks of official experts.

"Now, I will not disguise from you the fact that I am in terrible trouble. Never did girl need the assistance of a brave, strong man, to save her from the gallows more than I do at this present juncture.

"The police, in fact, have got their suspicions fixed upon me, and, unless you can quickly aid me, they will prove me to be one of the most dastardly assassins on earth!

"As a proof to you that I am not without means, I enclose you a Bank of England note for £100. Every day you strive to serve me, you will find a like note (£100) placed mysteriously on your breakfast-table in your chambers.

"Don't ever trouble to inquire how it comes there. That—shrewd and clever detective as you doubtless are—you will never find out. Be content to know that you are working for one who rewards you well—who will repay silence with fortune, and success with limitless gold.

"Now, then, to come to the point. Are you prepared to accept this offer and come out and help me? If you are, do not hesitate.

"Directly you have received this, go outside. You will find an empty hansom cab waiting in readiness for you. The driver will have a light-fawn overcoat on, and will wear a big red camelia in his button-hole. Immediately he sees you he will touch his hat. Spring inside, and whisper the word 'Rescue,' and he will whip up his horse, and drive you direct to me.—JESSIE."

"P.S.—In reading this letter over, I see I have, girl-like, missed out one of the most important points. I have omitted to ask you to bring with you your famous bloodhound Zub, which the police borrowed the other day to track out those dynamiters, and with the aid of which they caught that dreadful Whitechapel murderer. Do not, I implore you, fail to do this, for the main evidence in this case you will have to go on will be one small red stain."

Jack, more puzzled than ever, threw this letter on the writing-desk, at which he had been seated when the negro-boy entered, and looked round. Then it was he discovered that the lad had fled. For the moment the messenger's disappearance disconcerted him, and he was tempted to think that the

"CALLED TO ARMS," a stirring War Story, in to-morrow's "PLUCK," 1d.

whole thing was a cruel hoax on the part of some jealous rival. But when his eyes fell again on the £100 note, he still clutched in his fingers—which note he examined and found to be new and absolutely genuine—and when he peered out of the window, and saw that, sure enough, there was an empty hansom in charge of a driver, with a red camelia, waiting for him, he changed his mind, and banished his suspicions.

"It seems to me here's a proper mystery to unfathom, at last!" he muttered to himself, rising and clapping his hands.

"A chance, perhaps, to make all England ring with my name, as another Sherlock Holmes, or a Paul Sleuth, or an Inspector Melville! Ah, well, that is good. I'm tired of the ordinary, humdrum, week-day business of a private detective—ascertaining where a lot of poor, harmless idiots go, what they do, the company they keep, whether the club is responsible for such late hours, and if shopping alone occupies so much time.

"In truth, I'm sick to death of divorce-court work, of watching poor beggars of clerks, who are supposed to have stolen sixpennyworth of stamps, and of tracing missing friends, who have the best reasons in the world for desiring not to be traced at all. Give me my dog, and a good, strong scent, and I'm as happy as a king. Come, Zub!" he cried, throwing wide open the door of an adjacent room, and in an instant, a huge black-and-brown bloodhound, with its two great, red-rimmed eyes, glowing like deep-set electric-lamps, bounded into the place, his long, pendulous ears flapping wildly about his head.

It was wonderful, too, to see the sympathy and friendship that existed between the man and the dog. Without a second's hesitation, Jack Fairfax—who was a tall, broad-shouldered Saxon, with the most piercing blue eyes possible to conceive—flung himself on his knees, and threw his arms about the great brute, pressing his head closely to his side.

"At last, old chap!" he cried excitedly, "we have got our chance. Now, I hope I shall be able to show those fine people, who say that bloodhounds are no good, except to track runaway slaves across open spaces of country, that you are the one special protection Heaven has given to man to run down murderers, and all who take refuge in deeds of horror and blood.

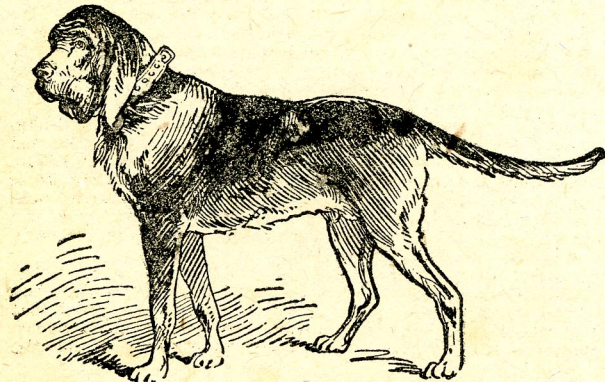
"Little did I think, when the dear old dad brought you home to me as a pup, that he would die so soon, and I should be driven to leave the old village in Yorkshire, and set up in a business as a detective, relying solely on your wonderful power of tracking to bring me fame and fortune. Alas! alas! I have never yet had an opportunity, Zub, of showing what your wonderful powers are.

"When I offered to lend you to the police, they only made fun of me; but when they could not catch the Whitechapel ruffian, or those scoundrels who had made up their minds

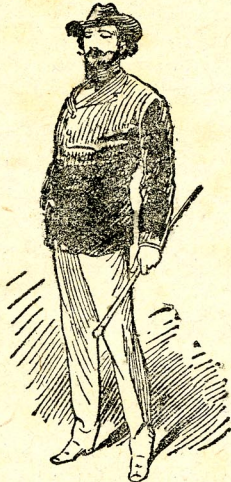
to shoot the Czar,

they were glad enough to borrow you then. Only, when you did lead them to the spots where the men were concealed, they hadn't the honesty to say how clever you were; but pretended they could have done quite as well without you."

For the moment, Jack was too upset by his recollections of



Zub, the famous dog detective.



Jack Fairfax, disguised.

Scotland Yard's ingratitude to continue; but the dog's answering bay, solemn, deep-throated, insistent, warned him that the precious seconds would not wait for him, or for any man.

Springing to his feet, he ordered the dog to lay down near the door, and then he began quick and eager preparations to obey the mysterious summons he had received. It was his proud boast that nobody outside his native village was quite sure the kind of man he looked in ordinary clothes, and, in order to throw people off the scent, he always took care to don a different disguise whenever he went out.

This time he repaired to a cupboard, and, with the aid of a make-up box, rapidly changed the colour of his eyebrows and hair to a deep, but glossy black, and added a vandyke beard and moustache.

Then he threw off his suit of dark-blue serge, and donned a pair of lighter trousers, and a brown velvet coat and vest. His hair was naturally long, and when the dye on it was dry, he curled it in the most approved artistic fashion, finishing by clapping a soft crush-hat on his head.

"Come, Zub!" he said at last, and, thrusting a couple of loaded revolvers, a pair of handcuffs, a police-whistle, and a small collapsible lantern in his different pockets, he hurried out of the room, and marched down the stairs into the street.

The hansom driver was showing plain signs of impatience when he appeared; but he duly touched his hat as Jack sprang inside, and whispered

the magic word "Rescue"

to him; and, in an instant, he had whipped up his horse and driven off. Where? Jack Fairfax's adventures, in truth, had only just begun.

CHAPTER II.
THAT STARING PATCH OF WHITE!

The hansom containing the young detective and the bloodhound made its way rapidly, under the skilful direction of

its driver, through the teeming thoroughfare of the Strand, along Pall Mall, and through Piccadilly, and turned off at right angles near the magnificent London mansion of the Duke of Devonshire. On the way thither, Jack Fairfax set himself down to solemnly consider what clues Jessie's letter afforded him as to the character of the search she desired he should undertake; but, try how he would, he could not guess what tangled skein of crime she wanted him to unravel.

Not for one moment did he fear treachery, nor did he pause and doubt whether he might not, after all, be marching into some den of cut-throats. Perhaps, indeed, it would have been better if he had been more suspicious; but, there, we must not anticipate.

Unfortunately, he could not understand timidity or hesitation in business like his own. Secure with Zub, he would, when duty called, have faced the biggest gang of swindlers, and the most desperate.

The hansom finally drew up in a dark corner of one of the many West End squares. Jack jumped out, and saw, set in between two immense mansions, a long, rambling-looking house, which stood far back from the pavement.

"That is the house!" cried the driver gruffly. And before the detective could put a single question to him, he abruptly whipped his horse, and drove off through the darkness.

"That's a nice cordial start, I don't think!" muttered Jack, turning, and carefully inspecting his rendezvous. Even that glance did not reassure him. The house looked as

dark and silent and deserted as the grave.

His footsteps, too, sounded weird and uncanny, and raised ghostly echoes as he moved up the narrow courtyard that led to the front entrance. Almost instinctively he felt he could have been glad if only a dog had barked, a cat had scuttled past him, or a noisy errand-boy had suddenly appeared, imp-like, beside him, and started whistling some silly music-hall tune. But no, there were no signs of human habitation like those, and when he reached the entrance-porch a strange sense of foreboding, and of mischief to come, took hold of him.

He seized the bell and pulled it roughly, and the clanging metal reverberated loudly through what appeared to be an empty and deserted house.

He waited a few moments, but no answer came to his noisy summons. Again he seized the bell, and again he sent those



Jack Fairfax.

wild pealing noises ringing through the mansion; but, again, nobody approached.

At last, in sheer temper, he seized the handle of the door, and shook it vigorously, not once or twice, but, at least, half a dozen times.

To his profound astonishment, the latch seemed to give, and the door fell open in front of him!

He took a step forward, and tried to pierce the darkness in which the hall seemed enveloped.

To his annoyance, he could discover nothing at all.

Motivizing Zub to keep close to his heels, he marched boldly into the place. The first step told him that the boards of the passage were bare. The next, the door closed with a sudden and startling thud, and, an instant later, the dog opened his immense fangs, and gave vent to a loud and defiant roar.

What could have roused the bloodhound like that?

Jack felt in his pockets hurriedly, and produced some matches, one of which he impatiently struck. By its light he discovered that the hall was destitute of carpet decoration or furniture. Apparently, the house was empty, and "to let."

Determined not to be beaten, he next lit his small bull's-eye lantern, and telling Zub to "Find them, dog, find them!" he passed the letter he had received from the page-boy in front of the dog's nostrils—a letter to which still clung a strong scent of Frangipani.

The great hound did not hesitate. With one bound it reached the foot of the stairs, and shot up, up, always up. Jack raced as hard as he could after it, little recking of the consequences; but his quick eyes took in the fact that these steps were dirty and mudstained, and that most of them bore the prints of a dainty woman's French-made boots!

Could those, he wondered, have been made by

the mysterious "Jessie"?

Her writing had been delicate and cultured—and so he reasoned she must be delicate and cultured herself.

Staircase after staircase, however, was ascended in this fashion, and Jack was just beginning to feel a little tired and puffed, when Zub turned sharply down a passage and projected himself with a great bang against a door at the far end.

"Steady!" cried Jack, warningly to the hound—"steady!" But he was too late.

Again the dog drew himself back, and again he thundered against the door, which splintered like matchwood at his wild onrush.

Another instant, and a girl's shrill scream rang out above the noise of the falling panels.

With a muffled curse on his own stupidity, Jack darted through the opening Zub had effected, to discover that the hound had seized a young and beautiful girl—one of the most beautiful he had ever seen—by the frock, and, would in another second, tear her to pieces. No wonder she screamed.

"Down, Zub! Down!" he thundered; and, as the dog gave way, with a sullen roar, he advanced into a room, delicately illuminated with candles in sconces, and bowed. "You have written me," he added simply, as the girl turned two large, round, beseeching brown eyes upon him, "and I have come. I am Jack Fairfax, the detective, and I trust that I and my dog here will always be at your service!"

Greatly agitated as the girl unquestionably was, she contrived to bow in return, and to motion Jack to an armchair that stood near the fireplace. His words had been so kind and courteous, that, in spite of herself, she felt reassured. He, too, took the seat she indicated, and glanced around the apartment.

As he did so, he could scarcely prevent a great start of surprise.

The furniture and ornaments of the room were, it seemed for the most part, of the most costly description. For instance, they embodied such articles as old oaken settees and chairs and tables, with tapestry designs hung upon the walls, and numerous bronzes dotted about the mantelpiece and sideboards and corner cupboards; but the wall in front of him stood out, and painfully challenged his attention, for it was absolutely bare.

Only a single coat of whitewash, indeed, hid these bricks from his casual gaze; but what horrified him the most was a great splash of blood in the centre of this staring patch of white—a ghastly red daub, above which was a small black seal, that, on closer inspection, he discovered contained the impression of a man's thumb!

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

Jack Fairfax glanced inquiringly at the girl, who had silently followed him when he started to his feet and darted to the wall, and now stood beside him, wearing a curious look of concern upon her face. It suddenly struck him that her face was beautiful—beautiful with the transparent goodness that serves to illumine the most commonplace features, and instinctively his sympathies went out to her, and he was glad that he had been called to her aid. The horror those hideous

marks on the wall had created in him forthwith died. Surely, he reasoned, she had had nothing do with those.

"Tell me," he said, with increased gentleness, "what this stain of blood, and this weird black seal mean? There are, as you can readily guess, a lot of questions I want to put to you about your dumb messenger, your intimate knowledge of my work as a detective, and the strange method you selected to bring me here, to an apparently deserted house; but these, for the present, must wait. The great stain, the black seal, are more important! There is some terrible tragedy associated with those marks, I am certain? Come, reveal to me what it was?"

The girl hid her face in her hands for a moment, and then she raised her head, and bravely faced the detective.

"Sit down," she said, with a certain suggestion of authority in her tones, that insensibly made Jack do as he was bidden. "You are right. I will tell you about what has happened in this unfortunate house, and to my most unhappy self. It is not, understand at once, a long story; but it's a grievously sad one. I only pray Heaven the sequel will not be as tragic as the opening; but that, of course, must rest with you and the future."

"With me!" echoed Jack. "How do you mean?"

The girl gave a sad smile, and shook her head.

"Wait," she added softly, "you shall see. You must know that until a few days ago my sister Viola Norris and I lived here with our guardian, General Cardwell. Although we had not a relative in the world, we were happy, light-hearted girls, rich and popular, and apparently we had not a care on our minds, or a cloud to darken our future. I had not a sweet-heart, I never had; but Viola had one—a nephew of the General's, a Lieut. Edward Glyn, an officer attached to the Hussars.

"We had, as a matter of fact, known Edward since we were children, and although I never liked him, I knew Viola was passionately attached to him; and, until this one fatal night, I never said a word against him. When, however, I did suggest to her, as we sat alone in the drawing-room, that he was not exactly a good man, or likely to make the best of husbands, we had a most furious quarrel. Viola indignantly defended him, and left me in a passion, declaring that she would never speak to me again.

"Alas! she did not. Early the next morning I went to her bedroom, which adjoined this, to beg her pardon—to own that I had been wrong to run Edward down. Well, her door was unlocked, and the morning sun was pouring through the casement, and illuminating every hole and corner of the room as I entered, clad in a soft dressing-gown. No sooner, however, had I glanced at the bed than I knew

something awful had happened.

"I looked again, and my heart stopped. I staggered backward. There lay Viola, twisted in a heap, with a great gash in her breast, dead, quite dead!

"I have never remembered how I contrived to get out of the room. I only know I shrieked loudly and madly, and moved like one in a hideous nightmare towards the door of this room which opened on her chamber. Then, worse horrors stood revealed. Directly I got inside here I saw that the tapestry had been torn from this wall in some terrible struggle, and that that awful blood-stain, with that mysterious black seal, had been imprinted thereon.

"A moment later I fell to the floor senseless.

"My shrieks, however, had alarmed the rest of the household, I am told. General Cardwell rushed hither, accompanied by a number of the servants, and a fearful scene of excitement and consternation followed, during which doctors were sent for. Then, finally, the police were called in.

"By this time I had come to my senses, and was able to answer all the questions that were put to me. But the two detectives who had charge of the investigations (one Supt. Fox, and the other Sergt. Whipp), showed me plainly that they did not believe me. They made me give them my word of honour that I would not leave here until they granted me permission. But they also communicated their suspicions to my guardian, who became very violent, threatening, and abusive; and, finally, because I would not own that I did not know more than I confessed, removed all the furniture, except the things in the rooms on this floor, and left me here in this house, which is my own property, alone with my old nurse Margaret, and, as he said, to my fate."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Jack.

"It is!" assented the girl, with a weary sigh.

"But it is most curious of all, isn't it, that they should suspect you?" suggested Jack, more to raise a conversation behind which he could have time to think than anything else.

The girl's lips quivered for a moment piteously, then she burst into a storm of tears. "It is dreadful!" she sobbed. "Poor—poor Viola. She was my twin sister, and I would rather have died than any harm should have befallen her!"

"It is strange, too," mused Jack, "that no mention of this



He lit his small bull's-eye lantern, telling Zub to "Find them, dog! find them!"

case has been made in the papers—although that, I know, is by no means uncommon. If only the people of London knew one half of the crimes that were committed in the metropolis, they would rise in a body and demand, either the reformation or the abolition of our present system of detective service, in which only ignorant constables of approved sharpness are the principal lights. What is the game of the wily Fox and the clumsy Whipp over this, I wonder?" And he pretended to close his eyes and meditate; but all the while he kept a sharp look-out, and narrowly watched

Jessie Norris through his half-closed eyes,

speculating whether, after all, she had told him the whole truth. The girl had now recovered from her agitation, and was bending down, and patting Zub gently on the head. It was a sign in her favour that the great bloodhound did not resent her attentions. If he had, Jack would have felt strongly inclined to trust his brute instinct, and—for the dog seldom made an error—have believed that the girl could not be relied on in any particular or degree. But she seemed so honest, so straightforward, so genuinely oppressed and upset by this vile suspicions of the police! So far as he could see, she had no motive in telling falsehoods to him, and, although he was bound to admit that she had surrounded herself with a good deal of mystery, the object of her appeal seemed clear enough.

"Then you desire that I should find your sister's murderer or murderers, I take it!" he said slowly and with emphasis. "You feel that, unless I do so, the police will weave about you such a network of circumstantial evidence that you will not be able to extricate yourself."

"I do," replied the girl frankly; "at the same time I don't know if all my anxiety is for myself. Indeed, I am sure it is not. I want, most of all, that Viola's sufferings should be avenged."

"Then I will do my best!" retorted Jack. And he held out his hand, which the girl took and silently shook. "I have only one condition to impose—that you divest yourself of all this mystery that surrounds you, and that you will tell me frankly how your page came to be maltreated, and how you, too, came to employ me in such an eerie fashion."

"And that is just what I cannot do!" gravely answered Jessie, and an expression of infinite weariness settled on her face.

"You cannot?" And Jack sprang to his feet, genuine astonishment on his face.

"I cannot!"

"Why not?"

The girl hung her head, and for a moment there was silence broken only by the ticking of a large antique clock that

stood in a corner of the room. Her lips were pursed tightly together, and her fingers nervously intertwined.

"Again, I tell you—you must confide in me!" broke in the detective, with indescribable earnestness.

"And again I repeat I cannot!"

said the girl; and her tones were full of anguish. "Oh, do trust me!" she pleaded, turning two great beseeching eyes on his. "I know you are good and brave, and that, if you will, you can save me, and, with your dog's help, track Viola's cruel assassin down. Be content with that. More information I dare not vouchsafe just now to you!"

"Dare not?" repeated Jack; but his tones now were kinder, more hopeful.

"Yes; dare not!"

"But suppose I find out for myself?" he hazarded.

"You can; but I must not tell you." And the girl tightened her lips, and looked him straight in the face.

"Very well, I will!" calmly declared the detective. "Indeed, I will not rest by day or by night until this Secret of the Black Seal is revealed!" And, without sign from his master, Zub, too, rose, and broke into a loud and threatening growl.

Ab, little did Jack Fairfax guess what a net of mystery and intrigue he had thus pledged himself to lay bare! Little did he know that the very men and women he trusted would

prove his bitterest enemies, and would, for their own base purposes, attack his life! If he had, he would have filled his ears with wax, and fled from that house like a place accursed.

But the future, as the ancients recognised, is "on the knees of the gods," and, no man, not even the wisest, or the wittiest, can guess what the years hold for him when the sole thing certain is death.

The girl, however, looked gratefully towards the detective and smiled. "In other respects," she added, in those musical tones of hers, "I will do what you direct. Command me now, and I will obey you."

"Well, the first thing," said Jack, after a minute's careful consideration, "is to show me the room where the body was found. Has it been disturbed since the crime was committed?"

"Only—only my sister has been buried," replied Jessie, with a convulsive little sob. And, hurrying across the room, she threw wide open the door that separated the bedroom from the place in which they had been seated.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNDERGROUND RAILWAY HORROR.

Calling Zub to heel, the detective entered the apartment, followed by Jessie. From the disordered state of the room he saw at once that there, too, must have been a terrible struggle.

Two chairs were smashed. Some of the bedclothes were torn, and on the floor lay several broken medicine bottles.

In a quiet, methodical way, however, he went to work, and, from close observation, helped by apparently careless questions which he addressed to Jessie, he learned that there was really no clue to the way the criminal escaped—no bloodstains on the windows or door. Robbery was clearly not the motive of the crime, for there, on the dressing-table, lay a gold watch, studded with emeralds, and a curious diamond tiara, just where Viola had placed them before she retired to bed. The broken medicine bottles puzzled him to a degree. Viola Norris, he was assured, was never ill, and their presence in the bedroom was absolutely unaccountable. He tried to piece the broken fragments together; but they were so shattered that that was impossible.

Finally, he returned to the sitting-room, and, with the aid of some soaked brown paper,

took a careful impression of that thumb-mark, which he secreted in his pocket-book!

(To be continued in next week's number.)

[An even more thrilling instalment next Friday, fully describing THE FINDING OF THE WAXEN IMAGE.]



By the Skipper of the "UNION JACK."

The Editor will endeavour to answer any questions that may be put to him by readers; but in future every query to receive an answer must have attached to it two of the numbers—146, or whatever it may be—from the cover of the issue for the week in which the reader sends in his question. All letters must bear the full name and address of the writer, and a non-de-plume for publication.

White is most readily distinguished of any of the colours by a searchlight at night. In the daytime, however, a drab-painted ship is with difficulty seen on the horizon. It harmonises most naturally with the sky, while the olive-green harmonises with the water. Olive-green is as invisible as grey in the daytime, and much more so at night.

This colour was first employed by the loyal ships of the Brazilian Navy in 1894, and it is understood to be the colour which our own Navy would adopt in time of war.

I hope to start a very novel new feature soon. Watch my Chat for particulars.

A naturalist, who has just returned from Queensland, describes a peculiar tree which has the power of stinging. Here is an account of its effects: "Sometimes, while shooting turkeys in the scrubs, I have entirely forgotten the stinging-tree till I was warned of its proximity by its smell, and, have often found myself in a little forest of them. I was only once stung, and then very lightly. Its effects are curious.

"The sting leaves no mark, but the pain is maddening, and for months afterwards the part, when touched, is tender in rainy weather, or when it gets wet in washing. I have seen a man who treats ordinary pain lightly roll on the ground in agony after being stung; and I have known a horse so completely mad after getting into a grove of the trees, that he rushed open-mouthed at everyone who approached him, and had to be shot.

"Dogs, when stung, will rush about whining piteously, and biting pieces from the affected part."

*Yours sincere friend,
The Skipper*

Be content to know that you are working for one who rewards you well; who will repay silence with fortune and success with limitless gold.

See "THE BLACK SEAL in The 'UNION JACK'"

1d., every Friday.

Cut this out and hand it to your friends.

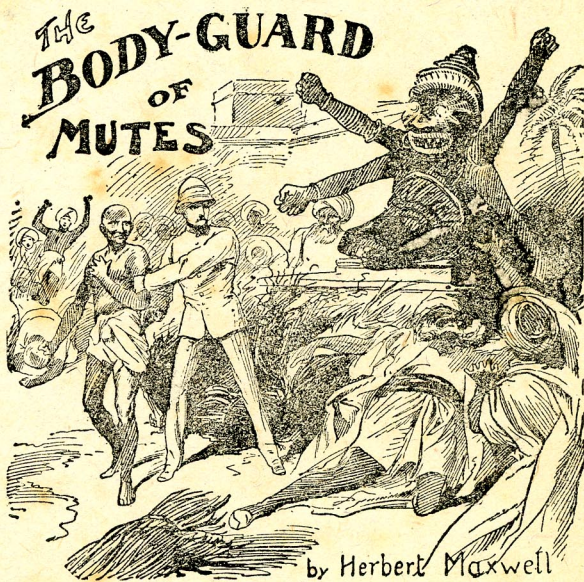
A PRIZE OF TEN SHILLINGS

is offered to the reader who best advertises our grand new serial, "The Black Seal," by means of the advertisement given above. This makes two prizes, one offered last week, and one this.

Do you like "The Black Seal"? It will get better and better every week. Tell your friends about it. Startling developments are coming!

Now, you readers who are anxious for a seaman's life, now is your time. The Admiralty have ordered the "Northampton" to call at all the principal ports in England, Ireland, and Scotland, to pick up lads who are ready and willing to help swell the numbers of England's great defender—the Navy.

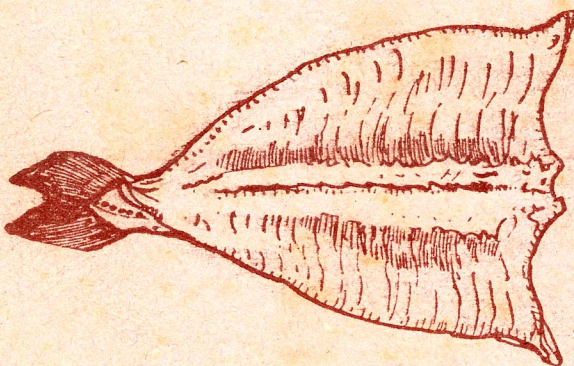
According to that bright little morning paper, the "Daily Mail," recent experiments have disclosed the fact that olive-green is the best colour for war vessels, all purposes considered.



by Herbert Maxwell

Next Friday's "UNION JACK" (No. 153).

WHAT FOOTBALL PLAYERS OR CLUBS are these?



Each of these pictures represents the name of either a well-known FOOTBALL-PLAYER or football CLUB. Can you tell their names? If you can, enter the Mammoth Football Competition in this week's "COMIC HOME JOURNAL," and try for one of the following splendid prizes:

£1 a week for 6 Months,

10s. a week for 6 months,

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And **60** Other Wonderful PRIZES will be absolutely offered to readers of this Week's

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