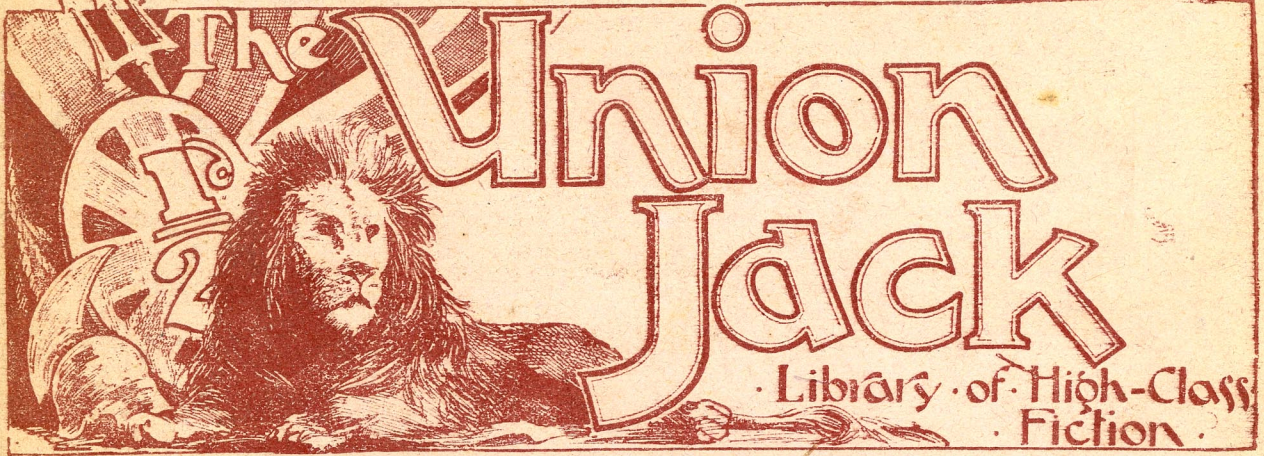


# A Splendid CYCLING STORY. (See Inside)

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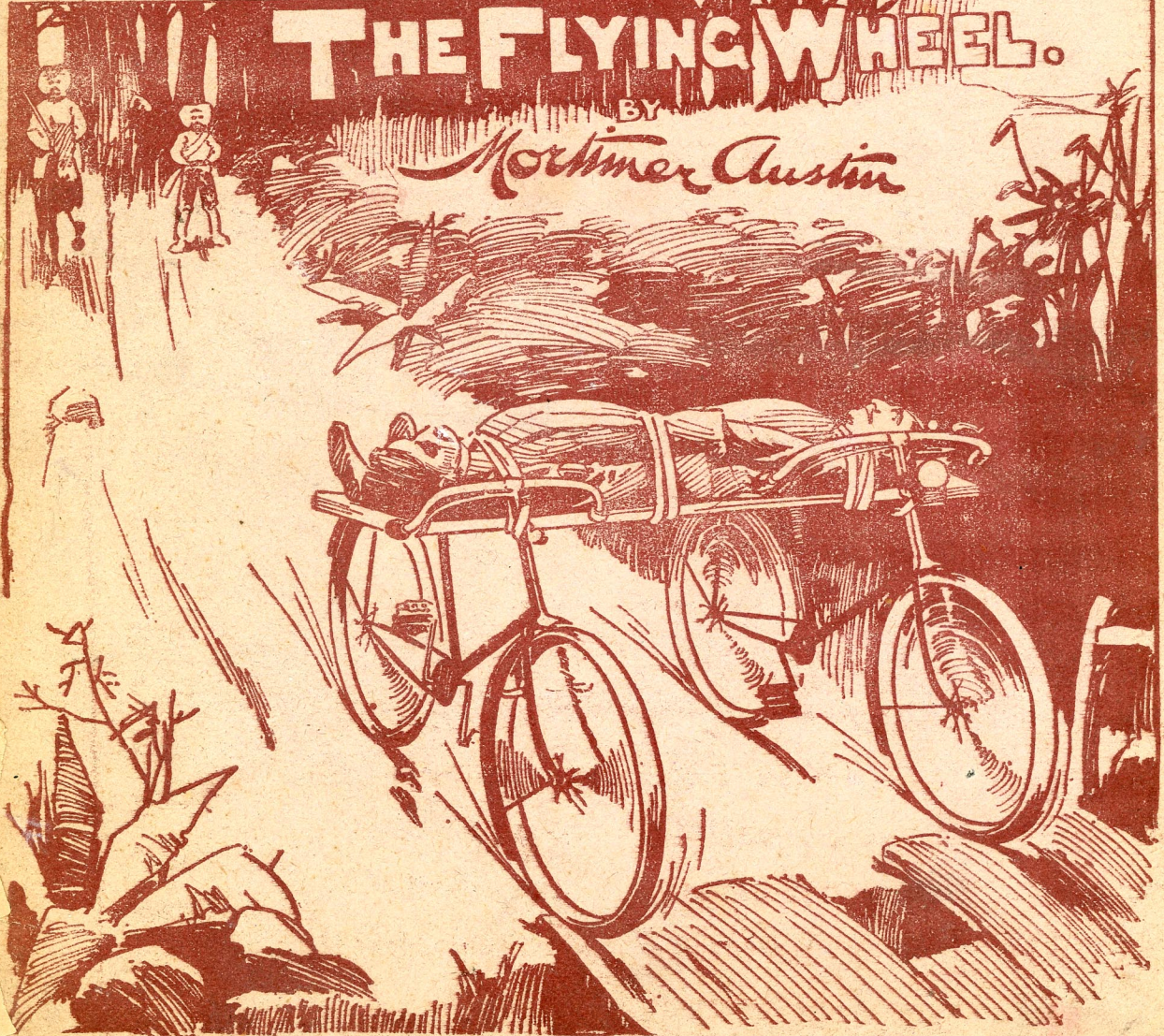


# The Union Jack

Library of High-Class Fiction

## THE FLYING WHEEL.

BY  
*Northmer Austin*



Bound to their own machines, the chums were sent rushing towards the precipice. Certain destruction awaited them.

**PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.**

No. 160.



# THE FLYING WHEEL;

OR,  
'ACROSS AUSTRALIAN WILDS ON BICYCLES.

## CHAPTER I.

THE TWO CYCLISTS—ACROSS THE DESERT—ATTACKED BY BLACKS—BUSHRANGERS!—A FIERCE CHASE.

It was a baking hot day in the wild and still almost unknown region of West Australia.

Far as the eye could reach on every hand stretched one dreary waste of burning sand, utterly destitute of any vegetation, except here and there tangled thickets of scrub.



The plank groaned beneath their weight, threatening to throw them into the abyss beneath.

Pitilessly the sun beat down upon the parched, crackling earth, and there was not the slightest breath of wind stirring to moderate the sultriness of the afternoon.

Two young men, dressed in cyclist suits, had thrown themselves down in the meagre shade of one of these oasis-like thickets, and were vigorously fanning their flushed and perspiring faces.

Beside them leaned a couple of safety bicycles—strange objects certainly in that great Australian desert.

But the conversation between the young men will, we think, explain how two such undoubted symbols of civilisation should be found hundreds of miles from its borders.

"By Jove! Hubert," remarked the elder of the twain by a couple of years, "they do well to call this part of the world 'a land of sun, sand, sorrow, salt, and sore eyes.' My eyes are full of sand, my throat is parched as if I had eaten a peck of salt, and the sun is strong enough to blind one."

"You are about right there, Norman," answered his companion; "but still it is splendid going over this hard, sun-baked ground, bare of bush, and without a rise or dip for miles. Who on earth would have imagined that cycling out here would beat that in the old country all ends up?"

"Beat cycling in England! I should just think it does! Where will you find a track equal to this desert, which stretches away on every side of us for hundreds of miles. And, then, think of the dash of peril and romance there is thrown in! It was, indeed, an excellent idea of ours that we should act the part of postboys, and carry the mails between the mines and Coolgardie on our 'bikes.'"

"Say, rather an excellent idea of yours, Norman, for it was yourself that thought of it."

The two young men were Norman Harcourt and Hubert Blanchard, and the sons of the proprietors of the newly-discovered Wallaroo gold reef, and they had volunteered to carry the letters and money of the miners to and from the settlements across the uninhabited and waterless country on their swift-flying wheels.

The region, as they have said, was particularly well-adapted for cycling; and "scorching" along for all they were worth over the barren waste, they had not to take into consideration the fear of knocking up their light steeds, nor had they to trouble about that scarce commodity in those parts—water—for the latter.

"Well, Hubert," said Norman, "if you are rested, we will make a move. We have come about forty miles. I should reckon; but there is a long way before us yet, and I would like to cover as much ground as possible before we camp for the night."

The young fellows rose, and vaulting into the saddles of their "bikes," dashed off once more across the waste.

Refreshed by their brief rest, they simply flew over the hard, sun-parched earth, and, exhilarated by the flying motion, they cracked jokes, laughed, whistled, and sang from time to time.

They were thus merrily speeding along, when suddenly, as they swept past an oasis-like thicket of scrub, there was a "whirr!" and a bright object whizzed over Norman's head, and struck quivering in the ground beyond.

It was a spear, and the next moment there resounded from the bush a series of ear-splitting yells, and out poured a mob of bushy-headed black warriors.

Spears and boomerangs instantly hurtled round our heroes' heads like hail; but, owing to the great pace at which they were going, none of the missiles struck them, though the aborigines of Australia are very skilful in the use of their weapons.

Bending low over their handle bars, Norman and Hubert pedaled away vigorously; but the blacks gave chase, and, as these savages are among the swiftest runners in the world, and can often outstrip a fleet horse, they were not so quickly left behind in the race as one might imagine.

Indeed, several of their number, forging ahead of the others, seemed almost to equal the speed of the machines for a short time, though soon the latter began to drop them behind; and, uttering yells of baffled fury, the blacks halted and sent a shower of missiles after them. In the excitement of the chase, the savages did not take very calm or accurate aim, and Norman and Hubert dashed on untouched.

They both knew that the aborigines would not rest satisfied with one disappointment, but would follow doggedly on their track, so they kept up the pace long after the savages were out of sight, skimming lightly over the plain like a pair of swallows.

Scorching away over the boundless waste, they were fast forgetting the peril they had just escaped, when all at once Hubert uttered a cry of surprise, and, letting go his handle-bar, pointed ahead.

Norman glanced in the direction indicated, and beheld about a dozen black objects outlined against the sky. These were rapidly approaching, and soon resolved themselves into a party of mounted men.

"Ha! A party of gold-seekers, I suppose," remarked Norman. "How we will astonish them with our 'bikes.'"

"Are you sure we have nothing to fear from them?" asked his chum. "For all we know they may be bushrangers or desperadoes of some sort or another."

"You are right, we will have to be careful. We carry enough gold in our belts and pouches to tempt even honest men."

Still the two sped onwards, and soon they were close upon the advancing knot of horsemen, who halted in evident surprise at sight of them.

"If we go straight on we will have to pass right through them, had we not better make a slight detour?" asked Hubert.

"It will be safer, seeing that we do not know who they are."

"All right," was the response. And, as they drew within gunshot of the strangers, they turned out of the straight course, with a view to describing a half circle round the latter.

But, to the horror of the young fellows, no sooner did the horsemen perceive their intention than they immediately scattered, stretching away in a long line on either side, as though to intercept them.

"By Jove! they really are bushrangers or horse-duffers!" cried Norman. "It is a good job, old fellow, we have our revolvers with us, we may need them. Still, if we can escape their bullets, we have little to fear, for I'll back these tight little steeds of ours against all their horse-flesh."

The strangers were now drawn up in a long line over the ground ahead, and presently they all galloped towards the cyclists, the men on the wings drawing slightly forward, so as to form a crescent.

Their purpose was clearly to enclose our friends in a sort of narrow circle, and then, by converging inwards, to completely cut off their escape.

"To the right, to the right, Hubert!" cried Norman, "and pedal away for your very life!"

Away over the level ground the two cyclists tore, while now the band of horsemen set up fierce shouts and volleys of curses, and several, unslinging their rifles, blazed away at our friends.

The latter, however, flying like the wind, remained unscathed; but now the nearest riders pressed their horses to their fastest speed, and tried to head our friends off.

The advantage, of course, was necessarily on the side of the horsemen, as the cyclists had more ground to cover in a wide circuit to enable them to get round the long line.

It was a race chiefly, though, between the horsemen on the left wing, and our friends; and the two parties, the one in the attempt to escape, and the other to prevent that, were converging towards one point on the horizon, like the sides of an acute-angled triangle.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CYCLISTS ESCAPE—TRAPPED BY THE BUSH-RANGERS—THE MAILS LOOTED—A DIABOLICAL SUGGESTION.

Away, away, across the desert tore the two cyclists, and away, away also galloped the long line of horsemen, scattered in headlong pursuit.

But the cycles soon began to prove their superiority over the horses ridden by the bushrangers; and, Norman and Hubert, pedalling away, drew ahead, and swept across the line of pursuit fully two hundred yards in advance of the nearest horseman.

The bushrangers yelled in baffled fury, and sent a volley of

bullets after them; but our heroes now felt tolerably safe from all fear of capture, and waved their caps in defiance as they still careered along.

The bushrangers seemed loth to give up the pursuit, and followed persistently in the rear; but, fleet as the wind, the bicycles skimmed over the ground, and rapidly dropped them behind.

"A narrow shave that, Hubert, old fellow!" laughed Norman lightly; "and we will have to keep a sharp look out for those gentry 'on our return from Coolgardie.'"

He had barely said the words, when, as they mounted a slight, scarcely perceptible rise, they found themselves on the brink of a small pitlike hollow, about three feet deep.

They had no time to stop, or leap off their machines, and both went bounding over into the hollow.

It was almost kneedeep in soft sand, however, and though Norman Harcourt was thrown from his saddle, neither he nor his bicycle came to any grief.

He sprang to his feet, with a merry laugh at the mishap, but the laugh died on his lips, and a scared, anxious look settled upon his face, as he beheld his chum still lying motionless near him in a strange and unnatural posture.

Norman ran to his side, and attempted to lift him up; but to his amazement found that Hubert was unconscious.

Turning him over, Norman's horror was increased by the sight of a deep cut in his forehead, from which the blood was trickling. In his fall, Hubert Blanchard had not been so fortunate as his companion, and had struck his head against a jagged boulder of rock, which lay half concealed in the sand.

Norman proceeded to stanch the flow of blood, and then, pulling forth his water-bottle, he bathed the temples of the insensible man, and poured a few drops of the liquid down his throat.

In a few minutes Hubert opened his eyes, and looked around in a dazed way.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" he asked.

"You fell and struck your head against that rock. How are you now, old fellow?"

"I feel faint and weak."

"Then we had better put off travelling any further this evening, and bivouac over there in the shade of that belt of bush. Lean on my shoulder, and I'll help you over there."

Soon they were both reclining on a soft bank in the heart of the thicket beside a little fire, which Norman had kindled to boil their tea. They did not think the blacks or bushrangers would be likely to follow them thus far, and, moreover, the bushes round would effectually screen the light of their fire.

The shades of night were rapidly falling, when the water in their little kettle boiled, and they both felt pretty secure from both bushrangers and blacks as they discussed their slices of beef and damper (a kind of cake made of flour and water).

After the meal, the two pulled out their pipes, for Hubert's head felt better now, and he said a smoke would soon set him right.

Lying at full length on the earth, with the blue rings curling up from the glowing pipe-bowls, they chatted over the exciting incident of their escape from the bushrangers, until the stars came out one by one, and studded the heavens. Then they thought of sleep, and, rising, they unrolled their swags,\* and spread their blankets on the ground.

They were both about to roll themselves up, and compose their minds for sleep, when they were startled by the trampling of horses' hoofs. As they sprang to their feet in alarm, they heard a coarse voice call out:

"They're in the thicket, right enough, boys. We have 'em now, all safe and sure."

The young fellows saw that they were trapped, for they would have to wheel their bicycles out of the dense scrub before they could mount and away.

As it was, even before they could run to their machines, the bush at one side of the camp parted, and four rough-looking men appeared, and levelled as many rifles at them.

"Bail up, my young sparks!" shouted the foremost of the gang, a great, black-whiskered, dirty-faced fellow. "So we have cotched you, at last. You thought as 'ow you had slipped away nicely, I suppose, eh?" he added, with a hoarse laugh; "but yer must have forgotten that 'em there wheels of yourn leave tracks behind. We jist follered the tracks, knowin' as 'ow you must camp somewhere for the night, and here we are." And the burly ruffian laughed as though he had cracked a joke.

While he was speaking, half a dozen other men had entered the little bivouac, and, at a sign from their leader, several of these now sprang on Norman and Hubert, and, despite their struggles, proceeded to bind them hand and foot.

"We will see what them swags and knapsacks of theirs contain first," said the chief; "and then we will have supper."

He and another of the band opened the mail-bags of the

\*The swag is the bushman's kit, or packet, into which he rolls his provisions, clothes, &c.—J. G. R.

"DARK DEEDS."

in this week's  
"MARVEL," &c.

\* Horse-thieves.

cyclists, and, as the rest gathered expectantly around, they tore open letter after letter, and packet after packet. Nearly all the envelopes contained money, sums that careful, hard-working miners were sending home to their families.

At sight of all this wealth, the eyes of the bushrangers glittered avariciously; but presently a yell of savage triumph went up as they came upon the store of nuggets, which the mine-managers were sending to their agents in Coolgardie.

"Here's luck, boys!" cried the leader. "There's a fortin' alone in 'em nuggets, for every man of us, or my name is not Jerry Logan."

"Ye're right there, cap'en, if I knows anything. S'elp me, but yer was right in sayin' them cyclist fellows would be worth follerin'. Strike me crazy, if you weren't!"

"Of course I was, Sam, my hearty! Well, boys, off 'saddle, and we'll share the spoil right away."

In a few minutes the band had hobbled their horses to prevent them straying, and then sat round the replenished fire to divide the booty.

It was far into the night before this important matter had been fully settled, and all the gold divided into a dozen equal shares.

Then bottles of rum and gin were produced, and were passed round. Now the desperadoes began to get very merry, and songs were sung, or rather bellowed, and ribald jokes were cracked, calling forth uproarious laughter. And, meanwhile, our cyclist friends lay upon the ground, helplessly bound, silent witnesses to the bushrangers' orgies.

At length, when nearly all the band were more or less in a state of intoxication, the leader, Jerry Logan, as he had styled himself, who was by far the soberest man of the lot, though he had drunk quite as much as any of the others, pulled out cards and dice, and soon they were all desperately and excitedly gambling for one another's ill-gotten gains.

The stakes were high, and large sums changed and re-changed hands rapidly, until at last the tired eyelids of the two watchers closed, and both fell off to sleep.

When they woke next day the sun was high in the heavens, and all round them lay grouped, in fantastic attitudes, the bushrangers, snoring like pigs. It was some hours later before Jerry Logan woke, and, rising unsteadily to his feet after his night's debauch, he proceeded to waken the others by the expeditious, if rather unceremonious, way of kicking them with his heavy boots.

In a few minutes the whole of the gang were aroused, and all of them looked considerably the worse for the previous night's carousal.

They lighted a fire, and began to prepare their breakfasts, and, while the work was going on, Jerry strolled over to where Norman and Hubert lay.

"Well, my young cyclists," was his greeting, "have you passed a good night? I hope so, for your own sakes, 'cause I am thinking of sendin' you both on a very long journey. Ha, ha! See the joke, do yer? Say, boys!" he called out to the group around the camp-fire, "what do ye propose we shall do with these 'ere young fellers? We had better now dispense with their company? What say ye?"

"Hang 'em!" cried one brutal ruffian.

"Ay, there are two gum-trees yonder will hold 'em!" chimed in another. "and let us tie their bicycles to their necks. The weight will aid the drop."

The suggestion called forth a general peal of laughter; but yet another of the gang said:

"I've something better nor that to suggest. Lone Tree Gully is not a quarter of a mile away. Let us tie the two bicycles side by side, lash the young bloods to the saddles and handle-bars, and send 'em rollin' down the hill over the precipice. That'll be far better sport, I'm thinkin'."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE NARROW BRIDGE—ROLLING DOWNHILL TO A FEARFUL DEATH—A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE—BLACKS—FLIGHT OF BUSHRANGERS.

A perfect yell of delight greeted this diabolical proposal, and the leader, seeing the consensus of opinion, exclaimed:

"A fine idea, Boggs. But how do you propose to tie 'em to 'em bits of saddles?"

"Oh, you'll see, cap'n. Leave it to me, and you'll have a rare sport."

"All right, I'm content. Fetch the two along then with their 'bikes' to the gully."

The bushrangers brought in and saddled the horses, and then several, laying hold of each of the prisoners, cut the bonds upon their lower limbs, and hoisted them into the backs of two of the animals, turning them, however, with their faces to the tail.

Then the mounted men took hold of the bicycles, and wheeled them along, and the others, either walked beside their horses, or prang into the saddle.

They proceeded slowly, but it was not long before they reached Lone Tree Gully, which was a frightful chasm in a chain of low hills that broke the monotony of the plain. Fully a hundred feet below ran a furious torrent, issuing out of the rocky wall, and flowing out in its narrow course to lose itself in the sandy waste, or, more likely still, to be dried up into water-holes by the scorching sun.

To the brink of the precipice our cyclists were first led by the brutal ruffians, who forced them to look over and view the awful depths, laughing with fiendish glee as the two young fellows involuntarily drew back, and failed to repress a shudder.

"Well, Boggs, get to work, and let us see how you intend to manage things."

But Boggs was looking up and down the line of cliff, and at length he said:

"See yonder, there is a steep incline right to the very edge. Let us take 'em there, and then their machines will run down hill at full speed, and go crashing over into the gully."

Boggs was nominally leader of the gang for the time, so Norman and Hubert were taken to the place he suggested, and then, aided by his willing comrades, he proceeded to lash the two bicycles side by side.

They found that this was not such easy work as they had at first imagined it would be. It required something more than merely tying the handle-bars together to make the two pairs of wheels run in parallel lines, and not wobble about. Moreover, they could not get either machine to stand upright.

"It can't be did. Boggs, ye're a fule!" said one of the bushrangers, standing round, watching the futile efforts of their comrades.

Boggs seemed to think so, too, for after a few minutes' rueful survey of the two machines, which merely leaned against one another in a drunken-man-sort-of-way, with the wheels turned inwards, he turned his eye towards the precipice.

He started instantly, and a look of triumph leapt into his bloodshot eyes.

"I'm no fule!" he cried. "Look! Do you see them planks?"

He pointed to a bridge about five feet wide, composed of rough-hewn planks lashed together, which at this point spanned the frightful gulf, it being narrower here than at any other point. Who had placed the bridge there it would be hard to say. Perhaps a party of gold-seekers, perhaps the aborigines. Anyhow, there it stood, its rotting timbers offering but a very frail support for anyone attempting to cross the gulf by its means.

"Do yer see them planks?" repeated the bushranger. "Well, I'm a-goin' to strip a couple of them off, and lash 'em across this 'ere part of the bicycles"—pointing to the horizontal bar of one of the machines. "That'll form a kind of carriage, an' to the planks we'll tie the young fellows."

The bushrangers saw the feasibility of this scheme, and they quickly ripped off two of the planks from the bridge, without lessening its width or strength in any way.

Then the machines were placed about four feet apart, and the two planks laid transversely across their horizontal bars, to which they were securely tied so as to prevent them slipping. The planks were each about six feet long, and the ends were allowed to project equally on either side.

Thus a rude sort of four-wheeled conveyance was constructed; and when, after an experiment or two, it was seen to run all right, Norman and Hubert were lifted upon it, and each bound tightly to one of the planks, with their heads and feet pointing in opposite directions.

The bicycles bore the weight excellently well; and now the bushrangers set up loud yells of laughter, and surveyed their intended victims with gloating eyes.

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho!" mocked Jerry Logan. "Bring the 'Lord Mayor's kerridge' up to the top of the hill. You'll have a pleasant ride, my friends! Won't yer give us a lift? Don't be selfish and keep all the fun to yourselves."

This supposed witicism elicited roars of laughter from the other ruffians; and, amidst shouts and yells, the machine was drawn to the top of the steepest part of the incline.

"Suppose they strike the bridge and run across," said one of the gang. "It's in a straight line for it."

"It will be a miracle if they do," replied Jerry. "By crime, boys, head it for the bridge. It will be fine fun if it runs half way across, and then goes crashing an' toppin' over."

The ruffians trained the machines for the narrow bridge almost as carefully as if they were firing a gun; and then, amidst a chorus of yells, they sent the strange carriage, with its helpless passengers, careering down the steep incline straight for the frightful gulf.

What the thoughts of our friends were, bound helpless to their own machines, as they tore downhill, it would be hard to say. Death, and death in one of its most horrid guises, stared them in the face.

They were rushing at full speed down the incline, nearer and nearer to the brink of the precipice. It seemed as if nothing short of the miracle Jerry Logan had mentioned could save

them from meeting their doom on the jagged rocks at the bottom of the gully.

But that very miracle did happen.

Straight as an arrow from the bow the two machines shot towards the bridge, and, before the bushrangers could recover from their astonishment, it had run straight across the narrow width, safely into a small dip on the other side of the gully, where it came to a stop.

As we have said, the bridge was about five feet wide, and the gauge of the wheels of the novel carriage was four, so that it was by the merest good luck the machines managed to run safely across.

The slightest side-shake in any of the wheels, or swerving aside, as the machines passed over the bridge, would have sufficed to precipitate them and their helpless passengers into the yawning abyss.

The bushrangers gave tongue to the most horrible blasphemies and cries of baffled fury as they beheld the defeat of their diabolical scheme; and, headed by Jerry Logan, they rushed down in a body to the bridge, intending to cross to the other side, and make sure of their victims by finishing their horrid sport.

The foremost man was Boggs, the contriver of the fiendish work; but he had barely placed his foot on the bridge when a crescent-shaped missile flew from a clump of scrub on the other side of the gully, and, striking him full upon the forehead, knocked him over into the abyss.

His comrades halted in dismay, and, ere they could turn tail and scamper back out of range, a shower of spears and arrows fell amongst them, and three more of their number fell to the earth, dead or dying.

"Black fellows! Curse 'em!" cried Jerry Logan. "To the horses, boys!"

The cowardly gang fled like sheep back to where their horses were tethered, leaving their wounded comrades to take care of themselves.

There came a chorus of fierce yells from the scrub, and a cloud of lithe, naked figures leapt out, and sent another volley of spears and boomerangs after the flying outlaws.

Then, while some ran across the narrow bridge like cats to extinguish what little sparks of life might be lingering in the breasts of the wounded bushrangers, the others surrounded the novel carriage, on which our cyclist friends were still firmly bound.

The blacks displayed the utmost curiosity in the, to them, entirely new and strange objects, the two bicycles, and they almost ignored our friends, lashed on top of them, in their childish delight at the bright, nickel-plated parts, the spokes, and the inflated tyres.

They jabbered away excitedly among themselves; but when one of them accidentally pushed the machines and the pedals swung round, they all uttered cries of terror, and retreated to a distance; and it was long before even the most daring among them would venture again to touch the strange, uncanny monster.

At last, however, they tied ropes to the handle-bars, and, leaving Norman and Hubert still bound to the cross-planks, they proceeded to drag the certainly curious carriage along, shouting with glee as they did so.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE ABORIGINES' ENCAMPMENT—THE CYCLISTS MEANT FOR A HORRIBLE DOOM—SAVED BY AN ALARM—THE BUSH FIRE—A BRAVE DASH FOR SAFETY—ON THE TRAIL OF THE BUSH-RANGERS.

The blacks marched on, dragging the bicycle-carriage with as much delight as so many children, until late in the evening when they reached their encampment—a mere collection of huts, or, rather, bowers of bushes and bark, scarcely large enough for the owners to sit inside.

The bicycle-carriage, with its helpless passengers, was placed in a circular space in the middle of the camp, and was immediately surrounded by an inquisitive and jabbering crowd of gins—women—and picaninnie g.

Norman and Hubert were still left bound to the planks, and the stout cords, tied with brutal tightness, cut deep into their flesh, and caused them acute agony.

The blacks lighted a huge fire, at which to cook a young steer they had killed; and, while some were cutting up the animal, the others seated themselves in rings round the fire—the men in the front rank, and the children behind.

When the joints were only half-cooked, the blacks snatched them from the ashes, and, after gnawing at them first themselves, passed them on to the women. Then, when the feast was over, the "corroborree" or triumphant dance was started; the women beating time with pieces of wood and rattling some stones inside a box or gourd to produce the music.

The dancers chanted a monotonous drone, as they flung themselves about into all sorts of fantastic postures, and kept on their eccentric antics, until they at last fell to the ground from sheer exhaustion.

Now, one who seemed to be a chief among them issued some orders to half a dozen of the warriors, and these at once leapt up from the ground, and, surrounding the bicycle carriage, cut the ropes which bound our heroes to the planks, and lifted them to the ground.

Norman and Hubert imagined they were to be tortured, and put to death in some horrible manner, but they little dreamt the fiendish purpose the savages had in view.

The aborigines of Australia yet practise cannibalism to a great extent, and the miserable wretches meant to complete their carousal by feasting off our friends.

The two prisoners were led forward into the centre of the ring, and forced upon their knees; then two of the savages held down their heads, and two others, armed with waddies—stone clubs—prepared to dash out their victims' brains.

But even as they were about to deal the fatal blow there came a wild shout of alarm from several of the warriors, and as all turned to ascertain the cause, they beheld a deep, red glow in the sky, and a dull noise like distant thunder was borne to their ears.

The savages needed no enlightenment as to the strange phenomenon. It was a bush fire, and the wind was bearing it down upon the camp at racehorse speed.

Instantly the utmost panic prevailed amongst them.

Warriors shouted, and women and children ran about, screaming and wringing their hands. The executioners forebore to slay, and the prisoners were left kneeling in the open space; while the entire tribe hastened to snatch up their few belongings and scamper away pell-mell in headlong flight.

One of the tribe, however, perhaps more mercifully inclined than the others—who can say?—hurled his spear at Norman's breast.

It missed its mark, but passed through his coat-sleeve, and the barbed head gashed his wrists, cutting through, however, at the same time the withes that bound them.

Norman uttered a loud cry, even in spite of the pain, as he felt his hands free.

In a moment he had leapt to his feet, and, seizing the spear, with the sharp point also cut Hubert's bonds. Then, instinctively, both men turned and looked in the direction of the fire.

It was a grand and awesome sight; the sky was as red as blood, and great tongues of flame could be seen leaping upwards, racing across the parched grass and herbage, enveloping and engulfing the clumps of scrub and gum-trees.

But there was no time to be lost in idle admiration of the spectacle, grand though it was, if they wished to save their lives.

"Thank Heaven, our bicycles are uninjured!" said Norman. "We must mount, and ride as we never rode before, to escape the flames."

Running to the machines, with the useful spearhead they severed the ropes fastening the planks across their frames, and in a few minutes freed their "bikes." But even in those few minutes the belt of fire had rolled fearfully close, and they were half suffocated by the dense volumes of smoke, while burning particles fell about them in showers.

To leap into the saddles and dash madly away was their immediate action, yet, pedal as they might, the all-devouring flames surged after them even more rapidly still.

The dry, sun-baked grass caught the fire like trains of gun-powder, and flaming branches and twigs, borne ahead on the wings of the wind, set the herbage alight yards in front of the belt of flame itself.

On, on, the cyclists raced for dear life, at a pace which almost rivalled the swallow in its flight; but the waves of that raging, roaring tornado of fire rolled fast upon their track.

The heat was stifling, and already our friends, as they bent over their handle-bars and tore over the ground, could see great forks of flame stretching away on either side of them; and presently even the very grass beneath their tyres began to smoulder.

They rode over it before it burst into flame; but they could not but perceive that, a few more minutes, and they must be hemmed in by a circle of fire.

Norman looked behind him, casting one brief fleeting glance over his shoulder.

The fiery flood was not fifty yards behind them, and he shuddered involuntarily as he thought what must assuredly be their fate should either of them be so unlucky as to be thrown from his machine by colliding with a stone, or by some long grass, which at times they were compelled to run over, becoming entangled in the spokes of their wheels.

But that brief glance also showed Norman something more than the flame and smoke.

He saw that in many places, here as on the desert they had previously crossed, the ground was bare of vegetation, and, consequently, there were corresponding gaps in the belt. Still, even across these gaps the great tongues of flame often kicked and leapt, and blazing masses were hurled.

It seemed madness to attempt to ride through one of these avenues, but Norman saw that such an attempt must be made, or they would inevitably be overtaken by and engulfed in the fiery element.

Even had they been able to outstrip the flames on their fleet bicycles, they would have to race on before the pursuing fire, unless they were fortunate enough to reach a wide stream in which they could take refuge, maybe for hours upon hours, until, indeed, Nature gave out, and they either fell from their machines or were overtaken; for these bush fires will last for days and cover hundreds of miles before they encounter a barrier that checks their further progress.

"Hubert," said Norman, as he thus realised there was no help for it but to turn back and charge through one of the gaps aforementioned, "we cannot go on much longer like this before being caught up. We must choose a sandy or rocky tract of ground. See, here is one quite bare of grass or herbage! The flames are sure to divide when they reach it, and then we must wheel round and make a bold dash back through the lane of fire. There is nothing else for it, and with a quick effort we may succeed."

"All right," responded Hubert cheerily. And the pair wheeled quickly round to be met by a blast of air hot as from a furnace.

Involuntarily they shrank from it, and closed their eyes to the blinding glare of the red-hot, seething waves rushing down upon them.

But only for a moment. The next, Norman shouted "Come!" though his voice was drowned by the roar of the flames.

Then, into the wall of smoke and fire, they both plunged as fast as ever they could pedal.

Showers of sparks and fiery particles fell around and upon them; the smoke and heat were suffocating, and both were almost overcome by the fumes.

But they passed the gap in safety, though only to reel blindly and sink exhausted from their machines immediately after.

They were safe, however, and, as they sat up among the blackened, hot embers, they could see the fire and smoke like a great curtain rolling on rapidly towards the horizon.

They sprang to their feet, for the hot ground was anything but a comfortable seat after their late experience, and looked at one another.

At any other time they might have laughed at the appearance each presented, but after what they had gone through they were in no laughing humour.

The clothing of both was scorched and tattered from the sparks and blazing twigs which had fallen upon them in the dash through the gap; their hair was singed, and their face blackened with the smoke, till they resembled a pair of sweeps.

"Thank goodness, we are safely out of that peril, Norman!" said Hubert. "The thing is now what are we to do? Are we to go on to Coolgardie, or return to the mines? With the loss of our mails and all the treasure, it would be almost idle to continue our journey."

"You are right, Hubert; but I could never face those poor miners back in Wallaroo, and tell them we have lost all their hard-earned savings. I will tell you what we must do. We must try and recover the treasure! It was entrusted to our care, and we are responsible to the various owners for its safe-conduct to Coolgardie. We must try and hunt down the bushrangers."

"But we have no arms; we are defenceless! What can two unarmed men do against eight well-armed desperadoes?"

"Much, perhaps, old fellow, if we go the right way to work. However, we are not quite defenceless, for I have still the old spear that has already proved so useful to us. A lot of good that will be in a fight, I suppose you will say; but,

never mind, it is better than nothing, and there is no knowing what may turn up. We must trust to luck."

"How do you intend to track the bushrangers, though, my friend? It is easier said than done, I should imagine."

"Not so. See! neither the blacks nor the bushrangers thought of searching in the ticket-pocket of my coat, where I carry our little compass, so that I have it still."

"That's splendid. We will be able to make for wherever we like."

"Of course, and as I particularly noted the location of Lone Tree Gully, as the murderous ruffians styled that horrible abyss, where we so nearly met our fate, we will be able to find that, I have no doubt. Then we will take up the tracks of the bushrangers' horses, and follow them like hounds on the scent."

"Providing, that is, that the bush-fire has not obliterated all traces."

"Ha! I did not think of that. But still, I don't suppose the fire would rage very much in that quarter, even supposing it passed over it, for it was in the heart of that sandy wilderness. Anyhow, there will be no harm in trying. Come, mount, and let us be off. Nor'-by-nor'-east is the course!"



Snatching up the spear, Hubert stood on the defensive over his chum's body, prepared to give his life for his friend's.

The two men vaulted into their saddles, and set off at full speed across the blackened and desolate-looking country.

## CHAPTER V.

THE CYCLISTS RETURN TO LONE TREE GULLY—STALKING KANGAROOS—NORMAN'S FIGHT—A DISABLING BLOW—ONCE MORE IN THE HANDS OF THE BUSHRANGERS.

They rode on rapidly till morning without meeting with a single living thing on that dreary, fire-blackened waste, though they came across the charred remains of innumerable animals and reptiles, which had been caught by the flames, and they shuddered as they reflected that such a fate might have been theirs had they been caught in the real bush country.

They reached Lone Tree Gully without mishap, and, to their exceeding delight, they found that the region here had been untouched by the fire, so that the bushrangers' tracks were still plainly distinguishable in the soft soil.

After a few minutes they were able to separate the various trails, and, taking up the right one, they once more mounted their light steeds, and spun merrily along in hot pursuit of the thieves.

Pedalling away vigorously, they hoped to catch up the band in less than twenty-four hours; but they had not tasted bite nor sup since the previous night, and, though the excitement of the past few hours had hitherto sustained them, they no sooner settled down into a steady run than they began to feel the cravings of nature.

Their wallets were empty, and, unless they met with some animal, they might even starve there in that dreary wilderness.

Yet starvation was not the worst to be faced.

Thirst now attacked them in all its horrors, and as they rode doggedly on, and tried to forget the pangs, the sun rose high in the heavens, and beat down upon them with scorching heat.

The sandy waste grew glaring hot to the eyes, and great clouds of dust, raised by the wheels of their bicycles, rose up all round them, and soon filled eyes, nose, and mouth, aggravating their sufferings, and almost choking them.

At length, perceiving the hopelessness of continuing the pursuit under the burning sun, and across a desert of sand without a drop of water, Norman suggested that they should return to Lone Tree Gully, where, at least, they could slake their thirst from the torrent that flowed through it.

Nearly ready to drop with fatigue, and, with their parched tongues swelling their mouths, they wearily wheeled round, and rode back the way they had come.

The distance naturally seemed ten times greater, and when at length they did gain the gully, they were both almost at their last gasp. They positively fell off their machines in the effort to get off, and could just stagger up to the water's edge, throw themselves flat, and lap it up like dogs.

Oh! How cooling, how refreshing were those first precious drops as they trickled over their tongues!

Both felt they could have gone on drinking gallons, but they were sensible enough to fight against that craving, and merely take a few good draughts.

Refreshed and invigorated once more, they now bethought themselves of satisfying their hunger, and, knowing well that the stream must be used by wild animals at some point or another as a drinking-place, the young fellows decided to follow its course across the desert.

At length, as they topped a small acclivity, they beheld to their satisfaction several kangaroos a little way ahead drinking the water.

A thick belt of scrub lay between them and the animals, and, leaving their "bikes" in the thicket, they crept forward stealthily on hands and knees, Norman grasping the short spear or javelin, on which all their hopes of obtaining food depended.

The kangaroos, three in number, an old and two young ones, remained all unconscious of the approach of their enemy, man, as the little wind there was blowing from them.

Norman had never before had any experience in hurling such a weapon as he now held in his hand, and he half feared to trust to a "throw." For if he missed his mark, the marsupials would be off like shots; and, even on their fleet bicycles, he feared they might not be able to overtake the creatures, which bound over the ground on the hind legs in a series of swift leaps.

These were of the species known as the red kangaroo, which is the largest of its kind, and the most ferocious if turned to bay, or in defence of its young.

But Norman little cared about the risks he ran, with the pangs of hunger gnawing at him; and, gaining the edge of the thicket, he rose softly to his feet, grasped the spear like a lance, and rushed out upon one of the young ones, which was playing about close by. In a moment he had transfixed it, and, uttering a peculiar cry, it sank dead at his feet.

The mother wheeled like lightning at the death-cry of its young one, and, giving vent to a shrill, vengeful growl, it made straight for Norman with its mouth wide open, and its short foreclaws ready to tear him to pieces.

With giant bounds it advanced upon him; but hastily Norman disengaged his weapon from the body of his quarry, and prepared to defend himself against the attack of the uncouth-looking beast.

As it came within reach, he made a fierce lunge at its broad chest, but he only pierced one of its forelegs instead, and, shrieking with mingled pain and rage, the marsupial suddenly dropped its powerful tail to the ground, rose bodily upon it, and drove its long hind-legs full into the pit of our hero's stomach.

Norman was doubled-up immediately and sent flying, and quite unable for several minutes either to recover his breath or rise to his feet; he would assuredly have been torn in pieces by the animal's sharp claws had not Hubert, seeing his friend's deadly peril, sprung out of the thicket, wielding a stout knotted stick, which he had fortunately picked up in the scrub.

As the enraged kangaroo was about to rend Norman's clothes and flesh with its hind claws, Hubert swung his cudgel high in the air, and brought it down with all his might upon the brute's small head.

Half dazed with the blow, it turned, however, to confront its new enemy; but, fetching it another thwack upon the body,

Hubert backed towards where the spear lay. This brief respite, though, had given Norman time to recover; and, leaping to his feet, he caught up the spear again, and rushed to his comrade's assistance.

Seeing it had now two determined foes to deal with, the marsupial evidently thought discretion was the better part of valour, and, uttering a peculiar cry to its surviving young one, it turned tail, and began to bound away.

The friends, neither being any the worse for the encounter, at once now proceeded to light a fire with branches and twigs from the thicket, and soon had a couple of slices of kangaroo meat frizzling before it. They scarcely waited for the meat to be properly cooked before they began to satisfy their hunger upon it.

After they had eaten their fill, they discussed how they might contrive to pack sufficient water to enable them to cross the sandy desert, and Norman was struck by a brilliant idea. This was nothing more or less than to make water-bags out of the skin of the slain kangaroo, using the sinews for tying round the necks.

They soon made a couple of very tolerable bags, which, to their great delight, they found quite watertight; and, securely tying up the necks, they slung them to their "bikes."

The remains of the kangaroo they also packed in like manner; and now, fully provisioned for the journey, they once more mounted their machines, and took up the trail of the bush-rangers.

They rode hard to make up for the time they had lost, halting only to snatch an occasional bite or drink from their water-bags; then on they raced once more.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached a chain of hills, and here on the rocky ground they for the first time lost the trail. The horses ridden by the bushrangers had, of course, left no hoofmarks behind on the hard rock.

The friends, however, determined to cross the hills, and try and pick up the trail again on the further side.

They were wheeling their machines over the rugged stony bottom, when a loud voice called on them to halt, and several rifle-barrels, with greasy, "cabbage-tree hats" behind them, were levelled from the crags and boulders around.

"Mount! mount, Hubert! Never mind the rocky road. Better to break our necks that way than fall into the hands of these ruffians again. They are the bushrangers, undoubtedly."

The two young men vaulted into the saddles, and attempted to dash over the rough and broken ground; but before they had gone a couple of yards, a rope, that had been stretched across the pass, was suddenly drawn taut, and, running full tilt into it, they were both sent flying over their handles.

Norman in falling struck his head rather badly, and was rendered unconscious, but Hubert was little the worse for the spill.

With loud mocking laughter at the mishap, and the discomfiture of the cyclists, the eight desperadoes now came forth from their ambush; but Hubert pluckily scrambled to his feet, and, snatching up the spear, stood over his prostrate chum, prepared to defend his life and his own.

"Drop that toothpick!" cried Jerry Logan. "Quick! Do you hear? Children like you shouldn't play with edged tools. Drop it, I tell 'ee!"

Norman's reply was to make a fierce thrust at the heart of the nearest ruffian, which would assuredly have ended the fellow's life there and then, had he not stepped back so quickly as to slip upon some stones, and fall flat upon his back.

With a furious oath, two others of the gang immediately struck Norman savagely over the head and shoulders with their rifle-butts, felling him also in a bleeding and insensible condition over the body of his chum.

## CHAPTER VI.

### HANGED BY THE NECK—A MIRACULOUS PRESERVATION—CHASED BY A WHIPSNAKE.

Jerry Logan bent over the prostrate forms with a look of ferocious exultation.

"The cussed young varmint!" he growled. "We'll teach 'em to foller us. They escaped us afore, but I'll take jolly good care they'll not this time. Bring 'em along, boys, and their blessid bicycles also. There are some trees on the top of the hill, and we'll string the pair on 'em up without more ado."

Several of the bushrangers seized our senseless heroes and carried them up the rocky path; the others followed, wheeling the bicycles along.

They soon reached the clump of trees mentioned by their leader, and, producing a couple of ropes, the ruffians ran a noose on the end of each, and threw the free ends over the projecting limbs of two of the trees.

"Hold on, boys," cried Jerry. "We must first waken these young gentlemen up to a sense of their own importance. Here, you there, look up; open your eyes!" And the brutal

"DARK DEEDS," An Enthralling Drama, appears in this week's "MARVEL," &c., now on sale.



miscreant began to kick Norman Harcourt's senseless body with his heavy boots, while another of the gang in like manner attempted to recall Hubert to life.

The rough treatment had the required effect, and presently both the chums opened their eyes, and looked up into the brutal, jeering faces bending over them in a dazed, bewildered way.

"So you have come round! That's all right. Now, my hearties, stand up and put the nooses round their necks. Young gentlemen, ye were a cussed pair of fules not to know when you were best off. Ye shed not have followed us. We're dangerous, we are. Did ye think ye could get back the gold? Ha, ha!"

Norman and Hubert were placed under the improvised gallows, the nooses placed around their necks, and they stood face to face with death.

Still, neither of them flinched. They were true British grit, and they scorned to show the white feather, or afford their cowardly murderers the slightest chance of exulting.

"Pull away, boys!" cried Jerry. "Let the young fules dance their merry jig."

The ropes tightened around our heroes' throats, and their feet swung clear of the ground. They were choking, strangling; earth, sky, and the mocking, jeering faces round them blended into one horrid, blood-red mist; their brains throbbled, and a noise like thunder rang in their ears.

"That settles their hash!" said Jerry Logan, with a jeering laugh. "Let go the ropes now, boys. It won't do to leave 'em hangin', 'cause there's no tellin' how things might turn out. Hid in the bushes, the bodies are not unlikely to be found until the dingoes and birds have gnawed the flesh off their bones, and then there will be no sayin' how they met their deaths."

"True for ye, cap'n. You've yer 'ead screwed on right, blow me! But wot 'ull we do with their machines?"

"Oh, leave 'em beside 'em, and then they may be thought to have met their deaths from starvation, or maybe that they fought and killed one another. Be the hokey, that's a good idea! We'll put a knife or two in their hands and cut their bonds so as to make it look more real like."

The suggestion of the chief was carried out, and then, laughing at what they thought was a grand joke, the gang mounted their horses, and rode quickly from the scene.

And the two friends lay where they had been ruthlessly tossed atop of one another, their faces purple, and the features distorted.

Minutes passed, and presently there came rolling up from windward thick, louring clouds, which spread and spread until the earth became almost as dark as night.

Then suddenly from out the inky darkness overhead leapt a lurid jag of lightning, and a deafening clap of thunder immediately followed.

The rain descended in perfect torrents, pelting down upon the faces and forms of the two cyclists.

One of the latter at length moved. There was life, then, after all in at least one of the supposed hanged men.

Again the form moved, and Norman, for it was he, at length opened his eyes once more upon this world.

He sat up, his brain dizzy, and his ideas confused; but the drenching storm speedily restored perfect consciousness, and his eyes fell upon Hubert.

"Good Heaven!" he muttered, "have the wretches done for my dear old chum as they nearly did for me?"

He bent anxiously over Hubert, and, placing his hand over the latter's heart, was rejoiced to find that it still beat, though faintly.

The bushrangers had been too precipitate. They had not let their victims hang long enough to extinguish the vital spark; indeed, our friends had been simply hauled up—held aloft for perhaps a couple of seconds, and then let fall.

Jerry Logan and his associates were not sufficiently acquainted with the rudiments of the hangman's trade to know that a man in the vigour and strength of his manhood is only put to death in this way by being left hanging for some minutes, not seconds.

It is a well-known fact that many men hanged in haste by the vigilantes and lynching gangs of the American frontier have been cut down in time for their lives to be saved.

Norman Harcourt no sooner found that his beloved comrade still lived, than he exerted himself to the utmost to restore him to animation, and his efforts were finally rewarded.

The purple-look hue faded from Hubert's face; the features relaxed into their ordinary contour, and he breathed more regularly. It was long, though, before he opened his eyes or could articulate distinctly.

Then the two chums returned silent and heartfelt thanks to that All-Powerful One who had so miraculously saved them from death.

The storm passed away almost as suddenly as it had arisen, but our friends were, by this time, drenched to the skin,

though they had no reason to complain, seeing, that in great measure, the rain had helped to restore them to consciousness.

They were overjoyed to find their bicycles uninjured, except by the beating of the rain, and almost as much by the sight of the knives laid beside them.

The first thing they now did was to seek out a cave among the rocks, and, finding one to their satisfaction, they first lit a fire with their matches, which Norman carried in a water-proof case inside his jumper, and dried their clothes.

The machines, too, they cleaned and completely overhauled, to their delight finding these little the worse for all the rough usage they had lately met with.

One of the handle-bars of Hubert's machine was a bit bent, and the front wheel was a bit shaky, while in Norman's some of the bearings were loose.

But, fortunately, they had all their bicycle tools still, and were able to tighten up everything once more. They finally lay down to sleep in the cave, and did not wake till nearly noon on the following day.

A good breakfast was made from the remains of the kangaroo, washed down by draughts of clear, cold water. During the meal they decided to follow on the track of the bushrangers once more, though this time with more caution.

Shrewdly surmising that the thieves would make for Coolgardie with their ill-gotten riches, it was the intention of the young men to enter the settlement immediately after, and denounce the ruffians.

They were about to rise and continue their journey, therefore, when a loud hiss startled them, and, turning, they beheld a huge rock-snake issuing from the inner depths of the cave. Its great, ugly head was erect, and swaying slowly from side to side, while its emerald eyes gleamed malignantly in the semi-darkness.

It was making straight for Hubert, and ere Norman could catch up the cudgel, it had coiled itself round his chum's body, and drew back its head to strike its envenomed fangs deep into its helpless victim's throat.

There was not a moment to lose if Norman wished to save his chum's life.

Swinging the cudgel high into the air, he brought it down with all the strength his arm was capable of upon the hideous creature's skull.

It instantly dropped to the ground as if stunned, and, ere it could recover, Norman threw down the cudgel, whipped forth the knife the bushrangers had left beside him, and, with one quick slash, almost severed its head from its body.

The powerful coils relaxed, the reptile beat the ground helplessly with its tail, and then lay still in death.

Norman helped his friend to rise; but it was some time before the latter could recover from the terrible shock he had sustained sufficiently to mount his bicycle.

Then the pair left the cave, and, after some little search, picked up the trail of the bushrangers, and once more started in pursuit.

The day was not so hot as the previous one, but the sun was sufficiently strong to dry the ground after the heavy rain of the night before.

They had half expected the trail of the bushrangers to be obliterated by the storm, but instead the hoof-marks were plainly visible once they debouched on to the plain, and it was evident the desperadoes had taken shelter also among the rocks, and then pushed on over the wet soaked ground.

From this fact the cyclists gathered the fellows could not be far ahead of them, and, therefore, they decided to take things coolly, knowing well it would be comparatively easy for them at any time to run down the gang on their fleet wheels.

They were bowling easily along, discussing ways and means by which they might get even with the robbers, and recover the gold, when, chancing to look behind, Hubert was almost petrified with horror to behold what looked like a great hoop or wheel trundling rapidly after them.

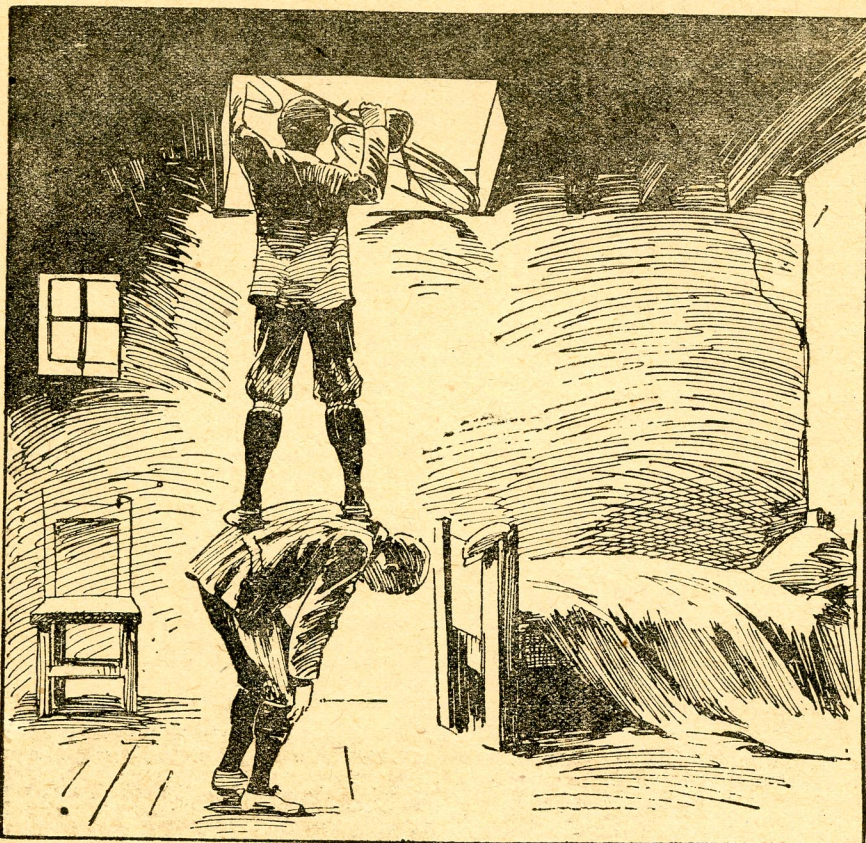
"Gracious heavens, look behind, Norman!" he cried in terrified tones. "What is it?"

Norman glanced back, and instantly an alarmed expression crossed his face.

"Ride, ride for your life, Hubert!" he cried. "It is a hoop or whap snake,\* I believe, though I never saw one before."

Hubert needed no such admonition to put on greater speed. The sight of the uncanny monster, with its lithe, slimy body, thin as a whip-lash almost, whence its name, coiled round in the shape of a hoop or wheel bowling along after them was so decidedly horrible to the imagination, uncanny even, that

\* The whipsnake is amongst the most venomous of reptiles. A man has been known to die within a single minute after a bite from one, all help proving unavailing. The creature is also known by the name of the hoopsnake, from its peculiar habit of taking its tail in its mouth, and rolling along like a hoop. It generally does this downhill and towards water.—J. G. R.



As the pair hoisted their cycles through the trapdoor, they could hear the desperadoes battering at the door.

Hubert was almost overcome with superstitious awe, and pedalled away at a scorching pace. But the snake, as though determined to overtake its human foes, appeared to put on greater speed still, and rolled on after them at astounding speed.

"Is it venomous, Norman?" asked Hubert anxiously, as he bent low over his handle-bar, and pedalled away as rapidly as ever he had done, even when running before the bush-fire. "It seems to be coming nearer. Do you think it will overtake us? The very sight of it gives me the creeps."

"I really don't know whether it is venomous or not," answered his companion with a backward glance at the strange object behind them, "but I don't think it is indigenous to Australia. It may have escaped from some menagerie. Ah! it is giving up the chase."

"Thank goodness for that!" responded Hubert fervently, as he looked back and saw the snake had drawn aside from the track. "You don't know how the sight of it trundling after us affected me. I could almost have swooned with horror when I saw it first."

"I have heard of whipsnakes," said Norman, "but it is the first time I ever met with one of the species."

"I hope it will be my last as well as my first," replied his chum. "I must admit it gave me a proper turn."

## CHAPTER VII.

### A FEARFUL SPECTRE—NORMAN KILLS THE STRANGE OCCUPANT OF THE CAVE—THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED—SCORCHING THROUGH AN ABORIGINAL VILLAGE.

After their late curious experience, the chums continued their way for the next couple of hours without meeting with any further mishap than Norman puncturing his tyre.

While they were trying to find the puncture, and to remedy it as well as they could, they were overtaken by another heavy rainstorm. They pushed on through the drenching shower towards a range of hills on the horizon, and were drenched to the skin long before they reached the rocks, and found a cave, in which they could take shelter.

Night came on as they crouched shivering in the cave; but the storm continued with unabated fury, the rain descending

in sheets, and the lightning flashing continuously. They found the cavern ran back some distance into the rocks, and, searching about, they at last found sufficient dry twigs and brushwood to make a fire, and soon they had a very genial blaze lighting up the dark recesses.

Stripping off their saturated garments, they were proceeding to dry them at the fire, when all at once from the interior of the cavern came a loud, blood-curdling scream, and a spear whizzed past, and shattered itself upon the rock floor beside them.

Both instantly leapt to their feet, and turned to see an awe-inspiring sight.

A wild-looking figure—the figure of a black man—stood before them, his face and body apparently emitting a kind of brilliant light. The features were distorted with rage, and an unnatural, insane fire shone from the eyes.

The weird figure brandished an aboriginal spear, and was on the point of hurling it at Hubert, who, after his late experience with the whipsnake, seemed overcome with superstitious awe and horror, and fairly covered before it.

Another minute, and the spear would have flashed through his heart, for the savage, or spectre, whatever it was, was taking careful aim. But Norman, throwing off the feeling of awe and superstitious terror, which had also at first fastened upon him at the uncanny vision, uttered a loud cry, and, catching up the spear-blade that lay at his feet, hurled it straight at the unknown.

The aim was true; the spear-head penetrated the luminous stranger's chest, and, with a shrill, unearthly scream, he dropped to the ground, blood gushing from the wound.

Instantly snatching up a brand from the fire, Norman ran towards the fallen man, and to his horror found him writhing in horrible convulsions, while his face and body was fast assuming a purple hue. Even as Norman bent over him, he uttered a more appalling shriek than ever, blood and foam commingled flowed from his mouth and nostrils, and then his body relaxed in the calmness of death.

Bending over him, Norman perceived that he was an aborigine, and that his body was painted all over with some luminous pigment, which thus caused it to shine with such remarkable and unnatural brilliancy in the dark depths of the cavern.

"It is a good thing that none of these spears struck us, Hubert," remarked Norman, who was attentively examining the slain man. "It strikes me they are poisoned. See that peculiar-looking liquid on the tip of the blades, and look at the unnatural hue the body has turned. By Jove, old man, we have both had a narrow escape!"

"And you have saved my life once more, Norman," said Hubert, with deep gratitude. "Had it not been for your promptitude, I would now be a corpse. How can I ever repay you for all you have done for me?"

"By saying no more about it, old fellow. Do you know, I am inclined to believe this poor wretch was insane, and lived quite alone here; but come, we will explore the cave, and see how far into the mountain it runs."

They armed themselves with their old spear, and the cudgel, for now that they believed the dead man's weapons were poisoned, they would not touch them, and, with Norman lighting the way with his torch, they proceeded into the inner recesses of the cavern.

But, to their surprise, they found that the cave did not run back so very far after all, merely turning a corner, and coming to an abrupt stop.

In this small chamber or recess round the turn the two found traces of the mad black man's occupation in scraps of half eaten meat, a few rude weapons, and a litter of leaves and brushwood.

Strangest thing of all, though, there was a small canvas bag in one corner, and when Norman opened it, he found it full of various luminous pigments, and the mystery of their late

owner's extraordinary appearance was explained. Probably enough he had stolen the paints from some white man.

Scarcely knowing what he was doing, Hubert took up the bag of paints when they were leaving the recess.

They returned to the outer cavern, and, having built up a small barricade of rocks across the mouth to hide the light of their fire from the eyes of either savages or white desperadoes, they threw themselves down by the snug blaze, and chatted and listened alternately to the splash of the rain, and the rolling of the thunder outside, until at length their eyelids closed, and they fell asleep.

When they woke next morning the rain had ceased, and they were able to continue their way, though they were obliged to wheel their machines on account of the muddy nature of the ground until nearly midday, by which time the scorching sun had dried up the rain of the previous night pretty much.

They had now, of course, lost all trace of the bushrangers, for the heavy rainstorm had washed away the hoofmarks, and so the pair decided to ride on straight to Coolgardie, trusting to reach it before the outlaws on their flying wheels. Jerry Logan and his vile associates could not possibly dream that they had again escaped death, and would, therefore, have no hesitation in riding into the settlement, and representing themselves as successful prospectors. If the young fellows could get there before the ruffians, they could tell the settlers their tale, and then Jerry and his friends would find a warm welcome awaiting them.

They had pushed their bicycles up a pretty steep rise, and were about to spring into their saddles, and ride down the incline on the other side, when they suddenly beheld a large encampment of blacks at the foot of the hill.

"We must turn back," said Norman. "Quick! I don't think they have seen us."

But, even as he spoke, a couple of spears whizzed perilously close to their heads, and about a score of black fellows, who had been lying in hiding in a dense belt of scrub near, sprang out of their ambush, and rushed towards them.

Retreat was cut off, and, with a cry to Hubert to follow, Norman jumped into his saddle, and started down the hill towards the encampment at breakneck speed.

His comrade, seeing his intention, was after him in a moment, and the two tore down the incline in full career, bearing straight for the camp of bush-huts.

The disappointed blacks in the rear were quickly left behind, and they yelled their loudest to alarm their friends in the camp.

But the sight of those two unnatural-looking objects rushing down upon them with such frightful rapidity startled the occupants of the encampment, and shrill cries of horror and superstitious fear arose from it, and women and children could be seen by the cyclists running about in panic.

Evidently the majority of the men were absent, either on a hunting or harrying expedition, and the few that remained appeared to share in the terror of the women and children.

Straight as a die did the two machines, now almost abreast, make for the aborigines' village, and presently they were careering through one of its narrow and straggling streets.

But steering cleverly, Norman and Hubert succeeded in avoiding striking any of the little huts, or gunyahs, as they are called, and, still keeping up their reckless, headlong pace, were through the village and out once more upon the plain in no time.

The blacks seemed to recover from their panic once the cyclists had swept past, and followed in hot pursuit, sending volleys of arrows and spears after them; but, bending low over their handles, and scorching away, our friends soon put all pursuit out of the question.

The friends pushed on rapidly now for Coolgardie, only halting to snatch a hasty meal about midday.

They were enjoying a refreshing pipeful each to aid the process of digestion in the shade of a small grove of trees, when all at once Hubert uttered a startled exclamation, and pointed away across the plain.

Norman looked, and beheld several horsemen riding leisurely along. He counted eight of them, the number of the gang of bushrangers under Jerry Logan, and he felt sure they were the very rogues.

Could the desperadoes be following their track? No, he thought not, for they were crossing the plain in a parallel line, and too far away to his thinking. Probably the bushrangers had taken a roundabout way, and thus allowed the cyclists to get ahead of them.

"What shall we do?" asked Hubert. "Shall we mount, and ride off?"

"No," answered his comrade thoughtfully. "I don't think they can be aware of our proximity, or, indeed, of our being still in the land of the living. They seem too far away to be possibly following our trail, though certainly they might be playing off a ruse. Still, I don't think so. We will wait here, and watch developments. At the worst, we can make a dash for it, and our 'bikes' can easily outstrip their mounts."

"But what about their rifles?"

"Oh, they are not the best of shots, and once on our 'bikes,' they would have to be pretty quick to hit either of us."

The bushrangers rode on across the plain, and soon it was quite obvious they were perfectly unaware of the presence of their foes, for they continued their way towards Coolgardie.

"I will tell you what, Hubert," said Norman. "We will follow close behind them, and I have an idea we can put into practice when they camp for the night. By Jove! yes, it is a glorious idea! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Norman burst out into a ringing laugh at his own



The ghosts of the two cyclists they believed they had so cruelly murdered dashed towards them.

thoughts, and, leaping up, began to dance about, and smack his right knee as though he had gone crazy.

"Whatever is the matter with you, Norman? Have you gone clean daft, man?" inquired his chum, surprised beyond measure at these antics. "Why you might have recovered the treasure the way you are going on!"

"That is just it, Hubert, my boy. I see a grand way to recovering the stolen gold."

"Then you needn't keep it to yourself, and leave me out in the cold, you selfish fellow. I scent some sport. Tell me, what is the game?"

Norman stopped his dancing, and, looking at his chum, said:

"Look here, old fellow. You remember the luminous paints we found in the cave, and which we luckily have brought along with us? I have thought of our painting ourselves, and our 'bikes' all over with the stuff, and riding into the bushrangers' camp in the dead of night."

"What nonsense are you talking now?"

"I mean it seriously, Hubert. Don't you remember how terribly scared both of us were when we first saw that old madman in the cave, from the unnatural appearance the luminous paint gave him. Now, the bushrangers believe us both to be dead—hanged. And if we ride down upon them in the night with our bodies and machines painted all over with this luminous pigment, why we ought to create a wholesale panic."

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! I see your plan now. It is excellent certainly, and most ingenious. But hold on a bit. I fail to see how you hope to recover all the gold by its means. They will not run and leave their ill-gotten spoil behind. I've no doubt each man has his share tightly packed in his belt."

"Ah, I never thought of that. Still, wait, I don't see why it should not work after all. We may be able to secure some of their arms, a couple of rifles or so, and then the fellows may be so badly scared, that if we act the rôle of spectres properly we may induce them in their superstitious terror to hand over the treasure. Anyhow, we will try the trick. It can do no harm that I can see, even if it fails."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BUSHRANGERS RECEIVE A WHOLESOME SCARE—JERRY LOGAN "BAILED UP"—PART OF THE GOLD RECOVERED—THE TRAPPERS TRAPPED.

The two cyclists waited until the outlaws had disappeared over a rise, and then, wheeling their bicycles out of the thicket, they mounted and pedalled slowly after them.

They took the greatest precaution not to show themselves on the plain, until the men they were following were fading from sight on the horizon.

In this way the chase was maintained until darkness began to creep over the scene, and now, taking advantage of the fast gathering shadows, the pair rode more quickly and easily caught up with the unconscious fugitives.

The bushrangers soon halted to bivouac for the night, and now had come our friends' time for putting into effect their remarkable and novel scheme.

Withdrawing into a dense clump of scrub within sight of the outlaws' camp-fire, they got out the bag of luminous pigments, and proceeded to paint one another's faces, clothes, and bicycles all over. The stuff they found would wash off quite easily by the application of some specially prepared oil, also found in a small can inside the bag.

When they had completed their strange toilets, they certainly presented a startling, not to say weird, appearance, for their faces and machines shone again in the darkness with greater brilliancy than would have been caused by phosphorus.

Each felt inclined to laugh heartily at the phantom the other made; but, choking down their risible faculties, they picked up the spear and cudgel, which they still retained, and wheeled their bicycles through the scrub till they were close to the bivouac of the outlaws.

Then, stepping forth into the open, they sprang into the saddles, and, without a single cry or utterance of any kind, they glided down upon the camp.

The bushrangers were seated in a group around the fire, all laughing and joking, when suddenly one of their number caught sight of the two demoniacal-looking cyclists bearing down upon them.

The fellow uttered a horrified yell, and leaped to his feet; and, looking up, the others, too, beheld the awful phantoms—the ghosts of the two cyclists they had so brutally murdered, as they imagined.

A wild scramble ensued, and the panic-stricken wretches, with cries of horror and superstitious fear, ran like madmen in every direction.

Norman had singled out Jerry Logan, and Hubert, another of the gang, and, when the band scattered and fled, both of them followed their respective men.

Jerry Logan no sooner saw that the ghost was after him in particular, than, with yells and screams of childish terror, he ran straight on, until, tripping over a root, he measured his length on the ground, where he lay sprawling, spread-eagle fashion, and shrieking for mercy.

Instantly, Norman leaped off the machine, and, bending over the guilty and craven scoundrel, quickly deprived him of his revolver and knife; then, in sepulchral tones, ordered him to deliver up all his ill-gotten gold.

Gravelling upon the ground, in the most abject fear, Jerry unbuckled his belt and handed it to the ghost, who seized it in a very substantial hand, and proceeded to secure it round its body.

"Have you any more of the gold, you ruffian?" demanded Norman.

"No; oh, no! I have given you all my share! Spare me! Oh, spare me!"

Without replying, Norman mounted his ghost-like machine again, and rode back to the camp, where he found Hubert confronting another of the gang, "bailing him up" with his own revolvers.

At sight of his chum, Hubert told the fellow to be gone; and, without a word, the bushranger, who even yet did not appear to grasp the fact that he was opposed to real flesh and blood, and not beings of another world, rushed off after his comrades.

"The plan has worked beautifully, Norman!" exclaimed Hubert. "That fellow bailed up his share of the gold without a show of fight."

"The same with Jerry Logan. Ha! some of the rogues have left their rifles behind them in their hurry. Quick, take one, and we may entrap the rest of the gang. We may secure the whole of the booty if we are sharp!"

But though they searched all round the camp, they could not find any more of the ruffians, and it was likely enough that, utterly panic-stricken, the miscreants would continue running into the night until they nearly dropped, to escape the pursuit of the ghosts.

It would not be altogether safe to stay by the fire the thieves had built, because some of these had their rifles with them, and all except the two who had been "bailed up" would have revolvers. It would be too easy for a gang of eight men, supposing the fugitives took heart of grace and returned to the camp, to pick off two when outlined against the blaze.

So our friends determined to quit the camp, and return once more into the thicket, whence, by the light of the camp-fire they could see if any of the bushrangers returned. If any did, they might be able to "stick them up," and recover more of the treasure.

The time passed slowly as they lay in hiding, and still the camp remained solitary, and the fire began to burn low.

At last, however, the bushes at one side of the little glade parted, and four of the bushrangers crept into the open, looking about them still somewhat fearfully, and ready at the first alarm to retreat into the thicket again.

The cyclists waited first to see if any others would follow, but evidently the quartette were alone, and our heroes' hearts beat fast, as, by the dull glow of the dying embers, they saw that the four included neither Jerry Logan nor the other whom Hubert had "bailed up."

They might succeed in recovering more of the treasure; though if they wished to do so, they had better make the attempt at once, or the others of the gang might return, when they would have too many to deal with.

Whispering to Hubert to sling his rifle over his back and to draw the two revolvers he had captured, Norman did the like himself.

Then the pair of them stepped softly out of the thicket into the circle of light cast by the fire, which the ruffians were engaged in making up again.

"Hands up, the four of you!" cried Norman; and, horrified and amazed, the startled bushrangers sprang up and seemed inclined again to take to their heels, at sight of the beings they had every reason to believe were not of this world.

The luminous paint, added to our cyclists' unnatural and weird appearance, increased the superstitious terror of the desperadoes.

"Stand where you are!" continued Norman, levelling his brace of revolvers in such a way that no man could know but that it was aimed at him. "If one of you attempt to run, I will shoot him down without mercy. Now, Hubert, do you quietly go round to each man and oblige him to give up all the gold he has stolen."

The four men saw they had flesh and blood after all to deal with, and one of them asked:

"Say, mister, are you really human after all? If so, how

\*The Australian expression for being made "stand and deliver."

in thunder did you escape death, when we hanged you, certain sure?"

Norman ignored the query, and Hubert, holding one of his revolvers in readiness for any treachery, stepped up to the first man and ordered him to "bail up." The fellow trembled like an aspen leaf as he obeyed the mandate.

Hubert received the belt into one of their empty water-bags, and then, passing to the next man, made him "bail up" in like manner, and so on to the fourth man.

Hubert had relieved all four ruffians of their money-belts, and was proceeding to despoil them also of their weapons, so that he and his chum might be able to retire to their bicycles in safety, when suddenly a bullet hummed within an ace of Norman's head, even tearing away a lock of his hair.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A BOLD BREAK FOR FREEDOM AND LIFE—NORMAN WOUNDED—THE BLOODHOUND.

They were trapped, fairly trapped it seemed, but Norman Harcourt was determined not to yield with life.

He knew well the mercy they had to expect from these blood-stained wretches, especially now when enraged at their own discomfiture and fright.

"Ha, my young bucks!" called out the voice of Jerry Logan: "It is now your turn to bail up. Drop them shootin'-irons at onst, or we'll drill holes through ye! Yer'll go try and play the ghost ag'in, will yer? Drop them pistols, I say, drop them!"

Norman, instead of obeying, let drive both weapons at random in the direction of the rifle-barrels, and a cry of pain answered the shots, and told that one, at least, had taken effect.

Instantly two other rifle-shots rang out, and Norman staggered, with blood streaming from a bullet-wound in his left arm, just above the elbow.

Still, he was not seriously hurt, and, letting fly another couple of shots into the scrub, he shouted to Hubert to run to their machines.

But, as he turned to fly himself, he was horrified to see Hubert knocked down by the four bushrangers whom they had held up, and who, taking courage at the arrival of their associates, had sprung upon him.

Without a word, Norman bounded to his friend's assistance; his pistol cracked once more, and two of the desperadoes fell back wounded. The other two drew back also, and Hubert, who was not very much hurt, scrambled to his feet, and together the pair rushed towards that part of the thicket where they had left their bikes.

A fusillade of pistol and rifle shots followed them, and again Norman felt a stinging sensation in the right shoulder.

But the baffled miscreants fired in too much haste, and most of the bullets flew wide.

Plunging into the bush, the pair were quickly hidden from the sight of the infuriated desperadoes, who, however, followed fast upon their track, and sent bullets whistling through the bushes in and around them.

At last their friends reached their bicycles, and, hastily catching these up, they hurried along as quickly as the entangling bush would permit.

On, on, they went, until at last, Norman, who had lost a considerable quantity of blood, began to feel weak and faint. They were about to halt, when suddenly the deep bay of a dog was borne faintly to their ears through the stillness of the night.

"Ha!" exclaimed Hubert, joyfully, "we must be near a station (farm). Bear up a little longer, Norman, old fellow, and you will soon be safe and snug in warm quarters."

They hurried along in the dark, and the baying of a large dog became more and more distinct, until at length they could see a light shining ahead, and they ran, or rather stumbled, along over the broken ground towards it.

It proved to be a mere shepherd's humpie, or hut, built of slabs and bark, and not the large homestead they had fondly hoped.

Advancing up to the door of the hut, Hubert knocked loudly upon it, whereupon the baying of the dog was increased greatly, and it could be heard tearing at its chain in the little yard behind the shanty, as though it longed to get at the nocturnal visitors.

Hubert had to knock several times before the door was at length cautiously opened, and a stout, thick-set man appeared, holding a lantern aloft, so that the light might fall upon the faces of the visitors.

He started back at sight of them, and asked suspiciously:

"Who are ye? Where do ye come from?"

"We are from Wallaroo," answered Hubert, for Norman was by this scarcely able to stand much less speak. "We have been attacked by bushrangers, and my friend is badly wounded."

"How do I know that you yourselves are ~~not~~ bushrangers?" inquired the man, somewhat rudely.

"Do we look like such ruffians?" retorted Hubert. "We are cyclists engaged in carrying mails to Coolgardie. See, here are our machines!"

The man stared at sight of the bicycles, and, after a few minutes' hesitation, threw open the door, and told them to come in.

Norman could just stagger across the threshold and fall into the nearest chair. His chum was at once beside him; and the shepherd also now seemed eager to lend what assistance he could.

Possessing some rough idea of surgery, Hubert proceeded to probe the bullets in his friend's arm and shoulders, and at length succeeded in finding and removing them. Then he bound up the wound tenderly, and, with the shepherd's aid, carried Norman into an inner room, and laid him down upon a bed. The wounded man at once fell off into a sound sleep.

Returning to the outer room, Hubert related for the man's benefit their adventures since leaving Wallaroo, and the listener appeared greatly interested, and inspected the two bicycles with evident curiosity. He told the young cyclist he had never seen any other machines than the old ordinary when he was in the settlements. The safety, with all its great improvements, was certainly a revelation and eye-opener to him.

The owner of the hut remained in the other and outer room.

Lest the baying of the dog might also attract the bushrangers to the hut, the man went out to the back and brought the animal in, and Hubert was astonished to find that it was a huge Cuban bloodhound, and one of the fiercest of its kind.

At sight of Hubert, it strained and fugged at its chain in the effort to get at him, and its owner found it all he could do to restrain the animal's ferocity, and hold it back. He had finally to chain it to an iron staple in the wall; and even then the savage brute kept bounding about, and leaping out to the full extent of its chain, growling ominously, and baying continually, despite its master's orders to keep quiet.

As the only means of quietening the brute at last, Hubert was obliged to retire into the room where his friend lay; and, fortunately for himself and his chum, as things turned out, he decided to give the two "bikes" a complete overhauling, and so took them into the room with him.

Hubert took some time over his inspection, examining the tyres for punctures, blowing them up, and shaking the various parts to learn if any were loose.

At last, having completed his examination to his satisfaction, he lay down beside his chum on the bed, and soon dropped off into a quiet and restful sleep, the first he had had on a proper bed since leaving Wallaroo.

How long he had slept he could not have said; but he was suddenly awakened by the sound of whispering in the next room.

As his senses threw off the dulness of sleep, he wondered who on earth could be the shepherd's companion, or rather companions, for there seemed several voices, all speaking in low and subdued tones.

All at once Hubert started up in wild excitement.

Surely he recognised those harsh, mocking tones? They could only belong to one individual, and that one the man they had most to fear, Jerry Logan.

The head of the bed on which Hubert was lying was placed against the thin partition which separated the two rooms of the hut, and the alarmed listener distinctly heard the ruffian say:

"Well, boys, we have the birds trapped as neat as could be this time. We need be in no particular hurry to lay hands on 'em, for they are safe as ninepence. But say, Tom, you had better have a peep inside to make sure they are still asleep, and then, when we have satisfied the inner man, we will have some fun with those young chaps. They are a sight too cheeky, and want takin' down a bit."

Some one came towards the door of the room, and instantly Hubert lay down again, and got up a good imitation of a snore. The fellow was evidently satisfied with this, for he closed the door again, and went back to his companions.

A chink of light penetrated through a crack in the partition, and Hubert put his eye to this, and had a full view of the room beyond.

It was as he thought.

Jerry Logan and his seven vile associates were sitting around a table, which was spread with the best fare the hut afforded.

But what surprised Hubert most was, to see the shepherd, the man whom he had every reason to believe was their friend, sitting at the table with the others, and hobnobbing freely with them.

The fellow was, doubtless, in league with the bushrangers, if not one himself, as is frequently the case with shepherds and stockriders living in solitary, out-of-the-way parts of the bush.

Hubert no sooner took in the situation, than he at once saw their only hope lay in instant and immediate flight, and he

glanced hastily round the dark room to see was there any egress except by the door.

There was a window, but it was too small to permit of their lifting their bicycles through it, and involuntarily his eye travelled to the rafters above.

Hurrah! He could distinctly trace the outline of a great, double-leaved trapdoor in the bright moonlight, which now flooded the room.

Bending over Norman, he shook him gently, and at length succeeded in rousing him.

"Up! up! Quick! quick! Norman!" he whispered. "The shepherd has betrayed us. We must get out of here at once. Jerry Logan and the whole gang are in the next room."

Norman felt considerably refreshed even after the short spell of rest he had had, and, rising from the bed, he asked, in the same cautious tones the other had used:

"What are we to do? We cannot escape by that window."

"There is a large trapdoor in the roof. Get on my shoulders, old fellow—I am the stronger now, you know—and see if it is open."

Despite his weakness, Norman mounted the shoulders of his friend with considerable agility, and after a few moments of keen suspense for the man beneath him, he whispered:

"It is all right; the trap is unfastened, and I can swing it up easily. It is a wide, double-leaved one, and the bicycles will go through easily."

"That is the style! Now hold on tightly a minute; I am going to reach over to the 'bikes,' and lift them up to you. So, steady! Here is your own."

Hubert lifted up the machine as high as he could without altering his position; and, stooping down, Norman took it in one hand, and, raising it till he once more stood erect and was able to use both his hands, put it through the opening and softly laid it upon the roof outside.

The second "bike" was got up in like manner, and then Norman swung himself up lightly.

Despite the care he exercised, however, he could not help making some noise, and he dislodged one of the bicycles, which went scraping and bumping down the slanting roof with a great clatter, till it brought up in the gutter.

Hubert, standing underneath the trap, waiting for his friend to lower him his coat, by which to draw him up, heard the clatter, and knew it could not fail to reach the bushrangers' ears also, and alarm them.

He had noticed a couple of bolts on the door, and, quickly running to it, as he heard them in the next room upsetting chairs, and trampling in their haste to learn the cause of the noise, he shot the bolts. He was not a moment too soon, for the next he heard them trying the handle.

When the ruffians found it resisted their efforts, they hurled themselves upon it in a body, and strove to burst it in.

The door was frail, and Hubert knew it could not stand for long before nine strong men. But now he heard Norman calling to him, and saw that his chum was holding a coat down to him.

Taking hold of the garment, and aiding his own ascent as well as he could by digging his toes between the planking of the wall, he was drawn up, until at last he could clutch the frame of the trap with his hands.

As he was drawing himself through the opening the door gave way with a crash, and the bushrangers burst into the room, cursing and yelling.

Hubert was not yet through the aperture, and, mad with rage, Jerry Logan and several others fired hastily at his legs, as those members dangled over their heads, while others rushed forward to try and seize him by the ankles.

But Norman, exerting all his strength, whisked his friend upwards out of their reach, and he was able to scramble out on to the roof unhurt, but followed through the trap by a perfect hail of bullets.

"Quick—quick! now to the ground!" cried Norman.

And, seizing their bikes in their left hands, they slid down the slant and dropped lightly on to the ground outside.

As they did so three of the bushrangers came rushing out of the hut, and let fly a couple of shots each at them as they were picking up their machines from the ground.

But the light of the moon, no matter how bright, is always deceptive, and the shots flew wide. And, running beside his machine, ere he leapt into the saddle, Norman fired his revolver in return, and was gratified to see one of the ruffians fall with a cry of mortal agony.

The next minute our friends were in the saddle, and were racing away from their baffled foes across the moonlit ground.

All at once however, Hubert uttered a cry of horror, and pointed ahead.

Norman also looked, and beheld a great black band lying apparently right across their path.

It was the yawning mouth of a gully, fully twenty feet wide, and it cut the plain like a knife, running as far as the eye could reach in a zigzag course both ways.

They had been bearing straight down upon it, and were

seemingly caught as in a trap, for, looking back, they could now see the whole gang of bushrangers galloping after them, and spreading out in a long line, as before.

The horseman rapidly closed round them, forming a wide half-moon.

Pedalling away, our friends realised their only hope of escape lay in getting outside the "surround." But vain their efforts. A couple of the bushrangers reached the brink of the precipice ahead of them, and, with loud shouts of triumph, now rode towards them with levelled rifles.

All was apparently lost, unless they could overcome the two ruffians before them; and this seemed out of the question, for, while they would be unable to control their bicycles and yet shoot with their rifles, the horsemen could keep up a regular fusillade without drawing rein.

In their dire extremity, Norman cast a quick glance up the gully, and his heart gave a great bound as he beheld, between them and the two desperadoes, a single plank spanning the gulf.

It was evidently part of a bridge that had originally been thrown across at this point.

With a cry to Hubert to follow him, he rode forward, and, reaching the spot, found that the plank was only about a foot in width, and old and rotting besides.

Still, it seemed to offer the only chance of escape; and, checking the momentary dread that rose in his breast that it might crack under his weight, he boldly put his machine on it and rode on to its narrow width.

Hubert, too, hesitated to trust himself to so frail and treacherous a bridge; but, determined to follow his comrade to death, if need be, he plucked up courage and followed.

The plank creaked and groaned and shook under them, almost bouncing them both off at times, machines and all, into the awful gulf below.

But, keeping their eyes steadily fixed upon the opposite side, neither of them ventured to look down, and the narrow rims of their wheels kept pretty much in the middle of the plank.

The bushrangers seemed at first awed into positive inaction by the daring attempt; but as our friends presently began to draw near the opposite bank they saw the possibility of the fugitives escaping them, after all, and opened a sharp fire upon the pair.

The bullets hummed past the cyclists like hail, and one chipped a piece off the side of the plank, passing within an ace of Hubert's left foot.

At length Norman gained the other side, riding on to terra-firma once more. Whereupon he immediately jumped off to render his friend assistance, if it were necessary.

But Hubert needed no help, and the next moment he stood beside his friend.

They had safely crossed the abyss on a twelve-inch plank, and, despite the bullets, which now cut the grass and bushes all round them, they sawed at the ropes which fastened the hither end of the plank, and sent it crashing over into the gully.

To mount once more and push on their journey was their next move, and, pedalling rapidly, they saw no more of the bushrangers, who had probably to go a long way round to cross the gully.

A couple of hours after they had accomplished their daring feat they fell in with a score of the mounted police, who, hearing their tale, at once set off in the direction of the gully in quest of the bushrangers, for whom, as a matter of fact, the band had been searching for the past week in vain.

Our friends rode on, and easily covered the distance to Coolgardie before nightfall, reaching the settlement without meeting any further adventures.

Naturally Norman was quite overcome by his ride in his weak state, but a brief stay at Coolgardie soon set him all right again. The pair, of course, when they related their adventures, became the heroes of the hour, and especially when it was known that they had recovered the greater part of the gold stolen by the bushrangers.

A few days later the posse of police returned, bringing in five of the desperadoes captives; the other three had fallen in the fierce fight between them and the troopers.

Jerry Logan was among the prisoners, and the cowardly ruffian was quite broken down at the prospect of the fate in store for him, for there was more than one brutal murder and atrocity to be laid at his and his vile associates' doors.

The five of them were subsequently tried, convicted, and hanged for their crimes.

As for our two cyclists, they recovered all the treasure that had been entrusted to their care, and banked it in the settlements until each individual could come and claim his particular share.

The pair often after this made journeys to and from Wallaroo, and carried the mails and treasure on their good old bikes, meeting with many adventures from the aboriginals; but they never again had such a thrilling experience as on their first journey.

THE END.

"EUROPE ABLAZE." See last page of cover.

# THE BLACK SEAL

OR THE QUEST OF "ZUB" THE DOG DETECTIVE

## CHAPTER IX. (continued).

The general, a hoary-headed, frosty-faced, irascible old fellow, was seated in a luxurious apartment, which he was pleased to designate his "study," though his principal occupation there consisted in nursing his gouty leg; his amusement, in snarling at all who disturbed him.

Fairfax began by describing the explosion that had just occurred, the shock of which had been felt even here, and the old man grew peevishly excited over the narration.

"Dear! dear! dear!" he cried, lifting his hands in dismay. "What a dreadful thing. What madness will that girl be up to next, I wonder?"

"What, sir?" exclaimed Jack, in astonishment. "Do you imagine that Miss Jessie has done this thing? Why, what could a girl like that know of infernal machines? How could she procure such explosives? Be reasonable, sir. Further, she was in the house when the explosion occurred. Would she want to blow herself up? Poof! the thought is madness, indeed! I was there myself at the time, and can assure you (though no assurance should be required) that she had no more to do with the affair than you had yourself.

"You seem to doubt her very strangely, general," he went on, warming with his work; "you accuse her of all sorts of fiendish crimes, without the faintest foundation—of murder and of robbery amongst the rest. Now, sir, I know she did not commit the former, and that I shall prove ere long by dragging the real assassin to light; the latter accusation I can dispute at once. She did not steal the wax image. I chased the real thief myself, and captured the figure. I was on the point of going to fetch it when the explosion occurred. That figure, sir, may elucidate the murder mystery."

"That's done already!" cried the old man irritably. "Confound that gout! The police are certain. Captain Mortimer has pointed out many circumstances, more than suspicious. Oh, there can be no doubt about it, Jessie killed Viola, that's certain!"

"For shame, sir!" interposed Fairfax hotly. "The police! Do you know so little of their methods, Captain Mortimer? As a man of the world, you must know his character—that of a gambler and a rōu. Would you accept the malicious, sinister suggestions of such a man, rather than the solemn assurances of an honourable English lady, the daughter of your former brother-officer?"

"And further, General Cardwell, remember that this girl is your ward. You stand towards her in the relation of a father—you must protect her as her real father would have done had he lived. You must resume your guardianship at once; you must let me bring her here to live; she must not, cannot remain where she is! Consider. The house is wrecked in front, it may collapse at any moment. It is in the hands of the police, surrounded by a gaping crowd. Is that a fitting residence for a delicately-nurtured young lady?"

Much more Fairfax continued in the same strain, till at length he drove the prejudiced, stubborn old warrior from all his positions, and the general agreed to receive Jessie again under his roof, and resume his wardship.

Quickly Jack made the transfer. Jessie and her nurse bundled together a few things, and Fairfax escorted both to the general's residence.

"You have rescued me from one great danger, Jack," said Jessie, as the detective was leaving, after seeing her comfortably established in her new quarters; "I feel sure you will save me from the still greater peril threatening me."

"I mean to! I'll do it! I shall claim my reward sooner than you think!" replied Jack ardently. "Now I go to fetch that wax figure. We will learn its secrets together."

Springing into a hansom, Jack bowled away towards the District Messenger Office, to reclaim the wax figure, Zub sitting like a figurehead on the front platform.

"Aha!" chuckled the jubilant detective. "I have reached the end ere I had well found the clue. Happy chase through that subterranean passage; fortunate finding of that image; no doubt it contains all Viola's secrets, if not the secret of her murder, at least, definite clues pointing to the assassin. Then, too, it contains a considerable sum in banknotes. Whew! Was that the cause of the robbery, the reason for the murder?"

It was dropped by that mysterious female-fiend in black, whom I traced to the quarters of Captain Mortimer. The captain again! I fancy the net is closing around you, my gallant captain. That image may shatter your scheme as effectually as the infernal machine tore up the garden."

But what was the matter? Cabby was driving unusually slowly, though promised an extra fare for haste. Ah, the streets were growing greatly congested, obstructions increasing every minute; a hurrying crowd was streaming along, rushing in one direction. Now the hansom had to pull up to allow passage for a fire-engine, which flashed and thundered by, under the stentorian shouts, the "Hi, hi, hi!" of the firemen.

Jack's Jehu saw his opportunity, and seized it. The fire-engine was going in the direction he himself was making for, and, lashing his horse to a wild gallop, he dashed along in rear of the engine, like a small boat being towed by a steam-launch.

Thicker grew the crowd. Then arose a smell of burning, fleecy smoke-wreaths began to float around, growing denser momentarily, and a great black smoke-cloud presently eclipsed the sun.

On, and still on, ever following the dashing, crashing engine, which now began to snort and wheeze on its own account as steam was raised.

Still onward, a corner was rounded on single wheel, and the conflagration itself appeared in view.

The District Messenger Office was in flames. The building was well alight from basement to attics. What of the all-important wax model now?

## CHAPTER X. FIRE! FIRE!!

Following closely in rear of the rushing fire-engine, the hansom passed unchallenged through the cordon of police, holding back the gaping crowd, and cabby pulled up his panting horse in the clear space devoted to the fire-brigade.

"There you are, my man!" cried Fairfax, springing out of the cab, and tossing a sovereign to his Jehu; "never mind the change; you have well earned a liberal tip. Clear away, now, and mind the hose-pipes as you go."

A closer view of the conflagration confirmed the worst anticipations. The fire had been in progress for some time, and already several steamers were on the scene, their hose (lying like a network of lines at a railway junction) delivering powerful streams upon the doomed building.

The whole tenement was well alight. From the windows of the upper storeys lurid flames were shooting out long forked tongues; from the ground and first floors (occupied by the messenger company) dense volumes of smoke belched, as from a volcano. What of the model, with its all-important secret? Was the wax figure adding its quota to these devouring flames? No, perhaps not yet. The actual fire had not yet secured a firm hold of the messenger premises. Ah! they were saving the stock there. The salvage men, with several amateurs pressed into the service, were removing the various bundles, packages, and other articles, stacking them temporarily in a yard on the other side of the street. The model might be there, and Jack dashed off on the quest.

No luck there; the eager searcher hunted right through the pile, tossing bags and bundles, portmanteaux and packages right and left. A wondrous assortment of articles lay there; but not the thing he sought. The wax model had not yet been saved.

Then it must be in the burning building; if still unconsumed it might yet be rescued; and Jack, enrolling himself in the salvage corps, rushed to the blazing tenement, and dashed through the dense smoke volleying from the doorway.

The fumes were suffocating, the atmosphere was blinding, and for a few moments Fairfax felt powerless for further effort, but stood gasping and choking, his eyes smarting, blinded by their tears.

Then, summoning all his powers, the young fellow shook himself together determinedly, resolved to conquer, if man might win.

Unwinding his silk scarf, he wrapped it over his mouth and

nostrils, and dashed the water from his aching eyes; then, on observing that Zub was not so much affected, he realised that the atmosphere was clearer towards the floor, and stooped himself low.

Now he could dimly see around. Overhead, the smoke-wreaths rolled in ominous thunder-clouds, broken here and there by lightning flashes; the fire was rapidly eating its way down; in a few minutes the flames must envelop this floor. Nay, they were attacking already; even now their advance guard, their stormers, were biting fiercely through the ceiling: the crashing crackle following their course, sounded momentarily nearer; the scorching heat grew greater with every second.

Jack seemed alone in the furnace, the other salvors having abandoned their quest in fear of their lives.

They appeared, however, to have finished their work. The shelves were all vacant, not a bunk contained its package. There was another door, though, in the rear, and towards this Jack darted, determined to continue his search at all risks, to the evident dissatisfaction of Zub, who sneezed and coughed, shaking his great head, and whining remonstrance, yet still sticking loyally by his reckless master.

The two entered another and larger store or warehouse, and here the fire was even hotter, the smoke denser, the fumes more stifling than in the outer office.

This place had been partially cleared; and, stacked in niches in the huge partitions, a number of articles had been left to their fate.

Undeterred by the suffocating smoke, undaunted by the ever-gathering danger, undismayed by the advancing crackle of the flames, Jack pursued his quest, passing up and down the long lines of woodwork, scanning the contents of every nest. In vain—the figure was not there.

Still another room appeared; a smaller apartment opened out behind, and recklessly the searcher entered, all thought of personal danger lost in the excitement of the quest.

Now the fire was upon him in earnest, the room was as hot as an oven; the ceiling was blazing; a lurid, dancing glow glared through an open door, facing a passage on one side of the apartment.

This place appeared undismantled, the shelves were mostly full, and Jack was about to continue his dogged inspection, when his ear caught another sound. To the dull roar of the fire, the fierce crackle of the flames, the rending and splitting of the walls and woodwork, the crash of falling masses, was added the quick "pit-pat" of human feet, the hurried tread of one rushing in hot haste.

The sounds came from the passage on the right, and, glancing to the doorway, Jack saw a figure dash across it. He had only a momentary glimpse, as of a shadow picture silhouetted upon an illuminated screen, then swiftly withdrawn. He saw a small, spare form, with shoulders haunched and head extended. It was that of a little old man, very shabbily dressed, with flashing eyes, prominent nose, and a scrubby grey beard. He looked like a Jewish "secondhand garment merchant," from the old clothes' mart in Houndsditch.

The resemblance was increased by his bearing a bundle under his arm. He, too, then, was a salvor? Nay, he looked more like a thief, looting amid the confusion.

It was a singular bundle he bore—a long bundle, a stiff bundle, bearing a most unpleasant likeness to the corpse of a child; and it was wrapped in a long black garment, like the pall of an undertaker.

Jack started. He had found his quest. The object of his search was before him. That black pall was the cloak worn by the mysterious figure—the garment wrapped around the model when he found it in the underground passage. The wax figure itself must be within!

In a bound Jack reached the door, darting into the fiery passage; the Jew pilferer was but a few steps in advance, the black cloak streaming behind with the fury of his flight.

After him. In a couple of leaps, Jack was almost upon the fellow. The flying cloak flapped against his face, momentarily blinding him, and, seizing it, he tore the cloth away. Another step, and he would clutch the image itself.

There was a tremendous crash, the ceiling opened like the sliding of a furnace door, a rush of scorching flame, accompanied by an avalanche of building material descended, the passage floor gave way, and Fairfax fell, dropping, he knew not where.

It seemed as though the end of the world had come; the thunder of the falling material was deafening; the harsh, rending crackle bewildering; the rush of hot air suffocating.

He crashed into the basement floor, accompanied by rumbling masses of debris, an avalanche that would have crushed and buried the victim, had it not been partially checked by an iron girder that fell across the opening. Yet this very girder, while it protected temporarily, threatened the sufferer with a more awful fate.

It was red-hot—white-hot rather; its glow was scorching, and Fairfax would soon have been shrivelled up had not he

found protection in another menacing body—the very debris that threatened to bury the man alive, yet spread a kindly screen between him and the fiery girder, tempering the fierce heat.

As if that was not peril enough, now arose a further danger. The basement was partially flooded by the streams of water poured upon the burning building, and the red-hot rubbish, pouring into the pools, raised a dense steam, and created foul odours and suffocating gases, threatening asphyxia.

Death was all around—death on every hand, in every form; only in the multitude of danger was there possible safety; one impending peril restrained another.

Yet the plight of the young detective was desperate at best, lying, as he was, partially buried in debris, which yet afforded but an ineffectual protection against the scorching heat of the glowing girder, while over all the trembling building threatened thundering collapse.

Fairfax could do nothing to help himself. The foul gases entering his lungs and brain, numbed and stupefied him, rendering action of body or mind impossible. He was fast subsiding into a comatose condition—mercifully, perhaps, sinking into that dreamy state that accompanies death by drowning. All must soon be over, the sooner the better, he vaguely thought.

But if Jack could do nothing for himself, he was not without resources; a friend was at hand—a faithful and devoted one.

A movement sounded amongst the rubbish, inquisitive "sniff-sniff-sniffs" were whispered in the dull air; then, on arriving over the spot where lay the inert body, a little whine of delight resounded; there was a noise as of scratching and digging, and stones and rubbish began to fly in all directions.

Zub, close by his master when the floor gave way, had fallen with him into the basement; and, chancing to alight on a more protected spot, was less buried by the falling debris, while his lungs were less affected by the foul gases and noxious odours.

Now, like a trained St. Bernard on the snow-clad Alps, he was hunting for the lost one. His keen scent discovered where the body lay under the avalanche, and, undeterred by the fiery presence of that awful girder, the noble dog set to work to dig out the victim.

Desperately Zub fought, seeming to know that his own time of action was limited; he, too, must succumb ere long to death, in one or other of its menacing forms. Stones and bricks were volleyed aside like bullets from a machine-gun, the loose dirt flew like hail, yet with all his haste Zub dug with care. Not a scratch his master received.

The body was partly uncovered, and, with a plaintive whine, the dog nestled his cold nose against his master's cheek, inviting him to rise; but Jack found action on his part impossible. He did not even care to attempt it. True, the girder was now losing its fiery heat, but the stifling vapours were unabated.

Then, recognising the situation, Zub seized his master by the shoulder; pulling and tugging, he drew him clear of the debris; then, dragging away in the darkness, the dog hauled Jack into the blessed light—to daylight, which the dazed detective had never expected to see again.

Daylight? Twilight, rather. A faint glimmer filtering from overhead showed a small, cell-like cavity, into which the dog had drawn his inanimate master. It was a small area, closed by an iron grating flush with the street. That grating was now partly blocked by an accumulation of fallen rubbish; but space remained for the blessed light to steal in, and, more important still, allowed pure, fresh air to percolate.

Quickly Jack benefited by the relief; his senses, his powers returned; and ere long he was able to sit up, and consider the prospects of escape for himself and the faithful Zub.

But what was this thing in which he was entangled. A long, clinging black robe it seemed?

It was the mysterious garment worn by the weird woman in the railway carriage; the cloak that had been wrapped around the wax model. Becoming entangled in its flying folds, Jack had snatched it from its wrapping round the model carried by the pilfering Jew, and dragged it with him in his fall.

"I've got the husk, if I missed the nut!" mused Fairfax. "Better than nothing; perhaps the one may lead to the other." And he rolled up the cloak for future inspection. "Wonder if that little old Jew fell with his spoil into the basement when I did?" pondered the detective. "If so, man and model must be in hopeless plight; they have no Zub to fetch them out. Well, I can't help them, I dare not return. My first duty is to get Zub and myself out of this fiery furnace, if escape is possible." And rising, shaking off the dirt and dust, the youth addressed himself to the task, while Zub looked on approvingly.

The grating was low, easily within reach; but although it seemed loose, even rattling when shaken, it resisted all efforts to raise it.

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

"EUROPE ABLAZE." See last page of cover.



# Life in Hand By Viscount Y

Only two persons in the world know exactly who I am. For it were certain death to reveal more than this—that I am a Viscount and an Englishman. For my name, Y, will serve. In disclosing as I am those secret dangers which I have encountered during a life of travel and adventure in all parts of the world, I run a real and very terrible risk, for I deal with stern and grim realities, and not with fiction.

There are men, be it known, moving in vastly different circles, who would rather answer for my death than allow a word of what I am about to tell you to go forth to the world.

## TREACHERY.

Something was amiss on the West Coast of Africa—the white man's graveyard. At a time of grave peril Imperial cablegrams were being vexatiously held over.

I had reason to suspect that Government despatches in secret cipher were being unravelled in Berlin long before the same were cabled over to our own Colonial Office.

A traitor was at work!

To detect him in the act was easier said than done, notwithstanding that I was fortunately on the spot.

Now, the cable service in the vicinity was superintended by a comparatively fresh man. This was not sufficient to warrant suspicion, for no white man could exist for long in the fever-ridden locality, and fresh operators were constantly coming and going. All the subordinate posts were filed by natives.

Leo Fanshaw was the name of the superintendent whom I began to suspect was playing the traitor's part.

And this is how my suspicions were aroused. I was in the cable-station, when a vitally important message was flashed from the Cape for transmission to England. I ought to mention that a day or two before a submarine disturbance had snapped the cable out at sea. Still, the connection with Europe was sustained by flashing the messages from Fanshaw's station overland across another company's line, thence transmitting them on to the original service some thousand miles further up the coast.

The "ting-a-ting-ting!" heralded the despatch in the usual way, and Fanshaw proceeded to take down the cipher, which ran as follows:

"Secretary, London—83771, 73270, 87682, 55530, 38715, 03019, 98610, 12793."

I watched him carelessly. He did not know that I understood the mysteries of Recorder, Mirror, and Morse instruments as well as he. He would never have risked what he did.

Instead of repeating the cipher by the overland route, he sent a short message of his own, addressed to a high dignity in Berlin.

Very shortly the reply came back.

"Translate cipher and forward."

I gave a sharp exclamation. I did not mean to; but the thing was done before I could check it.

Fanshaw started. For a minute or so he regarded me so narrowly that I feared he would perceive my agitation. It was a relief when he spoke:

"You are unwell, Viscount."

The words suggested a desperate plan.

"What is it, Fanshaw?" I cried, feigning a seizure so well that I considerably alarmed him. "The room grows dark. Oh, my head! my head! How hot—how terrible it is!"

I reeled intentionally against the desk, and dropped into his chair.

He was very white.

"By Heaven! Viscount, the marsh fever has gripped you!" he gasped.

"Brandy—quinine—something at once!" I groaned.

Save for ourselves the room was empty. I knew that he would have to quit it to obtain any one of the articles I required. He was shivering with terror, for the fever was contagious; and alarm for his own safety was pitted against his desire to send that cablegram to his confederate in Berlin.

"Quick! I am dying!"

He was out of the room in a twinkling.

Swiftly I jotted down a melee of figures after the fashion of the cipher, placed the bogus cable on the desk, and put the genuine one in my pocket.

Then the scoundrel returned. He poured out a bumper of raw spirit, and I made believe to toss this off.

"Here is Japhet, Viscount, who will carry you outside into a place where you may rest."

Japhet was a gigantic black fellow, a scoundrel, who kept a sort of unofficial guard-house, whither many a rich traveller had been removed, and never reappeared since.

I started. The rogue either suspected me, or was in such a

dead fright that without the least compunction he was willing to consign me to the tender mercies of this ruffian.

"No, Fanshaw, I prefer to remain here. Indeed, I dare not, and cannot move!" I said, trying to catch the whisper which the two rascals proceeded to exchange.

I watched them. They were both armed. I was not.

"I am afraid, Viscount, your removal has become a question of necessity," said Fanshaw, adding, while he turned to Japhet, "my orders here are absolute. Remove that gentleman quietly."

The powerful ruffian came forward grinning, just as an impatient demand for the cipher came over the wire from Berlin.

The trick I had played Fanshaw was likely at any moment to be discovered. Ah! something had already gone amiss.

A shout and an oath from Fanshaw attracted Japhet's attention.

I knew what was coming, and prepared for it.

"Hallo! what is this? By Heaven! I have been tricked. Where is the cipher, Viscount?"

His eyes fairly blazed as he hissed out these words. He had left the instrument, and was standing over me.

"What do you mean, Fanshaw?"

"Mean?" he screamed. "You have tricked me, you hound! Mean? Japhet—help!"

He flung himself upon me, and the black Hercules followed.

I sprang up, and dodged Fanshaw. Japhet caught me a sledge-hammer blow on the side of the head.

I reeled over, falling at their very feet.

With a yell Fanshaw knelt upon me. There was a revolver in his hand.

I snatched out of his belt a knife.

"If you fire, you cur, I will bury this knife into your heart!"

I cried, feeling, with a shudder, the cold barrel of the revolver pressed into my ear.

But he pulled the trigger, feeling that my boast was impossible, for the black rogue had seized my other side. By a superhuman effort I swung up my head just as the shot tore through the barrel. I thought my ear had been torn from my head. Luckily, however, the movement had saved me. The bullet tore through the lobe of the ear, and grazed the skull behind.

Fanshaw, expecting that I would fall back stone dead, recoiled with a piercing shriek, for I had struck the knife into his wrist. Springing up before Japhet had time to recover from his amazement, I dashed across the apartment, and sent a message flashing over the cable.

"Treachery! Stay all despatches!"

Then, dodging my baffled foes, I darted out of the room, securing the door behind me. I felt sure they would break through, and strain every nerve to overtake me. Nor was I mistaken. I had a journey of ten miles to go ere I could secure help.

They brought me to bay not far from my destination, and a terrible struggle, lasting over half an hour, followed. But luck was against Fanshaw; assistance was forthcoming, and himself and the ruffianly black were secured.

It transpired that Fanshaw was another man altogether. That he had murdered the ill-fated cableist of that name, being assisted by Japhet. For every despatch he transmitted to Berlin, £1,000 was placed to his credit!

(Another of this series next week.)

SEE

NEXT

PAGE

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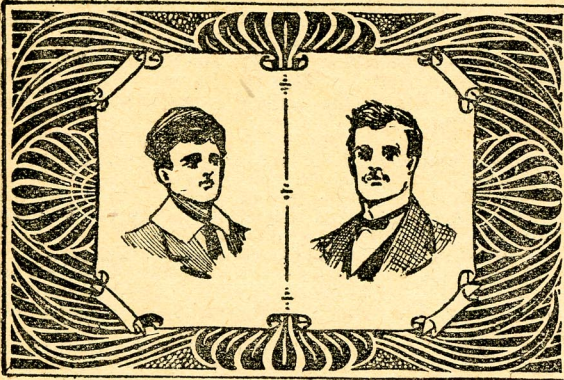
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NEW

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# From the Quarter-Deck.

BY THE SKIPPER OF THE "UNION JACK."



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(New York, U.S.A.).

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Did you notice this last week? I reprint it, in case you did not.

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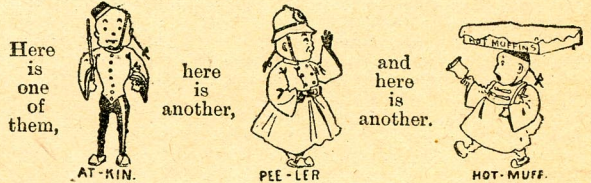
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# EUROPE ABLAZE!



The cup is nearly full! Soon the great war-bubble will burst, and the whole of Europe be converted into one vast battlefield. Plunder, starvation, and wholesale bloodshed will be visited upon every country, and all the terrors of modern warfare will rage with terrific fury. It must come—perhaps before we expect it; but undoubtedly it will come. Turkey and Greece have sounded the keynote—it is but the beginning of the end. Captain Maurice Clarke, "Pluck's" Special Commissioner in the East, has written a thrilling story of the Cretan rebellion, and has appended thereto a forecast of what he (a naval and military expert) thinks will happen in the near future. It is offered to the British public for the small sum of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in to-morrow's

## "PLUCK."