

"How to Make Money in Spare Time." (See page 16.)

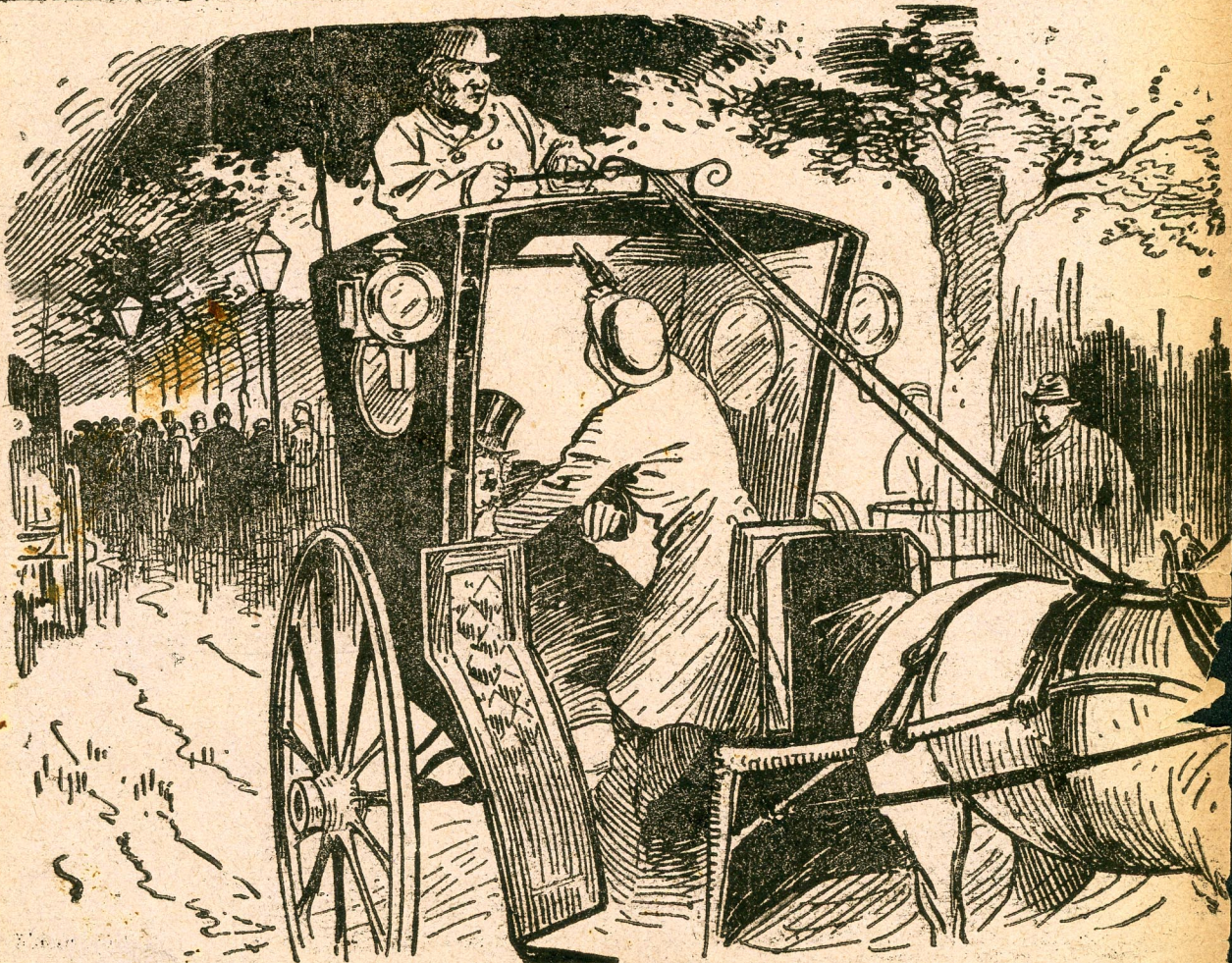
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He held the passenger down with one hand, and with the other put his revolver in a line with the cabman's head. "Now, drive on, will you?" he said.

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How to take story in their time. (The end of the world)



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LEAGUED AGAINST BRITAIN

By A. STEFFENS HARDY.

CHAPTER 1.

THE LEAGUE OF THE SILVER STAR — PETER RAMAGE — PICARD IN DANGER — A CHASE THROUGH THE STREETS OF PARIS—VIPART REEVES.

It was a bleak, cold winter's night, and Paris lay shrouded in fog, frost, and snow. So heavy was the darkness that torches, lanterns, anything that could bear a light was made use of to help the wayward traveller upon his journey.

Down a deserted street in the Quartier Latin a single pedestrian was making his way, seemingly careless alike of the weather and his health, for his long overcoat was unbuttoned, and his neck free of covering. He went on his way with a careless stride until at length he paused before a desolate-looking house. He mounted the three steps that led to the door, and knocked, once, twice, three times, and then ended in a peculiar flourish of sounds. For a minute he received no answer, and then the door was noiselessly opened, and a lantern flashed its light upon him.

"Your business, monsieur?" came the query.

Without a word the traveller unbuttoned the small jacket he was wearing, and displayed his vest, on the collar of which glittered a small nickel brooch of peculiar pattern—a seven-pointed star, the points in curved formation, in the centre of which was the design in relief of a Maltese cross.

The custodian of the door inclined his head humbly, the door was closed, and the visitor followed his guide along a bare corridor, at the end of which a steel door was opened, and the mysterious arrival passed through.

The room was almost as barren of fittings as the hall outside, the furniture consisting of two lounge chairs, an elegant oak table with a leather surface, two candelabra, each burning four candles, and a bracket in the centre of one of the walls supporting an altar of strange appearance. It consisted of a figure of Justice trampling upon a number of pigmy forms wearing crowns and imperial regalia. In one of the chairs before the fire sat the figure of a man. He motioned the new-comer to the other without turning.

"Well, you have come, Picard," he said. "It is well. I calculated that, making your journey in quickest possible time from Moscow, you would arrive in thirty minutes from now. You have saved half an hour, and it but confirms the high opinions I have had of you from my officers."

The other came forward to take his seat, and as he did so a slight smile hovered on his lips. At last he was in the presence of the head of the most powerful confederacy in the world; a society that often made Governments totter at their base—the League of the Silver Star. And this man, who leaned back so listlessly in his chair, to see whom he had dared everything, was the mysterious "Z," who could hurl his implements of destruction how and where he pleased. The stranger took the chair and glanced at him, and as he did so his hand tightened into the velvet pile he grasped, and his teeth set themselves hard.

"At last!" he murmured. And then beneath his breath, he added: "Tis he! I have found my enemy!"

"Yes, at last," echoed the master, and he sat up gazing piercingly at his companion—"at last, Picard, you are in the presence of 'Z,' who has a power greater than that of kings. It is few gain your privilege, but your work on behalf of the league has been so important, and so well carried out, that I know you can be trusted, and in the work I have in hand I want a cool head and a master brain. That essay of yours in Moscow was a masterstroke, and the downfall of General Muscovitch saved the league from annihilation."

"Oh, it was simple matter enough, Peter Ramage!" answered the other carelessly.

The chief sprang to his feet as though an electric shock had traversed his frame, and stood trembling, with a revolver clasped in his hand.

"That name, here!" he hissed. "Where did you hear it? Who are you?" And his eyes glared at the inscrutable face before him.

"I am Picard, at your service," replied the other, "emissary of 'Z,' the chief of the League of the Silver Star. Put up your weapon, man. It has no power to frighten me. You know me through your spies and agents, and must be aware that I am a man not easily cowed!"

In spite of himself, the chief put up the revolver and sat down.

"But that name," he repeated. "It was known to but two on earth, and they are dead!"

"I make it my business," said Picard, "to know the history of all great men I come in contact with, and so I know yours. Don't finger your revolver, man. As you say, but two knew that name, and they are dead! One of them, dying, told me his story, and, no matter how or when, I found you to be the man who had wronged him past all repair; but he is dead now, and need trouble you no more. But let us to the matter in hand."

The mysterious "Z" looked but half-satisfied, but after a moment's thought went on.

"As you doubtless know, Picard, the greatest danger to our league now that Russia is disposed of rests in Britain. And, to secure that freedom which is necessary for our future plans, Britain must be rendered powerless to harm us."

"That I understood before I came here," interrupted Picard.

"Is it so, indeed? Very well, you must proceed to London with all speed, for, London being the heart of the kingdom, we intend to strike the heart first. It was a noble plan that of Fawkes to destroy at one blow the flower of Britain's statesmen; and we will emulate it, with the exception that our method will be different. It is the intention of the league to destroy utterly the governing classes in Britain, and with them must fall the Royal house as well. They are a danger to our



Quick as thought he knocked up his hand, and the bullet struck the ceiling.

principles, and form together the greatest foe we have. That foe must be removed, and to you, with the aid of my lieutenant 'M,' who is now located in London, I give the task of removal. Do not fail us, for the penalty of failure is death!"

"That I understand; but death has no fears for me," answered Picard. "But before I start upon my work I want your authority to carry out my task in my own way. It may be necessary for me, in order to work unhindered, to throw dust in the eyes of the police, and for that purpose I know no surer way than to work with them."

"To work with them?" said "Z." "Have a care, Picard, your words are dangerous. The traitor—"

"Traitor!" interrupted Picard, with a laugh. "Traitor is a hard word after what I have done for the society. Ramage, had I been a traitor I could have betrayed you all, again and again. I hold your secrets now within my grasp, and the safety of you all rests with me as surely as yourself. Your plan to

assassinate the President of the French was known to me three weeks before it was carried into execution, and the man who did it is also known to me. That is but one instance."

"You say this out of bravado, Picard!" said the chief sternly. "For that plan was devised secretly by me, and its perpetrator in this very room when you were in Moscow, and we spoke so loud that the sound of our voices did not even reach that door."

"Nevertheless, I knew of it, and, to prove it, the murderer is Count Frascolli!" And Picard smiled.

"Curse you—you know too much!"

The revolver was levelled, and Picard stood smiling down the barrel. He never moved or flinched.

"Hold, Ramage!" he said quietly. "If you fire, your plans are foredoomed to failure. The moment that revolver goes off you and your league will be doomed!"

Ramage gazed doubtfully at Picard, and then slowly lowered the weapon. But nevertheless the determination to get rid of this man, who seemed to know everything, strengthened within him. He would not kill him with his own hands. If the British plan failed, then he might be held responsible. It would be far better to settle him in the street, and make him victim of a brawl.

"Very well, you shall have my authority; but, remember, the moment we suspect your faith you are lost."

He went to the table and wrote rapidly, presently giving a paper, headed with the device of the silver star, to Picard.

"There you are, and that is my signature," he said.

"That will do. And now, what documents and messages do you send with me to 'M'?"

"None! Those I will send to you after you have settled in London."

"You do not trust me, eh?" said Picard. And his cold, sharp eyes pierced the other through and through. "It would be a bad thing for the league if my body were found with incriminating documents upon it? But beware how you interfere with Picard, oh, my noble master, for those who try to harm me will know it to their cost! You sent for me to give me this work of yours to do, for I pulled General Muscovitch by the beard after all of you had failed, and now I have shown you a little of my power, you decide to murder me! If I had known that the all-powerful 'Z' was a murderer, a slayer of women, this society had long ceased to exist, and even now its fate hangs in the balance, and that balance is with me. You, Ramage, do you remember Helen Rees, whom you murdered years ago? Do you remember, I say?"

The words came ringing out into the loftiness of the room, and Ramage shrank before them.

"Remember! You can't forget, you! Now let me tell you one thing, Peter Ramage. I was with Vipart Reeves when a dying man bequeathed to him an oath of vengeance; vengeance against the murderer of Helen Rees. And Vipart Reeves has toiled night and day to track him down, and has failed, because he has never thought of looking to the chief of the League of the Silver Star for his man. But you know not on what dangerous ground you stand. He is a member of our society, and knows a few of our secrets. Beware how he finds out more! As for myself, I came not into the league to commit and foster murder. A coup d'etat, such as that in Moscow, I delight in; but the wholesale murder of the British you propose I will have no hand in, and so take back your authority and your commission!"

He held out the paper as he spoke.

"Traitor!" shouted the chief. And he fired his revolver at Picard; but, quick as thought, the latter knocked up his hand, and the bullet struck the ceiling, the revolver clattering upon the floor. With a yell of baffled rage, Ramage rushed to the wall and pressed a button. Immediately a big bell clanged loud throughout the house, and a moment later a rush of footsteps came down the passage. Picard picked up the weapon and waited. The great iron door swung back, and a number of masked, murderous-looking men stood without. Ramage moved forward to the threshold.

"I have a traitor here; arrest him!" he shouted.

They moved forward en masse. Picard also altered his position, from behind to near the edge of the door.

"Peter Ramage," he said, in a clear, ringing voice, "I could shoot you now, but that is not in my line. Go on with your plots. You shall hear of me again, but not as Picard. Look to your plans in Britain. For they may fail you yet."

With the last word he fired three shots in rapid succession at the wall in front of him; and then, in the midst of the smoke and confusion, he dashed at the men who had been brought up short by these blinding flashes. Before they realised what had happened, he had broken through their midst, and was half-way down the corridor. With a yell of baffled rage Ramage dashed out after him, followed by the rest.

"After him, men! Seize him! Don't let him escape! Our lives depend upon it!"

They rushed wildly down the passage after the flying figure.

"The door locks with a spring known but to ourselves!" cried Ramage. "He can't escape!"

But Picard ran on without hesitation until he reached the door; and then, to the astonishment of his pursuers, the massive portal opened, and he passed through into the street, the door clanging to in his rear. He knew that secret as he seemed to know everything else. With another yell, Ramage fumbled at the button of the door, and when he at last found it, and they passed into the street, the figure of Picard could be seen running a hundred yards away. The fog had cleared, and he was plainly seen against the snow. Then ensued a strange scene. Through the streets of silent Paris, in the depths of night, went the hunters and the hunted. Gendarmes in this disreputable quarter of the city were few, and so they had no interruption. Ramage himself was active and fleet of foot, and so were several of his men, but nevertheless Picard kept his lead.

"They can't run with me!" he mused. "And so I suppose they'll take a pot-shot at me presently."

The thought had hardly crossed his mind than there came the report of a revolver, and a bullet whistled near his head.

"Not a bad try," he said, "for a shot whilst running. But if they go on like that they'll wake the neighbourhood, and then I'll soon be safe."

But no more shots came. Ramage realised this as well, and so the chase went swiftly and silently on. At last, diving quickly round a corner, Picard ran on faster than ever, and by the time his enemies had reached it he had cleared the next. Running on down the street, he then took the first to the right, and to the right again. Here he did a curious thing. He stopped, turned his coat inside out, threw his bowler hat down an area, drew from his pocket a soft hat, and placed it on his head, and then pulled the hair from off his lips and chin. After these proceedings he strolled lazily along, and presently came across the baffled party returning from their hopeless search.

"Good-night, monsieurs," he said, in a gruff voice; but received no reply.

He stood in the centre of the snow-covered street and looked after them.

"Bluffed, my beauties!" he muttered; "and I am master of another secret. Thanks to me Britain will be protected from a great peril that menaces her. At the same time, I thank poor Picard, who is now, through my intervention, on his way to Siberia instead of plotting anarchy against the Czar. And to think that this man—this 'Z'—should be Peter Ramage, the murderer of Helen Rees! It is strange how things come about. Well, poor old Rees will have the satisfaction of seeing him brought to justice at last. And now, Vipart, my boy, I think you have done enough for to-night and can go home to bed. But, having set the whole gang by the ears, you'd better be up and doing, or else they'll get the start of you in London, and then who knows what may happen."

And, ruminating quietly, Vipart Reeves went home to bed.

CHAPTER 2.

RAMAGE SETS THE LEAGUE UPON VIPART'S TRACK
VIPART CALLS ON THE HOME SECRETARY
—VIPART ATTACKED—HE TAKES REFUGE IN A
HANSOM, AND ASTONISHES A JUDGE.

After the incidents of the night before, Peter Ramage—for as such we shall henceforth speak of the grand master of the League of the Silver Star—thought it fit to change his place of residence. He removed at once to a well-furnished house in the Rue de St. Peter, a much superior place of abode. Here he was sitting after his midday meal, biting his lips with impatience. For the first time since he became an all-powerful leader in these leagues of injustice and murder, he found himself baffled—baffled, and by a mere petty officer, Picard. But the fiat of vengeance had gone forth, and he knew that in a few short hours he would receive intelligence of Picard's death. He waited for it with burning fever. He rose from his chair and paced up and down the room, then struck the gong upon the table savagely. A servant entered.

"Any news for me, Jacques?" he asked.

"None, master," answered the servant.

Peter Ramage cursed, and dismissed the man. A few minutes later the door was flung open rudely, and a man travel-stained and weary burst into the room.

"What is it?" queried Ramage. "By what right do you invade my privacy?"

"By the right of the urgency of my mission, master," came the answer.

"Very well. What is it?"

"I have come down from Moscow post-haste, master," said the messenger. "Picard, for whom you sent, was betrayed by some means, and is a prisoner in Siberia. A good man is

lost to us. I came on without delay to tell you this news. It was too risky to wire."

"Picard a prisoner in Siberia!" said Ramage incredulously. "Be careful what you say. He was with me last night. He wore the star of the league, and he learnt my plans with regard to Britain, and knows where to find 'M' and our headquarters there. I believed him a traitor, and have sent forth my order for his death."

"Master, there is no mistake," replied the messenger. "Picard was betrayed, and he who betrayed him learned his mission, and impersonated him last night. I heard in Moscow that Picard underwent the torture."

"By Heaven!" ejaculated Ramage, bringing his fist down upon the table, "the league and Picard shall be revenged. Whoever this interloper may be, he shall learn what it means to thwart the progress of our plans. I will have him torn to pieces! And now to discover who he is."

He banged the gong again, and the servant appeared. "Send for Rousillon at once!" he commanded.

After about ten minutes had passed, a well-dressed, smart-looking Frenchman entered the room. He gave a quick sign from head to breast, which the others returned.

"You sent for me, master?" he said.

"Yes; a traitor entered my presence last night and gave himself out to be Picard, our emissary to Russia, who has been betrayed into the hands of the enemy. Can you give me any idea as to who he is? He was about six feet in height, stooped slightly, and I noticed a scar under the left eye."

The agent Rousillon started.

"I take it to be Vipart Reeves, master," he said. "I know he had come to Paris from abroad, and the league had notice as to his presence; but, beyond tracing out his place of abode, we did nothing. If he is working against us the league is in serious danger."

"Vipart Reeves! Vipart Reeves!" hissed Ramage. "Then that is it. I remember the spy made use of the name at one portion of our interview. Well, he knows our secret, and has meddled with our affairs. He will be sorry for it. What is he precisely?"

"Vipart Reeves, master," answered Rousillon, "is a man of strange parts. There is scarcely a movement of moment in any quarter of the globe that he does not know through his agents and his spies. His power is very great. He started merely as an inquiry agent, and domestic detective, but through his genius soon worked up his business on a grander scale. He interfered in Government affairs, and through sheer ability became recognised privately by the British Cabinet. He works independently of all military and police systems; but such is the value of his information and his work that he is appealed to at times from even the remotest corners of the earth. You'd better beware, master, of Vipart Reeves."

"He is, indeed, to be feared if such is the case!" muttered Ramage. "And I dare not doubt it, for the knowledge he showed last night of my affairs and those of the league prove it to be so. Well, we have never failed yet in silencing an enemy, and, maybe, we are as powerful as he."

He sat down and wrote for some time rapidly in cipher; then he rose, and handed the paper to Rousillon.

"Take that, Rousillon," he said, "and cable it to 'M' at the London headquarters. You see, it's in the secret cipher, and it explains our position with regard to Vipart Reeves. The members of the league will be on his track to-night, and he will be cleverer than I think if he escape them. At the same time I inform them to hurry on with our plan. I intend to follow my cable to London as soon as possible."

Rousillon bowed, and, taking the paper with him, disappeared. Ramage turned to the messenger.

"Now," said he, "what is your name?"

"Gustave Marlot, master!"

"Well, Gustave Marlot, you can be trusted, I suppose?"

"To the death for the league!" came the answer.

"Very well, you I take with me to do as I bid. At the slightest sign of hesitation I shall shoot you, you understand!" Marlot bowed his head.

"Come, then, help me pack my things, and we will go," said Ramage.

In a quarter of an hour the necessary trunks were packed, and Ramage had sent his messages clicking over the wires to all parts of the world, warning the members of the league, in cipher, of their danger, and the power of Vipart Reeves.

If ever man was placed in a tight fix, it was the secret agent Reeves; and so we will shift the scene from the mail packet steamer, which is fast approaching the English shore, bearing Ramage and his man aboard, and see what he is doing.

Vipart Reeves was fully aware of the risk he was running, and did not under-estimate the power of the league he had boldly set at defiance, but he was a man of strong personality, and knew not what fear was. In his business he was an

egotist, and it was this, in combination with the wonderful network of spies he had organised throughout the world, that enabled him to face the greatest of tasks unflinchingly. He had long thought of destroying and unmasking this danger to all forms of government, the League of the Silver Star, as the crowning act of his career; and with the arrest of Picard he started in to win or lose. As he guessed the league meant to destroy all power as at present constituted in Britain, he—Vipart Reeves—would have a word to say to that.

After his adventure in Paris, he journeyed in the early morning to London, and the cipher telegram from Ramage reached him in due course through one of his agents. It was a strange cipher, but a little close study and research gave him the clue, and he read it. He then slipped a few articles into his pockets, including a life-preserver and a revolver, and started for Downing Street. Here he burst in upon the Home Secretary without ceremony.

"Why, bless my soul, Reeves! What brings you here?" said that worthy, dropping a manuscript he was reading in astonishment.

"Affairs of State," said Vipart. "I want you to get me written authority to control the police, the military, even a portion of the Navy, as I wish, in case of need."

"That is impossible, Reeves," said the Home Secretary. "I cannot do that!"

"You must, my lord!" answered Vipart emphatically. "I have every reason to believe that an attempt will shortly be made to destroy every minister and official of note in the kingdom. Even the Prince and the Royal Family are threatened! I learned this last night at the risk of my life, and know the plot to exist. At least you can warn your Ministers, and get everything prepared. I have already made a communication to Scotland Yard, and by this evening they will be prepared for everything. My own men I have ready. But I want a special order, so as to command the use of a fast vessel from our Navy at any moment."

"Tell me, what has happened?" said the astonished minister. In a terse, incisive manner Vipart Reeves imparted what he knew of the league and its power; their recent success in Russia; his adventure of the previous night, and their determination to crush Great Britain's power. When he had concluded, the Home Secretary leaped to his feet.

"I realise the gravity of the situation," he said. "I will at once summon a Cabinet meeting. Everything shall be done that we and you shall think fit. The authority you require shall be yours."

"Thanks," said Vipart Reeves simply; "I'll go at once now and see that strict watch is kept upon the conspirators."

"Take care of your life, Reeves," said the minister. "You are too valuable a man for us to lose."

"Never fear," Reeves answered; "I don't think my star will set just yet."

He passed out of the room and down the stairs. On the steps outside he paused and looked about him. He was now without disguise, and as he stood there he was worthy of remark. He was six feet in height, with a slight stoop in his shoulders; long limbed and wiry; his hair was, in spite of his thirty-five years, already a decided grey, turning to white at the brows, and worn long and wavy; his complexion was of a deep brown, and his eyes were brilliant and set deep in the head; his nose was somewhat Roman and clear cut; his mouth firm, and the lips thin. He stood for a moment and looked about him.

"I thought so," he muttered; "they are on my track already. Well, we must beat them again, that's all."

He passed carelessly down the steps and along the street.

Two men were standing, as though in conversation, at the end. Reeves took his way into St. James's Park, and, looking back, he saw the two following him. He quickened his pace and made his way to the road. The two approached him now at a run.

"The fools!" said Vipart; "they show their hand too plainly."

He stood waiting on the kerb until he heard the scrunch of the gravel behind him. He then quickly moved his position, and, as he did so, a form stumbled by him with a knife grasped in his hand. Without a second's pause, Vipart turned quickly. The other man was almost upon him; but, with a blow, he sent him headlong to the ground. Then, as the other astonished wretch gathered himself together for another rush, Vipart went at him. A blow of his fist caught him square upon the chin, and down he went with a thud. Policemen, soldiers off duty, and pedestrians were now rushing to the spot from every side. Vipart did not like the look of the oncoming crowd, and, as the two men were staggering to their feet again, he shouted to the nearest constable:

"Constable, arrest those men for attempted murder! I can't stop now, but will prefer the charge later!"

Vipart Reeves knew the danger he faced amongst a crowd in

his present undisguised condition; and, as the bewildered policemen laid hands upon the pair of rascals, he ran out into the road, where a hansom was passing, and, at the risk of breaking his neck, jumped aboard. The passenger at once commenced a volume of expostulation, and the driver pulled in his horse. Vipart Reeves looked out. A man of foreign appearance was making towards the cab.

"Don't stop, driver!" he shouted, shoving up the opening in the roof. "My life's in danger, do you hear?"

"I want to know what you're a-doin' aboard my cab?" grumbled the driver.

"Vipart caught sight of a revolver in the hand of the man who was approaching them. It was no time for argument or hesitation. He held down the passenger forcibly with one hand, and with the other put his pistol in a line with the cabman's head.

"Now, drive on, will you!" he said.

The cabby did not like the situation at all. There was something in Vipart's face that told him it would go hard with him if he resisted. He jerked the reins, and on they went. As they dashed off, a rage of curses came from the man upon the kerb. They drove along at a furious pace, and Vipart Reeves sat down quietly, and released the amazed passenger.

"You shall suffer severely for this!" spluttered that worthy.

"I'm a judge of the Court of Queen's Bench! I'll see whether a public outrage like this can be committed with impunity!"

"I don't care who you are!" retorted Vipart easily. "You've done me a service, and I am exceedingly obliged to you. If that cab hadn't gone on, I should have had to have used my revolver upon that man who was following me, and I don't like to do that in a public place."

In a few minutes they had reached the corner of St. James's Street and Pall Mall. Vipart roared out to the cabby to stop. That worthy man immediately did as he was told, and he jumped out, the enraged judge following him. The driver also jumped down, and squared up in a fighting attitude. The noise and wrangle brought the constable on duty quickly to the spot.

"I give this man in charge for violent assault!" blurted the judge.

"And I 'as 'im arrested for attempted murder!" shouted the cabman.

"Constable," said Vipart quietly, "I am Vipart Reeves, and what I did was for a good purpose. I was in a tight position, and could not stop to explain. Perhaps my name is sufficient; if not, will you look at that paper?"

The constable touched his helmet with respect. "All right, sir!" he said.

And then, Vipart Reeves, seizing his opportunity, slipped from the group, crossed the road, jumped into another cab, and disappeared. It was too risky a thing to stay about anywhere just at present, and he watched every party he met with alert and suspicious gaze. He was a hunted man, and needed all his wits about him.

The judge, in his excitement, forgot to pay his fare; and, wonder of wonders, the cabman forgot to ask for it!

CHAPTER 3.

VIPART REEVES DISGUISES HIMSELF—THE HOUSE OF THE LEAGUE WATCHED—IN THE HOTEL RENAISSANCE—A DISTURBED REST—THE DEATH OF GUSTAVE MARLOT!

Vipart Reeves had just experienced the heaviest day's work of his life. After making his escape from his antagonists, he doubled about so as to put them quite off the scent, and then he made for one of his numerous nests just off Oxford Street. Here he disguised himself as a distinguished foreigner, and took from a case some cards bearing the name Count Froso.

Then he made free use of the telephone. The answers were entirely satisfactory. The cipher telegram of the morning appointed a meeting of the league. Their headquarters, as he well knew, were in Brewer Street; but it was not likely, after what had taken place, that the meeting would be held there, so he had the premises watched. Ramage had landed at New-haven, and was dogged from there to Hammersmith by the watchful agent of Reeves.

He had put up at 402, Grove Road. Vipart was sure his man would not lose sight of him. Every minister of State was watched by officials from Scotland Yard, and the members of the Royal Family were unapproachable. So far, so good.

Vipart considered for a moment. He must be present at the meeting on the morrow, and seize the conspirators. They must not have a loophole of escape. Well, he would consider more closely in the morning what he should do. He had ample time, as the meeting did not take place until the following evening. Meanwhile he decided, as it was probable most of his resorts would be watched, to sleep at the Hotel Renaissance. He communicated this decision to his agents, and left the house. He strolled on towards Northumberland Avenue, by way of Golden Square and Brewer Street. Outside the house of the

league he paused. A few yards away a man stood with a can of roasting chestnuts.

"Very good!" he murmured. "Miller is on the watch."

He walked up to the man, and took out his purse. He opened it, and passed the chestnut vendor a piece of silver. As he did so, he said quickly, in a low voice:

"Well, Miller, what news?"

"Suspects passing between here and Giannelli's in Frith Street," came the reply in a whisper. And then, "Thank you, sir!" aloud.

"Good, my man!" said Vipart. And he passed on.

Unsuspecting as had been the whole transaction, Vipart knew he had been watched; but he walked ahead carelessly to Piccadilly Circus. Here, as he glided through the press of people, he felt instinctively that he was followed, he could imagine a man immediately behind him. He shifted his position, and a hand glided by his head. A man had tried to seize his wig. He turned quickly. A foreigner stood there; it was Gustave Marlot.

"What is it, my man?" asked Vipart in perfect French.

Marlot looked at him suspiciously. He was undecided.

"Pardon, monsieur!" he said. And he slunk away.

Vipart continued his way to the Hotel Renaissance.

When he reached the hotel he went quickly in. He asked for the manager, who presently appeared.

"May I see you alone?" asked Vipart.

The manager led the way to his private office, where he closed the door.

"Mr. Rouselle," said Vipart, "my name is Vipart Reeves." The manager bowed with respect. "I am working out serious Government business, and I have come to your hotel for peace and safety. I am staying here as Count Froso"—he handed his card. "Will you give me a room and let me have a list of your visitors. If, after you have allotted me my room, anybody should make suspicious inquiries, don't hinder him in the least. He may desire to have a room next to my own. Let him have it; but acquaint me at the same time with the fact. If anybody should inquire for me on business, send him up, whoever he is. I shall be prepared in case of emergency."

The manager immediately said he was ready to do anything the noble count desired, and Vipart left the office well content. He felt himself safe here, anyway.

He went upstairs to his room, No. 79, on the third floor. Here he carefully examined everything. There was one window leading on to a balcony and overlooking the street. The bed was placed near the wall on the right-hand side. One door led into a bath-room, and the other out into the corridor.

Vipart waited on. He did not mean to turn in until he was satisfied all was safe. He took from his pocket a small appliance in nickel steel, which he fastened to the joining of the window frames. Another of a different shape he fastened to the door leading into the bathroom and the floor, by means of small thumbscrew-headed screws. In a small receptacle attached to these instruments were a small mass of compressed powder and a detenating-cap. On any attempt to force the door or window an instant alarm would be given. Vipart was too wily a bird to be caught napping. He had just finished these preparations when the manager entered quietly.

"Two strangers have just been here," he said, "and from their manner of questioning me I soon gathered that they were seeking somebody. On hearing of you, and getting your description, they appeared satisfied. They had the number of your room. They said they could not find the party they were in search of, but at the same time asked if Nos. 77 and 78 were vacant. On my saying 'Yes,' they agreed to take them, and went out. They were both of foreign appearance, and the spokesman was dark-skinned, with a cast in his eyes, and wore a black moustache."

"The man whom I met at Piccadilly Circus," thought Vipart. "They are sharp, these members of the League of the Silver Star. That moment with the chestnut-man was fatal. But I will beat them yet." Aloud, he said to the manager: "That will do, Mr. Rouselle. These men are enemies of mine, as I expected. But have no fear. Give them the rooms. No trouble shall come to you through it."

"Very good, Mr. Reeves," said the manager. "I will do as you say, and am very pleased at the honour you do to our hotel by staying here. I wish you good-night and a pleasant rest."

The manager withdrew, but Vipart did not feel disposed to rest just yet. He lit a cigar, and went below. He went into the smoking-room and took up the evening paper; but the contents made him smile. In spite of the proficiency of the up-to-date journalist the news was sadly behind the times. Vipart himself knew all, and more, of that intelligence long ere it was published. As he waited there a man came in. He looked about for a moment, and then crossed to Vipart. Reeves looked at him.

"What is it, Wilson?" he said.

"Russell, whom you set to watch the party who came over on the steamer, was seriously injured this morning, and all trace of the men he was watching is lost," said the agent.

"Indeed!" said Vipart, with a smile. "I am sorry for Russell; but I have reason to believe the men you speak of have taken rooms here for to-night. But, however, Wilson, I want you to watch them from the moment they leave here in the morning."

"Very good, sir," said Wilson. "Anything else?"

"No, Wilson," said Vipart.

The man withdrew. After waiting some time longer, Vipart rose and went upstairs. As he passed into his room, he saw the door of the apartment next to his slightly opened. It was enough.

"They are watching me!" said he grimly. "Well, let them watch."

He closed the door, and locked it, and then, as noiselessly as possible, shifted the bed over until it was pressed close upon it. He then brought over a small table, and placed it beside the bed, and laid his revolver on it. He tried the instruments he had placed at the window and small-room door again. They had not been tampered with. He blew out the light, threw himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, and prepared for sleep, as if there were no danger for him. An hour or more passed swiftly on. Vipart heard "Big Ben" strike the quarters with regular persistency, but no sleep came to him. His brain was whirling, and gradually his thoughts straightened out. On the

was being made. Vipart remained motionless, half raised upon the bed. The whispering ceased, and the face of Gustavo Marlot showed itself pressed close in the hole where the lock had been. It was a temptation Vipart could not resist. Like a flash of lightning, his hand closed round the barrel of his revolver; he raised it high and brought it crash upon the nose of the spy. A half-suppressed howl of agony greeted this performance, and the face of Marlot disappeared.

"What is the next move, I wonder?" thought Vipart.

He had not long to surmise, for something was thrown in through the door which fell, struck the floor, and exploded with a dull report. The first was followed quickly by another, and this also went off. A thick, pungent, nauseating odour arose; and prepared as Vipart was for any turn his adventure might take, the fumes almost stifled him. He took from his pocket a handkerchief, clapped it over his mouth, and, staggering to the window, broke the pane of glass upon a level with his face. The cool air revived him. For half a minute he stood drinking in the pure air, and then he heard the windows of the room next to his thrown open, and dimly saw the forms of two men step out on to the balcony. The two stayed for a moment in conference.

"We will give him another half minute," said Marlot. "He is an extraordinary strong man, and we will give the mycardine time to do its work thoroughly. Then for the vengeance of the league!"

"Are you sure, Gustave," said the other, "that he will be overcome by your pellets? We had better be careful, in case of accidents."

"There is no fear, man," answered Marlot contemptuously. "I have never known a case where the mycardine has failed us. If a man remains more than six seconds in their fumes, he is lost. He's done for, right enough."

"But I thought I heard the sound of breaking glass," objected the other.

"You were wrong!" said Marlot savagely. "Now, come along, there is no time to waste, and I can scarce bear the pain of my injured face." He clenched his fist savagely. "Now, steady, Gustave, my boy; revenge and deadly compensation will be yours in a moment or so."

The two men advanced at once on Vipart's room. The fumes of the mycardine pellets had now risen in a vapour to the ceiling, and left the lower portion of the room free. Vipart could breathe now. He stepped away from the window and pressed himself against the wall in the darkest portion of the room. The forms of the two men were distinctly seen against the window.

"Now!" said Marlot, with a triumphant chuckle, as he laid his hands upon the window-frame. He pushed with all his strength, and they burst asunder, but at the same

instant a blinding flash and a report came from Vipart's mechanism, and Marlot fell back across the balcony with his hands clasped to his eyes. His companion stood aghast, rooted to the spot with terror.

"Good, I think that will do!" said Vipart grimly.

A moment later the noise of clattering footsteps was heard coming from all parts of the hotel to Vipart's room, and with it a babel of excited voices. The hotel was roused.

A police whistle rang out upon the clear night air, and the sound of rapid footfalls came clear upon the road in Northumberland Avenue. The flash and report had attracted universal attention. The companion of Gustavo Marlot shook him by the shoulder.

"Come, Marlot, come," he said. "Don't you see the whole neighbourhood is roused, and we must escape? We can defer our plan of vengeance if the mycardine has not already killed that fiend Vipart. Come, I say!"

"Oh, Heaven!" groaned Marlot in his agony; "I can't see, my eyes are blind." The noise came nearer now.

"Come, Marlot!" hissed his friend. But Marlot made no answer, and, finding the situation critical, the man dashed through the room and disappeared.

Vipart, finding all immediate danger over, drew back the bed,



A blinding flash and a report came from Vipart's mechanism, and Marlot fell back across the balcony with his hands clasped to his eyes.

morrow, or the day later, the League of the Silver Star, all powerful as it was, would cease to exist. The network of an unapproachable system would close round them, and members of the society would be captured simultaneously in every part of the world. Good! He would despatch his cables with the early morning's light.

Vipart had just pieced together his puzzle, when he heard a stealthy footfall and a slight scraping noise at his door. He sat up and listened. Gustavo Marlot and his confederate doubtless counted upon him being asleep, and were attacking the lock upon the door. Vipart smiled and waited. For two minutes or thereabouts the noise continued, and then the point of a sharp instrument made its way through the wooden framework above the lock. The point then paused for an instant, whirled round, started off again, described a sweep of almost three parts of a circle, and in place of the lock was a gaping aperture.

"Very cleverly done," said Vipart to himself. "I don't think I could have managed better myself. That rogue is something other than a member of the league."

An attempt was made to open the door, and it struck the bed. There was no moving it. The effort ceased, and a whispered conversation went on outside. A new plan for entrance

opened the door, and, avoiding the people who were coming from all parts of the corridor, went down to the manager's room to make his explanation.

Meanwhile the porters and the guests quickly gathered round the door of Vipart's room. Two policemen entered, and, finding nothing, passed out upon the balcony. They saw Gustave Marlot, and advanced upon him.

The leaguer could not see, but he heard them coming, and, seizing the rails of the balcony in his hands, vaulted over them.

With a cry of horror the constables looked over the iron railings and saw his body crash sheer down into the street.

CHAPTER 4.

RAMAGE AT HOME—THE STRANGE REAPPEARANCE OF PICARD—THE NET WORKS CLOSER—THE CONSPIRATOR TRAPPED—THE SIGN DISCOVERED BY VIPART REEVES.

Peter Ramage was smiling broadly with delight. Everything from his point of view was running so smoothly. He had come from Paris to London, and, as he soon became aware, was followed from the mail-boat until he arrived at the address he had decided to stop at—402, Grove Road, Hammersmith. The host was a leaguer, and Ramage felt safe with him, but he must get rid of the spy who had followed them. This was eventually managed by Marlot, who had cleverly drawn the man with him into dense traffic, and then with a push thrown him down. The man was severely injured, and they were free to work again without hindrance. To make doubly sure of everything, Ramage changed his address. He journeyed rapidly to Vere Street, Kensington, and put up with another of the emissaries of the league. And now satisfied that he had baffled Vipart, so far as his movements were concerned, he laughed aloud in his delight.

"Good!" he ejaculated, rubbing his hands. "Everything is going in the right direction. We meet at 'M's' place in Frith Street to-night, to prepare our final plans, and to-morrow the decisive blow will be struck. In the wholesale panic that follows our action, the picked band of the leaguers will ride post-haste to our Imperial patrons, who will control the military, and to-morrow will see another family reigning upon the throne of England; and then what a glorious future for the league!"

He rang the bell, and a servant entered, the same he had had with him in France. Peter Ramage had few confidants.

"Jaques, tell me," he said, "has there been no news or sign from Marlot?"

"None, master," answered the servant.

"It's strange," muttered Ramage. "He went out to trace that fiend Vipart, and he promised to let me hear from him early this morning. Can anything have happened? Nonsense"—but he moved uneasily—"Marlot is one of the most careful, clever, and trustworthy of our lesser officers, and he would not fail. If Vipart beat him I should begin to fear. That will do, Jaques."

The servant departed. Ramage strolled uneasily up and down the boudoir. It was certainly time Marlot had returned. He could scarcely retain his impatience. At length the door was opened, and Marlot's companion of the night before at the Hôtel Renaissance stood upon the threshold. He gave the sign.

"Come in," said Ramage; and then, as the man came in and sat down upon a chair in front of him, "Well, your news?"

"Master," answered the man, "Gustave Marlot is dead!"

"What!" said Ramage, and his eyes distended with a look of terror and rage. "Marlot dead! What do you mean?"

"He killed himself last night at the Hôtel Renaissance by jumping over the balcony in order to escape from the police," said the man.

"The police? How?" queried Ramage.

"We had followed the man Vipart there, master——"

"Vipart! always Vipart!" And Ramage's lips quivered with impotent rage. "Oh, I will make him suffer for this! I will have such a revenge that all others shall pale before it. But you must have bungled, and badly, too, Rupert, to have given Vipart a chance last night. And then the police! You must have bungled, I say!"

"We did all in our power, master. Listen, and you shall hear. We traced Vipart to the hotel. We succeeded in getting rooms next to his. We operated with our silent tools upon his door, but he was awake, and we could not force an entrance; then we threw in our mycardine pellets, enough to suffocate ten men, and, after waiting, attempted to make an entrance by his window on the balcony, and complete our vengeance; but when Gustave Marlot forced the frame, a blinding flash occurred which robbed him of his sight. The

noise alarmed the house; the police entered, and Marlot, wounded, maddened, bearing them coming, threw himself from the balcony. I escaped in the excitement. Vipart, it appears, was not even overcome by the fumes, and also disappeared. Our agents have lost him altogether."

During the recital of the story, Ramage stood still, with his lips tightly compressed, but now he lost all restraint.

"Vipart Reeves escaped the mycardine!" he said. "Then he must know it and its power—a secret, I thought, safe locked within our breasts. This man must by some means have become a member of the league. We must change our sign for the meeting to-night; we do not want to run the risk of his presence, for should he learn our final plans all is lost. Go, Rupert, and give it out to the brethren that we change our pass to-night from the silver star to three English pennies, with the Queen's head crossed with a 'V.' That will do for all."

The man Rupert bowed humbly and passed out of the door. Ramage, left to himself, kept no check upon his rage. He stormed and swore like a madman; he picked up a great wooden inkstand and hurled it crashing through the magnificent mirror that adorned the mantelpiece.

"It is now a duel to the death between you and I, Vipart Reeves!" he hissed, his face lighted with demoniac fury. "I spared you like a fool in Paris, when I thought you Picard. You bluffed me then, but it will be my turn next, and then beware!"

He strode to the window and looked out upon the peaceful street. On the other side of the road a man stood looking up at the house and making occasional notes in his pocket-book. Ramage stood rooted in amazement. He rubbed his eyes to see if he were awake or dreaming. No; there was no mistake, the man was the Picard he had seen in Paris! What did it mean? Ramage was so taken back by this apparition that all thought of prompt action was lost to him. This apparition of Picard stood smiling for a moment, and then moved on. Ramage ran downstairs and opened the door. He looked up and down the street, but the man was gone. He went upstairs again and burst in upon the servant Jaques.

"Jaques," he said, "there was a man in the street just now the living embodiment of Picard—our Picard who is in Siberia. Go out, find him, trace him, and if you once come across him, don't let him go. He must die!"

Jaques took up his hat and departed.

Meanwhile the supposed Picard had with wonderful nimbleness gained the main road. Here he joined a man who stood waiting near.

"Give me my long coat, Miles," he said; and the man helped him on with it. He turned up the collar, and hailed a passing hansom.

"Now, Miles," he said, as he was about to jump into the cab, "it's all right. The man Ramage is there, right enough. He showed himself quite clearly. Stay about and don't lose sight of him. I will go on and busy myself about the preparations for upsetting that little meeting to-night. I have reason to believe the beauties have changed the sign, so that I shall have a little extra excitement."

"All right, sir," said the man Miles. "I'll keep my eye on this bird, never fear."

As the cab drove away, Vipart Reeves, for it was he, had the pleasure of seeing the nonplussed servant of Ramage vainly endeavouring to locate the vanished Picard. Vipart Reeves drove away straight to the West End, and the astonished cabman, when his fare alighted, saw instead of the foreign-looking man who had hailed him a smooth-faced young man of the genus clerk.

"Not a word, on your life, driver!" said Reeves. "I am Vipart Reeves, you understand?"

The cabman took the fare, exactly double what he expected, and stood gazing after the retreating figure, until a policeman shifted him on. "Well, I'm dashed!" was his only comment.

Vipart made his way to Vine Street. "Well, inspector," he said cheerily, "here I am. Are all your men ready, and in harness?"

"Yes, sir," answered the inspector.

"Very good. Let them be in the neighbourhood of Frith Street by 8.30; but make no show."

"I understand all that, sir," said the inspector.

"Very well, inspector," laughed Vipart. "Then I'll be off, as I've a little plan to complete by that time myself."

Vipart made his way to Brewer Street. The vendor of chestnuts was still there. He gave him a glance and passed on. In Frith Street a man was busy setting a pane of glass in a window-frame of the house opposite to Giannelli's Cafe. Vipart smiled. Just as he got near the house the pane of glass fell with a crash into the street, seeming to knock Vipart's hat off in transit. The man disappeared from the window, and presently came out of the house to where Vipart stood apparently lost in astonishment. He picked up Vipart's hat, brushed it with his sleeve, and returned it, profuse in his apologies.

Vipart went on his way. He turned the corner, took off his hat, and from it took a piece of paper. He read it, and it was as follows:

"A number of people, mostly foreigners, have passed into Giannelli's to-day, and but few have left. I have seen no suspicious sign given; but there seems to be a passing of money. No sign of 'silver star.'"

"As I thought," mused Vipart, "the sign is changed. Well, we must find the new one out, that's all."

He strolled leisurely back, and entered the house two doors from Giannelli's by the means of a pass-key. He went straight to a back room. It was filled by a large body of men. Vipart cast his eyes critically over them.

"That will do," he said. "Now, my lads, you have stiff work before you to-night, and you must obey implicitly. I see you are all the same men who helped me in that Bohemian affair, and I am glad of it. I know I can rely on you. You have your weapons?"

"Yes, sir!" came the answer in chorus.

"Let me see!" he commanded.

In a moment a revolver was held aloft in every right hand in the room. Vipart was satisfied.

"Very good," he said. "Now, Inspector Reveille will be here with his men presently, and they will surround the house next door, you I intend to lead in myself. Remember, not one man must escape. Have you examined the back of Giannelli's premises?"

"Yes, sir," said a tall, broad-shouldered man. "We can easily let ourselves down into his yard by the means of a ladder we have here. Some others of us, in conjunction with the police, can stop all egress by means of the trapdoor, by remaining on the roof when you make your attack."

"That will do," said Vipart. "Now to get the sign!"

He went into the street. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere; the place was deserted. He waited patiently smoking a cigarette. Presently the chestnut-seller came leisurely down the street. Vipart approached him.

"The man Ramage has just gone into the premises in Brewer Street," said he. "The police are already busy watching the place."

"All right," said Vipart. "Ramage will be here presently. We don't want to flutter the nest before the king of the birds arrives."

The chestnut-seller went into the house, and Vipart watched from a neighbouring doorway. Ramage came along in a short while with six others, mostly carrying small bags. Then several more couples came. And at last a single man. He was shrouded up to the chin in collar, and his hat was crushed down upon his head. Vipart went up to him, and gave him the quick pass with his fingers from head to breast. The man returned it.

"Well, brother of the Star," said Vipart, "I am glad to meet you. There is noble work toward to-night, and the brethren will not admit me because I do not know the new sign. Will you tell it me?"

"The new sign was circulated this morning, and by me, brother; it is strange you do not know it," said the conspirator.

"I have been away from my usual haunts," said Vipart.

"Come, tell it me?"

"Not I," answered the other. "You must be very careless in your work for the good cause not to know it."

He was about to pass on, when Vipart's hand dropped upon his shoulder like a vice, and he felt the cold barrel of a revolver pressed hard against his forehead.

"You are my prisoner!" said Vipart in a whisper. "Not a word, on your life; but come with me!"

The man opened his mouth to cry out, but Vipart was too quick for him, and, moving his hand from his shoulder to his throat, he gripped it hard, at the same time forcing him backwards. The man could not speak or resist, and in spite of himself he was dragged into the house. When he entered the room, and his affrighted eyes fell upon the assembly of armed men, he struggled no more.

"Now," said Vipart, letting go his hold for the first time, "the sign! What is it?"

The conspirator, Rupert, drew himself erect. He knew now that he was in the hands of Vipart Reeves.

"I refuse to answer!" he said boldly. He showed a bravery now that he had sadly lacked the night before at the hotel.

"Search him!" cried Vipart. They seized the unresisting man, and turned his pockets out. "Pass me his coins!" said Vipart. They were passed.

"Now," murmured he, "there was passing of money! Let me see. Ah! I have it! Three pennies crossed with a 'V'—very good! Now, lads, hold that man tight. I shall enter the house next door, and I leave it to you to carry out the other work successfully. I must see that not one iota of their plot escapes us, for we must crush them with one blow. In case of need I will give you the owl call, and you know the rest!"

Vipart Reeves left the house, and started on his perilous mission.

CHAPTER 5.

OLD MR. REES FINDS VIPART! — VIPART GAINS ADMITTANCE TO THE SECRET MEETING—THE PLOT EXPLAINED — VIPART LETS THE POLICE INTO THE HOUSE — THE ARREST — PETER RAMAGE ESCAPES.

Vipart went out into the street. He noticed that a number of ghost-like shadows showed themselves at various portions of the street; they were Reveille's men upon the watch. An old man, with white hair and beard, who was standing in the shadow of the house, approached him, and peered eagerly into his face.

"You here, Mr. Rees?" said Vipart.

"Yes, it is I," answered the old man. "I have come to see you. You said in your letter that you had found the man who murdered my child. I have followed you here, no matter how; but I seem to know this man is not far off—that I shall find him. May I stay with you, Vipart?"

"Yes. Stay, by all means, Mr. Rees; but go into the next house. You will find my men there. Wait with them. I have dangerous work on hand to-night, and require all my wits about me. You may hear something more of your enemy when all is over."

"Thank you! Thank you!" said the old man. And he went away into the house.

Left alone, Vipart looked up at the Giannelli establishment. The lights had been turned down, and the shutters were up. Giannelli did not desire any business for that night. Probably he would never do any more. Hard work in one of her Majesty's penal prisons seemed the more likely prospect for him. Satisfied that his lieutenant would do all that was desirable with his men and the police, Vipart did not hesitate. He went up to the private door of the café and knocked—once, twice, thrice, and a flourish, as in Paris. The door was cautiously opened, and a voice demanded:

"Your name and business, monsieur?"

Vipart gave the pass from head to breast. "Rupert, brother of the order of the League of the Silver Star," he said.

"The sign!" came the voice.

Vipart gave him the three pennies with the "V" scratched upon them.

"It is well," said the voice. "Pass on. They are waiting for you, Brother Rupert. You are the last."

So far all was well; Vipart had gained admittance to the sacred precincts of the league. He went along the passage, and from a room at the end he heard the busy hum of many voices. He opened the door and entered.

"Welcome, comrade!" said a dozen voices.

Vipart looked round him. In the long room at the back of the café proper were assembled about two hundred men of every nationality extant, and three of them sat at the head of a long table; they were Ramage (the mysterious "Z"), and his two lieutenants, "M" and "X"—three of the most dangerous men in the world. Ramage jumped to his feet.

"Now, comrades," he said in a loud voice, that penetrated to every corner of the room, "for the first time in the history of our league has such an assemblage as this been drawn together; for the first time, also, myself, your chief, and the powerful 'X' have been present at a meeting of our brotherhood in England! The reason we have gathered together is well-known to all of you; it is, in so many words, to destroy the present system of government in this country. As at present constituted, it is a menace and a danger to our league, and as such must be swept away. We represent to-day a great power, and we must maintain that power at all costs. To-morrow we have ordained as the day on which to administer our most crushing blow; to-morrow shall see our enemies bite the dust! I believe all instructions have been given; is it not so?"

"Yes, yes!" came the reply.

"Very good. Number 10!"—a man stepped forward—"you have your dynamite prepared?"

"Yes, master!"

"Then to you and your two associates I leave the destruction of the Prince and his household. In the panic you will create you can easily escape."

The man resumed his place in the ranks of the brothers.

"Number 12!"—another stepped out. "You have twelve men working under you, I believe?"

"Yes, my master!"

"Then to you I leave the destruction of the officials, and of the War Office!"

The man inclined his head and retired.

"Number 14!"—the brother stood forth. "You will take as many men as you think fit (I should say about six at least), and undermine the house of the Prime Minister, who gives his reception to-morrow. All the pride of the land will be there, and to you is given the greatest triumph. You have managed to get charge of the refreshment contract there to-morrow, I believe?"

"Yes, master!"



"You are my prisoner!" said Vipart. "Not a word, on your life; but come with me."

"Good! then you cannot fail."

The man retired.

And so the dread leader of the League of the Silver Star went on. His organisation seemed perfect. Of the two hundred men present there was not one who was overlooked. Everyone had some task appointed, some work to carry out. He had forgotten nothing. Almost at the same moment the dread work would begin. The police would be so disorganised by this surfeit of crime that they would be powerless to interfere seriously; and he pointed out that those of them who fell died in a good cause. They advanced the world for their fellow-men by centuries. The War Office and the military would suffer for the same reason, and they could not interfere until far too late, when the game was won. The Bank of England and the Mint, would fall into their hands at once; the thousand and one honorary members of their society, although at present doubtful, would, in the case of success, flock to their banner on the morrow; the league would be an army.

He had had advice that day from the leaders abroad that four transports of armed men had left various countries, and were now waiting near to the English coast, ready to land when the right moment came. They carried eight thousand trained men, and the Great Powers, which had winked at them going out, would aid the cause also when the blow was struck. Britain, the Britain that was a danger to them; the Britain that was now a power and a glory unapproachable, unassailable, would, on the morrow, be a nothing—a grandeur of the past!

A thrill of excitement passed over the group. The determined eloquence of their chief possessed them all. They would do or die. Vipart listened and wondered. He knew the league was dangerous, but this monster plan was beyond his wildest dreams. He realised now that not one man present must escape. He must get out of the room somehow, and see that all was arranged perfectly. He edged towards the door. Amidst the wild buzz of whispering and agitation he passed unnoticed. He glided quickly along until he was met by the doorkeeper.

He anticipated his question.

"On urgent business for the master," he said, in a whisper. The man opened the door, and said: "The sign!"

"I gave it you when I entered," responded Vipart.

"There is another sign for exit," said the man.

"This is it, then," retorted Vipart. And he struck him heavily upon the head with the stock of his revolver. As the man collapsed, he caught him and bore him into the street. Outside two men were standing.

"Inspector Reveille," cried Vipart quickly, "take this man in custody, and prevent that door from closing; we shall want to use it presently. And gather your men together."

He passed on into the house next door.

"Now Wilson," he cried, to the chestnut vendor, now transformed into a smart man in semi-official uniform, "how have you disposed your men?"

"Fifty are at the back, with a portion of the police force, and ten on the roof; the rest are here."

"Good!" said Vipart. He went into a corner of the room, took off his wig, and let his long, white, grey hair hang about his neck, placed a slouch-hat upon his head, and removed his false beard. He was himself once more. "Now, lads, these men have arranged their plans. Let us see what Vipart Reeves can do. Come with me!"

They followed him out into the street. Here already the police, under Inspector Reveille, had assembled. The prisoner had been disposed of, as Rupert before him. A hundred strong, determined men had gathered there. Vipart felt strong enough to lead a forlorn hope. By admirable foresight the inspector had drawn a cordon of police up at the head of each thoroughfare leading into Frith Street, and every person leaving a house near was passed along outside the purlieu, and so all noise likely to alarm the conspirators was avoided. The curious crowd could only stand afar off and wonder in unsatisfied curiosity.

"Now, Inspector Reveille, I think we have them fast," said Vipart. "You have seen my authority from the Government to take matters in hand, have you not? Very well, then, we'll to work. Follow me quietly."

Vipart entered the house. His lips were closed with firm resolution, and a slight flush hung upon his cheek. He was in his element. Wherever there was danger, Vipart Reeves found delight. Noiselessly as a cat he went down the passage, and the armed police and his agents followed. Scarcely a sound did these heavy men make as they went along. In quiet order a line of communication was made from the street to the rear of the house. The men in the rear had by this time also closed in upon the house, and were waiting, over fifty strong, for the signal on which to burst open the door and rush in upon the conspirators. The police had scarcely been placed, when Vipart heard the Master Ramage ask for brother Rupert. The moment had almost come.

"Brother Rupert," repeated Ramage from within the room, "stand forth!"

No answer was given.

"Brother Rupert was here a moment since," said Ramage.

"He was here, for he was the last to arrive. Have any of you seen him?"

Again there was no answer.

"What does this mean?" stormed Ramage. "Does any member of our sacred league dare to absent himself at such a time as this? Were he my own brother he should suffer for it. Go, one of you, and seek him!"

Vipart and those waiting heard footsteps approaching the door. They shrank back. The man stepped forth, but no sooner was he away from the vicinity of the threshold than he was seized by four men and rendered powerless to move, struggle, or speak. The work was carried out noiselessly, and all was quiet as before. For some forty seconds no more was heard, and then Ramage exclaimed distinctly:

"Brothers, there is treachery about! Out with the lights and disperse as silently as possible!"

The light thrown across the passage from the inner room was gone in a moment; the gas was extinguished. The moment for Vipart had come. Clear and shrill upon the quiet came the hoot of the owl, then the noise of a bolt being withdrawn, and the crash of the back door to the room giving way.

"Treachery! Treachery! Traitors!" came the cry.

Vipart dashed into the room heedless of his men, the darkness, or the enemy.

"Hands up!" he called, clear above the tumult. "Hands up, I say, those who would leave this place alive!"

And now ensued a scene it is impossible to describe. For a moment the two hundred remained inactive, stunned, and then they made a simultaneous effort to escape. Scarce a sound was heard, but an occasional curse, and the noise of a struggle. Half the police and Vipart's men had entered swiftly with drawn service revolvers in their hands. These at once dominated the situation for Vipart. Some of the brethren got out of the door into the passage, but they were immediately secured and passed swiftly into the street. The quickness of the police was remarkable to witness. Other men forced their way past the

police who were entering from the rear, but only to fall into the hands of those outside.

The game was up, that they saw at a glance; and a few who had managed to draw their weapons tried to fight in their despair. Vipart had leapt upon the table, and he struck a match and lit the gas with the utmost sangfroid. He was naturally an object for attack, and several bullets whizzed near him, but he seemed not to heed them.

Two police officers were struck, and with their fall shots were exchanged, and five of the leaguers fell.

This scene as described was but the work of a moment, and now the law was the master of the situation; the conspirators were demoralised, and seemed unable to do anything. The fate of those who tried was a lesson to the rest, and the sight of the five men lying in their blood cowed them.

Besides every police officer, every vigilant had his weapon out and ready.

Vipart looked round in search of Ramage, but to his surprise he looked in vain. The arch villain was gone. Gone! But where? Perhaps he was a prisoner in the street. Vipart went out. He searched through group after group, but there was not a sign of Ramage. How could he have got away?

As Vipart moved from one to another the old man approached.

"Have you found him?" he said eagerly. "Have you found the murderer of my child?"

"No, old man, no!" said Vipart. "He has escaped us. But I'll track him down yet!"

Inspector Reveille came up to them. "A triumph, Vipart!" he cried. "I am sorry we had to shed blood; but on such an occasion as this it was necessary. It is a perfect triumph."

"Marred by the escape of the principal," said Vipart moodily.

"Where are you off to now, Vipart?" queried the inspector.

"To set my agents to work and run that man to earth," said Vipart. "While he is at large there is yet danger. But I'll have him, or my name is not Vipart Reeves!"

He moved off towards his agent Wilson. The old man followed him.

"You will find him, Vipart?" he asked.

"Yes," was the answer. "It is either he or I now. Come with me, old man, and you shall see Vipart Reeves's triumph."

CHAPTER 6.

A CLUE—VIPART REEVES STARTS FOR SOUTHAMPTON—ON BOARD A TORPEDO-CATCHER—THE "MAYFLOWER" AT SEA—THE COLLISION—RAMAGE ABOARD A GERMAN STEAMER.

Vipart Reeves sat in his chamber a moody, silent man, and

opposite him was the old man Rees. A week had passed, and Ramage had not been found. After all, he had escaped. Vipart had called up all his resources, set all his smartest agents to work, but he had failed to trace the man.

It was not enough to him that the world rang with his name; it was not enough to him that he had ruined utterly and for ever the dangerous organisation that had for years past threatened all social and political government; he wanted that one man who had escaped him, who had at last baffled Vipart Reeves. His thoughts went back to the years before when his dying brother, killed by the hand of Ramage, bequeathed to him a solemn oath of vengeance; and now the peevish railings of the old man, who thought of nothing but the man who had slain his child, irritated him past all bearing. He remembered how, in the years gone by, pretty Helen Rees had won his brother's love, and how the two lived happily until that villain came upon the scene. He had that demon in his power in Paris that night; but he let him go, so as to make more perfect his final destruction of the League of the Silver Star, and now he had escaped—escaped to carry out his nefarious plans; escaped to baulk Vipart Reeves of his justice and his vengeance.

On the morning following the surprise of the league, the cables between England and various countries abroad were quivering with countless messages, and as a result the world was startled from end to end by a series of arrests almost as complete as that in London. The power of the league was shattered. Ministers, noblemen, politicians, merchants, stock-brokers, generals, princes, all called and showered lavish praise and favour upon Vipart Reeves; but that did not content him. Like a true artist he did not want pecuniary reward or titled honour; he wanted his own satisfaction, and that he had not got.

The door opened, and the agent Wilson entered.

"Well, Wilson?" he inquired eagerly.

"We have succeeded in tracing Ramage to Southampton, sir," said Wilson; "but he has disappeared there as completely as he did here!"

"To Southampton!" And Vipart started to his feet. "That is it, then? Thank you, Wilson; the game is not over yet. I think I can now play the winning card."

He took from his pocket a telegram that had arrived an hour ago from Southampton. It was from the Earl of Marnham, and had puzzled Reeves for a moment, and he had put it on one side in his effort to put together the other puzzle; but now he understood. It read as follows:

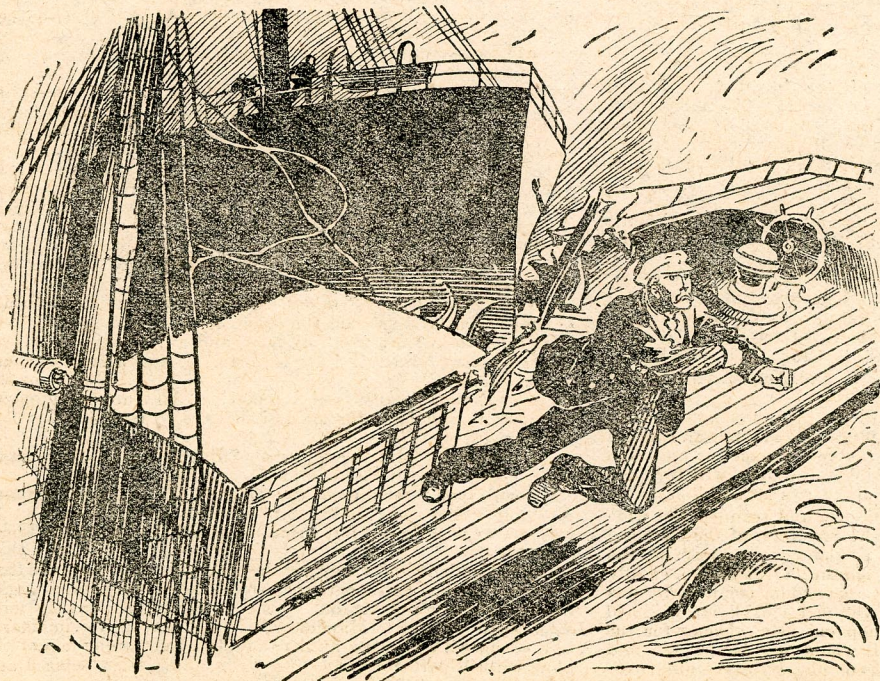
"Vipart Reeves.—If not too busy, look into this matter for me. My yacht 'Mayflower' was stolen this morning from her place in Southampton Harbour at 8.30 by a man purporting to be myself. The resemblance was such as to deceive my crew. Give the case attention, if you can. Yacht, as you know, was to cross the Atlantic, starting to day. "MARNHAM."

"Wilson," he said, and the old bright look came into his face, "my instinct tells me Ramage has done this thing, and I am rarely wrong. Go at once to Waterloo and charter a special to run us down to Southampton, to be ready to start in half an hour. Come, Mr. Rees, we'll go to the Admiralty, and then for Southampton. I think we have our man caught at last."

As Wilson went on to Waterloo to fulfil his mission, Vipart Reeves and the old man took their way to the Admiralty. As good luck would have it, a council was sitting. Without any difficulty, Vipart Reeves made his way into the chamber. His name, after the recent scare, was sufficient for that purpose. The worthy lords stared in surprise.

"My Lords," said Vipart, with little preface, "I have reason to believe Ramage, the man we want to secure, has escaped from Southampton in the Earl of Marnham's yacht this morning." The council looked bewildered. "You have a torpedo-boat destroyer lying at Southampton at the present moment, have you not?"

"Yes," said the First Lord.



As the great vessel struck the yacht, Ramage leapt overboard.

"Very good; she is the fastest vessel there at the moment. I wish you to give me an order to use her to chase this miscreant and run him down."

"With pleasure," was the answer.

A moment later the permit was in the hands of Vipart Reeves. He bowed good-day, and was leaving, when his lordship detained him a moment.

"I will telephone all instructions on, Mr. Reeves," he said, "so that when you arrive the vessel will be ready to put to sea immediately."

"Thanks, my lord," said Vipart; and he made his way to the cab.

A few minutes' fast driving brought them to Waterloo. Here they joined Wilson, who led them to the special, one engine and a coach. Vipart helped the old man aboard.

"You'd better come, too, Wilson," he said.

They got in and started. The engine-driver had his orders, and he ran the engine as hard as he could. Mile after mile was run off at a marvellous speed. The passenger traffic was stopped at every point to allow the special to go by, and sulky travellers gazed curiously at the lightning-like apparition of the engine and one car, little dreaming that it carried Vipart Reeves, whose name had now become a household word. On and on they went, obstacles were few, and in an incredibly short space of time Southampton was reached. Here Vipart found a cab waiting for them. They jumped in, a quick run brought them to the harbour's side; they leaped out, descended the steps into a gig that awaited them, and were rowed swiftly out by two stalwart bluejackets to the long, slim, black vessel, which was already puffing dense smoke from out her funnels. They got aboard as soon as possible, the boat was hauled up, and all being ready, the snakelike warship glided swiftly out of the harbour. As soon as the open sea was reached, she put on all speed, and Vipart Reeves was carried along on his mission of vengeance at thirty-one knots an hour.

The old man Vipart sent below, but himself he stood wrapped in oilskins in the deckhouse with the officer, who steered the vessel, a prey to anxious thought. First of all, was he on the right track? He thought so, because a man would have to be in desperate straits before he would venture to steal a yacht so famous as the "Mayflower"; it was a last chance. Then, if Ramage were aboard the yacht in the disguise of the earl, had he made for the Atlantic or elsewhere? The Atlantic, he forced himself to answer, for the yacht was to start that day on its voyage to America to take part in the forthcoming race at New York. He felt pretty sure, at any rate, that Ramage would keep on the direct course for some time at least. About afterwards he knew nothing, for it was equally certain Ramage would not continue straight ahead when it would mean his exposure and capture when information of his theft was known.

Vipart looked at his watch. It was half-past four. Ramage had eight hours' start. Eight hours! What might not have happened in eight hours! Vipart began to think his pursuit hopeless, and his brow grew moody with a look of despair. Was he to fail again?

Far out at sea, on the bosom of the broad Atlantic, the yacht "Mayflower" was gliding on her way like a beautiful thing of life. The night was as calm as could be, and every stitch of canvas flew above. Occasionally a cheer came from a passing steamer as the crew recognised the pretty vessel that braved the dangers of the deep; and then, she was off to America to race for the cup.

On her deck a man paced slowly up and down, his head bent, his hands behind his back. It was Ramage in disguise. His reflections were not comfortable ones.

"Curse the fates!" he muttered, "that threw me across Vipart's track! He has ruined all I have planned, destroyed my ambition. Thanks to my cleverness I have escaped so far; but they will run me down on this vessel sooner or later. I must find some plan of escape, and then for sweet revenge!"

For some time he thought on hard, and then raised his head with a grim smile.

"Yes," he muttered, "that will do. To stay another day aboard this yacht will mean my capture. If any but an English vessel comes in our way, I'll run the yacht upon her and take my chance of the rest. And I think the chance will turn my way this time. If it does not—well, there's an end."

He walked up and down impatiently and scanned the wide stretch of sea. It was bare with the exception of the coloured lights of a steamer making for England right away on the right. Above the stars were shining vividly—too vividly Ramage thought. One thing alone gave him comfort, he was at liberty—the only one of those who met a week ago who had his freedom; at least he could map out new schemes for the future. But what years of work it would take before he could regain the lost power! How completely everything had

fizzled out; even the troop-ships with the armed auxiliaries were cast upon an African shore in the endeavour to escape the fictitious enemies the panic had wrought. He would wait and see; and then—Ramage caught sight of three twinkling lights, red, green and white, right behind them, almost two miles away. He watched them for a moment, and then walked up to the helmsman.

"Give me the wheel," he said.

"Yes, my lord," answered the man as he gave place to Ramage.

It was no unusual thing for the Earl of Marnham to take that place, for his love of seamanship was so great that he took a hand at everything in turn.

"There's a vessel coming up," said Ramage. "Will you tell me what you make of her when she gets near enough? And you can tell the other men they are not required, as the night is so calm; they can go below and rest."

"Yes, my lord," said the seaman.

A minute later Ramage and the sailor were alone, the first holding the steering-wheel, the seaman peering at the oncoming steamer. Presently it grew plainer, and the sailor, after a moment's pause, said:

"I think, my lord, she's a German passenger boat bound for America."

A German passenger boat! It was what he wanted! He sent the man forward and then laughed in his glee.

"I'll risk all on the one chance," he said. "If I get aboard that ship I'll beat them all yet."

He turned the wheel and ran the yacht nearer into the course on which the steamer was coming. The great twin screw vessel came up hand-over-hand, but not a sign did she give that she had noticed the yacht in front of her. Everything was going as Ramage wanted it. She was now close upon them, and then her steam siren blew in alarm. Ramage altered his course a little, and noticed with satisfaction that the German vessel—if such she was—came on. She was now only three hundred yards away. Ramage put the helm round sharp, and she answered beautifully, and made for straight across the steamer's path. The siren blew again and again, but it was all too late; the yacht was doomed. Nothing could stop the way of the great vessel. She came on with relentless, measured pace. The sailor in the bows of the yacht turned round surprised at her altered course, and saw the steamer looming right above them. He gave a shriek of horror. At the same moment Ramage leapt overboard, and then, with a sickening crash, the liner struck the yacht right amidships. The light timber with its thin covering of metal, gave way like so much matchwood, and the steamer went over and through her. Ramage saw the pretty sailing craft fill and sink. He saw the ocean steamer stop her engines and pull to, a couple of hundred yards away, and he saw the boat lowered. He looked around over the sea; there was nothing but a bit of floating timber to be seen.

The boat was rowed swiftly towards him, and he was hauled out of the water. In due time he found himself aboard the steamer.

"Ach, mein Gott!" roared the skipper. "What for was you doing mit such a course on dat sheep of yours? Haf you no senses, dat you do dis thing, eh? What?"

Ramage could have laughed in his delight. Not a soul from off the yacht was saved but he. The steamer was a German boat. He could tell any lie he pleased, and he saw his safety almost assured.

"My helmsman must have been mad or drunk," he said apologetically. "But anyway, captain, you've not sustained any damage, and I've lost my yacht."

"Dat vas so," said the German skipper, somewhat pacified, and feeling a sympathy for this unfortunate voyager. "And what was de name of your leetle sheep, anyway?"

"The yacht 'Irene,'" said Ramage, unblushingly. "I was out for a six days' spin on the Atlantic, as the weather's fine, and now I've lost my men, my boat, and all."

"Dat vas so," remarked the German. "And what was your name, anyway?"

"Mr. Rimmel," answered Ramage. "And now I suppose as you can't put back for me I shall have to continue on the voyage with you?"

"Dat vas so," said the skipper. "But I will put you on a sheep going home in de morning if you likes it."

"Thank you," answered Ramage; "I'll tell you in the morning. I've some business to transact in America, and I may go on with you. But meanwhile will you show me to a cabin?"

Under guidance of a steward, he made his way through the group of curious passengers that stood around them and went below. He was not yet out of the wood, but anyway he felt safer than on the "Mayflower." His savage, evil heart lighted up with pleasure at the thought of returning blow for blow with Vipart Reeves.

CHAPTER 7.

THE "AVENGER" PICKS UP A MAN AT SEA—HOT ON THE TRAIL—THE GERMAN STEAMER IN SIGHT—RAMAGE AT BAY—AT LAST!—THE DEATH OF PETER RAMAGE.

As the grey of the early morning broke over the sea, a small, slim, black hull was making its way through the light swell. On each side she tossed the spray high into the air, and above her the black smoke welled out of her funnels, and was swept away by the wind. The fast boat was the torpedo-catcher, the "Avenger," and she carried with her Vipart Reeves. All through the dull hours of the night he had stood trying to pierce the distance with his eyes. All through the night he had lived on the hope that they would run the "Mayflower" down, but now day had come, and they seemed as far from success as ever.

"Ought we not to be near her now, if she be upon this course, lieutenant?" he asked of the officer at his side.

"We ought not to be far off, anyway," was the reply. "A half-hour's run at most."

"Half an hour," repeated Vipart Reeves. And he looked ahead as if he could see that time's run in front of him. His eyes rested on something away at sea.

"Officer," he said, "what is that?" And he pointed with his finger at the object.

The lieutenant looked at it hard for a moment.

"I think," he replied, "it's wreckage of some kind."

He turned so as to run near the mass, whatever it was, and in a few minutes they could see it was a jumble of floating spars, and, clinging to it, was the form of a man.

As they drew near the floating figure, Vipart, who was looking overboard, saw moving past a lifebelt, and on it clearly discernible was the name the "Mayflower." He looked at the half-drowned man now with something more than curiosity. Could it be his enemy? They were right upon him now; he was a stranger. A boat was lowered, and the fainting man taken aboard. The war vessel, having recovered its object, continued ahead with the same speed as before.

"You are from the yacht 'Mayflower,'" said Vipart. "How comes it that we find you floating here at sea? What has happened to your boat?"

"She was run down last night by a German passenger steamer," said the man faintly.

"How did it happen?"

"The Earl of Marnham had the wheel, and he put her head dead across the bows of the steamer. Why he did so I can't tell."

"You can't," said Vipart. "Well, perhaps you will understand when I tell you that the man was not the Earl of Marnham, that he was a criminal, who stole the earl's yacht, and that I am out in this warship to track him down."

"Heaven send you to do it, sir," said the man. He was very ill, but he had understood perfectly. "My mates have all gone to Davy, and I am left alone. If the prayers of him you have saved can help you, sir, you'll not miss the scoundrel—you'll not miss him!"

The man's voice faltered with emotion and weakness.

"One question more," said Vipart. "Can you tell me was the villain saved?"

"I believe so, sir," answered the man. "I saw him jump the yacht before the steamer struck her, and I saw the boat pick someone up. I was too weak at the time from the effects of a blow I got in the collision to cry out, and so they missed me. It must have been he, sir; none of my mates had half a chance."

"The steamer was a German, you say?"

"Yes, sir!"

The crew of the Government vessel helped the poor man below, and Vipart remained, as before, in the steerage-house, peering straight ahead. Ramage, as a climax to his villainy, had now sacrificed the lives of those poor innocent men. Well, he would soon bring him to account for it, thanks to Providence.

On swept the torpedo-catcher at its steady speed of thirty-one knots an hour, and each turn of her screws took her slowly but surely nearer to her chase. An hour and a half passed, and the look-out reported a steamer in sight. Every minute brought her more plainly in view, and they soon made her out to be a German vessel. She was also steaming a good pace, and it would be some time ere they caught her, notwithstanding the speed they were going.

"Can't you signal her to stop, lieutenant?" asked Vipart.

"I can fire one of our guns; that will answer, doubtless," said he.

He gave the order, the gun was loaded and fired, and the dull boom went travelling over the sea towards the vessel they were pursuing. Through his glass Vipart could see a commotion going on on her deck. Her skipper evidently did not know what to make of it. Such a thing had never happened before during the whole of his experience. However, beyond the commotion, little notice was taken of the summons. The old

man Rees had now come up and joined Vipart, and was also gazing eagerly at the steamer.

"Give her another gun," said Vipart.

Again the gun was fired, and this time the great liner took heed, her screws ceased to churn the water, and she gradually slowed up, and down upon her swooped the warship the "Avenger." Gradually her decks became visible to Vipart, and then the people on them. Eagerly Vipart swept the crowd with his glass; but the man he sought was not visible. Soon they were within speaking distance.

"What dis mean, anyway?" roared the captain of the liner.

"Why do you let off de guns at me, eh?"

"You have a criminal aboard your ship, and we've been sent out by our Government to catch him, dead or alive!" called the lieutenant. "And we're just going to do it!"

"A criminal, on my steamer!" yelled the captain. "Dat is nonsense. I will shoost go on!"

"If you touch your telegraph, or attempt to move your ship," shouted the lieutenant, "I'll blow you out of the water; and, as you know, a Briton's as good as his word. Look out, we're going to board you!"

As he spoke the gig splashed into the sea, and the crew took their seats. Then Vipart, the old man Rees, and Wilson, and the lieutenant followed, and they put off to the ship, where the German captain stormed and swore upon the deck, whilst the crew and the passengers looked on it all in amazement.

Meanwhile, Ramage had been spending a very pleasant time in his cabin. He had hoodwinked the skipper, and had escaped his enemies; and now he was busy concocting a plan by which he could be revenged upon Vipart. He knew where he could hire assassins by the dozen, and he had sufficient influence left him by which he could obtain the money wherewith to complete the bargain; and when once Reeves was dead he would build up another society far more dangerous and powerful than the last.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "I will rise again like a phoenix from the ashes of the past. The sun is for the moment eclipsed, but will shine again with greater power and glory for it. The brain that conceived and fostered and built the League of the Silver Star, can produce a yet greater combination by means of which not even a prince of the old bloods' Royal shall be left to tread the earth. I will exterminate all; I will revolutionise the world, and it shall bow down to me! Ah! Vipart Reeves, you are doomed with the rest—doomed, I say! Doomed!"

He rose to his feet, and stood, with his arms thrown high up into the air, like an inspired fanatic; and then, as though to seal his words, came the boom of a gun far out across the sea. He started, and then his hands fell, and he remained in silent wonder. A minute later the sound was repeated. What could the noise mean? He stepped to the cabin port-hole and looked out, and while he looked a slate-coloured, serpentine object, belching black smoke, flashed across his line of vision. The liner had ceased to move. For the first time a terrible fear took possession of him. He looked again, and his fear was confirmed, for there upon the deck of an English warship stood the tall, grey-haired form of Vipart Reeves.

A curse rose to the lips of Ramage, and he beat his fist upon the iron casing of the port-hole.

"Curse him!" he cried. "He has trapped me here. After all my pains, my ingenuity, and my care; after my sacrifice of the yacht this man has run me down. Well, if the end is to be here, I shall not go down alone!"

Then his eyes rested upon old Mr. Rees.

"He, too!" he muttered, and his cheek turned the hue of death; "then I am indeed lost. After all these years he has found me. My time has come."

Ramage seemed now to have lost all hope, but the evil light in his eye showed he meant mischief still. He felt in his pocket; his revolver was gone! A storm of oaths and blasphemies came from his lips; but, after a second's thought, he rushed from his cabin, and made his way to the captain's berth, which was just past the main staircase amidships. The interest in the warship had drawn everyone on deck; not a soul was in sight. He opened the door and entered; he looked round; the cabin was bare of everything save a chart or two, a compass, a few books, and writing materials. He opened the drawers one after another, but could not find what he wanted. He then opened the drawer to the table in a corner of the cabin, and as he shifted the papers in it his hand touched a revolver. He drew it out. It was a regulation Colt, and was loaded in four of its chambers. He set it to one of the loaded chambers, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he quietly stepped out, drew the door to after him, and went on deck.

While Ramage was searching for a weapon the boat had reached the liner, and its occupants had gone aboard—the lieutenant first, Vipart next, and then the old man Rees, and Wilson. They drew up in a line before the German captain. Around them assembled the curious passengers.

"Well, sir," roared the skipper, "I am waiting for you to explain de meaning of dis outrage!"

"I am sorry to put you to any trouble, captain," said Vipart; "but you poked up a man last night from a yacht, the 'Mayflower,' which you ran down."

"I picked up de man, right enough; but de yacht was not de 'Mayflower.' And what den, anyway?"

"That man is Peter Ramage, which will, I think, sufficiently explain and excuse our conduct," said Vipart.

At this dreaded name, which had terrified every civilised country in the world for the past week, the passengers drew back with exclamations of horror, and even the ruddy captain's cheek paled.

"Peter Ramage, aboard my sheep. Dat is impossible!" he groaned.

The lieutenant, meanwhile, had called for a boatload of blue-jackets, and now they came tumbling up on deck, rifle in hand, and formed line behind the lieutenant.

"Let us search the steamer without loss of time," he said. "The fellow has evidently slunk into a hole like the fox he is, and we shall no doubt have to rout him out at the point of the bayonet."

"Yes, yes! Search the ship!" said old Rees, trembling with agitation and excitement. "Search the ship, and have him out. I want to see him!"

"I suppose it is the only thing to be done," said Vipart. "Come, my lads, we'll search the ship."

They turned to do so, but at the same instant Ramage came up from below, with his head erect and his eyes flashing with a dangerous light. Instinctively the passengers shrank away from him.

"I will save you the trouble, Vipart Reeves!" he hissed. "You and I have met face to face again. You betrayed the league to the police, and you and I have a long account to settle. We'll settle it now!"

He drew his revolver quickly; and, before Vipart Reeves could move or think, he pointed it at him, and pulled the trigger.

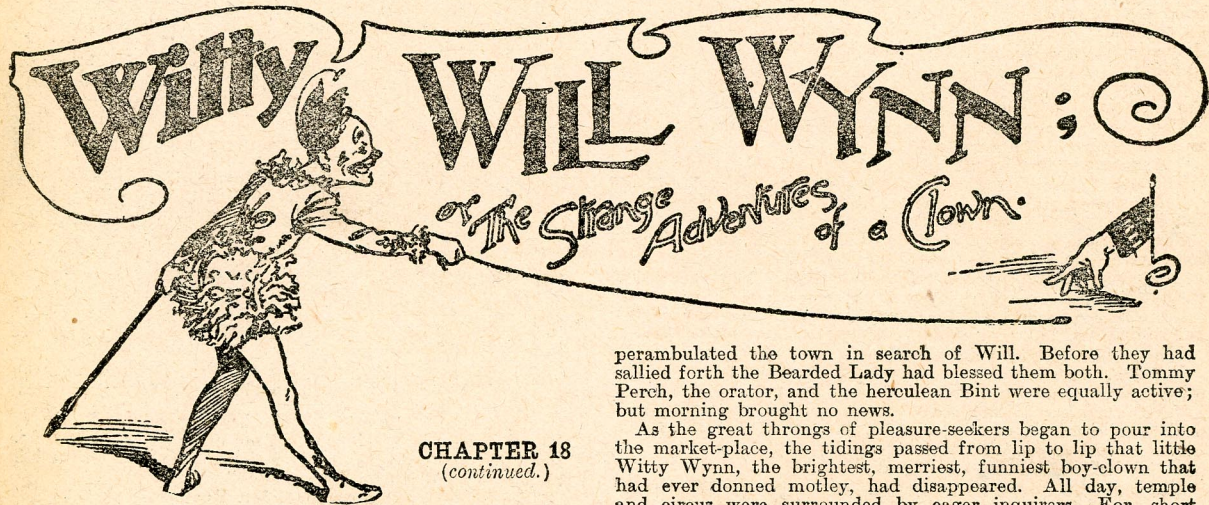
There was a flash and a report—but it was written that Vipart Reeves should not die that day. The old man had from the moment he set eyes on Peter Ramage watched him like a tiger; and, as he drew the revolver, he threw himself headlong at him, and seized him by the throat. The pistol exploded, and the ball entered his breast; but he hung on to Ramage's neck as if he had grown to be part of him. In vain Ramage struggled to free himself; in vain he struck the old man again and again with the head of his weapon—the old man kept his hold.

"So—we meet—at—last—Peter Ramage!" gasped old Rees. "Remember—my daughter—remember Helen!"

With supernatural power, the old man forced Ramage to the side of the ship, where the taffrail was open to allow the party from the war vessel to land, and all the while the blood gushed from the wound in his breast. They reached the side, stood there together for a moment, and then went sheer down into the sea, the wild, despairing shriek of Ramage, clashing with the old man's cry of "Revenge!" They struck the water together, and the hands of Ramage were seen clutching desperately at the surface for a moment, and then he disappeared beneath the waves for ever. The two—the old man, and the young; the sinned against and the sinner—sleep side by side at the bottom of the Atlantic.

With the death of Peter Ramage, Vipart Reeves found his great task ended. There was no need for him to work again so long as he lived; but so energetic a spirit as his can never rest for long, and it needs but some great motive such as the League of the Silver Star, and its intrigue against society, to stir him, when he will be found as active, as true, and as infallible as ever, and willing to risk his life in the service of the State. On his brother's tomb in Brompton Cemetery may be seen now the additional names of—Peter Ramage, Robert Rees, coupled with the curious word—"Revenge!"

THE END.



CHAPTER 18
(continued.)

"Why, here's Sharp!" cried Ada Graham, who, late as the hour was, had refused to return to the lodgings, and whose white face and nervous looks told of a great anxiety. And Sharp scampered around, and barked with delight. Then he, too, seemed to realise that something was wrong, and, ceasing his gambols, began to sniff the air, and look round as if in search of someone. He missed the presence of his good friend, the Witty One.

Matters were indeed looking serious. Finally Professor Romah, Spangler, and Jim Butler decided that it would be advisable to go to the police-station. The three men were silent, the same secret dread in their hearts. Had the Giant Grix anything to do with Will's disappearance? It was known that since his dismissal he had been in drink, and was still hanging about the town.

Ada Graham returned with Madame Romah to the lodgings, to pass a sleepless and anxious night. Her mind was full of gloomy forebodings. It seemed as if some evil destiny dogged Will's footsteps. He only escaped one danger to fall into another. Madame Romah was equally disconsolate, and when, in the early hours of the morning, the professor, tired out and distressed, returned with no news of the missing one, the good lady could no longer contain herself, and gave way to a flood of tears.

The Skeleton Masher and the Human Serpent, forgetting their rivalry in their grief, combined forces, and throughout the night

perambulated the town in search of Will. Before they had sallied forth the Bearded Lady had blessed them both. Tommy Perch, the orator, and the herculean Bint were equally active; but morning brought no news.

As the great throngs of pleasure-seekers began to pour into the market-place, the tidings passed from lip to lip that little Witty Wynn, the brightest, merriest, funniest boy-clown that had ever donned motley, had disappeared. All day, temple and circus were surrounded by eager inquirers. For, short time as he had been in the town, Will had already become a universal favourite with the public.

But there were two people who inwardly rejoiced. Joe Grix, who, quite unconscious of the fact that Will had been decoyed to the Beetle and Whistle, still stayed in the town, and who was rapidly spending what money he had in drink, and Adolphus Byron Jones. The poet, accompanied by a friend, Angelo Raphael Simpkins, had kept his appointment at the back of the circus. He was supremely relieved when Will did not appear, and when he heard the news of his disappearance, he hinted to his friend that Will had probably run away because he was afraid to meet him. And, feeling that he was secure from further interruptions, determined to renew his attentions to Lanetta, the peerless gipsy queen.

Returning home, and after having chewed up half a pen, and with much scratching of his head, he concocted the following poem:

"Thy dusky skin, thy sparkling eyes,
That rival 'em on the summer skies,
Have filled my heart with gnawing pain,
I'm waiting, love, for thee again,
At half-past eight, sunshine or rain,
Behind the temple, lovely queen!
If you don't come, I'll die, I ween!
For thee, I'd give a thousand thrones—
This poem's writ by Byron Jones!"

DO YOU LIKE THIS?

Armed with this concoction of nonsense, the poet, his lanky locks well hair-oiled, set out for Ada Graham's tent.

"That little, vulgar, clowning fellow," he said to his friend, Angelo Raphael Simpkins, "did not dare to encounter me! Pah, he is only hiding from me! I will win her yet, the dusky beauty!"

"I will paint her picture," said Angelo Simpkins, whose paintings were about on a par with Byron Jones' poems. "I will immortalise her on canvas!"

And he fingered a sketch-book that bulged out of his pocket.

Poor Ada sat in her tent, more than once struggling hard to keep down rising tears. It was as much as she could do to get through the day's work. Her thoughts would wander away. But she had one faithful companion. Sharp, who also seemed sadly depressed, sat beside her, and now and again sympathetically thrust his cold nose into her hand. Several times he got up, walked to the entrance of the tent, and peered out as if looking for someone.

Tommy Perch, outside, harangued the crowd, and sang the praises of the gipsy queen; but he was not in his usual form. Sorrow and anxiety, like a great cloud, enveloped the Temple of Matchless Mirth.

When Byron Jones, close-followed by Angelo Simpkins, having duly deposited two sixpences, entered the tent, Ada gave a little exclamation of annoyance. She was in no mood to listen to his extravagant nonsense.

"I have brought a friend," said the poet, with a love-sick glance at Ada, "a slave, like myself, to art. I would have you read his fate, my peerless queen."

Sharp eyed the two slaves of art suspiciously, and began to sniff the air, now impregnated with an odour of cheap scent. Angelo Simpkins had inserted a penny in an automatic scent-machine, and smelt accordingly.

The money had been paid, and Ada had no other alternative but to do as she was asked. Angelo Simpkins stretched out a hand that showed that in his case art and cleanliness did not go together. Ada rapidly told him his character; but, when she had finished, neither poet nor painter showed any inclination to leave the tent.

"I have finished!" said Ada, glancing significantly towards the entrance of the tent.

The poet drew his poem from his pocket, and, with a bow and an amorous glance, presented it to Ada.

"A tribute to thy beauty—a little trifle of my own!" he said.

The painter had whipped out his sketch-book.

"One moment," he said; "do not move—the pose is perfect. Let me limn your classic features!"

Sharp began to walk slowly round the tent as if revolving some problem in his canine brain.

Ada's eyes flashed. She crumpled up the poem, and threw it to the ground.

"I wish you would go," she said. "I have told you once before that I do not care about your poems or your attentions!" Sharp began to growl.

But the poet, carried away by his passion, did not notice the growl; the painter was far too absorbed in his sketch.

"You shall hear me!" cried Byron Jones; "your boastful champion, the boy-clown, has not dared to face me. He is in hiding to escape the chastisement I should have meted out to him. It is I, not he, who is worthy of you!"

The hot blood rushed to Ada's cheeks. She was of a fiery nature.

"You're a coward!" she cried. "You wouldn't dare to speak like that if I will were here! Will you go out of my tent?"

"Yes," said Byron Jones; "but I will have a kiss first from those disdainful, cupid-arched lips."

And before Ada could prevent him he had grasped her by the wrist, and drew her towards him. She tried to free herself; then, as the poet drew her still closer, she gave a little scream. Adolphus Byron Jones did not obtain the kiss for which he pined. Ada's cry had given Sharp his cue. He realised that the time for action had come. With a yap and a display of fangs, he flew at Byron Jones, and fastened on to the calf—such as it was—of his left leg. The poet howled, and relaxed his hold on Ada's wrist. The painter dropped his sketch-book and bolted to the entrance, followed by the yelling poet, and Sharp still hanging on.

Now, Tommy Perch, the orator, standing outside, had heard Ada's cry, but events had taken place so quickly that before he could enter the tent, poet, painter, and Sharp came tumbling out pell-mell. The painter came first, and Tommy, an ardent but chivalrous admirer of Ada, let drive at him with his open hand, and, catching him on the side of his face, sent him to the ground. Byron Jones, following close behind, tripped up, and fell on top of the prostrate Angelo Simpkins. Sharp—whose crest should have been a rat-trap with the motto "What I have I hold"—still hung on with the grimness of death. Arms and legs moved frantically; strange cries filled the air. The crowd, gathered round the tent, roared with laughter. It

is impossible to say how long Sharp would have held on to Byron Jones' calf had not Ada appeared at the entrance of the tent. She called to him, and Sharp reluctantly released his hold.

Then the poet and painter struggled to his feet.

"Show your faces here again," said Tommy Perch, "and I'll give both of you a hiding that you won't forget in a hurry! Now then, get!"

And Byron Jones and Angelo Simpkins did get with all possible haste. They were considerably hustled, too, in the process by the crowd, who, with a little encouragement, would have handled them more roughly. But Tommy Perch shouted out contemptuously, "Let 'em go!"

And, followed by cries of "Get year 'air out, 'Amlet!"—"Where did you get that hat?" and sundry other appropriate and inappropriate remarks, Byron Jones and Angelo Simpkins were suffered to depart in comparative peace.

Tommy Perch hurried into the tent, and learned from Ada what had exactly happened. While he was listening to her account, Sharp trotted up to him, and deposited something at their feet, and then, looking up at Ada, wagged his tail.

"Why, what's that?" said Ada.

Tommy stooped down and picked the something up.

"Well, miss," he said, as a broad grin crossed his features, "I reckon it's a piece of the poet's trouser-leg. Well, don't let me catch either of them round here again, or they won't be let off so lightly. I'm afraid," he added in a low voice, "that there's no news of Will."

With quivering lips, and a look of grief upon her face, Ada turned away her head.

CHAPTER 19.

WILL ENDURES THE TORTURE OF DARKNESS—HOW PAT FLANNIGAN CAME TO HIS RESCUE, AND HOW THE LANDLORD OF THE BEETLE AND WHISTLE WAS TARRED AND FEATHERED!

When Will's senses returned to him he was in total darkness. A horrible feeling of sickness was upon him, and his brain was reeling. He was lying on his back, and for a while he did not stir, trying to collect his scattered thoughts. Then gradually he recalled all that had taken place. Why had he been ensnared? Who were the men who had made him prisoner? He had not seen either of them before, as far as he could remember? Still weak and dizzy from the effects of the drug, he staggered to his feet, and began to grope around in the darkness. Presently he found the wall, and, feeling his way along, reached a door. In vain he beat upon it, and struggled to force it open; it was massive, and securely fastened. Then he shouted, but a weird echo was the only answer. He was full of pluck, but his heart sank within him. Had he been shut up there to starve? He did not know where he was. His last recollection was of the stone kitchen, where his senses had left him.

Round and round he worked his way in the darkness; the floor was uneven, and more than once he stumbled over casks. Their lightness told him that they were empty. Had he been locked up in some old cellar? In vain he searched his pocket for a match. There was nothing to be done but to wait. Every moment seemed to add to the horrible intensity of the darkness; what seemed to him to be long hours of waiting was in reality only a few minutes. Once again he was on his legs and circling round. This time, on reaching the door, he discovered that there was a small space between it and the ground. A wild hope surged to his brain. What if he could manage to squeeze himself through? He went down on all fours. But, supple and acrobatic as he was, the space was not wide enough. Again he rattled and beat upon the door. Hollow, reverberating echoes only answered him. It was the darkness that haunted him. If only he could see he might be able to find some means of escape.

At last, utterly worn out and still heavy with the drug, he sank down on the uneven floor, and passed into a deep sleep.

When he awoke he was still in darkness. He found himself wondering how much longer his reason would endure the terrible strain. Then he sprang to his feet, for his ears had caught the distant sound of approaching footsteps.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds, and then a glimmer of light shone through the space beneath the door.

"Who's there?" cried Will. "Is it a friend? For goodness' sake let me out of this! I'm Will Wynn, and some scoundrels have decoyed me here!"

"Hold your noise, you young brute! If you don't, something worse than being locked up will happen to you! Be thankful that you're being treated as well as you are! I've brought you some food.

And a plate and a mug were thrust under the space below the door.

Will started back. He had recognised the voice as belonging

to the man with the squint; the man who had given him the drugged drink.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, losing all control over himself, "you decoyed me here, you drugged me—let me out! If you don't, it will be the worse for you."

"Ho, ho! my young bantam," came back the answer, with a jeering laugh, "you crow loudly; but you're going to stop here, so just make yourself as comfortable as you can. And if you go making a row, I shall just dock your wittles, and we'll see if a system of dieting won't produce obedience."

Then the light faded away; there was another jeering laugh; and Will was again left in utter darkness.

Almost mechanically he felt for the plate and the mug. He would eat and drink to keep up his strength. For he did not yet despair. But, as he munched the dry bread, he could not repress a shudder. It was more like a horrid nightmare than reality. To be carried off, to be made a prisoner in a large city? What did it all mean? How would it all end?

Will had no idea what the time was—the inky darkness that surrounded him gave him an impression that it must be night; but, as a matter of fact, it was well past midday.

Meantime, Dicky Neave, the scoundrelly landlord of the Beetle and Whistle, carrying the light, was returning along the subterranean tunnel. Reaching the stone steps, he proceeded up them into the cellar above. Scarcely had he passed up through the cellar, and up the wooden steps that led into the kitchen, when a carrot pole was thrust round one of the beer-casks, and immediately afterwards Pat, potboy and cellarman, emerged.

For a moment he stood still in the dimly-lighted cellar, and vigorously scratched his head.

"And what's the rascal been after doin'?" he muttered; "What did he want to take that plate of food and that mug down that trap, and then come sneakin' back like some thafe in the night. Begorra, but I'm thinkin' I'll make inquiries down that bit of a trap! The mean villain, after dockin' my wages for that glass he tried to break on my scalp, is capable of anything! And that oily, ferrety friend of his; they're just a pair of rascally lackguards. And, all along, I've had a thought it's mischief they're been brewin' over their drinks, bad cess to both of 'em!"

The landlord, all unconscious of the fact that Pat had been in the cellar when he had passed and repassed, had closed down the trap. Pat drew some matches from his pocket, wrenched out the stump of a candle that was fastened into the bung-hole of an empty cask, and, having lit it, quickly raised the trap-door that led down into the tunnel below.

"They say," he muttered, "it leads down into the old cellars. Well, I'll just be after seein' for myself if it is so; and just try to find out what that ghoulis, squint-eyed master of mine means by takin' vittles down. Cellars don't need food, that's shure!"

Pat descended, and, holding the candle above his head, cautiously proceeded along the dark tunnel.

Will, having finished his food, and, crouching on the floor, heard the approaching footsteps, and fancied that it must be his captor returning. As the light shone under the door, he cried out:

"Are you going to let me out, or not? You've no right to keep me here. Let me out, do you hear!"

Outside, Pat, at the sound of the voice, nearly dropped the candle; then, recovering himself, advanced close up to the massive door.

"What—but who are ye? Shure, an' it's not me that's locked ye up, though perhaps it's me as will be after lettin' ye out!"

Will's heart beat fiercely. Was an opportunity of escape at hand?

"I'm Will Wynn. I was drugged and locked up in this place. Who are you?"

"Patrick Flannigan, by the some token. But, begorra, did ye say Will Wynn, ye are—the boy-clown that I've heard so much talk about, and I've been wishin' to see, only my rascal of a master niver gives me a chance, keepin' me workin' like a slave, for all that my skin's white and not black? By jabers, an' it's Witty Will Wynn!"

"Yes, that's me; but, for Heaven's sake, unbolt the door! I seem to have been in this horrible place for ages, and I don't know what my friends will be thinking!"

Pat held aloft the stump of the candle, and examined the door. A little cry of dismay escaped his lips. As well as being bolted, it was locked.

"What's up?" asked Will from the inside.

"Shure, an' the door's locked!"

Will's hopes began to die away. But Pat, outside, began to scratch his head violently, a sure sign that he was endeavouring to evolve some plan.

"Whist!" he whispered, "that squintin' master of mine must have the key somewhere about him. I'm goin' to leave you for a while, and try to get it from him. He generally takes forty

winks after his dinner, and that'll be my chance. What wid whisky and food, he sleeps like a hummin'-top! Just keep your spirits up, and I'll be wid ye before very long."

"Thank you, Pat," answered Will; "you're a good sort, and if I come out of this place alive I sha'n't forget, I can tell you!"

Dicky Neave, the landlord, satisfied that his prisoner was safe, had eaten a huge meal, washed down with plenty of whisky, and, the key of the cellar in his pocket, now reclined in an arm-chair in the back-parlour, his legs cocked up on the table. Sleuth Slymer had started out early that morning for Oldham to see his employer, the bird-like Copples, and was not expected back till late in the evening.

Gradually the landlord dozed off, and began to snore. His wife, a brow-beaten, down-trodden little woman, was looking after the bar, where Joe Grix, maudlin with drink, sat silently chuckling over the Witty One's disappearance.

"What'll Spangler do now?" he hiccoughed to himself. "He'll be wanting me to go back—and, if he does, he'll have to pay me my price. I hope that little whelp has fallen in the Trent and got drowned! Another quarter of gin cold, missus!"

The landlord's snores had deepened in their tones, and were ringing out like the notes of a foghorn when Pat's red head peered cautiously round the door.

"It's sleepin' he is, wid beef and whisky on his chest!" he muttered, going down on his hands and knees, and crawling towards him.

Reaching him, he deftly thrust a hand into one of his coat-pockets, and there, sure enough, was a heavy key.

"Now," thought Pat, "if only he'll go on sleeping, and I can get down to the cellar, let out Will Wynn, lock up the door, and put back the key before he wakes, there'll be a pretty little surprise in store for him!"

Having crawled out of the room, Pat, without meeting a soul, made his way back to the subterranean cellar where Will was imprisoned.

"Well!" cried Will, who had been waiting in deepest suspense.

"Arrah! but I've got the blissed key, and it's free ye'll be in a brace of seconds!"

A moment later, the bolts were withdrawn, and the door unlocked. Will stepped out into the rock tunnel, dimly-lighted by the candle Pat carried. He gave a deep sigh of thankfulness. He was not yet out of the wood; but anything was better than the horrible darkness that he had endured for so long. With an impetuous movement he stretched out his hand, and Pat took it.

"Thank you, Pat," he said; "I owe you something for this. Some day, perhaps, I will be able to repay you."

"Not a bit," said the Irish lad, "there's nothin' to be repaid. But there's more to be done. You've got to get away from here; and I want to lock up the door, and put the key back in that rascal's pocket widout him knowin'. If he found out I'd let ye free, I'm thinkin' it's murder would be done. Ye don't know Dick Neave, p'r'aps, as well as I do. Now, if ye'll wait here, I'll slip back, return the key, and be wid ye again in a couple of shakes. Then we must see about gettin' you out of the house widout bein' see. By St. Patrick, but won't Dick Neave be mad when he comes down, unlocks the door, and finds ye gone!"

"We musn't count our chickens before they're hatched," said Will. "I'm not out of the place yet!"

Having relocked and bolted the door, Pat departed. A quarter of an hour later he returned.

"It's all right. He was fast asleep, and the key's back in his pocket."

"And now how am I to get out?" asked Will.

"You can't go through the house widout bein' seen!"

"Where does this tunnel lead to in that direction?" said Will, pointing in the opposite direction.

Pat scratched his head.

"It's the first time I've been down here; but I've heard Dicky Neave say something about it leadin' to the castle."

"Well," said Will determinedly, "if it comes out there I shall be all right! Now, Pat, you go back; look as if nothing had happened. I shall find my way out, never fear. And then let Dick Neave and the villain who decoyed me here look out!"

The two lads shook hands, and Pat insisted on Will taking the stump of the candle, as he himself would be able to find his way back in the dark.

"What's the name of the house?" asked Will.

"The Beetle and Whistle."

"Well, when I come to the Beetle and Whistle again, I'll bring some friends with me. Good-bye, Pat; thank you for all you've done. I hope to repay you some day. If I've any luck in getting out of this place I shall be back again in time to appear in Spangler's ring."

"Good luck go wid ye!"

Thus they parted—for a time. Pat to return to the Beetle and Whistle; Will, holding the guttering stump of candle, to grope his way along the subterranean tunnel. Once, as he

steadily pressed forward, the passage narrowed so much that he had to go down on his hands and knees; then it opened out again, and began to ascend.

"It must be coming out somewhere," muttered Will. "What an extraordinary adventure I've had, and am having! I do hope they are not worrying about me. Something tells me I'm coming out of it all right. And, if I do, I mean to get even with those scoundrels. What puzzles me is, why should they want to entrap me?"

The tunnel was still ascending, but there were no signs of any exit, and the candle was beginning to burn down to Will's finger-tips. A few moments later the light expired. Will was again in utter darkness. Feeling his way along the side, he was still moving forward when a draught of cold air struck him. He must be near the outer world now. In his eagerness, and despite the darkness, he pressed forward more hurriedly. The tunnel took an abrupt turn. When he had rounded it, a cry

of joy escaped his lips. An opening was before him, the dim light of evening shining through. Then his cry changed to one of dismay. Strong iron bars, like those of a cage, railed in the aperture from ground to roof. He was still a prisoner!

Reaching the bars, he thrust his head through. He gave another cry of surprise when he realised where he was. Above him rose up Nottingham Castle; below, and some eighty feet distant, was the town; the rocky slope leading down to it was rugged and precipitous.

"Where the head can go, the body can generally follow," Will muttered. And, compressing himself into the smallest possible space, he somehow managed to wriggle himself through the bars.

Clinging on to the bars, for there was no foothold beyond, he glanced, first up, and then down. Above and below nothing but rock.

(To be continued in next Friday's UNION JACK.)

What Countries do these people come from?

First Prize, £5.

Over 150 other Prizes.

WRITE THE NAME OF THE COUNTRY UNDER EACH FIGURE.

Below you will find the fourth set of six pictures, representing people of different countries. Two more sets of six pictures will appear, making thirty-six pictures in all. A £5 Note will be sent to the reader who correctly names all the nationalities.

IF TWO ARE RIGHT, THE PRIZE WILL BE DIVIDED.

THE EDITOR'S DECISION IS FINAL.

The other Prizes are: Six Silveroid and Gun-Metal Watches, Fifty Sheffield-made Pocket Knives, Fifty Stamp Albums, Fifty Pencils. Also a Special Ladies' Prize of Ten Shillings.

The sender of every TWENTIETH Letter opened (whether the solutions are right or wrong) will be awarded a Consolation Prize.

SOME HINTS TO COMPETITORS.

1. As we cannot answer any letters in connection with this competition (whether accompanied by stamped addressed envelope or not), competitors should ask their parents or friends to advise them about anything they cannot understand. Everything has been made very clear, and anyone entering the competition may rest assured that every reader has an equal chance of winning the prizes offered.

2. You must not send in any solutions until we give the word in the UNION JACK. When the sixth set of pictures appears (in No. 207) we shall tell you exactly how to send in your solutions. Not more than one country may be written beneath any one picture. Competitors are warned that any breach of this rule will disqualify them.

3. If, when you have made out one set of solutions, you think you have one or two of them wrong, make out a second set (for which you must purchase or obtain from your friends extra copies of the UNION JACK). Any competitor may send in as many sets as he likes; but each complete set of six lists must be sent to us in a separate envelope. THIS IS IMPORTANT.

4. Every reader of the UNION JACK should have a try, BECAUSE THE SENDER OF EVERY TWENTIETH SET OPENED, WHETHER RIGHT OR WRONG, WILL BE AWARDED A CONSOLATION PRIZE.

IMPORTANT!

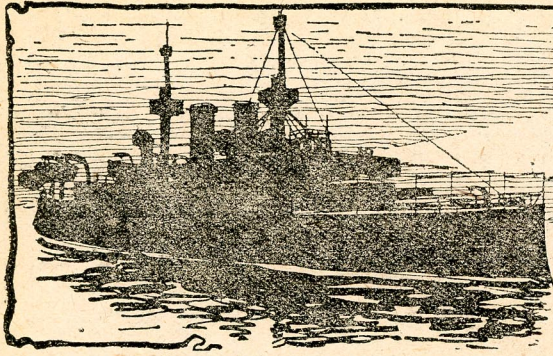
Keep the Sets of Pictures until we tell you how and when to send in.



19..... 20..... 21.....



22..... 23..... 24.....



FROM THE QUARTERDECK.

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.

Is the long, complete story in this number to your liking? Write me a postcard, and tell me; it will only take you a minute or two, and will help me very much.

Mr. Hardy is now engaged on another story for the UNION JACK, which will appear shortly.

Next week's number contains "A FALSE DETECTIVE," by an old friend of yours, Mr. John G. Rowe. It is a most exciting tale of life in a powder-mill. You can judge for yourself by the chapter headings I give:

The Detective Arrives at the Powder-mills—The Mills by Night—The Dynamitard at Work. In Chase of the False Detective. A Fight in the Dark—A Daring Leap. The Struggle on the Water-wheel. The Strike at the Mills—The Police Defeated—Mr. Trevor Doomed to a Terrible Fate.

The week after next you may expect "RIVAL BULL-FIGHTERS," by Mr. S. Clarke Hook, the author of so many successful UNION JACK stories.

"Dear Editor,—I have much pleasure in writing these few lines to you about your paper the UNION JACK, as I have been a reader of it for twelve months or more.

"The story it contained last week ('A Marked Man') I took a great liking to.

"I had much pleasure in telling my friends about it, and ever so many of them say that they will get your book every Friday. If I might make a suggestion, I should be very glad if you would have some more stories of Jim Ware. It says he is going to be a detective, and it would please a good many, I am sure.

"Your story 'Witty Will Wynn' I think is also a very good story. I must tell you that my father reads this paper, and he says that it is a very good paper, too. This is all I have got to say at present.—I remain, yours truly,

"PATRICK J. MOONEY.

"Belfast."

Thank you very much for your long, appreciative letter. What do my other readers say about further stories of Jim Ware?

How to Make Money in Spare Time.—No. 8.

One more lesson in bamboo working, and the novice who has followed out the instructions that have been given so far will know as much about this very simple and remunerative work as it is possible for him to learn without actual practice.

The subject illustrated is a very useful and ornamental cabinet, which is not only a very saleable article, but presents a useful lesson to the bamboo worker, inasmuch as it differs from any yet

which form the gallery at the top and at the bottom, are respectively 9in. and 30in. in length; four of each will be required.

The bottom shelf is 9in. from the ground, and the other shelves are the same distance apart, so the four legs which support the two short shelves are each 9in. high. These are dowelled at each end, and screws are driven through the shelves from under the bottom one in an upward direction into the dowels of the lower pair of supports, in a downward direction through the lower short shelf into the dowels at the top of the lower supports, and in a similar manner from below the lower shelf into the supports for the third shelf, and from above the third shelf down into its supports.

The corners of the shelves where they are connected with the four stout uprights must be rounded out with a rasp or gouge, as is shown in Fig. 2. When the bamboo fits nicely into this curve, a hole is drilled through, and a long French nail is driven through into the wood of the shelf.

The ends of the canes used for the galleries must be dowelled and rasped out hollow to fit against the uprights, where they are secured with nails in the manner before described.

The carved supports, which are really more for ornamentation than for use, are bent on the bending-iron, the ends dowelled and cut to fit neatly against the bamboo and the lower part of the shelves, and there secured with nails, or, better still, fine screws.

And now for the treatment of the shelves themselves, for it is clear that they cannot be left plain.

It is usual to cover such parts as these with Japanese paper; but this highly ornamented paper is very expensive. Enamel will make a good substitute if it is carefully laid on; a pale green, a white, or a sealing-wax red colour would all look well.

Two coats should be applied, the first being allowed to dry thoroughly before the second is put on; or the shelves may be stained and varnished, using the com-

Fig II

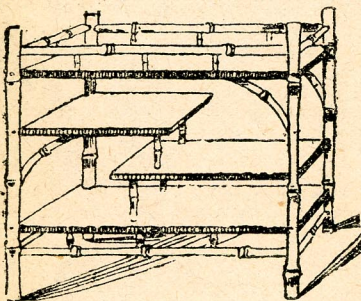
mination stain and varnish for the purpose, and applying two coats.

It is well to first scour the shelves with sandpaper, then apply the first coat. When this is thoroughly dry, rub lightly over it with the finest sandpaper again, and apply the second coat. This method is applicable both to enamelling and to stain and varnish, if a nice smooth, polished surface is desired.

The tops of the four uprights should be dowelled, and a coating of enamel or stain applied to them to give the work a finish.

Well-made, this cabinet should bring its manufacturer from six to ten shillings. Its cost is about fifteen to eighteen pence.

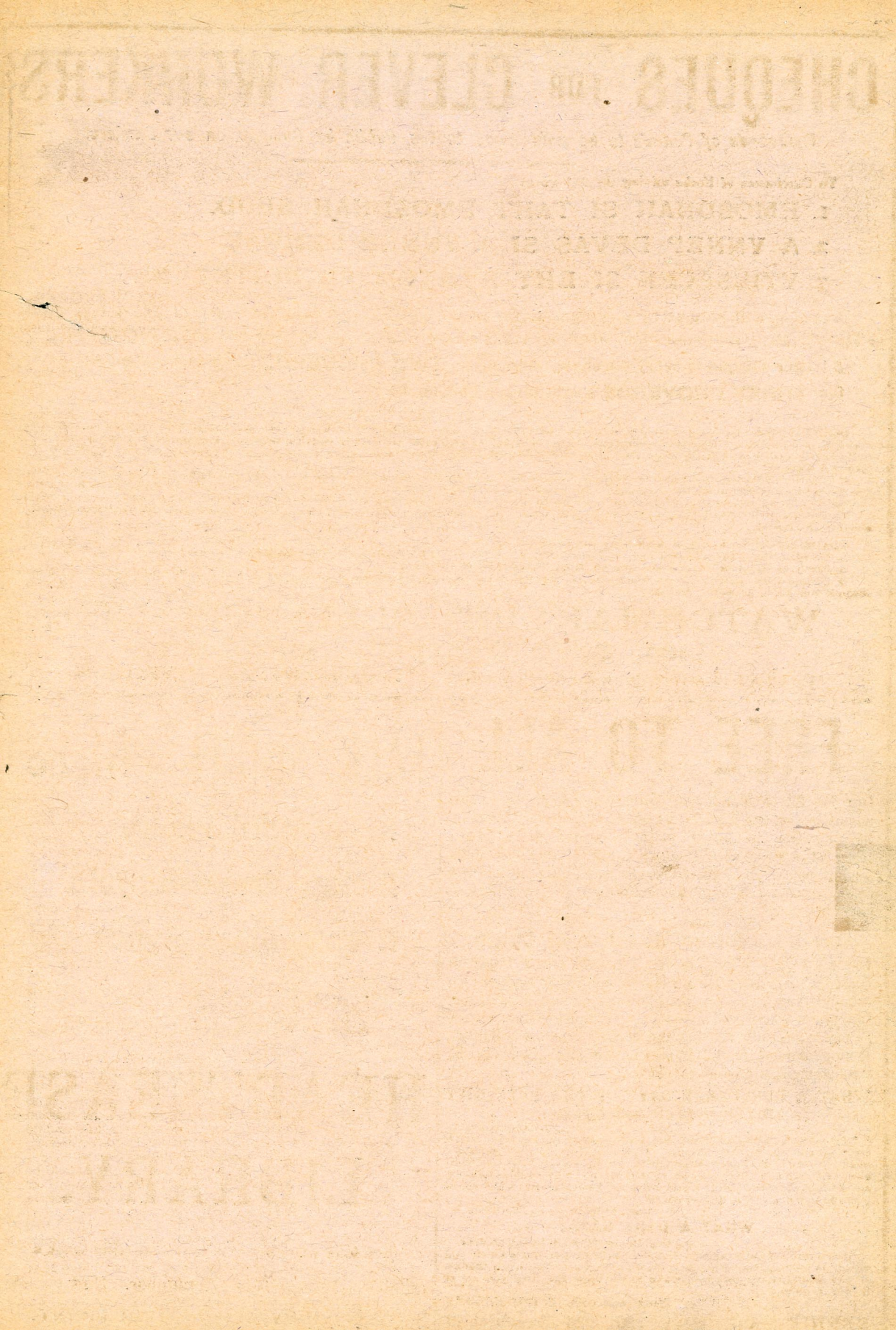
(To be continued in next Friday's UNION JACK.)



described, as there is wood used in connection with the bamboo in making up the article.

The wood, which may be deal, 3in. thick by 9in. wide, is sawn up into four lengths, two of 30in. in length and two of 20in. in length, in all about 9ft. will be required.

The four bamboo uprights should be 4ft. in length, and should be the stoutest canes procurable. The thinner canes,



CHEQUES FOR CLEVER WORKERS

Thousands of Pounds to be paid away to the Public by Cheques on our Bankers.

To Purchasers of Forks solving the following:

1. EMOSDNAH SI TAHT EMOSDNAH SEOD.
2. A YNNEP DEVAS SI A YNNEP DENRAE.
3. YTISSECEEN SI EHT REHTOM FO NOITNEVNI.

A Cheque will be sent to every purchaser of our wonderful Nickel Silver Forks who solves **ONE PROVERB**, besides an offer whereby a £2 Silver Watch can be obtained **FOR NOTHING**.

A larger Cheque to every purchaser who solves **TWO PROVERBS**, besides an offer, &c.
For **THREE PROVERBS** a still larger Cheque, &c.

DIRECTIONS—Re-arrange to represent well-known Proverbs as many of the above lines as you can, and enclose with it 4/6 for one half-dozen Forks, or 2/6 for a dozen. The Forks are full-size Table Forks, and we guarantee them fully equal in wear and appearance to solid Sterling Silver Hall-marked, as they are actually manufactured from Solid English Nickel Silver. Also enclose a stamped, directed envelope for us to post you your cheque if correct.

If it takes 25,000 to pay the Prizes we will pay it cheerfully. All depends on the number of successful contestants, and the number of cheques and the amounts of each which we must send, according to our promise in this advertisement. There is no chance, no lottery. Each successful contestant will receive a euro and certain CASH PRIZE by cheque, as well as the Free Silver Watch offer mentioned above.

This offer is good for 30 days from the date of this paper. The cheques for the Prizes will be forwarded immediately, with the Forks ordered, as soon as they are received.

The Result of our last Prize Distribution was as follows:

A Cheque for £40 was posted to J. A. Turner, Esq. (son of the Premier of British Columbia), 46, Queen Victoria Street, London, E.C.

A Cheque for £20 was posted to Charles Bailey, Imperial Hotel, Hiramcombe.

A Cheque for £10 to Officers' Mess, 3rd Field Battery, Royal Artillery, per Messrs. H. B. King & Co., Pall Mall, London; and seventeen other cheques from £5 to £1 each.—Address:

WATCHMAKERS' ALLIANCE, LTD., 184, OXFORD STREET, LONDON.

Incorporated according to Act of Parliament. Capital £90,000; Reserve Fund, £7,500.

FREE TO ALL

Our 60s. Silver Watch and Chain, who comply with this advertisement and the offer which we shall send. It would be ridiculous to expect us to continue giving away these watches and chains for any length of time. So kindly send at once if you wish to secure one. This is our first advertisement, and by it we are determined to bring our name before the public.

Our 60s. Silver Watch and Chain.

For 1s. 6d. we will send an 18-carat Gold Cased Brooch or Scarf Pin, together with our Marvellous Offer; and on your complying with offer, we shall forward entirely Free of any Charge our 60s. watch and chain. Understand, we charge no money for these watches and chains. Number is limited. Money refunded in full if sent in too late. Send 1s. 6d. with stamped addressed envelope.

WHAT A GENTLEMAN SAYS OF OUR FREE GIFT SILVER WATCH AND CHAIN:

"North Jesmond.

"GENTLEMAN.—I beg to thank you for the handsome present which came to hand on Tuesday morning. I simply answered your advertisement thinking it was only a fraud, but to my pleasant surprise I received a Silver Watch and Chain. I wish your company every possible success, and I will recommend you to all my friends. You may make what use of this you like if it will be to your advantage.

"I remain, yours truly, W. STAVELY."

WHAT A LADY SAYS:

"Ingoldby House, 18, High Street, Redcar.

"DUAL SEX.—I must say I think it is a most beautiful little watch and chain. A most handsome present, for which I return you many thanks. If you should think proper to make use of these few lines you are at liberty to do so.

"Yours respectfully, E. STOTHARD."

RENNIE & CO. (Dept. 199), 236, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow.

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A High-Grade Bicycle.

A First-Class Typewriter.

The above Three Gigantic Prizes are to be Given

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