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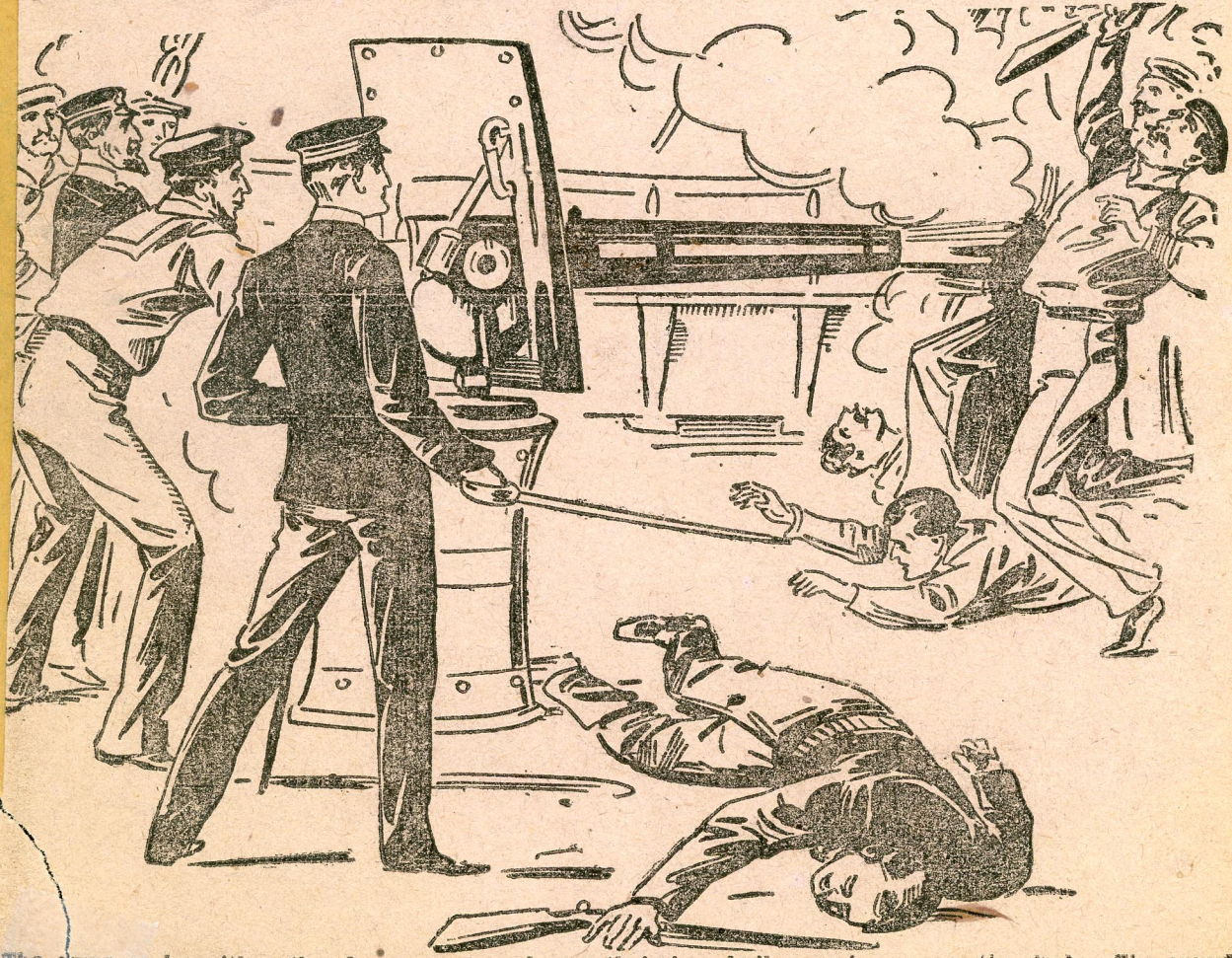
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Kidnapped to Command



The guns spoke with a thunderous roar, and sent their iron hall sweeping across the deck. The crowd of Spaniards were literally mowed down as corn before the reaper.

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

No. 225.

KIDNAPPED TO COMMAND.

By MORTIMER AUSTIN.

CHAPTER 1.

A WOULD-BE MURDERER UNMASKED — THE MYSTERIOUS STEAMER—CAPTAIN RANDALL—A WELL-MATCHED PAIR.

"I tells yer it was an accident!"

"It was no accident, Sam Stoddart, as you well know. You deliberately stumbled against me and knocked me overboard. With such a sea running as there was at the time, good swimmer though I am, I should, to a certainty, have been drowned if Will here had not thrown me a lifebuoy. It kept me afloat until the boat could be got round."

The speakers were both dressed in the rough garb of fishers; but while he who had been styled Sam Stoddart was a stout, burly man, in the prime of life, with an inflamed, drunken face and cunning, shifty eyes, the other was a fine, handsome, sunburnt young fellow of eighteen.

They were standing in the middle of the main street of the little fishing village of Burnham, upon the Cornish coast, surrounded by three or four other men, also fishermen, who, however, had hitherto taken no part in the conversation.

One of these, though, now broke in with:

"By Heaven, Stoddart, if I only thought as 'ow you meant to take the life of my boy Dick, I'd—I'd break every bone in your miserable body!"

And he looked as if he could do it, too, for Tom Lewis was a splendid type of his class, standing six feet high, and broad in proportion.

There was, however, but little resemblance, if any, in his hardy, weather-beaten features and the clear-cut ones of the youth Dick; yet they stood in the relationship of father and son to one another.

"Ay, and I'd help you, Tom, my hearty!" added brawny Will Holmes, first hand of the smack "Ocean Wave," of which Tom Lewis was the skipper, and the others around the crew.

"The lad is mistook. I never pushed him, as he says. What would I go an' do it for?" queried the fisherman Stoddart. "Does yer think I wants to commit murder?"

"It is well bekknown to us all as 'ow you don't bear Dick any goodwill," replied the skipper. "Ever since he thrashed you for ill-using Miss Bromley's dog you have had a spite against him. But if ever I cotch you trying on any hanky-panky tricks, a-trying for to injure him, as I said afore, I'll break every bone in your body!"

"You won't believe me, then, that it was an accident?"

"I does, and I says let the matter drop. If I didn't really believe it were a pure accident you'd never no more step aboard the "Ocean Wave," I tells yer that straight!"

And with that the skipper moved off in the direction of his home, accompanied by Dick and Will Holmes, leaving Stoddart staring in anything but an amiable frame of mind by himself.

"Curse it!" he growled, glaring after their retreating forms, with a look in his eyes that certainly boded them no good.

"Curse it! I nearly overdid the thing that time. I'll have to be a little more careful, if I wish to pay that confounded young jackanapes out. I will be even with him yet. Ay, Tom Lewis, and you, Will Holmes, you'll break every bone o' my body, will ye? So ho, we will see—ay, we will see!"

"What will we see, my man?" demanded a sharp voice at his elbow.

Sam Stoddart turned with a half-cry of fear, to confront a tall, slim man, with a face the colour of parchment, a hooked nose, and a great mouth, made ten times more ugly now by the half-sneer curling the thin lips.

The stranger was dressed in the finest broadcloth, and there was nothing whatever in his appearance or manners to bespeak the seaman. Yet the fisherman at once knew him to be the captain of the mysterious steamer that had attracted so much attention, when she entered the bay a week or two before.

She had dropped anchor among a fleet of coasting and



One of them muffled his cries with a handkerchief, while others proceeded to bind him hand and foot.

fishing craft that lay close inshore, and looked as much out of place there as a swan would in a flock of ducks.

Comments upon her object in thus coming to that out-of-the-way spot were freely indulged in by the fishing population; but hitherto no satisfactory explanation had been forthcoming.

At first it seemed as if she had merely put in for water and fresh provisions, for she had taken aboard quantities of both; but that was over a week ago, and still she lingered.

Though furnished with steam-power and a screw propeller, she was barque-rigged, with long lower masts, which enabled her to carry large fore and aft sails. Her graceful lines and trim build had already won the most ecstatic admiration from the older and more seasoned mariners in the place.

Evidently the "Throstle," as the strange vessel was named, was meant for speed, and this, too, more than for carrying purposes, for she sat very lightly upon the water; and, judging from external appearances, her depth of hold could be by no means great.

To add still further to the mystery surrounding her, her crew were never to be seen ashore.

The individual whom Stoddart had recognised, and who was reputed to be her owner as well as her captain, alone paid an occasional trip in his gig to the wharf, and stayed for an hour or two at a time in the best room of the Jolly Fisher Inn.

The landlord of the latter house of entertainment was frequently interviewed by inquisitive persons, who tried to pump him with regard to the "Throstle"; but, if he knew anything more than that her master's name was Amos Randall, he preserved a discreet silence.

"What shall we see, my man?" had asked the captain of the mysterious steamer of Sam Stoddart.

"Who were a-speaking to you?" was the surly answer. "You mind your own business, and p'r'aps you'll have enough to do!"

"Come, come, my man, there is no need to be uncivil. I overheard everything that passed between you and your shipmates, and I came to the conclusion you were unjustly suspected by them!"

"I was, sir. As if I would try to murder the lad; I that wouldn't hurt a fly a-purpose!"

Amos Randall's mouth expanded in an ugly grin as he rejoined:

"I knew you were quite innocent of any evil design, and that it was their malice trying to saddle such a crime upon you. Now, after what has occurred, I suppose you will not care very much about remaining aboard the same boat?"

"I would be right glad to find another berth, I can tell you. Do you want a hand on board the 'Throstle,' cap'en?"

"Ah! you know me, then?"

"Know you, sir? In coorse, I does. Who in the village does not, as the cap'en of the prettiest craft that has bin seen in this 'ere harbour for many a long day?"

Randall smiled a peculiar smile.

"So, my man, you'd like to ship with me?"

"Ay, sir, I would; only—only—"

"Well, speak out. What is the matter?"

"Askin' your pardon, sir; but there are some—er—ugly rumours afloat about the "Throstle," sir. "Some do say as 'ow she's a Cuban filibuster in disguise, sir!"

"Ho, ho! And do you believe all rumour says?"

"No, no, in coorse not, sir; but—but I'd like for to know afore I sign articles where the ship is a-going."

"Well, what manner of lubber are you at all to think I'd ship a man without giving him full information about me and my craft? Why, I would tell him how many rivets the "Throstle" has in her hull, if he wished it!" was the ironical reply. "But I am going up to the Jolly Fisher, and, if you will accompany me thither, we can settle the matter out of hand. I want a talk with you in private," he added in a lower tone, and looking around cautiously, to see no one else was within earshot.

A few minutes later, Sam Stoddart and the captain of the "Throstle" were closeted together in a private room of the Jolly Fisher Inn.

Over stiff glasses of grog they talked long and earnestly, and in strangely subdued tones. At length Stoddart rose to go, and as he did so, Captain Randall said:

"Mind, now, to-night at dusk, by the old quarry."

"Never fear, sir!" answered the fisherman. "I will be there, and, unless I'm greatly mistook, he will be up to time too. Hee! hee! I didn't think as 'ow the opportunity of revenge upon 'em all would be afforded me so soon!"

"Act squarely by me, and deliver the young fellow into my hands without arousing any suspicion, and I'll afford you all the opportunities you want of venting your spleen upon him once we are well out to sea!"

"Thank'ee, cap'en; thank'ee, sir!"

And, grinning with pleasurable anticipation, Stoddart left the Jolly Fisher, and took his way to his humble lodgings.

CHAPTER 2.

THE OLD POST-CAPTAIN AND HIS GRAND-DAUGHTER—DICK KIDNAPPED ABOARD THE STRANGE VESSEL—GRIEF AND DISMAY OF HIS FRIENDS—WILL HOLMES HAS SUSPICIONS.

Upon a high cliff, overlooking the blue waters of the English Channel, and at some distance from the village, stood a noble-looking mansion, the residence of an old post-captain, long since retired from active service under his country's flag.

His name was Bromley, and his only kith or kin was a granddaughter, a sweet, winsome little thing of twelve, who lived with him.

Between this child and the fisher-lad, Dick Lewis, a warm acquaintance had been formed, the result of an incident, which was alluded to in the dialogue between Stoddart and the youth's father in our first chapter.

Dick had interfered when Sam was brutally ill-treating a little dog belonging to Miss Bromley, and saved it from the hulking coward's fury.

Since then he had been a frequent and ever-welcome visitor at the home of the old post-captain, and it was not long before he had become as great a favourite with the grandfater as with the innocent grandchild. The old man had taken quite an interest in him, and frequently assisted him with his studies; for, though only a poor fisher-lad, he had received a fairly good education, thanks to old Tom Lewis's ambitious hope to see "our Dick" a gentleman some day; and the lad himself from the first had had a praiseworthy wish to better himself.

This particular trip of the "Ocean Wave" Dick had purchased a canary and cage from one of the hands, which he intended to make a present to little Dorothy Bromley, whom he knew to be devoted to pets of all kinds.

It had cost the young fellow all his pocket-money for several months; but he did not repine at the loss. The thought of how the pretty face of his little friend would light up with pleasure at sight of the gift was ample recompense to him.

Consequently, immediately after the frugal tea was over in Tom Lewis's cottage, we find Dick bending his steps in the direction of "Eagle Cliff," as the home of the old post-captain was called, carrying the cage, with the bird inside, under his arm.

Captain Bromley at first was unwilling to allow Dorothy to accept such a present from a simple fisher-lad; but the latter pleaded so hard, and the little damsel herself seemed so anxious to possess the bird, he at length gave way, and permitted the canary to change hands.

Night was rapidly falling when our young hero, after spending a most enjoyable evening with the jolly old sea-dog and his grandchild, began to bethink himself of returning home.

He had traversed about half the distance, and was following a tortuous path along the cliffs, when suddenly, as he was close to an old quarry, half a dozen rough, sailor-looking men sprang out upon him from the sides of the road.

All their faces, with one exception, were strange to him; but the instant recognition of that one face was quite sufficient. It was Sam Stoddart's! And, with a thrill of vague apprehension, Dick silently faced the fellows, who had quickly surrounded him.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want you, my young fellow!" answered one. "You have got to come with us aboard the 'Throstle,' whether you wish it or no; them's the cap'en's orders. Seize him, boys!"

The men made a rush upon Dick, who struck out manfully with his fists, inflicting many a nasty knock upon the faces of some of his assailants before he was overpowered by numbers and flung heavily to the ground.

Even then the fearless young fellow, while uttering shout after shout for help, lashed out with his feet, and managed to catch the poltroon Stoddart a most unmerciful kick upon the shin, causing that individual to dance an impromptu hornpipe, to the tune of some very bad language.

However, some of the men held him down while one quickly muffled his cries with a handkerchief, and others proceeded to bind him hand and foot.

This done, he was taken up bodily by several of his captors and carried towards where a break in the cliffs permitted of their gaining the shore below by a rugged and precipitous path.

Down this the seamen bore Dick, helplessly trussed like a fowl for the basting, and hurried towards a little cutter, hauled up high and dry upon the beach.

Quickly, but softly, they ran the boat into the water, and, throwing Dick none too gently down in the bottom, jumped in and picked up the oars.

Bending to their work, they made the small craft fairly bound over the smooth waters of the little bay, and soon they were

amongst the coasters and fishing-vessels, which surrounded the mysterious steam barque.

Now the oarsmen began to pull more leisurely, and Stoddart threw some coarse sacking over Dick's recumbent form, to hide it from any prying eyes, for, though it was pitch-dark, it was quite possible that a lantern upon any of the vessels they had to pass close under might throw too much light upon the boat and its occupants.

They reached the side of the "Throstle," and, as the rowers shipped their oars, a voice hailed them from her deck in very little above a whisper.

A reply, in equally as cautious a tone, was given by Stoddart, and then a rope ladder was thrown over the side of the steamer, and Dick helped aboard.

Great was the consternation in the village next morning, when it became known that Dick Lewis had mysteriously disappeared, no one knew whither.

His father was dreadfully out-up, and old Captain Bromley almost equally so, while little Dorothy wept copiously at the dreadful thought that she might never see her kind friend again.

Needless to say, search was made in every direction; but without avail.

It seemed to everybody as if the very earth must have opened and swallowed him up.

No trace whatever could be found of him after he left "Eagle Cliff" to return to his home.

There were not wanting some among the crew of the "Ocean Wave," and more particularly big Will Holmes, the first hand, who swore positively Sam Stoddart was at the bottom of Dick's disappearance. But Captain Amos Randall, of the "Throstle," came forward with the voluntary statement that on the previous night Stoddart had been aboard his vessel until a very late hour, looking after a berth as an able seaman.

This independent evidence went far to clear Sam in the eyes of all except unbelieving Will Holmes.

That worthy was now even heard to say that he wouldn't be at all surprised if Captain Randall himself knew a little more about Dick's disappearance than he cared to pretend. And the blunt-spoken fisherman repeating this frequently over the bar of the Jolly Fisher, it at length reached the ears of Randall.

Far from resenting the hinted suspicion, in indignant anger, however, the latter made it his business to call upon both Tom Lewis and Will Holmes and invite them to personally search his vessel.

The skipper of the "Ocean Wave," almost beside himself with grief at the strange loss of his son, had been an easy convert to his mate's belief, and was, therefore, nothing loth to accept the invitation.

Accompanied by Holmes, he made a complete survey of the mysterious steam barque, but without discovering any sign of Dick's presence aboard.

As the pair were about to descend the "Throstle's" side again into the boat waiting to row them ashore, Captain Randall turned with his peculiar smile to Will, and asked:

"Are you satisfied now, Mr. Holmes, that this craft is not the pirate you evidently thought her?"

"Not me," was the bluff reply. "You mayn't have the lad aboard, and I may have misjudged you on that count; but I'd like for to know 'ow it be you have so many foreign, Spanish-lookin' chaps among your crew if you are, as you say, a peaceable trader?"

"Economy, my man—economy!" answered the captain of the steamer, that dry smile of his again settling for a moment upon his yellow face, but vanishing the next. "British seamen are a sight too expensive for shipmasters these times. You can get a crew of "Dagoes,"† or "Dutchmen," at half the cost."

"And I s'pose you'd call yourself a patriotic Englishman?" retorted Will in disgust. "And yet you take the bread out of your countrymen's mouths to put it into strangers'!"

With that parting shot, the honest fisherman followed his disconsolate skipper over the barque's side.

Captain Randall turned towards his state-room, still wearing that sinister smile.

CHAPTER 3.

EXTRAORDINARY INVASION—THE "THROSTLE'S" SECRET—DICK BEFORE THE CAPTAIN—OFFERED A CADETSHIP.

That night the simple fisherfolk were mightily astonished at the invasion of their village by some three or four score hard-drinking, hard-swearing seamen of various nationalities.

What their business there was, of course, the topic of the

† "Dago" is the sailors' contemptuous name for all Spanish or South American seamen, just as "Dutchmen" is for Scandinavians, Germans, &c.

hour; but one and all the gossips concurred in the firm conviction that in some way this influx was connected with the mysterious steamer.

However, no certain opinion could be expressed, as the seamen simply carried the solitary tavern by storm, and, filling it to overflowing with their own numbers, excluded all prying and curious outsiders.

Later on, half a dozen men arrived, superior in both language and appearance to the first arrivals; but, to a man, either Spaniards or Cubans. These immediately hired a boat, and put all end to further conjecture on the part of the fisherfolk, by desiring to be rowed straight away to the "Throstle."

Half an hour had scarcely elapsed after this party had gone aboard, when the vessel began to get up steam.

Without doubt, the engineers had had the fires banked, for in less than ten minutes they had steam up, and were ready to trip anchor.

Then there came the report of a gun from the barque's deck, and evidently this was meant to be a signal, for, like a cloud of bees, the strange sailors poured out of the Jolly Fisher, and, making at once for the beach, chattered with the owners of shore-boats for the transport of themselves and their baggage to the steamer.

Soon the little bay was alive with boats rapidly passing to and from the ship, conveying squads of half a dozen at a time.

When the last man had climbed the side of the "Throstle," the anchor was weighed, and the steamer got under way, without any further delay.

She passed out of the bay under a full head of steam, and very quickly she was swallowed up in the shades of the night.

Wondering greatly at what they had seen, the still mystified spectators upon the shore and wharf dispersed to their homes.

Twelve hours later a telegram came in hot haste to the Customs' officials from the Government, ordering them to detain the "Throstle" until further instructions, as there was reason to believe she was being equipped and manned as a Cuban insurgent cruiser.

The secret was out.

No wonder Captain Amos Randall had sought that secluded little harbour to take on board his stores and his crew.

Had the British authorities known in time that he was nothing more or less than a privateer in the service of the Cuban rebels, he would not have been allowed to leave port. As it was, several prominent Cuban secret emissaries in London of the insurgents, were all the time secretly advised of the real purpose and destination of the "Throstle," and gave her captain timely warning to clear off.

She was now upon the high seas, a full-blown rebel cruiser.

We will step aboard and see what has become of our young friend Dick.

He had been confined in a secure hiding-place, cunningly contrived in the bulkhead of the captain's own cabin, on the visit of his father and Will Holmes; and, to his intense mortification, though he could hear the voices of his friends through the thin partition, being gagged and bound hand and foot, he was unable to in any way let them know of his presence.

When he had heard them leave the ship, he had abandoned himself to the lowest depths of despair, for he could not imagine what purpose the "Throstle's" captain could have in thus kidnapping him.

When the barque was well out to sea, and beyond all risk of being again overhauled, Dick was released from his cramped quarters in the secret recess, and brought on deck.

The sight that met his gaze was enough to make him think he had been carried back a hundred years, and was standing upon the deck of some buccaneer or corsair.

A perfect multitude of rough seamen, with black, grimy faces, were toiling at the open hatches, hoisting up huge packages out of the hold, breaking them open, and scattering their contents about in every direction.

And the contents of those packages, as they were revealed, gave a still more suspicious and piratical look to the ship.

They were arms and ammunition of all kinds—heavy guns, rifles, pistols, cutlasses, shot and shell.

Such was the cargo the ostensible merchantman carried.

But Dick was not allowed much time to speculate upon what all this could mean.

He was hurried before the captain, who was mounted upon a gun-carriage amidships, surrounded by some half a dozen foreign-looking officers and gentlemen. The group were attentively watching, and Randall at times offering a word or two of advice to the carpenter and his assistants, who were busy laying the pivots for a shell-gun.

"Well, youngster," was Randall's greeting, in even a gracious tone, "you are on board a gunboat, sailing under the commission of the American Government, and not a pirate or smuggler, as I suppose you imagine!"

"Then, if this is a man-of-war," was Dick's fearless retort, "by what right do you detain me as a prisoner on board?"

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What right had you to kidnap me as you did from my home? I demand to be put ashore instantly!"

"Easy, young man—easy! Just listen to me for a few minutes. During my brief stay in the harbour, I had more than one opportunity of seeing you were a degree above the ordinary fisherman, and learned from a few well-put questions about you that your father had given you an exceptionally good education for one in your humble sphere of life. Taking a fancy to you, and being rather in need of intelligent young fellows who might serve as midshipmen or junior officers with me, I took the desperate expedient of kidnapping you, for only by that means could I avoid a breach of the laws of neutrality. Now, what do you say to engaging with me as a naval cadet? I can promise you a cruise full of excitement and adventure, and plenty of prize-money. We shall travel every quarter of the globe, and you will have a grand opportunity of seeing the world. As you know, the United States have at last seen fit to interfere and put a stop to the Spanish atrocities in Cuba. President McKinley, in the name of the whole Anglo-Saxon race in America, has declared war on Spain; and I hold a 'letter of marque' from the Government at Washington, licensing me to make prizes of all Spanish merchantmen I meet with. Come, do you accept my offer of a cadetship?"

Dick hesitated. The offer seemed a most tempting one.

To be able to strut the deck of a gallant ship, with all the dignity and importance of a midshipman; to travel to foreign lands—those distant climes, around which he had always woven the wildest and most romantic dreams—no wonder the prospect captivated his boyish imagination and fired his enthusiasm.

However, he had the acuteness to say:

"Captain, as one of a neutral nation, I cannot be supposed to know much about the rights or wrongs of either side in this war between the States and Spain. I would, therefore, like to hear an explanation of matters before I come to any decision."

"That is but fair," answered Captain Randall, "and your wish will be gratified; for this evening I intend to formally put the ship in commission, and make an explanatory speech to my crew."

"In case I join you, sir, I would ask you to let my parents and friends know of my safety and whereabouts. They are sure to have been greatly alarmed and put about by my strange disappearance."

"Of course, I will, Mr. Lewis, and I must crave your pardon for the outrage I committed upon your personal liberty in kidnapping you as I did. But I am sure you will see that I really did it to serve you!"

Dick went forward to watch the seamen at their work, his mind a perfect chaos of conflicting thoughts.

Could he believe in Captain Randall's profession of good faith? It seemed hard to reconcile it with the harsh, nay, almost brutal, treatment he had been subjected to. Yet, what other reason could Randall have had in kidnapping him, if not the one he had given?

Thus Dick Lewis tried to argue the matter out, and look on the best side of things; but somehow, try as he might, he could not rid his mind of haunting doubts of Randall.

CHAPTER 4.

PUTTING THE SHIP IN COMMISSION—DICK BECOMES A MIDSHIPMAN UNDER THE STARS AND STRIPES—THE "THROSTLE" MAKES SEVERAL CAPTURES, AND ENCOUNTERS A SPANISH GUNBOAT.

As the sun began to climb down the western sky, a great change crept over the "Throstle." Her decks were cleared of all litter, the ammunition safely stowed away, and the guns fitted upon their carriages, and disposed in grim array around the ship.

Then, when all was in readiness for the ceremony, known as "putting the ship in commission," all the hands were summoned aft, and Captain Randall, taking his stand on the quarter-deck, in the midst of his officers, delivered a short address.

It was chiefly a justification of the Cuban people's rebellion against Spain and American interference. Afterwards he read his commission from the American Government, licensing him to arm and equip the "Throstle" as a cruiser in their service.

Then, at a wave of his hand, a gun was run out and fired, the Stars and Stripes run up to the peak, and officers and men burst into a ringing cheer.

The ceremony was over, and the crew dispersed to their various duties.

"Well, Mr. Lewis," demanded Captain Randall of our hero, "you heard my explanation of the war, and how it originated in Spanish tyranny and misrule. Now, what do you say to

taking service under that flag of the free, which has already waved triumphantly over many a fiercely-contested field?"

"I must confess, captain, I am but little the wiser concerning the cause of the war; but as the insurgents' cause seems that of the weak and oppressed, I am with you, heart and hand!"

"Bravo, young man, you have chosen well. You will, then, at once assume your place and duties aboard as senior and junior midshipman rolled into one!" And Captain Randall gave that peculiar, sardonic smile of his, which somehow aroused anew all Dick's vague distrust of the man.

Our hero found life for the first week pleasant indeed in his new capacity aboard the "Throstle." The only thing that caused him any uneasiness was the discovery, the very day he had accepted the captain's offer of the cadetship, of the presence of his old enemy, Sam Stoddard, among the sailors.

However, as the fellow seemed perfectly respectful at all times, and readily obeyed his orders, he began to think he might have misjudged the man in the past.

He little recked of the long interview Randall had had some time before with the former fisherman, when the latter had received strict injunctions to forgo his anticipated revenge for the time being, and treat Dick as his superior.

What dark scheme was underlying this command? Time shall tell.

The "Throstle" had a great quantity of arms and munitions of war aboard, which her captain meant to try and land somewhere on the Cuban coast for the insurgents.

The coast of the island, though, is almost encompassed by dangerous reefs and shoals; and, besides, Randall would necessarily have to use some circumspection in the attempt to land, on account of the Spanish men-of-war that cruised about to prevent any such disembarkations.

He was, therefore, determined to take his own good time in making the attempt, and meanwhile steered a south-easterly course towards the Bahamas.

Here he expected to fall in with merchantmen flying the Spanish flag, and which he considered his lawful prey.

The look-out sighted several sails; but they generally turned out to be English, French, or American vessels, and these, of course, were allowed to proceed unharmed.

At length, however, chase was given to a large vessel, which, on being overhauled, showed Spanish colours.

Thereupon a gun was fired, as a command for her to heave to, and the chase, obeying, a lieutenant was sent to board her.

He speedily returned with her papers, master and crew, and the prize herself was given to the flames.

She burned like tinder, and Dick Lewis, as he viewed the fire from the "Throstle's" deck, thought he had never witnessed so grand, and yet awful, a spectacle.

A groan of intense agony beside him startled him, and caused him to turn his head. The skipper of the ill-fated barque stood at his elbow, with tears rolling down his rugged cheeks.

The man mumbled something in Spanish, which, of course, from his unacquaintance with the tongue, Dick could not understand. However, the man's distress was sufficient, and he turned away sick to the core, and feeling miserably mean and despicable.

What an ignoble thing it now seemed to him for this ship-of-war, powerfully armed and powerfully manned, to thus capture and destroy a defenceless trading-vessel.

Yet, was it not the fortune and stern necessity of war?

But when ship after ship was taken and given to the flames in like manner, after everything at all of worth or value had first been transferred aboard her captor, Dick began to have haunting doubts of the legitimacy of such warfare.

It seemed so akin to piracy to thus prey upon helpless and unarmed vessels. He felt vague feelings of alarm and anxiety at times, too, when he reflected on the very short shrift every man-jack of the "Throstle" would be shown if she were unlucky enough to be captured by the Spaniards; for, after all, she was not a legitimate cruiser, but a privateer.

One thing in particular, in the making of captures, went most decidedly against the grain with Dick. This was the deception practised in hoisting the British, French, or German flag until the chase was almost under their very guns, and it was impossible for her to escape.

Then the false colours would be hauled down, and the Stars and Stripes hoisted.

What capped everything, though, was the cowardly and brutal manner in which the poor captured sailors were treated. They were ironed together like felons, and compelled to stay day and night on the open deck, exposed to terrible and incessant drenchings from the water shipped in dirty weather, and liable to be swept away by any heavy seas, which might sweep the vessel. The food they got, too, was of the worst possible description, and often Dick's heart bled for the poor fellows, who all, officers and men alike, had to submit to this disgraceful usage.

Randall's excuse was that he was at present too crowded

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below decks; but, when he had effected the landing of his cargo of arms, he would be able to place the hold at their service.

One day a sail was descried upon the horizon, and the first lieutenant, going aloft to examine her through his glass, reported her to be a Spanish gunboat.

"Do you know her, Valdez?" asked Captain Randall, with deep concern in his voice.

"Si, senior capitaine. Unless I am greatly mistaken, she is the 'Pizarro,' on which I served two years before the outbreak of the rebellion."

"What is her armament?"

"She carries two heavy guns less than we do, and an equal number of machine guns. She sails only about ten knots."

Randall reflected a minute or two.

"Crowd on every stitch of canvas we can carry, Valdez, and pass the word to the engineer to steam at full speed. We will lead her a long chase!"

CHAPTER 5.

A MUTINY, AND HOW IT WAS QUELLED—THE SEA-FIGHT—THE SPANIARD SUNK—AT MARTINIQUE—MORE MYSTERY.

The orders of the captain created the greatest dissatisfaction amongst the crew of the "Throstle."



As the great brute leaped full at his throat, Dick fired twice right into the red, gaping mouth, shattering its lower jaw.

One and all broke out into reproachful and even mutinous language.

Though, for the most part, coarse, brutal ruffians, recruited from the scum of every nation under the sun, they were not, however, devoid of animal courage, and this running away from a foeman, carrying less men and metal than themselves, aroused their disgust and indignation.

Several of the sailors, gathered near the foremast, began to defy the authorities of the ship, and one of them, bolder than the rest, seized a belaying-pin, and, flinging it towards an officer, swore in Spanish he would not obey the orders.

Captain Randall acted with admirable promptitude.

He immediately ordered Valdez "to beat to quarters."

With a shout of approval the rebellious sailors at once fell in at their guns, and, stepping forward, Randall said:

"My lads, I am glad to see the right spirit among you. My

intention from the first was to engage the enemy, and the order was merely a ruse on my part, to see if you were eager for the fray. I am glad to see I was not deceived in you. Valdez, clear the decks for action, and have the small arms served out!"

In "double-quick" time these commands were obeyed, showing the enthusiasm of the crew, amongst whom there were a great many Cubans, and the "Throstle" was put about to meet her astonished adversary.

The two vessels approached each other very rapidly, and, when they were within speaking distance, Randall hoisted the French tricolour.

The "Pizarro" replied by flinging the Spanish flag to the breeze, and unsuspectingly drew nearer to her insidious foe.

At length she hailed, whereupon ensued an ominous silence for a few minutes aboard the "Throstle."

Then down came the French colours at a run, up went the American, and Randall thundered through his trumpet:

"This is the United States cruiser 'Throstle! Fire!"

The shout was emphasised by the almost simultaneous crash of the "Throstle's" entire armament, which, at such close range, committed terrible havoc aboard the Spanish ship.

She retorted as soon as her captain and crew could recover from their surprise, and two of the "Throstle's" hands were killed outright, while several more were wounded.

Now the two ships blazed away at one another as rapidly as the gunners on either side could handle their terrible weapons.

For the first time in his life, Dick realised what it was to be under fire. The booming of the heavy guns, and the incessant rattle of the machines, was perfectly deafening, and he stood rooted to the deck in horror as he saw the men, mangled horribly, falling around him in numbers.

Despite the fact that the "Pizarro" was weaker than her antagonist in every respect, her captain handled her in a manner which clearly announced his intention was to try and board his enemy.

This manœuvre, however, Randall, frustrated by the superior speed of his ship, and the vessels maintained something of a running fight, the "Throstle" steaming away from the plucky Spaniard, whenever the latter showed a disposition to come closer.

It was evident Captain Randall's design was to riddle the "Pizarro" with shot until she was in a sinking condition. But he reckoned without his host.

The Spanish gunners worked like blacks at their pieces, and, though heavily handicapped by their inferiority in numbers and weight of metal, performed remarkable achievements, and caused frightful carnage by their more accurate aim aboard the "Throstle."

Mast after mast went by the board on both ships; but these losses did not cripple them, as they were steamers.

At length a shell from the privateer struck the Spaniard close to the water-line, and, exploding at the same moment, tore a great jagged hole in her iron sides, through which the water rushed in torrents.

Still, with his boat sinking under him, the gallant Spaniard fought on, and, with a lucky shot, succeeded in disabling the "Throstle" by damaging her engines.

Then, as the two foes lay like logs upon the water, both unable to manœuvre, and one rapidly foundering, the Spanish captain lowered his boats, got his crew safely into them, and then pulled rapidly away from the scene of battle, placing the hull of his ill-fated ship between him and the enemy's guns.

He was scarcely in time to avoid being drawn down by the vortex caused by the sudden plunge the "Pizarro" gave as she went down stern foremost, with her ensign still proudly floating at the peak.

Captain Randall trained every gun he could upon the flying boats; but the latter, drawing off from one another some distance, did not present very good marks, and the gunners aboard the "Throstle" were not the best of shots. Though they peppered away most diligently, they only succeeded in striking one, and the other boats contrived to pick up the greater part of her crew.

The fugitives drew steadily away from their spiteful, but now almost impotent foes; and, at length, seeing the futility of further firing, Randall ordered his men to cease, and set to work to repair the injuries his vessel had received.

When she was sufficiently "doctored" to be able to proceed on her way, she headed for the neutral isle of Martinique, towards which also the Spaniards had rowed.

Probably Randall had an idea of overtaking the "Pizarro's" crew; but if so, he was doomed to disappointment.

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He reached the harbour of St. Pierre without catching sight of them, and, casting anchor, was almost immediately surrounded by boats of curious sightseers, who had heard of the "exploits" of the "Throstle" among the unarmed Spanish merchantmen, and her drawn battle with the cruiser "Pizarro."

The captain and crew of the latter were said to be in the town; but, of course, both Spaniard and American would have to observe the laws of neutrality.

Randall learned from the visitors who came aboard of the naval fight at Manila a few weeks previous, and of the complete victory of the American squadron, under Commodore Dewey, over the Spanish. The further intelligence, though, that the main body of the Spanish fleet, commanded by Admiral Cervera, was believed to be somewhere in the vicinity of Martinique, caused the privateer captain considerable anxiety. He did not relish the idea of having to run the gauntlet, perhaps, of a perfect Armada, and so was most anxious to put to sea again.

He was busy all day superintending the repairs to his vessel; but, in the evening, he asked Dick to accompany him ashore.

The young middy, who had been kept by the ship up to then, was naturally nothing loth, and the two strolled leisurely through the streets of the little port, enjoying to the full the various sights.

Afterwards, leaving the town, they struck into a country road, which, however, followed the line of coast, until at length they came to a large and handsome mansion, standing deep in its own grounds.

Hereupon Randall stopped, and, turning to Dick, said, in the not unkindly tone which of late he had used towards him:

"Mr. Lewis, I am about to take you a little into my confidence, which I am sure will not be misplaced. Yonder house contains a— a lady, a French lady, who is very very dear to me. In fact, had circumstances not prevented it, she would long since have been my wife. My telling this to you, a junior officer, may seem strange; but within the past few weeks we have been brought together so much, I have taken a great liking to you, and I speak to you now as a father might to a dear son, knowing that what I say will go no further."

"You may rest assured of that, sir."

"I know it, my young friend. Well, the lady I mention is still under the control of a crabbed parent, who threatens to disinherit her if she has anything to do with me. However, as she has promised to remain true to me for all time, I have determined to take this opportunity of obtaining a secret interview with her. It may be long before I am in Martinique again, and I must see her now, if only for a few minutes. Stay here, Mr. Lewis, and keep an eye upon the house. I will creep round to the back and try and in some way communicate with her. If you hear or see anything unusual, whistle three times in quick succession."

The next moment the captain had disappeared among the thick shrubbery.

Dick maintained a close watch upon the house and grounds, as directed, for close upon an hour, without observing any signs that the inmates were at all cognisant of the presence of mademoiselle's undesirable suitor.

At last, however, his patience was rewarded by the glimpse of a man's figure, indistinctly visible in the semi-gloom of the night, among some trees to his left.

Not caring to give the pre-arranged signal until he had assured himself that the stranger was really spying upon the lovers, the middy crept softly towards the belt of timber.

As he gained its shadow, the sound of voices, raised in loud and angry altercation, reached him.

To his extreme surprise, he recognised one of them as Randall's, while the other was unmistakably that of a woman.

Where he stood, Dick could not help overhearing a portion of their conversation, and it puzzled and amazed him considerably.

Surely these were no fond lovers talking!

CHAPTER 6.

A STRANGE LOVE DIALOGUE—THE HOUSE ALARMED—CHASED BY BLOODHOUNDS—A FIERCE FIGHT—THE ENGLISH OFFICER—LANDING THE ARMS—SURPRISED BY THE SPANISH.

The lady was speaking in English, though with a slight foreign accent.

"You are a scoundrel, Amos Randall, to even dare to propose such a thing to me!"

"For the last time, Elsie, do you, or do you not, intend to accept my offer? I tell you I will make his life a burden to him, if you do not. Do you hear, woman? It rests with you

whether he is to suffer or not, for I tell you I will torture him; ay, torture him to death, if you do not conform to my wishes!"

"Oh, have pity—have pity!" the lady cried, changing her tone from passionate indignation to tearful supplication. "Oh, Amos, Amos, if you truly love me as you say, spare me this terrible affliction! Spare him, for my sake! I—I cannot—cannot comply with your wishes. You know my heart is buried in the grave, and can never be yours!"

Dick could not avoid overhearing the above dialogue, as he approached very close to the grove, before he perceived that the form he had mistaken in the faint light for some spy from the house was none other than his superior himself.

He was too much of a true gentleman to play the eaves-dropper, however, and, though mystified beyond measure by what he had accidentally overheard, he proceeded to steal softly back to his original station near the gate.

Scarcely had he regained it when a shrill scream for help in a woman's voice arrested him.

Then came a perfect series of shrieks and cries in French, which quickly alarmed the inmates of the house, as the flashing of lights and the excited shouts therefrom told.

Dick knew not whether to give the preconcocted signal or not; but he was relieved from his dilemma by seeing Randall burst out of the shrubbery and run towards him.

"Come! There is not a minute to lose!" he panted. "The whole place is aroused, and we shall have the servants down upon us if we don't hurry!"

The two sped along the road towards St. Pierre, but had not gone far when there came a deep-mouthed bay from the direction of the house.

Randall uttered a savage oath, and came to a dead halt.

"They have set the bloodhounds upon us!" he said. "Have you your revolver with you? Ah, you have; that is good! We will have to fight these dogs, or be taken; and that I never will!"

Both drew their weapons and waited for the approach of the hounds.

Nearer and nearer came the barks and yelps, and now the fugitives saw the fierce brutes burst round the turn in the road and race towards them, with mouths widely distended, showing the white rows of their cruel teeth.

"You take the dog on your side, Lewis!" said Randall quietly. "Keep cool; don't fire until the beast is almost upon you; then shoot, and shoot straight. Now for it!"

As the great brute leaped full at his throat, Dick fired twice right into the red, gaping mouth, shattering its lower jaw. Then he was hurled to the ground, with the hound upon him, madly clawing and striving to bite him with its glistening fangs, but unable to do so with its broken jaw.

The revolver had been knocked out of his hand by the hound's onset, and he had only his naked fists with which to do battle against the animal's teeth and claws.

All at once another shot rang out, and the maddened beast fell over on its side dead. Dick was helped to his feet by Randall, who had opportunely come to his aid, having finished the other dog with a couple of bullets.

Taking to their heels once more, they never stopped or slackened speed once until they reached the confines of the town.

Then they dropped into a brisk walk, and kept on through the streets, when, as they turned the corner of one leading to the quays, they came face to face with four officers of the British Navy.

"Ah," observed one, a fine, well set-up man of middle age, with a handsome, heavily-bearded face, "the American uniform! I presume I am addressing two gentlemen from the United States' gunboat 'Throstle' in the harbour?"

This was said with every symptom of courteous bonhomie; but Randall, deigning no reply, quickly turned his head the other way and passed on.

As he did so, the light of a lamp near fell upon his features, and clearly revealed them to another of the group. The man uttered a cry of incredulous surprise.

"Amos Randall, by all that is wonderful!"

"Randall, Randall, say you?" ejaculated the officer, who had first spoken. Surely you are mistaken, Mr. Court? No, by Heaven, you are right! It is he. Let me go, gentlemen, let me go!" as his brotner officers simultaneously attempted to detain him. "I will have speech with the scoundrel. I will tear the secret from him at the sword's point if necessary."

But his friends held him fast, and forcibly prevented him from following the captain, who, plunging down a side-street, closely followed by the middy, was soon aboard the "Throstle" again.

"Lieutenant Losada," Randall said to the Cuban officer of the watch, "tell Senor Valdez I wish to see him in my cabin at once."

Randall and his first lieutenant were closeted together for

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CHAPTER 7.

THE BATTLE WITH THE CUTTING-OUT PARTY—
RANDALL SAVES DICK'S LIFE—DISCOMFITURE
OF THE SPANIARDS—RANDALL'S RUSE—ELUD-
ING THE CRUISER—A SECRET EXPEDITION.

only a few minutes; then the latter came out and ordered the engineers to get up steam immediately.

This order excited great surprise both in the ward-room and the fore-castle, as the "Throstle" was not yet in a fit state to put to sea. However, "theirs not to reason why."

Many of the crew thought they had been obliged to leave the island through some action on the part of the French authorities.

Some hours later they made another of the Little Antilles—Dominica, a British possession, and, running in, anchored off the town of Roseau.

Here, under the wing of the Union Jack, the "Throstle" remained for another couple of days, repairing and refitting, safe from any fears of the neutrality of the waters being violated by any of the Spanish cruisers.

Dick Lewis, of course, was the only other individual beside the commander himself who had any idea of what had really necessitated their abrupt leave-taking from St. Pierre; but he thought it best to keep his own counsel.

What he had seen and overheard on two separate occasions, first in the garden of the French mansion and then in the streets of St. Pierre, puzzled and mystified him beyond measure, and certainly in nowise tended to raise Captain Randall in his estimation.

What dark secret underlay the latter's strange conduct on those two occasions?

Captain Randall knew better than to stay longer than he could possibly help at Dominica, for though the laws of neutrality would protect him from any of the Spanish gun-boats so long as he remained in the port, and therefore in British waters, still the enemy's ships had only to lie some miles off the coast beyond "the marine league," as it is called, and wait till the "Throstle" came out to chase and capture her.

However, when the privateer put to sea, there was not a sign of a blockader to be seen, so she stood away towards Cuba itself.

Two ships, one a French schooner, and the other an English brig, were soon sighted, and, heaving them to with a blank shot, Randall hoisted the Spanish flag, and asked their skippers had they seen anything of the Yankee pirate, the "Throstle," telling them at the same time that he was the Spanish man-of-war "Santa Maria."

This he did to misguide any Spanish cruisers these vessels might fall in with.

Night settled down over the sea, a rayless, pitch-black night, in which it was almost impossible to see a yard in front of one.

In a few hours they were off the southern Cuban coast, and now Randall handed the command of the ship over to his lieutenant, Valdez. The latter, a native-born Cuban, appeared to know the dangerous shore well, for he took the wheel himself, and, despite the inky darkness, successfully steered the vessel through the shoals and reefs.

When he had taken her in shore as far as he dare venture, she was hove-to, and then Randall sent up a couple of rockets.

Almost immediately the signal was answered in a similar manner from the black shore, and Captain Randall ordered the hatches to be removed, and all hands help in bringing up the arms and stores from the hold, ready for transport ashore.

The men worked with a will, and soon the deck was cumbered with bales and boxes.

There came the stealthy sound of muffled oars, and a whispered hail in Spanish, which was promptly answered, and then one or two shadowy figures swarmed up the rope thrown them, and, stepping on deck, were received in a most effusive way by Randall and Valdez.

At a word from the former, the "Throstle's" crew now proceeded to lower the bales and boxes over the side to the men in the boats, and as soon as one of these was filled it made for the shore, and its place was taken by another.

Thus the cargo of arms and munitions of war for the insurgents was being rapidly disembarked, when both the men in the boats and the crew of the "Throstle" were somewhat startled to hear a slight sound as of the dip of oars out to sea.

Anxiously they peered into the inky blackness, and presently they could distinguish the phosphorescent flashes from the water as the oars dipped into it.

It was evident there was more than one large boat approaching them.

Randall hailed the strangers, but no answer was returned, and, thereupon, guessing that they were the boats from some Spanish cruiser attempting to cut them out, he sung out to the boatswain's mate to pipe all hands.

"Quick, men," he added, "get your cutlasses and other arms. Losada, cast loose that pivot-gun, and turn it in the direction they seem to be approaching from."

The lieutenant obeyed, and then Randall himself sprang to the gun and hastily fired it.

As the bright flash from the muzzle of the gun for a single moment lit up the bosom of the sea, the watchers beheld nearly a dozen large boats, full of armed men, close alongside.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" thundered Randall. "Valdez, fire a bluelight, and let us see our foes!"

Before the lieutenant could obey the order, one of the Spanish boats had hooked on to the "Throstle's" quarter, and the next moment fully twenty men had scrambled up the side.

Guided by their sense of hearing only, the "Throstle's" crew fiercely resisted the "cutting-out" party, slashing right and left with their cutlasses, and firing their pistols at haphazard over the bulwarks into the blackness beyond.

But the assailants were now swarming up the vessel's sides, and, in the impenetrable darkness, many succeeded in gaining a footing unseen upon the deck.

By this time, though, Valdez had got out a bluelight and fired it, and by its brilliant illumination the crew were able to see their foes.

The latter had forced back the defenders in several places, and were mounting in overwhelming numbers.

Randall and Lieutenant Valdez flung themselves at the head of their men upon the Spaniards, and, fighting with fierce desperation, beat them back to the bulwarks.

But here the boarders rallied, and, reinforced by the numbers that were climbing aboard, held their own despite the utmost exertions of the "Throstle's" crew.

Dick Lewis found himself opposed to a giant Spaniard, who made a slash at him, which would have severed his head from his body had it fallen; but Dick fired his pistol full in the fellow's face, and he dropped like lead with the bullet through his brain.

Our hero felt a horrible sick feeling creep over him at the thought of having taken a fellow-creature's life even in self-defence, but he was not given much time for sentiment.

A stalwart man, in gay uniform, evidently the lieutenant in command of the "cutting-out" party, next attacked him, and, with a skilful twist of the wrist, sent Dick's cutlass whirling out of his hand.

Then, seizing Dick by the throat, the Spaniard forced him to his knees, and raised his own trenchant blade aloft.

Dick still retained his revolver in his left hand, but ere he could press the trigger, he saw a sword passed like lightning through the body of his foe.

The Spanish lieutenant dropped, and, staggering to his feet, Dick saw that it was Randall who had thus come so opportunely to his aid.

"Aft, every man!" shouted the captain of the "Throstle." And, as he fairly dragged Dick after him, Valdez, Losada, and several others were seen slewing a couple of the quick-firing guns round, so as to bring them to bear upon the mass of Spaniards on the fore-castle.

Many of the privateer's crew had not time to get aft before the guns spoke with a thunderous roar, and sent their iron hail sweeping across the deck. The crowd of Spaniards were literally mown down as corn before the reaper.

In vain the few survivors attempted to struggle across the intervening space and grapple again hand-to-hand with their foe. They could not stand up before that remorseless fire, and with loud shrieks and oaths they broke and scattered, clambering madly over the sides, and even plunging into the sea in their frantic haste.

Randall and his crew gave a ringing cheer, and, rushing to the bulwarks, heaved cold shot into several of the boats as they attempted to push off, sending boat and crew together to the bottom.

The Cubans from the shore had drawn off a little way during the fighting; but they had not remained neutral, for they kept up a brisk fire with small-arms upon the Spanish boats, harassing the occupants exceedingly.

Such of the Spaniards as were fortunate enough to get back again into the boats, cast off at once and rowed away into the darkness, leaving many of their comrades behind at the mercy of their fierce foes.

At this moment a bright glare of light fell all over the "Throstle" and around her, lighting up the entire scene with a brilliancy as of noonday.

It was the searchlight from the Spanish man-of-war, and the crew of the "Throstle" uttered ejaculations of horror and dismay.

They could be blown out of the water by their invisible foe without being able to fire a single effective shot in return.

But Randall's cunning stood him in good stead always.

"Quick, some of you!" he cried; "haul down the flag and run up the Spanish. They will think we are captured, and that will give us a chance to get out of these infernal reefs and shoals. Then we will show them a clean pair of heels."

It was evident the ruse deceived the Spanish commander, for

the searchlight was turned off, and a signal flashed to them by means of lights.

Randall interpreted the signal as meaning "Tow the prize out," and, to keep up the deception in case the cruiser turned on her searchlight again, he ordered out all his boats, and desired Lieutenant Valdez to guide the ship out of the reefs and shoals again.

The survivors of the cutting-out party, however, began to fire their small-arms to attract the attention of the cruiser, and presently her searchlight began to sweep the sea again.

When the boats were discovered, it was evident that the Spanish commander was puzzled, for the searchlight was once more directed upon the "Throstle," and then wandered back again to the boats.

"Are we out of these accursed shoals yet, Valdez?" inquired Randall, in deep concern. "The Spaniard outside will soon guess the truth, and then it will be all up with us!"

Even as he spoke, and before the lieutenant could reply, the bounding of the vessel told him they were riding the deep sea-waves.

The boats were taken in, and the next moment a volume of smoke rushed out of the "Throstle's" funnel as the engineers got up steam.

Again the searchlight fell around her, and immediately after a shot from the cruiser plunged into the water a little way from them, as a signal for them to heave-to.

But the desperate men aboard the "Throstle" knew that certain death by hanging awaited them all if they obeyed the summons, and they were determined to take the chance of being blown out of the water.

Ere the Spaniards fired again, they were moving rapidly through the water under a full head of steam.



With a quick movement, Dick drew a pistol, and, pointing it at the chimney, fired. Randall turned, and dealt him a fearful blow with his clenched fist.

A shell came screeching after them, and, striking the waves within a couple of yards of the "Throstle's" side, sent the spray over several of her crew.

Ordering the engineers to crowd on every ounce of steam the boilers would bear, Randall only presented the stern of his vessel as a mark to the foe, and away they rushed into the inky night, followed, however, like a terrible Nemesis, by that brilliant searchlight and shot after shot from their disappointed foes.

But the Spanish were never the best of gunners, and though one shell did strike the stern, and, tearing its way through the planking, burst and killed and wounded nearly a dozen of the privateer's crew, it was only by the merest chance. The others all fell far wide of their mark, and soon it became apparent they were drawing out of range.

Randall was now jubilant, for he knew well the slow-going Spanish cruiser would never be able to catch the "Throstle," which had been fitted with engines of the latest and most improved pattern by her owners, for the express purpose of enabling her to slip out of nasty holes like the present.

The Spaniards speedily realised this; but they had lost time in picking up the boats, and, though they laboured hard to try and cripple the "Throstle," the latter steamed on unscathed.

Once she was out of range, the cruiser abandoned the chase as hopeless, and Randall headed for Key West, gaining that port towards morning.

He only stayed there long enough to repair the few trifling damages the "Throstle" had sustained in the fight with the cutting-out party, and hand over the prisoners he had taken to the authorities, then sallied forth again ostensibly upon his career of destruction among the ships of Spain.

However, though several sail were reported by the look-out, Randall did not attempt to overhaul them, but stood steadily away across the Atlantic until sundown, then wore ship, and started under a full head of steam for Martinique again.

In the course of a few hours they were off the coast, which lay slumbering like a languid beauty beneath the silvery light of the moon.

The vessel was hove-to, and a boat lowered; and, in surprise, Dick received word that he would be required to accompany the captain ashore, and that, stranger still, in plain clothes.

When he returned on deck, after putting on some very coarse garments supplied him from the ship's stores, he found Randall and some dozen sailors, also decked out in very indifferent attire indeed.

Dick could but silently wonder at the meaning of this strange expedition, and still stranger masquerade, as he climbed down the steamer's side. Somehow he was convinced that it was in some way connected with the mysterious French lady.

As the boat approached within the shadow cast by the land, they stopped for a few minutes, while the rowers muffled their oars; then they darted on their way again.

Captain Randall anxiously surveyed the shore through his nightglass, but was apparently pleased with the inspection.

The boat soon grated upon the pebbly beach, and all but two of the crew sprang out.

"Remember my instructions, Stoddart!" the captain said in an undertone to that individual, who was one of the two to be left behind in charge of the boat. "Push off into the shadow of yonder rock, and wait there. I will give three low whistles on my return."

The sailors, who had landed, helped to get the boat off again,



The water poured in with such force that the steamer at once began to sink, amidst the most awful shrieks of anguish.

and then, placing themselves somewhat in military order, followed their officers up the beach.

Soon they gained a high road, which they simply crossed, striking into a field of sugarcane.

Keeping well away from every habitation, they got over the ground rapidly, and at length a dark mass loomed up, which, on nearer approach, resolved itself into a noble mansion.

Dick gave a start. Even though he had half suspected the expedition had something to do with the strange French lady, the truth came as a certain surprise to him.

Randall now called a halt, and each of the sailors took a black crape mask from his pocket, and put it over his face.

Dick was handed one by his superior, and donned it with many misgivings. He could not but view this part of the night's programme as decidedly suspicious.

However, he quickly saw he could serve no good purpose by refusing to do like the others; but, by seeming to acquiesce in everything now, he might be able to frustrate any evil scheme that might be afoot.

CHAPTER 8.

DICK'S SELF-SACRIFICE—THE VILLAINS BAFLED—THE ESCAPE TO THE BOATS—ABOARD THE "THROSTLE" AGAIN—DICK IS PUT IN IRONS—RANDALL TURNS PIRATE, AND FIRES ON A BRITISH VESSEL—CHASED BY H.M.S. "APHRODITE."

Creeping stealthily in Indian file, the party now entered the grounds, and crossed the shrubbery towards the house.

On reaching it, they paused just within the shadow of the trees, and Randall divided his forces into two groups.

One of these he placed under the command of the boatswain, whom he ordered to tie ropes at intervals across the path and among the shrubbery, so as to trip up chance pursuers.

Then, at the head of the other, which included Dick, he advanced towards the right wing of the house.

Not a light twinkled from a single window. The whole place seemed wrapped in slumber, the most profound.

Randall paused under one of the windows.

"This is it," he whispered. "Now, boys, look to your

arms. You may need them. Mr. Lewis, follow me; I will require your services. The rest can stay here!"

With that he sprang lightly up the steps of the terrace, and approached the casement on tiptoe.

Bracing himself for the crucial moment that he knew was at hand, and fully resolved at all hazards not to be a party to the abduction that he now saw was the captain's purpose, Dick followed close at the latter's heels.

The windows, which were of the French style, were only fastened with a slight catch, and this Randall forced back with a knife.

The pair entered the room, which was buried in darkness.

Now for it.

With a quick movement, Dick drew a pistol, and, pointing it at the ceiling, fired.

There was a stunning report, and the flash lit up the chamber for a brief second.

Like lightning, Randall turned and dealt Dick a fearful blow with his clenched fist, felling him unconscious to the floor.

Then, springing towards a corner of the room, where the pistol-flash had shown him a bed, he felt all over it, only to find it unoccupied.

With a horrid string of oaths, the baffled scoundrel seized the unconscious Dick by the coat-collar and dragged him through the window again.

Several sailors were on the verandah outside, and these Randall commanded to take up our hero and carry him to the boat.

As they were descending the terrace steps, the half-clad form of a man rushed upon them, and struck at Randall with a sabre.

The latter evaded the blow by stepping backwards, and, having the knife with which he had opened the window still in his hand, he immediately plunged it deep into the man's left side.

With a gurgling sob the victim fell back a corpse, and his murderer turned hastily and sped after the others.

Loud shouts and the rushing to and fro of lights behind told that the pistol-shot had alarmed the entire house.

The privateer's men retreated through the shrubbery, and were greatly assisted in their flight by the cunningly contrived snares made by their comrades, which tripped up and delayed their pursuers in the dark.

Several of the more ferocious among the seamen wanted to turn and show fight, but Randall cried:

"On! on! We will have the whole military and naval forces at St. Pierre down upon us if we don't make haste, and it would never do for one of us to be caught!"

At length the shore was gained, and, in answer to the preconcerted signal, the boat shot out of the shadow and approached.

Quickly leaping in, they shoved off, and then bent silently and swiftly to the oars.

The pursuers gathered in a group upon the beach, and opened fire on the rapidly-disappearing boat; but the bullets were badly aimed, and merely pattered into the water around.

In a few minutes more the fugitives were alongside the "Throstle," and had handed Dick, now a prisoner, over the side. Then the others clambered up, the boat was hoisted into place, and, the engines being started—for Randall had given orders to the engineers to have steam up, ready for instant flight—the vessel bounded off over the bosom of the ocean.

By morning she had left the West Indies far behind, and was speeding towards Europe.

Dick Lewis, aching in body and limb from the kicks and cuffs the exasperated captain and his toadying crew had liberally treated him to, was placed in irons in the hold.

Here he remained in total darkness for several hours, listening to the faint sounds that reached him from the deck, and the squeaking and scratching of the rats behind the partition.

It was Sam Stoddart who brought him his food, and the fisherman exulted over his position like a very fiend.

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! My gay young hossifer, won't the cap'en make yer sit up for the trick you played him las' night! I hope he'll make ye swing at the yardarm for't, yer moot-neer! In case he does, I'll whistle the tune for you to dance to!"

Dick did not reply to these taunts, and the fellow left him, after kicking him brutally several times.

Randall had no intention of giving up all hope of getting

"WITH POISONED KNIFE." In next Friday's "UNION JACK."

the lady (Elise) into his power, and he soon doubled back upon his course, and made yet once more for Martinique.

He was not yet in sight of the island, when the smoke of a steamer was descried coming up right against him.

Randall headed straight for the stranger, and, as the two vessels neared one another, he fired a blank shot for her to heave-to.

This the strange steamer promptly did; but as the "Throstle" approached still closer, the Union Jack blew out at her peak.

However, determined to make sure she was really English and not Spanish, and therefore his lawful prey, Randall ordered a boat to be lowered, and he himself took command.

Quickly he rowed to the steamer, and, as he prepared to mount the deck, he cast a sharp glance at the crowd of passengers, who were leaning over the bulwarks curiously watching his approach.

He gave a great start, but quickly controlled himself, and stepped aboard. In one of the lady passengers he had recognised Elise.

He kept his face hidden from her as much as he possibly could while he was aboard, and she, if she did recognise him, made no sign.

After a miserable attempt to examine the steamer's papers, Randall returned on deck, and, climbing back into his boat, gave the word to his men to pull quickly for the "Throstle."

The English steamer prepared to continue on her way, when captain, passengers, and hands were considerably astonished and alarmed to see the "Throstle's" crew manning the guns and pointing the deadly muzzles full at her.

The next moment one of the heavy guns crashed forth its message of destruction, and the shell, piercing the steel sides of the doomed ship like cardboard, exploded, and blew a tremendous hole in her bottom.

The water poured in in such force that the steamer at once began to sink amidst the most awful shrieks of anguish and terror from her living freight.

"Give her another gun in the engine-room!" thundered Randall to his gunners, who, fully believing they were sending a Spanish transport to the bottom, obeyed with a will, heedless of the hundreds of human lives they knew they were destroying.

"You bloodthirsty wretches!" cried the English captain from the bridge of his sinking ship. "My country shall make you pay dearly for this cold-blooded and wanton atrocity!"

But his words were drowned by the roar of the "Throstle's" gun, as it belched forth its missile of death.

"Lower a boat, quick!" next commanded Randall, and he himself was the first man to scramble down into it.

Rowing swiftly towards the sinking vessel, Randall eagerly scanned her decks in search of the woman for whom he had turned a pirate.

He detected her, at length, being handed over the side into one of the steamer's cutters, which her captain and crew had already launched.

So busily occupied were all on board the ill-fated ship in the effort to save their lives that Randall and his men were able to get close up before they were discovered. Then the English crew imagined they had come to their assistance, for, of course, the poor fellows could not even yet realise they had to deal with a nineteenth century corsair.

Running his boat alongside the steamer's, Randall sprang into the latter and seized Elise. Then, despite her own screams and those of the other ladies in the boat, he carried her back to his own, and ordered his men to give way.

The brave English captain, from the deck of the sinking vessel, saw the pirate's purpose, and, hastily pointing one of his pistols at the head of the daring scoundrel, he fired.

The bullet grazed Randall's cheek, drawing the blood, and, with a savage oath, he sprang up from his seat, and, snatching a revolver from his belt, returned the shot.

The unfortunate captain pitched forward upon his face on the deck.

"Pull, men, pull!" cried the miscreant, coolly replacing the weapon in his belt, and the boat sped towards the "Throstle" like an arrow from a bow.

As Randall stepped on to the deck of his own vessel, Lieutenant Valdez approached him, and said:

"There is a large cruiser coming up from the south, capitano; but I think she is English, not Spanish."

Randall swore an awful oath. If the new-comer should prove to be a British ironclad all was touch and go with him.

His wanton sinking of the English steamer was piracy, pure and simple, and it would, indeed, go hard with him if he were captured.

His crew, of course, would probably get off, as they were under the impression that the steamer was Spanish, and therefore their lawful prey; but for him, the deliberate perpetrator of the crime, there could be no mercy.

Telling Valdez to telegraph to the engineers to pile on every ounce of steam, Randall carried his fair prisoner below and

placed her on a sofa in the cabin. Then he hastily returned to the deck.

The "Throstle" was fast leaving the sinking ship behind, and her rascally captain now turned his glass anxiously upon the man-of-war, which was heading straight for the wreck.

All of a sudden he turned white as death, and almost let the glass fall from his nerveless fingers.

His eyes burned like living coals, and his thin lips twitched nervously, as he muttered half aloud:

"Good God, is this retribution? It is his ship, the "Aphrodite." I would know it anywhere! Curse the luck, she can steam almost as fast again as the "Throstle." What evil chance sent him into these parts at this precise moment, when my plotting and scheming seemed on a fair way to success? By Heaven, I will never be taken alive, or let her meet him! I will blow the ship up if it comes to the worst."

CHAPTER 9.

RANDALL'S FRANTIC BEHAVIOUR—THE IRONCLAD SHELLS THE "THROSTLE"—THE LATTER STRIKES HER FLAG—CAPTAIN WYNDHAM AND ELISE—THE FATE OF RANDALL—ALL MYSTERY CLEARED UP.

The "Throstle" had a long start of the British man-of-war, which had first to take aboard the crew and passengers of the ill-fated steamer, and hours passed before the two vessels were within range of one another.

Randall had exerted himself to the utmost to escape, telling the engineers to pile on coal until flames as well as smoke were pouring out of the funnels, and yet, like a terrible Nemesis, the cruiser came up hand over hand.

Valdez, Losada, and the rest of the crew could not understand their commander's frantic endeavours to run away from the British man-of-war, but unsuspectingly lent him their aid.

Randall acted like a madman, cursing and raving at everyone and everything, when he found that it was impossible to shake off his determined pursuer.

A screeching noise told them that the ironclad was within range, and Valdez looked at Losada in something like dismay, as a shell soused into the sea not a dozen yards from the "Throstle."

"Had we not better lie-to, capitano?" inquired the former of Randall. "She is an English cruiser, and we have nothing surely to fear from her."

"I shall never be taken alive!" vociferated the hunted miscreant fiercely; and he telegraphed to the engineers to cram even more steam into the boilers.

Another shell whistled through the air, and crashed into the stern, killing and wounding fully a dozen of the crew by exploding the next moment.

Loud were the murmurs and outcries that now arose amongst the sailors against their captain, and Valdez and Losada again exchanged glances. They thought they had a madman to deal with.

A body of the crew came running aft, and the foremost called upon Randall to heave-to, as they did not want to be blown out of the water.

Randall snatched a brace of revolvers from his belt, and, without vouchsafing any reply, he began firing at the mutineers as fast as he could press the triggers.

"Back, back, all of you!" he yelled, like one frenzied, "or I will shoot you down like dogs! I will never surrender, to die an ignominious death by hanging. Back, I tell you—back!"

As the sailors beheld their comrades falling right and left under that murderous and ceaseless hail, they uttered yells of horror and affright, and broke and scattered like sheep.

"The captain has gone mad!" were the cries that now rang through the ship.

"Yes, I am mad!" cried Randall, with a bitter laugh, thrusting the smoking weapons back into his belt; "mad with rage at seeing all my plotting and scheming have been of no avail. Curses on the luck! Go, Valdez, Losada, go! Get you out of my sight, or I may be tempted to pistol you also where you stand."

Crash! Another shell from the pursuer struck the funnel of the "Throstle," smashing it short off.

The catastrophe distracted the captain's attention for a moment, and Lieutenant Valdez took advantage of this fact to suddenly spring upon him and attempt to overpower him.

But Randall's frenzy seemed to give him additional strength, and, despite the lieutenant's desperate efforts to prevent him, he succeeded in freeing one arm and drawing a revolver.

He almost buried the muzzle of the deadly weapon in his antagonist's side, and pulled the trigger. Valdez sank limp and lifeless upon the deck, but the minute after his slayer measured his own length beside him from a crushing blow dealt him with a belaying-pin in Losada's hands.

The second lieutenant now assumed command, and imme-

diately ordered the engines to be stopped, the vessel heave-to, and her flag hauled down in token of surrender.

Then officers and crew anxiously awaited the approach of a boat from the man-of-war.

An officer in the uniform of a post-captain, the same who had been rendered so infuriated at sight of Randall in the streets of St. Pierre, was the first of the boarding-party to mount the deck.

He at once inquired for the commander.

"He lies insensible on the quarterdeck, senior," answered Losada. "I think he must have gone mad. He would not heave-to, and killed the first lieutenant. I had to fell him with a belaying-pin."

The British officer soon stood looking down upon the senseless body of his foe, while his men without further ceremony proceeded to securely handcuff the amazed Americans and Cubans.

"What is the meaning of this outrage, senior capitano?" demanded Losada of the officer. "What right have you to thus make prisoners of us? We have been guilty of no crime, but are waging legitimate warfare upon Spain by preying upon her commerce."

"You are nothing better than pirates. You have fired upon and sunk a British ship."

"A British ship, senior?" echoed Losada, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, you infernal rascal! The game is up. Throw down your arms!"

In vain, Losada and the rest of the crew expostulated and explained that they had been under the belief all the time that it was a Spanish ship they had fired upon. The British officers and tars only smiled cynically, and the latter told them "to tell that yarn to the marines."

Despite their remonstrances, they were one and all secured, and then the British sailors ranged through the ship and quickly discovered Elise, and Dick still in irons in the hold.

The pair were brought on deck, about the same time as Randall, under the rough attentions of the British tars, began to reawaken to consciousness.

At sight of the lady Randall had carried off, the English captain uttered a strange cry, while, with a gasping exclamation of "Richard, my husband!" she fell fainting into his arms.

Dick stood rooted to the deck at sight of the lady's features, now for the first time seen by him in the broad light of day. They bore a remarkable resemblance to his own.

Of course, they were more softened and feminine in expression; but still he could have sworn he was looking upon his own image.

He was suddenly aroused from the astonishment into which this discovery had thrown him by seeing Randall, who had meanwhile regained his senses, leap to his feet, and, snatching a revolver from his belt, aim it full at the English captain's head.

With a quick movement, Dick struck up the hand that held the weapon, and the bullet flew harmlessly over the officer's head, as he was attempting to bring his new-found wife round from her swoon.

The English sailors at once made to seize the would-be assassin, but, evading their rush, Randall sprang away and darted, swift as an arrow, towards the cabin hatchway.

"Stop him! Stop him!" screamed the terrified Losada. "He will fire the magazine and blow us all to atoms if he is not stopped!"

With cries of dismay the British sailors started in pursuit of the desperate ruffian, who, however, dodging and doubling like a hare, managed to elude them all and gain the main hatch. But just as he was about to dash down the companion, a figure, which had evidently been crouching on the stairs, darted forth and flung its arms about him.

It was Sam Stoddart, who had hidden himself during the chase, and was now creeping out of his place of concealment to surrender at discretion. He saw, as he thought, an excellent opportunity of currying favour with the captors of the privateer by stopping and overpowering his late commander.

Randall uttered a yell like a wild beast, as Stoddart closed with him and by the very impetuosity of the onset bore him backwards several paces. The next moment, though, the privateer captain recovered himself, and the two staggered and reeled about the deck, locked in a fierce embrace, while the British sailors ran to the assistance of Stoddart.

Before any could gain the sides of the combatants, though, Randall succeeded in freeing his right hand, which still clutched the revolver, and thrusting the deadly weapon full into the face of his antagonist. His finger closed upon the trigger. There was a flash, a whiplike report, and Sam Stoddart fell to the deck with a bullet through the brain.

Then, with a frenzied shout, the assassin wheeled upon the onrushing tars, and letting drive a couple of badly-aimed shots among them, bounded to the side of the vessel. He leaped upon the bulwarks, placed the pistol to his own temple, and

the next moment fell over into the sea with the roof of his skull blown completely off.

Elise quickly recovered under the tender ministrations of the husband, from whom she had been so long separated by the machinations of the villain who had just taken his own life.

Looking round her, at first rather dazedly, her eyes rested on Dick, and instantly her whole face and form became as it were electrified.

"My son! my son! It is indeed he!" And, as she caught and hugged the astonished young fellow to her breast, she burst into a hysterical fit of laughing and crying together.

The whole mystery was subsequently cleared up satisfactorily.

Dick proved to be not the son of the old fisherman, Tom Lewis, as he had always been led to believe, but of Captain Wyndham, of her Britannic Majesty's ironclad "Aphrodite," and Elise.

It appeared that Randall had some twenty years before been Wyndham's unsuccessful rival, and some time after the marriage had managed by clever scheming to separate husband and wife. He represented to Mrs. Wyndham that her husband had been lost at sea, and she, believing him, left England for the United States to join her friends.

The ship in which she sailed was wrecked off the Cornish coast, and her baby boy, as she thought, drowned, while she was picked up by a passing vessel. Believing herself now doubly bereaved, she finally settled in the island of Martinique, and it was only by the merest accident that Randall, more than a dozen years later, discovered her hiding-place.

Recognising her son, too, in the fisherlad, the villain planned the fiendish scheme of getting Dick into his power, and then threatening to force the mother to marry him out of love for her child.

As we have seen, however, the wretch's plot not only failed at the very moment when it seemed nearest success, but it was also the direct means of reuniting husband and wife after their long separation, and restoring their son to their arms.

What more is there left for us to tell that the reader cannot guess?

Dick did not forget the honest old couple, whom so long he had thought his real parents, nor yet did they forget him. They were very loth to part with him, for they had both grown to look upon him as their own, and it seemed hard that others should claim him on his turning up again safe and sound.

The crew of the "Throstle" had, after all, not much difficulty in clearing themselves of the charge of piracy, for their late commander's conduct proved they had not been taken into his confidence. They were released, and the "Throstle" restored to them, when the Cuban Insurgent Committee, acting really under the secret orders of the United States' Government, soon found her another captain, but her career was short-lived. She was captured by a Spanish man-of-war, and her crew summarily hanged as pirates, despite the admitted fact that she carried a license or "letter of marque" from the American Government.

Soon after returning to England, Dick Wyndham, to give him his proper name, began to study, under his father's tuition, with a view to entering the examination for a naval cadetship. He has not yet, of course, gone up for examination, but hopes to be able to do so in a few months' time, when, we have no doubt, he will pass "with flying colours."

If he does become a cadet, the reader many probably hear something of his adventures as such under our own "Grand Old Flag."

THE END.

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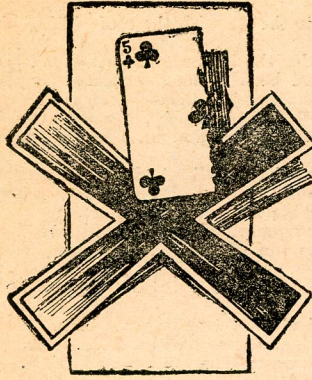
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THE SIGN OF THE SCARLET CROSS

By CLAUD HEATHCOTE,

Author of "Four British Boys," "Val the Boy Acrobat," "Roy Royal of St. Miriam's," "The Red Light," "Dick Danvers," &c.

BEGIN HERE.

The story opens on Harry's fifteenth birthday.

Harry and Pierre Evison, whose son Harry thinks he is, are about to have tea, when Harry's great chum, Shaggy, a newsboy, enters, and tells them that a body has been dragged from the Thames at Limehouse, and that on the breast of the dead man is a strange tattoo—a scarlet cross, and half of the five of clubs.

On hearing this, Pierre Evison turns deadly pale.

Harry asks Shaggy to tea. The newsboy tells his chum that he has a few papers to sell first, and goes out.

He does not return, and Harry sets out in search of him.

In the street he meets Paul Lamaret, who asks if he knows where Pierre Evison lives. Harry directs him to their home, and goes on his way.

A few moments later Paul Lamaret enters. "Pierre Evison, otherwise Pierre Goubert, I salute you!" he says. And he tells him that he has come to take his life because he has not killed one Horace Temple, as he promised to do. The pair fight with rapiers, and Pierre is mortally wounded. The murderer escapes. Harry, meanwhile, goes to where Shaggy lives. He is out. Harry is about to leave, when he sees a rat gnawing a paper. He takes it from the animal, and discovers it to be a letter half eaten away. He puts it into his pocket and goes home. He discovers Pierre dying, and is told by him that he is not his son; that his family name is Temple; and that he must beware of the Lamarets, all of whom are marked on the breast with the scarlet cross and the half of the five of clubs. Then he falls back dead.

Mawker, a crafty old lodger in the house and the father of a fair girl, Angela, enters the dead man's room at night-time for the purpose of searching for a note Harry, whom he has drugged, has in his pocket. While engaged in this search, he hears some one enter the room. It is in perfect darkness, so Mawker cannot see the man's face. But when the latter leaves the room, Mawker finds that a dagger has been plunged into the bed where Harry had been lying.

Through the craftiness of Mawker, Harry is next day arrested on a charge of theft. But he escapes from the policeman, for the purpose of placing some mementoes on the breast of Pierre. To accomplish this, he is compelled to visit the mortuary at midnight, and while discharging this sacred duty, a lady (whose face he cannot see) enters and places a bunch of flowers on the shroud. Harry afterwards overhears a conversation between this mysterious lady and the organist of the church. Then, having fulfilled his duty, he voluntarily gives himself up to the police.

He is tried, and sentenced to be sent to a reformatory for a year. He escapes, in company with a lad called Probyn. They are heard by Merrick, the reformatory bully, who arouses the officials. Probyn stays behind.

Harry tramps to London, and finds Shaggy.

Harry is supposed to have been shot. Together Shaggy and he go to Stentham, and put up at the village inn. Paul Lamaret and a Mr. Trevelyan are also staying there.

Mr. Trevelyan and Lamaret fight a duel, in which Lamaret is wounded. Mr. Trevelyan disappears. Harry learns from Lamaret's mutterings that Mr. Trevelyan is really his father, Horace Temple.

CHAPTER 40 (continued).

The constable had taken off his helmet.

The perspiration was oozing down his forehead. In one hand he clutched a large coloured pocket-handkerchief, with which at intervals he mopped up the perspiration. In the other he held his pocket-book, at which at intervals from the mopping, he gazed with a comical mixture of sadness and despair. All

the while the landlord, Boots, and the chambermaid were engaged at one and the same time in giving him information as to the missing man—Mr. Trevelyan.

The moment Harry and Shaggy entered the inn, the sad eyes of the constable fell upon him. He paused just as he was about to apply his handkerchief to his heated brow for the fiftieth time.

"Hi, young man, I want you," he said, flashing the handkerchief like a danger signal in the direction of Harry.

"Now you're in for it!" whispered Shaggy.

Harry stepped into the bar-parlour, followed by Shaggy.

"I can't make out where people's eyes can be," said the constable, in despair. "I've got four descriptions of this Mr. Trevelyan, and they're all four different. But the most different of 'em all is yours, young man!"—he sternly addressed himself to Harry. "Didn't you say as Mr. Trevelyan had blue eyes?"

"Certainly—who says differently?"

"These people," said the constable, waving his handkerchief at the landlord and the chambermaid. "Two of 'em says as they were black, the other brown."

The three volubly asserted they were right. Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"I still assert that the gentleman had blue eyes."

The constable's glance fell upon Shaggy, and a gleam of hope came to his countenance.

"Let's see, you'd seen this Mr. Trevelyan, hadn't yer?"

"Just a few times—rather!"

"Well, what colour do you say his eyes was?"

"Blue as a chunk o' starch!" said Shaggy emphatically.

"But the chief thing that struck me about 'em was that they had a sort o' born-on-Friday-looking-out-for-Saturday appearance about 'em!"

"A what?" gasped the constable.

"A born-on-Friday-looking-out-for-Saturday appearance about 'em, I said," repeated Shaggy calmly. "In other words, to bring it down to the level of rustie intelligence—ahem!"—Shaggy stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat, swayed himself on to the tips of his toes, and pretended to look in the most supercilious manner right over the heads of the others, as though their opinion were altogether worthless—"in other words—ahem!—there was a decided squint in the left optic."

"A what?" roared the constable.

"A decided squint in the left optic, I said."

"Oh, lor!—oh, lor!" said the constable, dropping into a chair, and again vigorously applying his handkerchief to his forehead. "It gets more and more bewildering. It's come to a squint now. What about his face? This young man"—pointing to Harry—"says that it was an ill-looking face—a treacherous-looking, foreign type. The landlord says it was a handsome, open-looking, Saxon type. So does Boots and the chambermaid."

"Open-looking, do they say? I've seen better ones in the Chamber of Horrors—'pon my siddy, I have. The poor chap couldn't help it, I don't s'pose. He didn't make his own frontispiece. So I'm not blaming him. It was that scar across the left eyebrow that made it look so terrible."

"Scar on the left eyebrow?" cried the constable, leaping from his seat as though he had been shot.

"Yes; sure-ly they haven't left out that important piece of information? As you very wisely remarked just now—where are people's eyes?"

"This case'll send me into a lunatic asylum!" said the constable, in despair.

"Well, there won't be anything strange about that," said Shaggy calmly. "That's what the Scarlet Cross always does—it either kills people, or sends 'em into lunatic asylums!"

"The Scarlet Cross?" cried the constable pressing his pocket-book to one side of his burning brow, and his pocket-

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handkerchief to the other. "What's the Scarlet Cross to do with it?"

"What's the Scarlet Cross to do with it?" said Shaggy contemptuously. "Everything, I reckon. He's got it!"

He jerked his head in the direction of the chamber in which Lamaret was lying.

"The wounded man, d'yer mean?"

"Yes; on the breast. It's a bad complaint, I can tell yer—a thousand times worse than the missiwissi-hottellums. I should chuck it, if I was you!"

The constable fell into a chair, gasping for a drop of brandy. With this parting shot, Harry and Shaggy mounted to their room. Harry was stifling with laughter all the way up the stairs.

When he reached their chamber, he quickly shut the door before giving vent to his feelings.

"How you guyed the poor man, Shaggy!" he laughed. "But why did you introduce the Scarlet Cross?"

"Well, we've had to worry enough about it. I don't see why someone else should not have a turn at the same game. It's only tit-for-tat. What's that?"

Harry had taken from his pocket the purse Mr. Trevelyan had given him. Upon opening it he found that there were five golden sovereigns within and some silver.

"It's the purse he gave me, Shaggy. I shall not touch the money for myself; but I think that I know of a very good use to which I can put it presently."

He closed the purse, kissed it reverently, and put it carefully away inside his pocket.

CHAPTER 41.

THE TRAMP IN THE CHURCHYARD—ANOTHER LINK IN A STRANGE STORY.

Harry was happier that night than he had been for many nights preceding. His father was alive; he had seen him, and spoken to him. There was something, then, to live for—something to live for in the prospect of their next meeting.

Having seen him, he could be sure of one thing—of his father's identity; so that there should be less difficulty in discovering him when he started on his second quest.

Yet, even as the thought came to him, Harry shuddered.

What if the police should be beforehand? What if they should hunt down his father before he did? Luckily both he and Shaggy had succeeded in completely mystifying the village constable.

But with the morning light came fresh sources of anxiety.

The doctor had announced that Lamaret's wound was only a very ugly flesh-wound, as, indeed, Harry had suspected; and that he would assuredly recover. In pity for the man, Harry had hoped that the wound was not a mortal one; and now that that hope had been realised, he began to see that the old enmity would revive again with a hundred times greater force than before.

Lamaret would pursue his father with greater thirst for revenge than before. Remembering the cruel, wolfish look that came to the man's eyes in the churchyard as he groped about for his sword, Harry shuddered to think what his vengeance meant.

The constable informed them that same morning that neither he nor Shaggy would be permitted to leave the village until Lamaret was well enough to appear before the justices, and examined as to the circumstances under which he had fought the duel in the churchyard.

Harry knew well enough that that inquiry might lead to awkward questions. The only consolation he got from the prospect was, that as a result of it Lamaret might be sentenced to a good term of imprisonment, not only for the fight in the churchyard, but for the previous charge against him—that of killing Pierre Evison.

He now saw, too, that Shaggy's shrewd reference to the Scarlet Cross, in the hearing of the constable, had served an excellent purpose; for, without disclosing anything as to the identity of Harry, it might disclose a good deal as to the identity of Lamaret, and put the police on the track of his former crime.

Harry had not long to wait before this conjecture was realised. Before two days were over, excitement in the village rose to fever heat.

The police had discovered that Lamaret was the man who had fought with Pierre Evison—the man who was associated with the strange mystery of the Scarlet Cross.

Extraordinary stories circulated through the village as to what that mystery was. The inn did a brisker trade than it had ever done before.

Men stood in the bar, and gathered in the parlour, and drank and talked, and talked and drank; and the theme of the talking and the drinking was one and the same—the strange mystery of the Scarlet Cross.

While matters were at this exciting stage, Harry happened one afternoon to stroll through the churchyard in which the duel had taken place between father and Lamaret.

It was quite deserted, for the channel of excitement had been diverted from the graveyard to the inn. But, as Harry reached the gate, he came face to face with a tramp, who was leaning on the gate-post, as though dubious as to whether or not he should enter or walk on.

He lifted himself lazily from his reclining posture as Harry came up to the gate, and eyed the lad from the corners of his eyes.

"Got a copper to spare, mister? I'm stony-broke!"

He seemed a bit thick in his speech, as though he had been drinking; but Harry took pity on him, and gave him a copper.

The man's eyes brightened. He spat upon the coin "for luck," and put it in his pocket.

"You're a brick—that's what you are. My pocket ain't seen the colour of a coin for a couple o' days and more. I s'pose you can't tell me which is the grave of the reformatory boy as was shot by a magistrate, can you? I read all about it in the papers, and, as I was tramping this way, I thought as I'd just like to have a squint at it!"

"Certainly," said Harry, pricking up his ears. "I've just been looking at it myself."

The man at once passed through the gateway, and with none too steady gait accompanied Harry to the grave.

"Hard lines on the youngster to be knocked off the stumps like that!" said the tramp, pretending to wipe away a tear with his coat-sleeve.

Harry could scarcely repress a smile.

"It strikes me," thought he, "that I've roused a good deal more interest in my death than I ever roused in my life!"

Then, turning to the tramp, he asked: "Did you know him?"

"The dead 'un? No; but, yer see, when I get in the vagrant ward at the Brambleton Workuss—that's where I'm going to lodge to-night—I shall be able to crow over the other vagrants!"

"How?"

"Why, by telling 'em as I've seen the grave of the reformatory boy as was shot."

"Oh, is that all? Well, and is that all your business in life—to tramp from workhouse to workhouse, and crow it over the rest of the vagrants?"

"Now, don't go on the scornful tack. I ain't always been on the tramping lay; but I've been down on my luck ever since I lost Bob!"

"Bob—Bob who?"

"Bob Ayres—my adopted son!"

Harry started so much that he nearly fell over his own grave.

"Bob Ayres?"

"Yes; that was the name of my adopted boy—a great rascal; but one of the finest fellows as ever lived!"

He again drew his greasy coat-sleeve across his eyes.

"You don't know anybody about here by that name, I s'pose?"

"No; what was he?"

"Well, as you've been good enough to help a chap when he's down, I don't mind telling you. He was a sailor."

"A sailor?"

"Leastwise, was a sailor; but he ran away from his ship for doing what he oughten't to do, and I s'pees he's lying low somewhere; but where that somewhere is, blowed if I know, though I've tramped miles to find him out."

They had walked on to the churchyard-gate. Harry had to clasp the post to steady himself. This man had come in search of his adopted son—in search of the youth with whom he (Harry) had exchanged clothes. Without knowing it, the tramp had been standing over the grave of his adopted son.

What a game of cross purposes? Harry's own father had come to that grave believing it contained the body of his son; this man had come to the grave on his journey in search of the son whom he believed to be living.

He looked a dissipated, broken-down, villainous species of humanity, and yet somehow Harry could not help feeling pity for him at the moment. He drew a shilling from his pocket.

"Here—take this!" he said. "I'm not rich, but you seem to want it a great deal more than I do."

The man's eyes glistened.

"Thanks, and many o' 'em!" he said. "You're a reg'lar out and outer—that's what you are. I wish I'd adopted you for a son instead of that rascal Bob. You're not in want of a nice old father, I s'pose?—one who'll sit in the chimney-corner and smoke his long pipe, as long as you'll provide him wi' just a bit o' 'bacca and a drop o' beer? Talk about ornaments for the fireside! There's no ornament like a nice old father, who knows how to smoke a respectable churchwarden, sit beside the fire, and look happy!"

FOR HOLIDAY READING

there is nothing to beat the "HEARTSEASE LIBRARY" 1d. Every Wednesday. Tell your sisters.

"No, thanks," said Harry drily, "I'm not in want of an article of that kind. All the same, I appreciate your kindness in placing your services at my disposal."

"Well, well, I s'pose I must keep on tramp till I find that ungrateful rascal Bob. Lord—Lord! What haven't I done for that boy? And yet he won't even drop me a line to tell me where he's hiding. That's what I call rank ingratitude!"

"But it may not be ingratitude. He may be afraid of being found out!"

"Not it. I'm the one that's got him out of many a scrape, and I'd get him out of this if he'd only come to me. But he won't. I know his little game. He's going on his own. It almost makes me tear my hair, that it does, after the father I've been to him. I've a good mind to disown him—to cut him off wi' a shilling. No, no; I won't do that. It's all I've got!"

He took out the shilling again, to make sure it was there; and once more spat on it. The loss of so much fluid had evidently made him thirsty; for, suddenly turning to Harry, he said:

"It's dry kind o' work, is tramping. So look here, as you seem a decent sort o' chap, I'll stand you a drink!"

Harry was rather amused at the idea of the tramp proposing to "stand him a drink" out of the money he had given him; but, as he wished to humour him, he accepted his invitation.

So together they walked towards the inn.

CHAPTER 42.

THE TRAMP MAKES SOME FURTHER REMARKABLE DISCLOSURES—THE SHADOW ON THE THRESHOLD.

Harry was curious to know something further of the history of the boy who was lying in his grave.

"You say you're in search of your adopted son?" he asked, as they walked towards the Royal Oak.

"Yes; and if you can 'elp me to find him, Tom Ayres—that is mesself—will be very grateful to yer."

Vagrant though the man was, Harry had some amount of pity for him. The search in which he was engaged was somewhat similar to his own; the only difference being that while he was in search of a son, he—Harry—was in search of a father.

Harry's pity was increased by the fact that he could at once have supplied the tramp with the information he was in search of; but he knew well enough that by doing so he would imperil his own safety.

Furthermore, how could he tell him that the son he was seeking was lying in the grave he had that moment visited.

"Have you tramped far?" asked Harry.

"From Portsmouth; but I wouldn't mind tramping the world over if I could only find Bob."

The man spoke in a whining key, and again drew his greasy cuff across his eyes.

"Well, you may be sure I'll help you all I can," said Harry, feeling a very great hypocrite. "If I come across him, I'll let him know that you're anxious about him."

"Cut up that awful that I cannot sleep o' nights!" put in the tramp. "It's a-killing me—this anxiety is—a-killing me as sure as a gun!"

"Well, but how am I to know him if I should come across him?"

The tramp glanced at Harry.

"How are yer to know him? Well, he's as near your cut and figger as one T's to another. He had a bit o' the swaggering gait of a sailor, and talked a bit nautical like. He had a couple o' mourners (black eyes) when last seen in Portsmouth, but he will ha' been long since out o' black by this time. The nat'ral colour o' his peepers is blue. He's not by any means a bad-looking sort o' youngster."

"What ship did he serve on?"

"Well, I don't mind tellin' you as you've been so generous to an old 'un; but keep it dark, because the police are still after him. The 'Ajax'—that was his ship."

Harry was silent for a minute or so. He could not have spoken had he tried. His mind went back to that critical moment when he was in hiding at the widow's cottage, and the patrol discovered the cap with the name of "Ajax" on it. If there had been any possible ground for doubting the identity of the youth the tramp was in search of, with the youth with whom Harry had exchanged clothes, it now vanished into thin air.

The tramp kept shuffling and snuffling along by Harry's side. "What made him run away from his ship, may I ask? Had he done anything very bad?"

"Well, nothing to speak of," said the tramp evasively. "Bob was a skittish young colt, yer see, who never liked the bit; and when it was in his mouth he was always jibbing. It didn't do to hold him with too tight a rein. If you did, sure enough

he'd kick over the traces. But, thank the Lord! Ain't this the inn? I'm as dry as the funnel o' a steam-engine."

At sight of the Royal Oak, he almost increased his shuffle to a run.

"Kim along," he said, his face brightening as he reached the bar. "Kim along, my young Samaritan. Order anythink yer likes up to tuppence."

Much to the tramp's surprise, Harry contented himself with a bottle of ginger-beer.

"That's only a penny drink. You'll get on in the world, 'cause you're not too extravagant. Now, my tastes are a bit expensive. That's why I b'lieve as Nature meant me for a nobleman, but I was somehow born into the wrong family. Hi, landlord, a bottle o' pop for my young friend, and a pot o' four-arf for a thirsty Briton, likewise a screw o' 'bacca."

The landlord regarded Harry's new-found friend with astonishment, as he attended to his requirements.

The tramp greedily took up the large mug of ale, blew off the froth, and crying: "Yer 'ealth!" placed it to his mouth, and did not set down the jug again until he had nearly emptied it.

He did not, of course, attempt to pay for the ale, the ginger-beer, or tobacco, notwithstanding his display of generosity, so Harry did it for him.

He smacked his lips with great gusto as he set down the jug; then took a piece of tobacco from the screw, and placed it in his mouth.

"Now I'm 'appy," he said. "I'll just rest for a few minnits; then hurrah for the road! Have another drink? Blow the expense! When I'm out with a friend I never mind how I fling away the pieces. What's it to be? Another bottle o' pop? Don't say no."

Harry shook his head at this invitation, but professed his readiness to pay for one more pint of ale, if the tramp felt himself equal to it.

It was marvellous to see the alacrity with which the man tossed down the remaining draught of ale.

"Equal to it? There you are," he said, putting down the empty jug on the counter. "I'm just equal to another wet, I think. A pint o' four-arf, landlord. Draw it as thick as yer can. P'raps you're right," turning to Harry, "not to take one bottle o' pop on top of the other. I know a feller as did, and he went off pop himself—afore my very eyes. A case of spontaneous combustion, yer see. Leastwise, that was the verdict o' the jury."

Finding that the man's tongue was now loosened, Harry determined to turn him again into the channel from which he was desirous of obtaining information.

"Thanks; I'm much obliged for your warning!" he laughed. "I don't want to go off with spontaneous combustion just yet. But about that son of yours. Didn't you say that he was an adopted son?"

"Yes, an adopted son. You see, I've got such a soft heart. My feelings run away with me. I've been a father to more than one poor chap as has left his home, or been turned out of it by his own people."

"Had Bob been turned out of his home, then?"

"Yes. His real parents were puffed brutes! They were always cutting into him; and, not satisfied with that, they almost starved him into the bargain. There was a chum of Jack's—"

"Jack!" cried Harry, in a trembling voice.

"Jack was his real name, not Bob. I rechristened him, yer see. There was a chum of Jack's to whom I'd been a sort o' father. So it was only nateral that Jack should turn to me when things got too hot for him at home. And I was better than a father to him—I was father and mother rolled into one. Through me he got into the Navy, as my son, yer see. It was wrong o' me; but I stop at nothing when I wants to help a young 'un or a pal."

"Jack—Jack!" repeated Harry, with white, trembling lips.

"What—that was his other name?"

"Jack Evans."

"A Welsh name, isn't it?" said Harry, with assumed indifference.

"I don't know about Welsh," said the man; "but there wasn't much of a Welshman about Jack. He was an out-and-out cockney."

"And he came to you from London?"

"No; he came to me from a place called Merrow. That was one of Jack's grievances—he liked London, but he didn't like the country. It was too monotonous for a smart boy like him. Hallo! What's up? You don't look very well."

Harry was clutching at the bar, his lips white and tightly compressed. Once or twice a vague suspicion had crossed his mind that Bob Ayres, and the runaway son of the poor widow of Merrow, were one and the same. From the moment the tramp had referred to his "adopted son" that suspicion had been reawakened. Bit by bit it had been confirmed.

The discovery was an appalling one to Harry. The widow

had saved his life by lending him the clothes of her runaway son. That son had met his death in Harry's clothes—the clothes of the runaway from the reformatory.

Thank Heaven, it had been from no crime of his that Jack had come to his death; but the stern, terrible truth was none the less hard to face. The widow's son was dead—the son who, in spite of his vices and profligacy, the widow loved with all her heart and soul.

The one thing for which she seemed to exist was his return home. The one thing for which she seemed to hunger was to clasp the prodigal to her arms once again. To say to him:

"Jack, you've returned at last—at last! Heaven knows how I have wept for you—have longed for you. Hush! No talk of the past. All is forgiven!"

That was the one desire of the widow's life. And he—Harry—had always had the wish that he would like to satisfy it. He would have liked to have been the medium of restoring to the widow her son.

"If I can ever help to find your son Jack, be sure I will do so," he had said to her at parting.

And now he was face to face with the grim fact that neither his nor the widow's wish could be realised in this life.

Jack Evans—alias Bob Ayres—was dead!

No wonder he was staggered by the stern truth which the tramp's story had disclosed—no wonder he was white to the lips. No wonder he clutched at the bar for support.

"A—a sudden giddiness—that's all!" he at length stammered in answer to the man's question. "It will soon pass off."

"The ginger-pop's got into your noddle, ha! ha!" laughed the tramp. "Why don't you try a good, wholesome draught of beer? Another pint, landlord."

Harry turned away from the man in loathing and disgust. He could now quite understand him. He was a loafing old vagabond, who kept a den in Portsmouth to which he lured youth of all sorts, and lived upon their profligacy and rascality. The town had evidently become too hot for him, and so he had at length been compelled to leave it, like a rat crawling from its hole.

"Going?" he cried, in astonishment. "Wait a bit—one toast more. May you never kick a comrade going down the hill of prosperity when you are coming up it."

As he spoke, a shadow crossed the doorway of the inn.

"Hallo!" he cried, putting down the jug hastily from his lips. "Phil Merrick!"

Harry had turned as the man spoke and saw, as he had seen, a shadow stealing across the doorway. The figure stood there an instant and looked in. In that instant, Harry had recognised, as the tramp had recognised, Phil Merrick.

The man went to the door; but when he gained it the figure had disappeared down the roadway.

"I could have sworn that was one o' the boys?" he said, returning to his jug of ale.

"What boys?" said Harry indifferently.

"One o' my boys, of course. He went a bit wrong, like Jack Evans, and was sent to a reformatory."

"Did he know Bob Ayres—or, rather, Jack Evans?"

"Should think he did. He was the one as recommended Jack to me. But I must now be on the move. So long! I hope as we shall meet again, and if you should ever get into trouble, remember Tom Ayres. He's the one to help yer out of it, and be a father to yer."

Considering that one of his "adopted sons," as the tramp called them, was in his grave, and another in a reformatory, Harry thought what a splendid father and protector the rascal would prove if he were ever fool enough to accept his benevolent, disinterested offer.

As the tramp went out of the inn, Shaggy came into it. He had been on a visit to Joe Mynns, the driver of the reformatory cart. Ever since Shaggy's introduction to him they had been great friends.

"I met a pal o' yours by the way, Harry," he whispered, with a grin.

"Who was that?"

"The boy you once had a slog with—Merrick!"

There was no mistake then. It was Merrick who had been hovering about the doorway of the inn. What mischief was in the wind?

CHAPTER 43.

THE WOUNDED MAN IS VISITED BY A RELATIVE— FAMILY JARS—THE DOUBLE OATH.

Lamaret was confined to his bed with the rapier thrust he had received. Throughout the day and night he cursed the fate which had kept him to his room; and when he was not cursing he was devising schemes of vengeance against the man who had triumphed over him.

"I thought I had him in my clutches. I thought that the last of the Temples would have bit the dust. The son dead—the father dead—I should have won the game. But the father

has escaped me—still remains, curse him! Fool that I was to let that thrust deceive me! When next we meet, he will not triumph over me so easily. He left me for dead! Ha! He shall find that there's plenty of life yet left in me. But, stay! If I am not careful I shall be thrust in prison, and that would delay my vengeance for many years. The great thing is to escape from here. How can I manage it—how can I manage it?"

His black brows were knitted together, and he was deep in contemplating various schemes of escape from the inn, when the door opened, and a boy dressed in reformatory clothes entered.

It was Phil Merrick!

"You!" cried Lamaret, with an oath. "What brought you here?"

"My legs!" answered the youth insolently.

Lamaret's face turned almost as black as night. He started up in the bed. For the moment it almost appeared as though, in spite of his wound, he would leap on the insolent youth.

Then he fell back, writhing with pain.

There was no pity in the eyes of Merrick. In fact, it seemed to give him a great deal of pleasure; for he drew nearer to the bedside, and smiled down on the face contorted in agony.

"Get out of this!" gasped Lamaret. "Do you want to kill me?"

"No; I don't want to kill you. I'm too good a son for that; and you're too kind a father!" said the lad mockingly.

"Cease your jibes!" said Paul Lamaret. "Is that the purpose for which you've been let out from the reformatory?"

"No; that isn't the purpose. I shouldn't have gone through so much trouble for so little. There's no love lost between us, I know, though you're my father, and I'm your son. It seems to me that all your life's been given to hating other people, so you've had no time for loving anybody. You never had any love for me, nor for my mother, the only one I ever cared for. When she went, it was all up with me. I went to the devil, and you—you never put out a hand to save me. So I haven't come to you because I love you."

"What, then, curse you, have you come for? Quick, or I'll ring this bell, and have you kicked from the room!"

Merrick's face became hard and set. His face was white. He looked fixedly at the contorted figure on the bed.

"Very well—ring that bell, if you like. I've no objection. But let me tell you. It would be the dearest bit of work you'd ever done in your life. You'd live to repent it in sackcloth and ashes—no, not in sackcloth and ashes, but in a lovely suit of clothes better than this suit of mine, with a beautiful broad-*arrow*."

Notwithstanding the youth's jibing words, Lamaret could see that there was some truth underlying them.

So he withdrew his hand from the bell-pull, and said, in a softer key:

"I didn't mean to be harsh with you, lad; but you see that I am in pain and suffering. Is this a time to taunt me? I dare say I haven't been all that a father should be towards you. But you've been far, very far, from a model son. You picked up with the worst companions you could find almost as soon as you could walk. And you continued to pick them up as you went on. But I won't say anything more about it. Only let me know to what cause I am to attribute the honour of this visit?"

"Because, though there's no love lost between me and my father, there's one I love still less."

"Ah! That's as well to know," said Lamaret, with an ugly smile. "I'm curious to learn who that interesting person can be. Do I know him?"

"Perfectly."

"Oh! This gets more and more interesting. Have you any objection to giving me his name?"

"Not in the least—the lad known as Harry Evison."

Lamaret gave a cruel, contemptuous laugh.

"What's the use of hating a thing that can't kick or squirm?"

"How?"

"How? You know well enough. What's the use of hating Harry Evison? He's dead. Didn't you attend his funeral?"

"No!" answered Merrick calmly.

"It's a lie! I saw you there!" cried Lamaret.

"Again I say that I did not attend Harry Evison's funeral. How could I when he isn't dead?"

"Isn't dead?" gasped Lamaret, staring at the youth, before him. "What lies have you come here to practise on me?"

"If you think them lies, there's nothing more to be said. I've only to wish you good-evening, father."

He made a step towards the door.

"Stop!" cried Lamaret, in a voice of such stern command that the youth, in spite of himself, was brought to a standstill.

"Well?"

"Did I rightly understand you that Harry Evison isn't dead?"

"Yes."

"Then who was it they buried the other day?"

"A young sailor named Jack Evans, alias Bob Ayres."

"Come here!"

Merrick advanced to the bedside, as one completely under the influence of Lamaret's will, tied though he was to a bed of sickness.

"Kiss that!" he cried, tearing away his shirt, and baring his chest until the scarlet cross seemed to shine out in the dim light of the room.

At sight of that strange cross, Merrick, as one overawed, bent down until his lips had touched it. Then he pulled them quickly away. The cross seemed as a cross of flame. It was as a hot coal to the lips.

"Swear by that you are telling me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!"

"I swear!"

An impressive silence followed that novel form of oath-taking. A bird flapped its wing against the outside of the window.

The distant hum of voices travelled upward from the inn below. Lamaret, usually so cool, was greatly agitated. The streak of scarlet from the fiery cross seemed to have mounted to his cheek, and radiated with a fiercer gleam to his eyes.

For once the pert, insolent mood of Merrick had gone. The touch of that fiery cross on his lips seemed to have inspired him with the terrible passion of his father.

"Then, if Harry Evison isn't dead, in Heaven's name, where is he?" at length demanded Lamaret.

"In this inn?"

Lamaret stared at his son in greater amazement than before.

"Where?"

"In the room next to this."

"Heavens! Who—who?"

"He's made up to look several years older than he really is; and he's changed his name to Hobbs—Harry Hobbs."

"I know him! I've spoken to him. He's supposed to be the cousin of that fellow with the birchbroom on his head?"

"Yes; that's him."

"The disguise is a clever one. How did you penetrate it?"

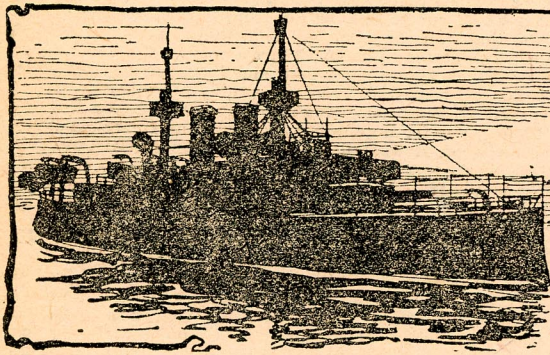
"Through overhearing an interview between Harry Evison and a pal of his belonging to the reformatory. I then discovered all about it. After escaping from the reformatory he changed clothes with one who was once a pal o' mine, Jack Evans, alias Bob Ayres. The police were after Bob; so he was glad enough to change clothes with Evison."

"But how was it the deception was never discovered?"

"How could it be? Both had black eyes; both were of the same figure. And the shot which was discharged in the face of Ayres further disfigured it, and prevented the mistake ever being discovered."

The pair remained some time conversing together. It was not till an hour later that Merrick made his way back to the reformatory.

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



FROM THE QUARTERDECK.

The Editor's Chat with his Readers.

I want you to criticise next Friday's UNION JACK. I ask you to do this because the story it contains is by an author who has not written for this paper before, and I am anxious to know what you think of this work. The story is called "With Poisoned Knife," and the scene is laid in Wales.

I have a number of good things up my sleeve, so keep a watchful eye on this page; you will not regret it.

The expression "Printer's Devil" is almost as old as printing itself, "Augur." This is how it came into use:

About the beginning of the fifteenth century Aldus Manutius, a famous printer of Venice, owned a black boy, whom he had purchased from a corsair, and whom he trained to assist him in the printing operations. The art of manufacturing books in great numbers and at small expense was then so little understood by the majority of people that the honour was ascribed to his Satanic Majesty, it being impossible for them to understand how, without the aid of magic, copies could be so rapidly multiplied. The suspicion that the Evil One had something to do with the new art was intensified in Venice by the presence in the office of Manutius of his black servant. So strong was the feeling that there was danger of his house and office being mobbed and his machinery wrecked by an indignant rabble. To prevent so unlucky a denouement, Aldus proclaimed that he would bring his boy forth, which he did, placed him on a platform in the public square, and declared that any person not satisfied that the boy was flesh and blood could come and pinch him to make sure. The mistaken impression was thus removed; but before this time the name "Printer's Devil" had been attached to the boy, and was thenceforth applied generally to the boyish assistants in a printing-office.

Last week I answered a question about lifeboats, now I am asked who the inventor was. It is difficult to say who was the first designer, for although Mr. Henry Greathead, a shrewd boatbuilder at South Shields, has been credited with designing and building the first lifeboat about 1789, yet it is certain that Mr. Lionel Lukin in 1785 took out a patent for a boat which, to a great extent, embodied almost all the more needful properties possessed by the present model lifeboat. Encouraged in his philanthropic plans by the Prince of Wales (George IV.) he

fitted up a Norway yawl as a lifeboat, and published a pamphlet "Upon the Invention, Principles, and Construction of Insubmersible Boats." He suggested that such boats should be protected by bands of cork round their gunwales, that they should be rendered buoyant by the use of aircases, especially at the bow and stern, and that they should be ballasted by an iron keel. The self-righting and self-emptying principles he seems not to have thought of; at all events, he did not compass them. Despite the patronage of the Prince, Lukin went to his grave a neglected and disappointed man.

Here is some interesting information, sent by a reader, which should interest my Irish friends:

"There are numerous legends of sunken cities scattered throughout Ireland, some of which are of a romantic origin. Thus, the space now covered by the lake Inehiquin is reported in former days to have been a populous and flourishing city; but for some dreadful and unabsolved crime, tradition says, it was buried beneath the deep waters.

"The dark spirit of its king still resides in one of the caverns which border the lake, and once every seven years, at midnight, he issues forth mounted on his charger, and makes the complete circuit of the lake, a performance which he is to continue till the silver hoofs of his steed are worn out, when the crime will be absolved, and the city reappear once more in all its bygone condition. The peasantry affirm that even now, on a calm night, one may clearly see the towers and spires gleaming through the clear water.

"With this legend we may compare one told by Burton in his 'History of Ireland.'

"In Ulster is a lake 30,000 paces long and 15,000 broad, out of which ariseth the noble northern river Bane. It is believed by the inhabitants that there were formerly wicked, vicious people who lived in this place, and there was a prophecy in every one's mouth that whenever a well which was therein, and was continually covered and locked up carefully, should be left open, so great a quantity of water would issue therefrom as would soon overflow the whole adjacent country.

"It happened that a woman coming to fetch water heard her child cry, upon which, running away in haste, she forgot to cover the spring, and, coming back to do it, the land was so overrun that it was past help, and at length she, her child, and all the territory were drowned."

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"October 19th, 1897.

"Gentlemen,—I received the Watch and Albert safely, and am exceedingly pleased with same. I have shown it to my friends, all of whom are astonished to find it such a genuine bargain. One of my friends wishes to know if he could obtain one in the same manner, or has the time expired? With sincere thanks, I remain, yours truly,"

"10, Dean Street, Lichfield,"

"November 1st, 1897.

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"The Folly, 43, Thornton St., Stratford

"November 1st, 1897.

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"New Brancepeth, Durham,"

"November 2nd, 1897.

"Dear Sir,—Just a line to say that I received the Watch and Chain which you sent me, and was highly pleased with them. I have shown the Catalogue to many of my friends.—Yours respectfully,"

"Miss Adams."

P. GRAHAM & CO.
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